

Letter to John Washington, 16 February 1859

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

[0001]

Will you let me know how Sabine liked the magnetical observations
Zambesi is 4 inches less, 15 feet above low water mark of November

Tette 16 Feb^y 1859

Private

My Dear Captain Washington

Having visited Kebrabasa

twice during the period of low water I left
orders with M^r C. Livingstone & M^r Baines
to examine it again when the Zambesi
had risen twelve feet, and with D^r Kirk
in company went up the Shire about
a hundred miles from its confluence
It is admirably adapted for steam
navigation being deep & without sand
banks. The current is not quite so strong
as in the Zambesi but unlike that river
it has no still reaches and is on that
account scarcely navigable by heavy canoes
The Portuguese have never ascended
it more than 20 or 30 from its con-
fluence but say that one Governor
having sent an expedition to explore it
their progress was stopped by the great
masses of duck weed which blocked up
the river. As the duck weed disappears
about 25 miles up we judge of the distance
explored as not very great

[0002]

Marambala placed on the wrong side of the
Shire in my map as M^r Arrowsmith may
explain is 4000 ft high and would make
a splendid sanatorium. It is well cultivated
on the top - has plenty of water and a
vegetation exceedingly like that of Londa
and Angola - the climate is quite different
from that below but our Portuguese friends
have never availed themselves of it
nor of the hot sulphureous fountain at
its base (174°) though skin diseases are
as common among them as red noses

among ourselves. I thought it would be agreeable to the Foreign Secretary to receive the impressions of another observer & requested D^r Kirk to write a report which no doubt you will see as one of my enclosures. I would only add that beyond the cataract that stopped our progress up, there are five days of rocky country & then the river is reported smooth and is used by the Moors to come down in canoes from Nyanja. The people were so suspicious of us that I did not consider it prudent to leave the vessel and go farther. We waited three days at the cataract for an observation for latitude in vain, and during that time had a regiment on each bank guarding us. We did nothing to make us ashamed

[0003]

to go back - the people had plenty of cotton, i.e. for their own use and sold their yarn readily, and provisions also, but they evidently expected us to attack & kidnap them. When we went ashore they behaved civilly and our wooding parties were never molested, so I think we made a favourable beginning of intercourse with them. They don't need cotton seed, one variety they possess is better than what we have to give.

On returning to Tette we found that M^r C. L. & his companion had gone to Kebra basa. they returned next day after [our arrival and] their reports which I have enclosed to the Foreign Secretary coincide with what I advanced in my last dispatch. the cataracts become obliterated in flood, but a strong steamer is necessary to stem the current and not be drawn into the eddies. this rapid is rather favourable for us than otherwise, for the Portuguese will not be able to pass without our assistance, and a sense of helplessness may dispose them to be more cordial in co-operating with us. At present they have to pay for leave to pass until they get to

[0004]

Zumbo, and think themselves happy if they get off by paying 20 pieces of cloth = 320 yards. At the time I came down they could not go at all but half casts go now.

the Makololo on learning that we had resolved to work down here till we had heard whither H M Government would send a vessel large enough to take us & our luggage up, proposed that I should give them my brother to lead a party overland home. I agreed at once and so did my brother but on second thoughts they said "that their orders had been to come back with me and they feared leaving me here would be construed into disobedience when they reached Sekeletu." They have uniformly acted from intelligent motives - I give them rations at the rate of 8 fathoms of cloth weekly or about 10/ in value. the majority support themselves - one of them is a stoker and M^r Rae says he does more work than all the Kroomen together At M^r R's suggestion I have raised his pay to 1/6 per day. When we go anywhere they accompany us as the Krooman profess to be unable to travel on foot

[0005]

You remember an order sent out by the Portuguese Gov^t to support them at the public expense of the Province of Mosambique. It would do no good to let it be publicly known that the order came with myself & has never been acted on. And here the native game law which claims the half of the elephant which lies on the ground for the Lord of the soil has been put into operation by the authorities. The commandant is our best friend and I dont wish this to be known as he would be blamed. He assisted the headmen very largely out of his own private purse and has done everything he possibly could for us. Col. Nunes took nothing for Bedingfeld's keep and other Portuguese have behaved liberally so I dont say

anything which might to be construed disparagingly.

We put up a little engine I brought with us and the first work it did

[0006]

was to saw up plank for a boat our friend Major Secard wishes to build. We can drive a corn and small sugar mill and mean to use them both for our own use (meal) and to shew the people here what can be done with their cane. I was mistaken in saying the natives dont make sugar. Here they do and we buy it very cheap for the Kroomen. We have a turning lathe and blast - but these were all intended & I hope will be used among the Makololo By the way we have three boxes of machinery of which I know nothing what I ordered I know they are all small and compact but these are large. I hope no one has come with a bill after I left. When the river rose I felt strongly inclined to drag this half canoe half steamer & whole abortion of a vessel through but when we should succeed as she can carry no cargo we would very soon be destitute. And there is Manica which I have a very strong desire to examine. We were going to Gorongozo

[0007]

but the Portuguese dissuaded us from the attempt now - the grass is now so tall as to wet one with the dew and obstructs the vision. this is too our most unhealthy season Here we have had slight touches of fever Baines Thornton & C. Livingstone Kirk and I have enjoyed uninterrupted good health ever since we came. We took quinine in the Shire. The Quarter master and Stoker are well and doing well. The latter William Rowe not Roe as I spelled it has been in the habit of giving his wife a portion of his wages and I have presumed

on your kindness to see it
continued. This was mentioned in
my last dispatch - Her present address
is M^{rs} Rowe N^o 79 Mount St
Devonport, Devon. By a mistake
he was marked Discharged, now
he is not discharged but lent
and as he has 18 years service
I shall write the Admiral to change
the word. He very promptly saved

[0008]

the lives of several natives whose canoe
was overturned and shewed an example
worthy of imitation to the Portuguese - only
yesterday morning a woman was taken
off by an alligator and the brute came
past the vessel with her in its mouth
Great numbers are taken off annually
by them yet when I offered a subscription
of £2 to build a fence as we saw done
in the Shire the priest at Senna would
not bring the project forward.

We came back from the Shire on the 2^d
currt. I think it proper to remain during
this month under shelter on account
of the unhealthiness of this season. At
Quilimane this is the fatal period
here there is illness but no deaths.
I wish I knew what Burton has
done at Nyanja. We have had no
mail since we left England except
a few letters in Nov^r last from
the Cape and a note from yourself.
The suns bearings will come in nicely
now, and if well you may expect
to hear that we have done something
either up Shire or in Manica
and Gorongozo. Please remember me
kindly to your Lady & family. I hear nothing of mine
David Livingstone