

Letter to Joseph D. Hooker, 9 December 1861

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)
[0001]

River Shire 9th Dec^r 1861

Private

My Dear D^r Hooker

Many thanks for your kind letter by the Pioneer. We had just returned from the Makololo country & contemplated a long run up the Rovuma so I thought it would be as well to wait before answering you till I had something to write about. D^r Kirk wished to go home as by the Victoria fall journey he had pretty well worked up the botany of a large section of the country but when he heard of a new steamer and a new field up Rovuma he was willing enough to stay - We failed at the Rovuma chiefly because the new vessel is too deep - then came round to the Shire intending to examine the Rovuma from above downwards and have again failed. We carried a boat past the cataracts then sailed about 60 miles up the Upper Shire -
[0002]

and some 225 up the Lake. We found it very deep - and from 20 to 50 miles broad the length is that above indicated though we say only over 200 miles. The country around is all highland or mountainous and sudden storms come down which raise seas in which no open boat could live. We were there during the Equinoctial gales and it would have been foolhardiness to have crossed to the Eastern shore at that period. When we came to near the North end, or where the people go round it, no food was to be had, and wherever we went we saw skeletons and putrid bodies of the slain the handiwork of a tribe of Zulus called Mazita or

Mazite. I met seven of them and they were as much afraid of me as I ought to have been of them. they would not take me to their chief. the country was depopulated so we were obliged to return and be content with the most contradictory reports of Rovuma ever heard. One man of intelligence and with no motive we [0003]

could imagine for deception, would assert positively that we could sail out of the Lake into the river - Another would say we must lift it [(the boat)] a mile - another fifty miles - a fourth a hundred & in one point alone did all agree it was "a very large river". The reason why we want an outlet there is the Portuguese follow us everywhere and introduce slaving. When we took the bishop up to a spot about 15 miles south of Zomba we met Portuguese slavers returning from near that mountain with lots of captives - we took them & gave them over to the bishop to be operated on by His Reverence secundem Artem high Churchii. If you are high church you had better rub out that bit of profanity! We have plenty of cotton for the collecting but no Englishman will submit to Portuguese officials. We shall be engaged for the best part of a year in carrying a steamer past the cataracts. We expect her soon and the parts to be screwed together. [0004]

Kirk will tell you about the palm oil nut found on the Lake. It is not half the size of that on the West coast & is not used for anything It cannot be of any value for they collect an insect not bigger than our smallest gnat and boil them into cakes which are used as a relish with other food. I expect some of the real nut from Loanda for planting.

I am very glad to hear that you are going to bring out a Genera Plantarum we have often talked about & felt angry that you did not come out more For the sake of your family you ought to be more of a popularity hunter - "Bosh"

[you say] "Teach your grand mother" &c. &c. &c. We think before hand how all your friends would feel if any of the Nobodies should be lifted over your head. Be as angry as you like with me I repeat you ought to make yourself more known. Could you not do something in the popular line with your Museum. there is nothing mean in it - see how Playfair and Sir Roderick get on. It is all fair and above board.

[0005]

We have been sadly vexed by Rae and the boxes five of which were lately seen at Mozambique without any addresses. He was entrusted to address them to your father when he should get paint. Some boxes had " D^r Kirk" on the corner. M^r Burrup the missionary who saw them added " England" a wide direction enough. One box with no address contained birds and belongs to my brother. I have been bothered enough by my companions, but did not expect Rae to act this way. If all had been like Kirk I should have had smooth sailing.

D^r Meller is very industrious but many of his specimens will be duplicates of Kirk's. I feel annoyed because many of the plants from Zomba were the same as Welwitsch got on the
[0006]

highlands of Angola. Ours were collected long ago and but for Rae's conduct would have been registered first

Please present my kindest regards to M^{rs} Hooker, and to your father. My wife is I believe now on her way out here after a three years unexpected separation. Has your eldest boy taken to anything My hopeful ran away from his tutor lately. They were trying to cram him [with Latin & Greek] if I understand

rightly, and thrashing was threatened
so off he went. Our friend Playfair
helped at this juncture & he is now
at a school at St Andrews. It is
comforting to think how much
better we were when we were
young!! David Livingstone