

Letter to George Grey, 15 November 1861

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[0001]

H.M.S. Pioneer 15 Nov^r

1861

Dear Sir George

We returned a few days ago
from a three months tour on the Lake Nyassa
A boat was carried past Murchison's cataracts
a distance of about forty miles. We then
sailed sixty more before entering the Lake
which is over 200 miles in length. It is
from twenty to fifty or more miles broad,
and very very deep. According to our
present experience a ship could find
anchorage only near the shore, but she might
get a rock through her bottom a good way
out besides. There are several rounded
rocky islands covered with dense forest
and uninhabited. Adjacent to those and
also opposite all the rocky headlands
detached rocks jut out or are covered with
with only a few feet of water. The lake
is surrounded by mountains or by
high table lands that appear as such,
the Eastern are higher than the Western
[0002]

A mountainous Cape which we named
Cape Maclear divides the Southern end
into two bays one 30 the other 18 miles
in length. The Lake has thus a forked
appearance there, and with the help of a
little imagination somewhat of the boot
shape of Italy. We went along the Western
shore and found it a succession of
bays until in the far north the spurs
of the mountains running sheer down
to the water scarcely afforded landing
places. In the south while rounding Cape
Maclear no bottom was felt with
our sounding line of 35 fathoms. In
the north none was found with a fishing
line of 696 feet but it broke in coming

up and was therefore unsatisfactory
We were there during the prevalence of the
Equinoctial gales and found that
tremendous seas like those that play off
Quillimane rose in fifteen or twenty
minutes. An Arab dhow lately built to
carry slaves across fled from us twice
to the Eastern shore. We could not cross
though at certain seasons the natives can
[0003]
in their canoes. We never saw so many
people anywhere else as on its shores and
slaving is the only trade - they were upon the
whole very civil. We were objects of great
curiosity to them - no fines were levied
nor dues demanded. Fish abound &
the people seem all fishermen catching with
large trawling nets - creels - hooks, torches,
or poison. One species resembles salmon
or trout in shape and goes up the rivers to
spawn. It tastes somewhat like herring.
Elephants and hippopotami very tame
Alligators seldom kill men so we could
bathe in the delicious cool waters when
we liked. When we passed Lat. 11° 40° South
we were in the borders of a tribe of zulus
called Mazite or Mazitu from the South
(originally: - they live on the highlands West
of the North end of the Lake. Very many
skeletons and putrid bodies of the slain
were seen and the land was depopulated.
We heard of course but one side of the
story and could form no opinion as
to the cause of this terrible slaughter. I
met and had a short interview with
[0004]
seven of these Marzite, they seemed as
much afraid of me as I ought to have
been of them. We saw some Marzite skulls
on trees and remains of burned bodies so
they do not always come off unscathed
We returned about as wise as we went
about the Rovuma - plenty of assertions
but in nothing did all agree except that
it is a very large river.

Col^l Rigby says [in a letter to you] that most of the slaves
entered at the port of Zanzibar come from
Nyassa and a small steamer [on it] would soon
break the neck of the traffic without knowing
his opinion till lately we have been

working towards this and will now be
employed the best part of a year carrying
a vessel past the cataracts

The bishop will tell you all about
his mission better than I can - three
of his men came up the Shire in common
country canoes without knowing a word
of the language or a bit of the way, this
feat was never performed by white
men before. I am &c

David Livingstone