

Letter to Lord Kinnaird

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

[0001]

H.M.S. Pioneer. River Shire

25 Nov^r 1861

Dear Lord Kinnaird

Your most welcome letter of April last came to hand by two of the Oxford and Cambridge missionaries who without knowing a word of the language or a bit of the way came up this river in common country. This has never yet been accomplished by a single Portuguese

From a small section of this river - say six miles, to which we were limited by our vessel being too deep to run up and down. we bought at a very cheap rate about 300 lbs of excellent clean cotton. It was not the period of the cotton crop and had we not been employed elsewhere double the quantity could easily have been obtained. the people had not been stimulated by the prospect of a regular

[0002]

market to plant more than they meant for their own use, and having ourselves been cheated in our supply of calico we had to offer them the most worthless hash you can in payment. But calico is here in very great demand. You must not imagine that we are here among the "Gonakeds." Every one is clothed with the inner bark of a certain tree and calico is so highly valued that the very best slaves cost only five yards valued out here at 2/6. Women and children go for two yards or one shilling. You can get any work done for calico. But a great difficulty meets us here. 1 We shew the way. 2 We open the markets

3 We so gain the confidence of the natives
that to any man of common sense
life and property are perfectly secure.
Are Government servants to become
besides public cotton collectors? I
think that after we have accomplished
these three important results in any one
part of the country there are work is

[0003]
done. This lower Shire valley[& hills adjacent] produces
an immense quantity of cotton superior
to common American. Who is to collect
it, and after it is collected are the Portuguese
to be allowed to put a tax on it while
all Portuguese productions go out
free. We go onwards. We are now
going down to the sea expecting to meet
a steamer built at Glasgow in
compartments, and every man of us
will be employed during the best
part of a twelve month in trans-
porting it past Murchison's cataracts
I look back therefore to see if any
advantage is to be taken of our
labours among a people now all
friendly - witness the passage of these
missionaries - and I see only the
Portuguese erecting a fort at the
mouth of the Shire.

With respect to the finer kinds
of cotton the sea island, it really
flourishes in this country with very

[0004]
little care. the soil of both the lower
and upper Shire contains a considerable
quantity of salt. the people even extract
salt for their food out of it. this may
be the reason why it takes so kindly
to the soil. But we have besides an
indignous cotton which shews an
inch and a half staple. We found it
below Victoria falls on the Zambesi
and again at the upper end of Lake
Nyassa With the idea of a colony
I throughly agree and I expect [soon] to
meet a D^r Stewart, a minister I
believe of the free church of Scotland
who has come out to consult me

on this very point. The object is partly religious. ~~and~~ with a view to influence the slave trade. and I suppose to benefit our honest poor. Besides cotton we could grow wool on all our highlands and instead of being considered intruders would be looked on by the natives as benefactors.

[0005]

When we went up to the highlands East of Murchison's cataract's to introduce the bishop to the Mangangja - (pronounced Mañ-anja. g not heard) we met Portuguese slave hunters returning with large numbers of captives - An extensive system of slave hunting had been set agoing by instigating a tribe called Ajawa to attack village after village of Manganja - kill the men and sell the women & children to the Portuguese. All the captives met fell with my hands and I presented them to the bishop to begin school with. the piecemeal destruction going on along their borders produced no effort at union for mutual defence among the Manganja - All were fleeing. So in order to prevent the country around the mission from becoming depopulated and to stop the effusion of blood we went to try what a conference would do. On approaching the Ajawa all our declarations of peace

[0006]

were nullified by some Manganja followers trying to frighten the enemy by calling out that one of their great sorcerers had come Unfortunately it did not strike me that we were thereby deprived of the protection of our English name till afterwards - they rushed at us like furies and shot at us with muskets and poisoned arrows at about 50 yards distance. We were obliged to drive them off with our firearms - the Manganja alone suffered from the weapons of the Ajawa. The bishop has since gone to drive away other companies of Ajawa who were destroying his people though I thought he ought to have acted only on the defensive as we did.

This slave hunting has depopulated large tracts of as fine land as any in the world And as the Portuguese encourage it - the authorities keeping discreetly in the background much more territory will be laid waste. A colony would be a defensive nucleus for fugitives from the slave hunters. the bishop has 200

[0007]

freed people on his station and a large population is collecting around him.

On the Upper shire we found thousands of fugitives. We carried a boat past the cataracts and sailed up into Lake Nyassa We found it to be a very deep lake. A ship could find anchorage only near the shore. Our leadline gave no bottom at 210 feet in the south and in the north we felt bottom with a fishing line at 600 feet in a bay. A mile outside we could find no bottom at 696 feet. It is from 20 to 50 miles broad - Over 200 miles long and surrounded by mountains and high uplands. the population is prodigiously large but slavery is the only trade. An Arab vessel called a dhow fled from us full of slaves to the East shore twice. We were on the West and it was so stormy during the Equinoctial gales (September) we could not cross in an open boat. The dhow had lately been built

[0008]

and Colonel Rigby our consul at Zanzibar says in a letter published in the "Times" that nearly all the slaves come from Nyassa & the valley of the Shire and a small steamer on the lake would break the neck of the trade. We shall now set ourselves to this work. then look for an outlet for ourselves by the Rovuma. We could obtain no accurate information about it except that it was a very large river In this all agreed but its distance from the Lake varied from a few yards to 50 miles

I suppose that the Government will

pay for the steamer after we have put
it on the Lake - but do not know.
It was built by my friends in Glasgow
and the builders "Tod & Macgregor" take
nothing [from me] until they see whether any thing
will be granted. The expenses of this
steamer [(Pioneer) &] all her crew are great £ 11,000
but next year they will be less.
The Pioneer is unfortunately too deep
A splendid strong good vessel with this

[0009]
one fault. Were she on the Lake she
would be admirable. I do not grumble
about her I am most thankful to
have her, but with half her draught as
was intended in the plan she would
have gone up any of the East African
rivers.

The kind of people that would
suit this country would be families
of the agricultural class - men that
could turn their hands to anything -
build their own huts - make their
own doors - tables - chairs, everything
They ought to form their first
establishment on the highlands
and as they became acclimatized
descend to lower levels. This is
what I have recommended for
the Mission, and they will in all
probability enjoy good health - If
the obstacle presented by Portuguese

[0010]
were removed, either by free access
being given - (It is not withheld now
but the placing of posts or stations
everywhere on our line of entrance,
shews what is intended) or by our
finding an entrance by Rovuma
I would say send at once. some
preparation might be made but
a year must elapse ere we are
on the Lake with our steamer.
and then there is difficulty of the
Pioneer's draught. She could take
cargo or people up either Shire or
Rovuma during but a part of
the year. the benefits to be derived

from a small colony of industrious
people in stimulating the people
of the country to cultivate largely
cannot well be over-rated. I am
supporting that besides cultivating

[0011]

cotton themselves they would purchase
the produce of the natives with calico.
Beyond all doubt slave trading would
soon die a natural death. When
we entered the Lake on the 2nd September
among the crowds that pressed around
us I said to an intelligent man
who had been down at the coast
" We come today only to see the Lake
but next year we shall come in a
ship to buy cotton and ivory. but
no slaves." After thinking some
time he addressed the crowd, going
over what I had said, and added
" I see plainly that these people will
enrich us. " they can see at once the
benefits we propose to confer but
the work must be done by many
hands, and it is encouraging to
remember that while benefitting
Africans we are bestowing a boon

[0012]

upon our own poor. the bishop thought
that introduction of whites would drive
the blacks into a corner, but when I
went up with him to the highlands
he spontaneously remarked, I see you
are quite right there is abundance of
room for all - He is high church
but there being no one to laugh at or oppose
the pretensions of that party it cannot
flourish out here - To be anything
is better than heathenism and if the
mission only works for the benefit
of the people I don't care though they
should pretend to be able to stand on
their heads as well as forgive sins.

Returning the kind saluation of
Lady Kinnnaird. I am yours

Most sincerely

David Livingstone

I expect to be joined by M^{rs} L soon after a
long & unexpected separation but without
I am sorry to say a single child