

Letter to Adam Sedgwick, 27 May 1859

David Livingstone

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

[MS 1011] River Zambesi East Africa
27 May 1859
Professor Sedgewick
My Dear Friend

We have just returned from the discovery of a magnificent Lake called Shirwa (Sheerwah) and a report of the natives on its banks, which we see no reason to doubt, says, that Shirwa is separated from a much larger Lake by a strip of land of only five or six miles in width - This larger Lake is called Nyinyesi = the stars - and is evidently the Nyanja, Nyassa, or Uniamesi of the Maps which stretches pretty well up to the Equator. This opening is so important that I feel bound to let you know about it as soon as possible - in order that you may sympathize in the emotions which it calls forth in connection with the great object we have in view -

We visited the Shire about the beginning of the present year and our presence caused considerable alarm among the people who had never seen white visitors before. We ascended in our little steamer about a hundred miles of Latitude - the Portuguese never went more than about 25 miles and having been beaten back had no good word to say for those who had drubbed them - The Manganja as the people are called are brave and can use well their & poisoned arrows.

We have had fever but of so mild a type that we failed for some months to recognize it. Dr Kirk & I have escaped altogether - The coal is excellent - one seam is twenty five feet thick and exposed in a cliff section - another 13 feet 7 in. old coal, I believe
[0002]

you must bear with my prosiness at first
My reasons will appear farther on - the river

is deep and easily navigated for one hundred miles - Seeing the alarm we had created - The people in large bodies guarding us on both banks night and day we retired in order to let out (though I say it) decently civil conduct have its effect, and in the end of March returned, and found the inhabitants so friendly, that we left the vessel with a chief named Chibisa; [(16°2')] and with Dr Kirk and 15 Makololo proceeded Northwards on foot - Our course lay along the banks of the Shire which then was found flowing in a mountainous region. and though our marches were but short we each day gained 200 or 300 feet of elevation; In about 10 days we were 1500 feet above the ship and in sight of a mountain - Dzomba - or as people near it call it Zomba, over 6000 feet high - A marsh prevented our following the Shire to the Northern spur of Zomba to which it seemed to go or rather come, and in crossing the Southern spur we were 3400 ft high, and thence we got our first sight of Lake Shirwa in the East - four days afterwards we stood on its shores, and thanked the Great Father of All, for permitting us the honour of first seeing its broad blue waters - A grand sight it is for it has among bold mountain scenery - and all the mountains are clothed with vegetation and several are inhabited even on their tops We went some distance up a mountain and could see 26° of watery horizon in the N. N., N.E. only, two mountain tops rose in the blue distance like little islands fifty or sixty miles away. the Lake is of a pear shape or were it not so unpoetical I would call it of a tadpole [0003]

shape - It is from 25 to 30 miles wide in the broad part but a narrow prologation stretches south of where we stood some 30 miles. No outlet is known - its water is bitter but drinkable and it contains plenty of fish alligator, and hippopotami - Leeches too as we found in wading through a piece of marsh to get a meridian observation of the Sun with the natural horizon - The shire probably comes out of Nyinyesi- It cannot come out of this for its water is sweet. We could obtain no information about Burton's party - but returning down the valley of the Shirwa - we ascertained that there is one point in which only which about 30 miles of land travel will be necessary between a

branch of the Shire, and the southern end of Shirwa - We have got no news from England since we left - If Burton has preceded us to Nyinyesi then we have got a Lake of our own and a short route to his - We mean to return shortly and I hope then to be able to tell you more about it.

At present I have to say that this is a real highland region - We saw many old people and D^r Kirk and I slept on the ground out of doors 20 nights and got our clothes wet with dew from the tall grass (7 or 8 ft) every morning yet returned to the ship in good health - The vegetation & people are much like what we have in Londa in the middle of the country also many streams with bogs - the people cultivate cotton very extensively - we never saw so much anywhere and this is the region I have pointed out as capable of becoming a counter poise to American slave labour The farther we went the more important did this crop appear and every one spins & weaves it.

[0004]

Now the Portuguese knew nothing of this Lake being so near - Lat 15 23' S. the point we reached Long. 35° 35' & 36° E. and we tell them very little - we allow our own Government to do that (tell them) for when I crossed the continent the Portuguese minister claimed the honour for two black men (Blue book for 1857) with Portuguese names, in order to establish a claim to lordship over the whole territory - then they propose to erect a station at the mouth of the Shire for the same purpose - and a custom house at the mouth of the Kongone branch of the Zambesi which we discovered = At present they are depopulating the country by French free emigration - The emigrants being sent out in chains - you will thus see that I cannot have much heart to open up a country for a parcel of Portuguese pedlars in mens bodies & souls, but I trust in Providence to turn all round to the glory of God - We were obliged to wait for a stronger vessel to take us up the rapids above Tette - I would rather have gone up to make our experiment in the Makololo country at once but it has turned out for the opening of a highland Lake region; and I pray that our own Christian people may be permitted to enter, and spread our blessed Redeemer's

kingdom - Be kind enough to present my
kindest remembrances to Professor Whewell
I shall take the liberty of writing him on our
return from Nyinyesi - Our naval officer
did not suit - Said he had not "his proper position
as second in command" so I had to become both
first & second and you know stand upon a paddle
box in a hot sun is not favourable to literary labour
Blessing be on you

Ever Yours Affectionately

David Livingstone