

## Letter to William R.S.V. Fitzgerald, 13 March 1872

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[0001]

Unyanyembe East Africa,

13 March 1872

The Right Hon'ble  
Sir W. R. S. V. Fitzgerald,

May it please your excellency  
Before starting on the  
Expedition into Central Africa in  
which I am now engaged I received  
very great kindness and important  
service from the Bombay Gov<sup>t</sup> then  
under Sir Bartle Frere. I have writ-  
ten to express my thankfulness but  
my letters to and from the coast  
have all been destroyed, apparently  
because I was considered a spy  
on the slave trade whose correspond-  
ence would do no good to the traffic.  
The search for the sources of the  
Nile they knew to be sham & I was  
prevented from either getting supplies  
of goods or sending information coast-  
wards. This letter however goes by  
Henry M. Stanley, the travelling  
correspondent of the New York  
Herald

[0002]  
Herald sent at an expense of over  
£4,000 to obtain accurate informa-  
tion & afford assistance in my  
isolation. If I give a short sketch  
of my progress thus far it may  
gratify the members of your Gov<sup>t</sup>.  
who cheerfully and cordially lent  
me their aid.

The first point of import-  
ance I ascertained was the  
watershed of South Central Africa  
was a broad tree-covered upland,

between 10° - 12° South Latitude. It is generally between 4000 & 5000 feet above the level of the sea, but mountains stand on it at various points which are between 6000 & 7000 feet above the ocean level - These mountains are possibly what the Geographer Ptolemy, for reasons now unknown, called the "mountains of the moon" because from the watershed on which they stand springs almost innumerable arise and unite into burns or brooks that never dry, and these converge into

[0003]

into streams of 20-40-60 or even 80 yards - and all running together form three great mains of drainage in a large gradually sloping upland valley which, beginning at the watershed, bends Northward and is probably the great valley of the Nile. The three [great] mains of drainage are large lacustrine rivers = extant specimens of what in prehistoric times abounded in Africa - and which in the Bechuana Country in the South still retain the name - "Melapo" and in the North are called "Wadys" both words meaning the same thing - River beds in which no water over now flows - these great Lacustrine rivers often take the name Lualaba & require distinctive epithets which I have ventured to supply. In the part of the great valley now explored there are, besides the great lacustrine rivers, fine lakes of great extent - connected by the rivers into one system - the furthest south is

[0004]

is called Bangweolo. It is between 140 & 150 miles long & 60 or 70 broad and I tried to cross and measure it accurately but on reaching an island 24 miles off, found that my mariners had stolen the canoe and got into a flurry on learning

that the real owners was in pursuit.  
They would come back for me - that  
they would certainly, but I had  
nothing left to hire another but my  
coverlet & it was very cold, being  
4000 feet above the sea - so I did  
not relish being a Robinson Crusoe  
on a small island, and an apparently  
shoreless sea for 183° degrees around,  
& came back. Bangweolo is not a  
source of the Nile, for no large  
river begins in a Lake. It is fed  
by the river Chambeze & other streams  
& these may be considered sources  
rising far South of anything that  
geographers had dreamed. Emerging  
from the Lake it takes the name  
Luapula and that flowing into Lake  
Moero

[0005]

Moero escapes thence by a huge rent  
in the lofty mountains in the North -  
East and in the country called Rua  
& now assumes the name Lualaba -  
Webb's Lakeriver. It next enters  
Lake Kamolondo and moves on  
after that it has received in Kamo-  
londo another large river - Bartle  
Frere's River - which far South is called  
Lufira as the Webb's great Lualaba  
or Central Line of drainage - Alto-  
gether west by Kamolondo, - Young's  
Lualaba flows through Lake Lincoln  
& then as to the great Lacustrine river  
Lomame it too falls into the Central  
main & four days beyond the conflu-  
ence a fifth great lake is formed  
the discovery of which I was forced  
by Bamain slaves sent to me instead  
of men, to give up as the "unknown  
Lake". Nothing is more surprising  
in this Central region than the vast  
amount of water in Lakes, - rivers -  
and running rills - Webb's Lualaba,  
North of Kamolondo, is from one to  
three

[0006]

three miles broad and never can be  
waded at any point or at any time

of the year. The Manyema Country through which it flows is inhabited by cannibals & no trader or traveller ever ventured there till two years ago. The elephants' tusks were left to rot in the interminable forests where the animals have been slain - the first adventurers I met had 18,000 lbs of ivory carried in two relays - and I have seen others with 3000 lbs weight bearing them in three relays of men. Bombay merchants will soon see these tusks in the market some half rotten & peeled to conceal the effect of tooth of time - others gnawed by a Rodent animal to sharpen his teeth, as London rats do on leaden pipes. In the forests one sees the sun about midday by thin pencils of rays sent down through the gloom, & at the clearances round villages. The Manyema, or as the Arabs shorten it Manyema, live in

[0007]

in villages & each headman is independent of & hates every other - there is no political cohesion and no great King in the whole country. They knew as little about the country as would be geographers who collected all their knowledge from slaves. At 30 miles distance they often had never heard of their own great river. It was therefore very difficult to explore & find out where the drainage went. I made four attempts in different directions but the vegetation was so dense, no help could be obtained by a glimpse of the river, - the mud was simply awful - plunging and splashing told severely on all. The ivory traders in spite of their intense eagerness to please the Bancain employers had often to give in by irritable eating ulcers fastening on the feet. I was laid up by them for five months. It is impossible to describe the toil of winding ones way through forests so dense only

elephants

[0008]

elephants & buffaloes could penetrate  
& often in mud from calf to thigh  
deep - these must be facsimiles of  
the haunts frequented by the megatheria  
& the great old uncomfortable beasts  
that geologists speak about - and  
then after all the great river made  
so much Westing - some [five] degrees of  
Long. - I could not for a long time  
be sure that it was not the Congo -  
& who would run the risk of being  
put into a cannibal Manyema  
pot and be converted into black  
man for anything less than the  
grand old Nile. But at length  
Bartle Frere's river & the Lomane  
river - the Western lines of drainage  
flowed into the Central main &  
report said it ran beyond the  
fifth or "unknown lake" into  
large reedy marshes - possibly  
Pethericks - or the Western arm in  
distinction from the Eastern which  
Speke, Grant, & Baker believed  
to be the Nile. - I do not speak  
positively

[0009]

positively yet too many clever men  
have been mistaken for me to assume  
the dogmatic tone. Before leaving  
the watershed I may add that four  
fountains are reported thereon &  
each at no great distance off becomes  
a large river. Two are reported  
to flow South & two run North -  
the Liambai or Upper Zambesi &  
the Kapul flow South. Bartle  
Frere river & the Lomane flow  
North to Egypt(?). I have pre-  
sumed to give names to those foun-  
tains whose rivers I know, & my con-  
cluding trip is to rediscover these  
fountains for I have the presumption  
to start the hypothesis in Central  
Africa, and without a single book  
of reference, that these are the foun-  
tains mentioned to Herodotus by

The Secretary of Minerva in the city  
of Lais in Egypt - if they exist  
only in my imagination, from the dim  
recollection of reading the ancient  
historian in boyhood, then we shall see -  
and

[0010]

and I shall tell you that I was  
mistaken; another point to be examined  
is the very extensive underground  
excavations which seem to be ancient,  
for the natives all ascribe their  
formation to the deity and all have  
running streams of water laid on  
& are equal to the protection of the  
people of large districts in cases  
of invasion - also very ancient &  
inexhaustible Malachite copper  
mines at Katanga

I have been much longer  
than I intended - 6 years instead of  
2 - but I have lost two whole years  
in time, been burdened by 1800 miles  
of useless tramp, - & how much waste  
of money I cannot say, all through  
the matter of supplies & men being  
entrusted to our Banian ~~Biehan~~ [Indian]  
fellow subjects & they entrusted  
the whole thing to slaves who lay and  
feasted on my stores for sixteen  
months & then sold off all for slaves  
and ivory - the slave trade in all  
this

[0011]

this region, & especially in Manyema,  
is carried on almost exclusively  
with arms, ammunition & goods  
advanced to Arab Agents by  
Banians - their slaves needed no  
more than a hint & all came &  
solemnly swore that they were told  
not to follow but force me back - they  
forced me back 500 miles and again  
I had to come 300 to seize goods here  
sent by another lot of slaves - and my  
Agent at Zanzibar believes all they  
tell him. - It was stated in the  
House of Lords on the authority he receives

that all my wants had been supplied  
while I virtually got only what I my-  
self sent to Ujiji in 1866. - But I am  
all right & ready by M<sup>r</sup> Stanley's help  
and will be off as soon as fifty men  
come from the coast.

I have &c  
by David Livingstone  
H. M.'s Consul,  
Inner Africa. P.S.

[0012]  
P.S. I have requested vaccine  
virus to be sent by mail & will  
feel obliged if it is forwarded [to Zanzibar] at  
your convenience, - add cover to John  
Webb U.S. Consul; it will be  
sent on safely.

(True Copy)  
A C Milder  
For Assistant Secretary.