

Letter to John Washington, 25 May 1859

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[0001]

Kongone Harbour

25 May 1859

Private

My Dear Captain Washington

We came down here for the 24th in expectation of meeting a cruizer with salt provisions for our crew but our letters to the Admiral must have suffered detention somewhere or the service may have required the presence of the ships elsewhere. We have lately been up the Shire and discovered a magnificent inland Lake called Shirwa. We visited the river in the beginning of this year and created considerable alarm the people never having been visited by white men before. Remaining at Tette during a portion of the unhealthy season we returned to the Shire and found the people all so friendly that we left the vessel in charge of the Quarter-master and Stoker - Walker & Rowe and with D^r Kirk & 15 Makololo proceeded Northwards on foot. the chief with whom they remained is

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Chibisa - an influential man as we found by a servant he sent with us. We went Northwards along the banks of the river and in ten days had risen 1500 feet above the ship - the river rushing over cataracts is confined in a narrow channel and with very little trouble would afford water power equal to that of all the mills in England. We then got information that a large lake existed on our east and

believing that the Shire came out of it we tried to go along it to fix the point of departure but a marsh prevented our going to the North West end of a Lofty mountain Dzomba or as the people nearest pronounce it Zomba to which the course of the Shire seemed to lead us coming round the southern talus of Zomba we got a distant view of Lake Shirwa and were informed that the Shire had no connection with it. The spur of Zomba which we crossed was 3400 ft. above the ship and the mass of the mountain on our left seemed higher than Morambala which we ascertained to be 4000 so we say Zomba is over 6000 ft. Four days afterwards we reached the shores of Shirwa and a grand sight it is for it is surrounded on all sides by lofty mountains equal if not of greater altitude than Zomba. We went up some distance the mount Pirimiti and could not see anything except a watery horizon and two mountain tops like little islands

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in the blue distance fifty or sixty miles away There is an uninhabited mountain island near where we stood called Shirwa too. It is of a spear or were it not so inelegant a tadpole shape. We were in Lat. $15^{\circ} 23'$. Long. $35^{\circ} 35'$ E the Long. wants a correction for I observed Antares for the East side of the Moon & found out afterwards that it was not in distance We cannot be far wrong in saying between 35° & 36° E. Long. This point is at the beginning of the broad part and 30 miles or so of tail stretch away southward the natives say and I see no reason to doubt them that Shirwa is separated by only five or six miles of comparatively level land from Nyinyesi (= stars) the Nyanja 'Nyassa or Uniamesi for it is called the "great Nyanja" but this word, meaning only a collection of water or a river, as the Shire, caused us much confusion. When we enquired for Nyanja we were supposed to speak of either the Shire, the Shirwa - a marsh - or the Lake 'Nyassa - but Nyinyesi is distinctive. We subsequently found out that the lower small end of Shirwa is separated by about 30 miles only of Latitude from the branch of the Shire

the Ruo up which we went seven or eight miles

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and not much over 2000 ft of altitude.
While waiting to see if we are to get another
ship capable of stemming the rapids, we mean
to examine Shirwa perhaps Nyinyesi more
carefully. A first visit creates alarm
so we have to manage slowly to avoid collision
There is no outlet known to Shirwa - the
water is bitter but drinkable. It resembled
a very weak solution of Epsom salts. Many
streams flow into it for it is a very well
watered region. Vegetation & streams with
bogs nearly identical with those of Londa.
People numerous and well armed with
large bows and poisoned arrows - they cultivate
an immense quantity of cotton. The farther
we went the more important did the
crop appear. All spin & weave it. They
have no ivory, but plenty of provisions
at a cheap rate. We slept 20 nights on the
ground out of doors and got our clothes wet
with dew off the tall grass (7 or 8 ft) which
overhangs the paths every morning yet came
back in good health to the vessel. We saw
many old people and it seems from its
altitude to be a healthy region. The mountains
are very beautiful - generally clothed with vegetation
and often inhabited. Zomba is so and
we could see the cultivated patches from
below by their
brighter green. By the way
this mountain is not in the Lake
but it lies between the Shirwa & Shire valleys

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and to a spectator on Nyinyesi probably
appears standing in the Lake. The Longitudinal
crack speculation is a "cracked" one and must
go alongside of the Zambesi flowing down
to Quilimane and getting lost in the
Kalahari Desert. The information collected
by the church missionaries (bating size) is
as far as we can learn the most reliable
We hope to be able to be able to tell you more about
it and we hope that our divergence
for a time only, from the Makalolo
country may be looked on favourably by the Foreign Office. The Makololo performed their
service very well. Tette
suffers from a drought so it is a

benefit to take them where provisions
are cheap. I have given them while at
Tette about 8 shillings worth of goods
weekly, but gave those who went
with us small wages. The whole trip
to Shirwa cost under £10. The Kroomen
say they cannot travel - but they are
bad specimens - the picked ones you
sent for all deserted on seeing that
Bedingfeld was with us - so we got
a sorry lot off the streets of Sierra Leone
a crew of four English sailors and

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trusting to country people for wooding
would be preferable to Kroomen for
country people eat country produce
Our fellows must have man of war's
allowance [of cocoa, tea sugar flour biscuits & beef &c.] and we have to expend our
expedition stores on them though when
we leave the ship to go anywhere they are
useless. They got fever before we did.
We have an excellent Makololo stoker
and the Quarter master says that they
beat the Kroomen in splitting wood. If
the Makololo perform good service at
Nyinyesi and they seem eager for it
having imbibed a little of the spirit of
discovery I hope you may get me
authorized to pay them say £1 or £1.10
each.

We have had fever among us
in spite of quinine but of so mild a
form that I failed to recognize it. the
difference may be in our being well
provided for. I had it severely when
destitute of every comfort. D^r Kirk
and I set down the attacks as common
colds - their repeated appearance with
the same symptoms in the same person
at last led us to conclude it was
fever. Baines gets heady & incoherent

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having it is said once had brain fever. Rae
exactly a severe cold. In M^r C. Livingstone as
if bilious. In Thornton it is like indigestion -
D^r Kirk and I have escaped - though we
have had enough of exposure to Malaria
We dont believe in quinine as a preventative

Rae took it without intermission -
but got it & so did C. Livingstone
We take it now though we have neither
sherry nor spirits to mix it by way
of keeping you folks from blaming
us after we are gone!

We left M^r C. Livingstone orders
to proceed to the gold region South West
of Tette in April but an irruption
of the Landeens prevented him. We
have a collection of plants to send
by the man of war - a box of Buaze
to be manufactured into cloth. We intend
sending seeds [of it] & live plants to India.
We send also sketches of the rapids
by Baines in oil. They are the only
things he does well. His natives are
a compound of Low West African
negro - South Australian and Patagonian
quite unlike the people here and useless
for the purposes of Ethnology. The

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only peculiarities D^r Kirk and I can
detect is a widening of the alae nasi and
prolongation of the head upwards & back-
wards - this Baines cannot catch.
Rae is an excellent engineer - very
obliging, willing & well behaved. But
he leaves at the end of two years I suppose
for the sake of rising in his profession
as he is much esteemed by Mess^{rs} Tod
and Macgregor of Glasgow. It would be
no loss though Baines and Thornton
retired too [(Baines becomes a little heady sometimes)] - The latter is too young for
roughing it. The expedition would be quite
as efficient without them. I have had
Thornton mining coal at Tette but he does
very little, and - he lays all the blame on
the people employed under him. He cannot
be trusted out of sight and is frequently
ill - a small expedition is the most
manageable in [exploration.] This is of course between
ourselves. The luggage becomes a nuisance.

the Portuguese have got a new Governor
General and his brother supersedes our
best friend Major Secard at Tette. We have
to vacate the commandants residence and
will use our iron house. They try to make

all we discover appear theirs & will soon set
up a settlement at the mouth of the Shire, and
a custom house here for this purpose. Please
present my kind salutations to M^{rs} W. David Livingstone

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D^r Kirk and C. Livingstone with the Quarter master & stoker are all than can be wished.
They
take kindly to the natives. We make another spirit level and will try Magnetical observations
at
Shirwa for Gen. Sabine. We shall probably try & carry a whaler with us on the axle & wheels
designed for the Launch but say nothing lest we fail

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Meteorology was in Bedingfeld's department and a sorry set of instruments he
selected. Mountain barometer without index error - another

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broken - Maximum thermometer broken another useless & other things wanting
altogether - a sextant I would not pick off the streets. Fortunately I brought my own
I have sent my observations to Maclear

I shall ask the Admiral to relieve the
Kroomen - the lighter we are the better
Two English sailors are better than 10 Kroomen

P.S. It would lessen our expenses and not
impair our efficiency if we could ship the Kroomen
on board a man of war without breaking their
engagement for two years. The Makololo would
not be half the expense - they are quite as much
sailors as four fifths of the Kroomen we have got.
The Portuguese and we are good friends, but when they are
drunk we hear that they dislike the Expedition in their
hearts, and when we recollect what they did to Macleod
if another ship is sent out a Pennon [with guns] or authority to wear
one would be an advantage, but of this you are the
best judge. D. L.

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Captain Washington R. N.
Admiralty
D^r Livingstone