

Letter to John Washington, 25 May 1859

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[0001]

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

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

[0002]

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

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

[0003]

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

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 f^t 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

[0005]

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 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

[0007]

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 don't 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 & backwards - 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

[0009]

I shall ask the Admiral to recieve 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.

[0010]

Captain Washington R. N.
Admiralty
D^e Livingstone