

Letter to John Washington

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

[0001]

Shupanga 5th May 1862

Private

My Dear Captain Washington

With a sore heart I have to tell of the loss of my bosom friend of eighteen years. She died on the 27th the complaint having the worst complication continued vomiting by which all the remedies were rejected. We have been three months down in the Delta instead of as I anticipated three or four days. I bitterly regret now having consented to her coming this time, but matters have taken a turn so utterly beyond my control that I bow to the will of the Almighty Disposer of events. I thought that Lady Nyassa could sail out & on reaching Kongone

[0002]

cut wood & steam up to the cataracts but she might have been lost. When Captain Wilson volunteered to help us up to the cataracts I thought all would then turn out right we should only be a week or two down here. But Pioneer as I thought failed to carry 35 tons. We landed the sections at Shupanga there was some tinkering at the engines and we came back to the sea in one day. We took 3 weeks to go up. I still [at that time] put the blame on her having been overloaded. She was down to five feet. But Gorgon had been driven away and during seventeen days we were detained at the Kongone nothing was done to the Engines. After the Gorgon had left the air pump was opened,

and happening to go down I saw
at least a quarter of an inch of
sand round the plunger & it had
worn a great way into the cylinder
on the working parts. he trunions

[0003]

which had not been packed for 20
months were repacked then, and we
were detained a day & a half while that
was done. We went up to Shupanga
with a load which brought her down
again to 5 feet in 2 1/2 days steaming -
We grounded a day. Now it is not
the Engineer's fault that we go
aground - but the feed pump ought
to be disconnected at once and
the boiler supplied by the donkey
engine. She ought not to be allowed
to pump in sand. When the
other valves come the Engine will
be quite safe. I tell you all this
without one ill feeling towards the
Engineer, he has become respectful
again & probably he was irritated
by some of the officers of the Gorgon
as it is evident he does not feel
kindly towards the service. But
I think it only fair to explain

[0004]

what without any engineering know
ledge appears to have been
the cause of the wretched failure of the
Pioneer in carrying 35 tons. he list
is nothing as in a seaway she would always list .

Gwilliam the quarter master
& Hardisty have always been at
variance & having come to words
lately Gwilliam assaulted Hardisty
and I have to give Gwilliam over
to a man of war for trial. I am
very sorry for Gwilliam for he
behaved well during our period up
the river and is a good hard working
man. When in drink however he
is bad. While among Portuguese
the men do get drink and we
had much dysentery & illness. We
could not get fresh meat except

at enormous prices & having no
flour the beans caused irritation
of the bowels. We part with a number
of the men - when we meet a man

[0005]

of war about the end of this month .
John Hutchins quartermaster
invalided from being subject to
dysentery. Wheatcroft quarter
master for Lady Nyassa an
inveterate drunkard disrated &
reduced to single pay. Nolan
a stoker never did a day's work
since he came nor is it said
any where else - single pay
from beginning - Waldman
a cooper intended to be carpenter
but quite useless. He was on
his passage to the Cape and I
shall send him off . He is not
a man of war's man. Reid
turns out a first rate man
as carpenter & everything. Macleod
a smith - a very good & well
behaved man. A civilian .

[0006]

M^r Rae put the hull together in
a fortnight with but a very few
hands - but for the sad event which
casts a gloom over all my horizon
I should have felt delighted. I cannot
spare my brother though I thought
of reducing our expenditure by sending
him home. We shall need every
hand at Roadmaking & carriage .
We have about 4 months
provisions - we the
preserved meats you sent but
the ale by 10 dozens remains
somewhere. I feel sorry that
your kindness is stopped in its
flow - where I cannot divine
we it but twice - eight
was the number in one - the other
much less. It surely could be
traced. It would have saved us

[0007]

a great deal of money. I had to
buy mess rum for our crew
at 10/ per gallon. I would have
let them want rather but
thought at the time we should
get the sections up to the cataracts
and wished to give them
their grog while working ashore.
I shall enclose my accounts
in a letter which will go to
the Cape in July. M^r Young
is going to give quarterly
accounts of expenditure as
we ought to have done all
along. We have no forms
for it. I am a good deal out
of pocket at present and
have not enough private
money to pay our six

[0008]

Johanna men who have now
served 13 months - If we get
12 more when these leave we
shall do with but few Europeans
Captain Oldfield has promised to send them. They have never
once been sick until lately.

My poor wife had made
ample provision for making
Lady Nyassa a comfortable home
for us all. We find evidence
of this in her boxes. As a great
deal was new I have selected the
best and any keepsakes for her
daughters and send them in three
boxes, to the care of M^r Frederick
Fitch. I have taken the liberty
of addressing them to you. We
took plenty of table linen & towels
for the Lady Nyassa .

I am &c David Livingstone

[0009]

P.S.

I would just add that the water is still
high but falling fast. I think we shall
get up the Shire in June. We have a

fair prospect of being able to do our work comfortably. D^r Kirk & C Livingstone went off this morning to Tette to remove our things by canoes. the Portuguese have said nothing to us about our freeing the captives & we say nothing to them. We are good friends still. I gave Major Secard his watch. the other would never work I suppose it had been knocked - if repaired I shall buy it if you please. Waller was down here &

[0010]
left on 3^d with all the mission goods in canoes. A report says that the missionaries contemplate retiring down to Chibisa's a bad movement to come down to the lowlands but some are faint hearted . We carry no more for them as it is out of the question .

Please give the sad intelligence to my friend M^r Conyngham of the Foreign Office & Remember me most kindly to M^{rs} Washington .