

Letter to Thomas M. Steele, 20 September 1853

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

[0001]

[Exploration into the Interior of Africa by
the Re Dr Livingston. Communicated by Lt Col Steele FRGS June 12.]
Town of Sekeletu, Linyanti 20th September
1853

My dear Colonel

As soon as I could procure people willing to risk a journey through country lately the scene of the gallant deeds of the Boers, I left Kuruman, and my being aware of certain wrathful fulminations uttered by General Peit to deter me from again visiting the little strip of country which the fancy lies between Magaliesberg and Jerusalem, our progress was pretty till we entered latitude 19°[at a place that I have marked on my map as the Fever Ponds] Here the whole party, except a Bakwain lad and , was laid prostrate by fever. He managed the oxen and I the hospital through the goodness of God, the state of the invalids permitted us again to Northwards, I did not follow our old path but from Kama kama on the magnetic meridian [(N.N.W.)] in order to avoid the tsetse. This new path us into a densely wooded country. The grass was from 8 to ten feet high, the greater leafiness of the trees shewed we were in a moist climate, and we most agreeably surprised by the presence of vines growing luxuriantly and clusters of dark purple grapes. The seeds, as large as split peas, and astringent leave but little room for pulp though the grape itself is good size. The Bakwain lad now became ill, but by the aid of two , we continued to make some progress. I was both driver and road , having either the axe or whip in hand all day long till we came to 18° 4 . Here we discovered that the country adjacent to the Chobe flooded - vallies looked like rivers, and after crossing several we came one - the Sanshurch - which presented a complete barrier to farther travelling waggons. It was deep. 1/2 a mile broad and contained hippopotami. searching in vain for a ford our two bushmen decamped. Being anxious to reach the Makololo I took [one of] the strongest of our invalids the Sanshurch in a small pontoon, kindly presented by Messers.

Webb and Codrington, and went N.N.W. [across the flooded country] in search of the Chobe. After through about 20 miles of an inundated plain, we came to a of reed which towards the N.E. seemed interminable. We then turned

[for a short distance] in the direction of our former waggon stand and from a high tree were by a sight of the Chobe. But such a mass of vegetation grew the bank and the flowing river, [that] our utmost efforts failed in a passage in [to it] - the water among the reeds either became too deep, we were unable to bend down the barrier of Papyrus & reed bound together a kind of convolvulus. You will understand the nature of our struggles I mention that a horrid sort of grass about six feet high and having edges which cut the hands most cruelly, wore my [strong moleskin] "unmentionables" through at the knees, and my shoes (nearly new) at the toes. My handkerchief the former, but in subsequent travelling through the dense grass of plains the feet fared badly. Though constantly wet up to the middle during day, we slept soundly by night, during the three days we spent among reeds, and having[only] effected a passage in[to][the open water of the Chobe] on the fourth day. after along the river in the pontoon about 20 miles we discovered village of Makololo. We were unexpected visitors and the more so they believed that no one could cross the Chobe[from the south bank] without their

[0002]

In their figurative language they said "I had fallen on them as if from a cloud, yet riding on a hippopotamus" (ponton) A vague report of our approach had [previously] reached the chief, and two parties were out in search of us but they had gone along old paths. In returning to the waggons which we did in canoes and in a straight we found the distance not more than ten miles. Our difficulties were now , for a great number of canoes and about 140 people were soon dispatched the town. They transported our goods and waggons across the country river, and when we had [been landed on the other side of the Chobe, we travelled] ~~gone~~ Northward till within about one day from Sesheké in order to avoid the flooded lands [adjacent to the River, we then struck upon] ~~on the other side of the Chobe, we reached the town by the path which M^rOswel and I travelled on horseback in~~

1850 [and turning into it proceeded South West until we came to Sekeletu's town Linyanti] Our reception here was as warm as could have been expected. The chief [Sekeletu] not nineteen years of age, said, he had got another father instead of Sebituane, not quite sure, however, about learning to read. "He feared it might his heart and make him content with one wife only as in the case of " It is pleasant to hear objections frankly stated, ~~and heartsickening to deal with gelatinous characters who agree with everything you say. In one of my first interviews with Sechele, he asked "if what you say be true, how was it that your forefathers allowed all my forefathers to pass away without once sending to let them know"!~~ When I proposed to Sekeletu to examine his to ascertain if there is a suitable locality for a mission, he consented , but he had not yet seen me enough. Then he could not allow to go alone, some evil might befall me and he would be accountable

[A] This and Fever caused some delay - ~~but when we did set out, though our company~~ consisted of 160 men, our fleet of 33 canoes proceeded rapidly the river towards the Barotse. I had the choice of all the canoes and best was 34 feet long and 20 inches wide. With six paddles we passed 44 miles of latitude by one day's pull of 10 1/2 hours. If we add the to this, it must have been upwards of 50 miles actual distance river ~~(called everywhere Leeanbye viz the River)~~ is indeed a magnificent one. is often more than a mile broad, and adorned with numerous islands of three to five miles in length. These and the banks too are covered with and most of those [trees] on the brink of the water send down roots from their like the Banian. The islands ~~and at~~ [at] a little distance seem rounded of sylvan vegetation of various hues, reclining on the bosom the glorious stream. The beautiful[y][of the] scene is greatly increased by date palm and lofty palmyra towering above the rest and casting their foliage against a cloudless sky.[D] The banks are rocky and undulating the water being now low navigation was rendered dangerous by and cataracts. The former are not visible when the river is full the Cataracts of Kalé Bombwe & Nambwe are always dangerous fall is from four to six feet in perpendicular height. But the Falls of (hard g.) excel them all. ~~omit Their chief peculiarity consists in the rock which forms one bank below the fall jutting out and presenting its shoulder to a portion of the torrent. The water thus dashed into a chasm and against the rock sends up a cloud of spray on which are reflected the colours of the rainbow. We waded through 100 yards river in order to reach the rock . This and portions of the river on the other side form fine cascades. The Heathen who went with me viewed the scene with awe. Some exclaimed "How grand the works of God are"!~~ others washed their faces in the spray as a charm, while those of the Utilitarian school searched the holes in the rock for round stones to grind snuff. I ought to have mentioned that [I]t [T]he main fall [of this] is over a straight of rock about 60 or 70 yards long and 40 feet deep. Tradition reports the [in this place] of two hippopotamus hunters, who, too eager in the pursuit of a wounded , were with their prey drawn down into the frightful gulph. And we some yams in what was said to [have] been the garden of a man who of old down the river and led out a portion of it here for irrigation - minds must have arisen from time to time in these regions but of the use of letters they have left no memorial. One never sees a , nor a stone of remembrance set up. The very rocks are illiterate contain no fossils. [F] In the bed of

the river they are of sandstone hardened porphoritic basalt. All the beautiful parts of the river are infested by but when we come to the Northern confines of Lat. 16° the tsetse suddenly . The high banks covered with trees seem to leave the river in the of ridges of about 300 feet high. they stretch away to the N N E & .N.W. untill they are from 20 to 30 miles apart - the intervening space valley is the Barotse country proper, and it is annually inundated not rains but by waters, one portion of which comes from the N.W. the other from the North. There are no trees in this valley except such were transplanted for the sake of shade by the chief Santuru. It is covered coarse succulent grasses, one of these is 12 feet high and as thick a man's thumb. the villages and towns are situated on mounds of which have been formed artificially. the site of Nahiele the present was so constructed. This was not the antient capital.[G] The river now flows over its site and all that remains of that which cost the of Santuru the labour of many years, is a few square yards the same thing has happened to another antient site the river seems Eastwards. Ten feet of rise above low water mark submerges whole valley except the foundations of the huts and two feet more sweep away the towns. This never happens though among the below the valley the river rises 60 feet and then floods the adjacent to Sesheke on both sides. The valley contains a great of villages and cattle stations - these and large herds of cattle on the succulent herbage, meet they eye in every direction visiting the ridges above mentioned we found them to be only the com-of lands which are never inundated. they are covered with trees abound in fruitful gardens in which are cultivated sugar cane potato, two kinds of manioc, two kinds of yam, bananas, millet &c is taken of the inundation too - to raise large quantities of maize Caffre corn of large grain and beautiful whiteness. These with abundance milk and plenty of fish in the river make the people always refer the Barotse country as the land of plenty. No part of the country be spoken of as salubrious. The Fever must be braved if a is to be established. [it is very fatal even among natives] I have had eight attacks of it the very severe, but I never laid by. I tried native remedies in to discover if they possessed any valuable means of cure

[0004] after being stewed in vapour baths, smoked like a red herring over a fire green twigs in a hot potsherd, and physicked secundem black artem believe that our own medicines are more efficacious and safer, I not relinquished [the search] and as I make it a rule to keep on good terms my professional bretheren I am not without hope that some of means of [re]establishing the excretions, and to this indeed all their efforts directed, may be well adapted for this complaint.

I did not think it my duty to go towards Mosioathuny-a, for though hilly country the proximity to Mosilikatze renders it impossible for the to live there, but I resolved to know the whole Barotse country coming to the conclusion now reached, that the Ridge East of Nariiele the only part of the country that can be fixed on for a mission. I left Sekeletu's party at [Nariiele] the Barotse capital and went Northwards river presents the same appearance of low banks without trees till we to 14° 38. Lat. Here again it is forest to the water's edge and Tsetse might have turned now, but the river Londa or Leeba comes from capital of a large state of the former name, and the chief being friendly to foreigners. If I succeed in reaching the west and am permitted to return by this river, it will be water for perhaps 2/3^{ds} of the way. We went therefore to the confluence the Leeba or Londa (not Lonta as we have written it) with the Leeambye is in 14° 11 South. the Leeba comes from the N & by W. or N. N. W. the Leeambye there abruptly quits its Northing and comes from East Nor East. (the people pointed at its course due East. Are the

Maninche or Bashukulompo river & Leeambye not one river dividing meeting again down at the Zambesi?). The Loeti with its light water flows into the Leeambye in 14° 18 . It come from Lobale which is probably a country through [which] a Portuguese merchant me he [had] passed, and had to cross as many as ten considerable in one day. the Loeti comes from the West N. West current of the Leeambye is rapid - 100 yards in 60 seconds of time or 4 & 5 miles an

hour. Our elevation must have been con-but I had to regret having no means of ascertaining how it was. The country flooded by the river ends on the west before we reach the Loeti and there is an elevated table land Mangoon which grows grass but no trees. The Barotse country inundated presents the appearance of a lake from 20 to 30 broad and 100 long. [K page 6]H-go on at K The above is I suspect quite enough on the physical features of the country I am afraid to launch out into its moral and political aspects. It would be like writing a book but I shall condense that which I have still to say and hope you will get comfortably through with it at a sitting.

The daughter of Sebituane[had] resigned the chieftainship into [- Sekeletu,] her brother's hands all I can learn she did it gracefully and sincerely. Influential men her to put Sekeletu to death lest he should become troublesome when he older. She turned from their proposals in disgust, called a meeting and a womanly gush of tears said she had been induced to rule by her but her own inclination had always been to lead a domestic life therefore requested Sekeletu to take the chieftainship and allow her to marry

[0005] was equally sincere in a continued refusal during several days, for he was afraid being cut off by a pretender who had the audacity to utter some threatening words in the . I do not [now] wonder at the resolution of Sebituane's daughter, having just come a nine weeks tour in company with a crowd who would have been her courtiers was no want of food, oxen were slaughtered almost every day in numbers more sufficient for the wants of all. They were all as kind and attentive to me as they have been to her, yet to endure their dancing, roaring, and singing, their jesting , grumbling, quarrelling, murdering and meanness, equalled a pretty stiff . These children of nature gave me a more intense disgust to Heathenism a much higher opinion of the effects of missions, among tribes in the South which reported to have been as savage as they, than I ever had before.

The pretender above referred to [at Sekeletu's accession and at the time of my arrival] believing that he could effect his object by means a [Portuguese] slave merchant and a number of armed Mambari, encouraged them to the , the selling of children was [had been] positively forbidden by the lawful chief [Sekeletu]But rival transported the slave trading party across the Leeambye[River] and gave them permission to deal in all the Batoka and Bashukulompo villages [to the] East of [it.]

~~the river.~~ A stockade was erected [at Katongo] and a flagstaff for the Portuguese banner planted in return for numerous presents of Sekeletu's, ivory and cattle, [that really belonged to Sekeletu] the pretender a small cannon. Elated with what he considered success he came down with the intention of murdering [Sekeletu himself]the chief, having no doubt but that [after]having ed[ing] this, he should by the aid of his allies easily reduce the whole tribe. We him in our way to Sesheké [as we travelled there from Linyanti] and a very slight circumstance served to the whole conspiracy. [The pretender]He carried a battle axe with which he had arranged his confederates to hamstring Sekeletu as a signal, when he rose up from first interview. I happened to sit down between [him and the pretender]the chief and him and feeling disposed to retire for the evening, said to Sekeletu Where do we sleep tonight He replied "come I will shew you." We rose together and my body that of Sekeletu the attempt was not made - the accomplices and revealed the whole in the evening. "If what you say you know to be true" Sekeletu "Take him off" He was instantly led forth and executed. In a close by. I knew nothing of it till the following day, others deeply implicated afterwards put to death in the same offhand way, and when I remonstrated shedding human blood, the counsellors calmly replied - "You see we are Boers, we are not yet taught." Another [Portuguese slave] merchant came from the West. He here only three days and finding no market departed. A large party of was encamped by ~~the town~~[Katongo] about the time of our arrival [at Linyanti] - no were sold to them and when they heard that I had actually crossed the Chobe, they fled precipitately. The Makololo remonstrated, saying, I would do no harm, but

the Mambari asserted that I would take all their from them because they bought children. The ~~other~~ merchant [I first spoke of] had no idea of the risk he ran in listening to the tale of a disaffected , [he was now in his stockade at Katongo and] ~~but~~ influential men proposed to expel both him and the from the country. dreading the results which might follow a of hostilities, I mentioned the difficulty of attacking a stockade could be defended by perhaps forty muskets. "Hunger is strong " said an underchief "a very great fellow is he" As the chief sufferers [in the event of an attack] would be the poor slaves [...] in gangs I interceded for them and

[0006] as the result of that intercession, of which of course they are ignorant whole party will be permitted to depart in peace. But no stockading will ~~permitted~~[allowed] again.[C]The Makololo quote the precedent of Santuru who when ruled this country was visited by Mambari, but refused them permission buy his people as slaves. This enlightened chief deserves a paragraph as he was a mighty hunter you will glance at it with no unfriendly eye was very fond of rearing the young of wild animals in his town and a number of antelopes, had two tame hippopotami. When I visited his capital the people led me to one end of the mound and shewed me some instruments of iron which are just in the state he left them. they surrounded by trees all of which he transplanted from the ridge. "On these the people " Santuru was accustomed to present his offerings to the gods

(Barimo - it means departed souls too) The instruments consisted of an upright having numerous branches attached on the end of each of which was miniature axe or hoe or spear. Detached from these was another which to me to be the gaurd of a basket hilted sword. When I asked if I might it as a curiosity - "Oh no he refuses" Who refuses? " Santuru" this seems to a belief in a future state of existence. After explaining to them the nature true worship and praying with them in [our] simple form which needs no on the part of the worshipper except that of the heart. We [planted some fruit tree seeds &] departed connection with the faith of these savages. [...and 100 long][Continued from H page 4] I may relate another which happened at the confluence of the Leebea and Leeambye taken Lunar Observations, we were waiting for a meridian altitude the Latitude before commencing our return. My chief boatman sitting by in order to bind up the instruments as soon as I had . there was a large halo round the sun about 20° in diameter that the humidity of the atmosphere which this indicates might rain I asked him if his experience did not lead him to same view. "O no said he "It is the Barimo who have called a

"pecho" (assembly) Dont you see they have placed the Lord (sun) in their "[continues this at K][K]

Some of the Mambari visited us subsequently to their flight [of which I spoke before] - they a dialect very much resembling the Barotse - they have not much in acquiring the dialects of ~~each other~~ even though but recently to each other. they plait their hair in threefold cords & it down by the sides of the head. They offered guns and powder sale at a cheaper rate than traders can do who come from Cape Colony, but the Makalolo despise Portuguese guns because from those in the possession of other Bechuanas - the bullets made of iron. The slave merchant seemed anxious to shew kindness probably by a valuable passport and letter of introduction the ~~Portuguese Consul at the Cape~~[the Chevalier Duprat who holds the office of Arbitrator in the British and Portuguese mixed Commission in Cape]~~He comes from the farthest inland trading station East of Benguela -~~ this is the first instance in which Portuguese have seen the Leeambye in the Interior - the course Pereira if ever travelled must be shifted Northwards. He never the Barotse which is one Malona or Laoi so the son

[0007] companions of Santuru assert and the event of the visit of a white [...] such a remarkable affair among Africans it could scarcely be forgotten [...] century. Our visit is commemorated in eight or ten [children called] MaRobert (M^{rs} L.) Monare's (M^e) Waggon, Horse - Gun, Jesus &c &c. But no one ever heard Pereira. His route may have been more

Northerly than it is laid down Portuguese maps. These indeed seem constructed almost entirely from informants - neither of the merchants I saw possessed as much as common compass.[L] At one time [as I mentioned before] I thought of going west in company with slave traders [from Katongo], but a variety of considerations induced me to decide on alone. I think of Loanda though the distance is greater as preferable Benguela and as soon as the rains commence will try the route on . Trees and rivers are reported which would render travelling by of a waggon impossible. [The Portuguese are carried in hammocks hung on poles - two slaves a man - It does not look well.]

I am sorry to say that the Boers destroyed my celestial Map and thereby it impossible for me to observe as many occultations as I had , I have observed very few, these I now send to M^r Maclear in that he may verify my Lunars. If I am not mistaken we placed our rivers &c about 2° of Longitude too far East. Our stand instead of being 26° East is not more than 23° 50' or 24° is probable that an error of my sextant of which I was not aware deranged calculations of the gentleman, who kindly undertook to examine them send many Lunar observations too, and hope it may be convenient M^r Maclear to examine them and let you know whether am right or wrong in my calculations. The map prepared by

M^rOswel and myself need not be altered yet. It is admirably well for all we pretended to viz. a guide to future investigators. the enclosed sketch you will see I give no more than I saw took the bearings of every reach of the river both in ascending and & allowing for the variation of the compass (21° West) reduced sketch according to the Latitudes and Longitudes obtained by ; I am not well satisfied with the reduction. I have been able to insert the islands and other remarks which would information as well as the form of the river - but you will how nearly my sketch from actual observation agrees with map from Native information. But I shall send an unreduced in order that if you wish it a finer pen than mine may it. The watch performs remarkably well - though deranged for time by an unfortunate knock I think it will yet do good service. you know any one at Loanda on the West Coast send me a graduated to shew the point of ebullition of water at different but please remember not to lay out much on that which be lost. I should like to ascertain the water shed of the east & west

[0008] continent seems to be an elevated table land sloping chiefly towards the East

Sportsmen have still some work before them in the way of discovering the Fauna of Africa. This country abounds in game and beyond Barotse herds of large animals surpass anything I ever saw. Elands and buffaloes tameness was shocking to me. 81 buffaloes defiled slowly before our one evening and lions were impudent enough to roar at us. On the of the Chobe where Bushmen abound they are very seldom heard. brave fellows teach them better manners. My boatman informed me that had never seen an animal with [long] wide spreading horns like an ox, called liombikalela the Indian Bison or another animal which ~~lives~~[does not live] in the water but snorts a hippopotamus and is like that animal [in size. It has a horn & may be the Asiatic Rhinoceros] And we passed some burrows a third animal which burrows from the river inland, has short horns feeds only by night. I did not notice the burrows at the time of passing I give you the report as I got it. Sable antelopes abound and so does the Nahong and there is a pretty little antelope on the Sesheke called "Teeanyane" which new to me. These animals did not lie in my line so you be content with this brief notice.

The birds [are] in great numbers on the river

Sand martin[s] never leaves

~~the River~~[it]. We saw them hundreds in midwinter

, and many beautiful trees were interesting objects of observation but I had perpetually regret the absence of our friend M^rOswel, I had no one to share pleasure which new objects imparts, and instead of pleasant in the evenings I had to endure the everlasting ranting Makalolo

Believe me yours

Most Affectionately

David Livingston
Lieut^t Colonel Steele

Prepaid
Lieutenant Colonel Steele
21 Upper Brook St.
Grosvenor Square
London