

Paper Prepared for the Royal Geographical Society by Dr Livingstone, January 1862

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)
[0001]

the Royal Geographical Society

Under the impression that the Fellows of the Royal Geographical Society appreciate attempts made by our countrymen for the benefit of their fellow men, I may mention before proceeding to detail the operations of our own mission on Lake Nyassa, that we had the pleasure of shewing the Oxford & Cambridge missionaries, the way from Dakanamoio Island a few miles below Murchison's cataracts to the highlands of the Manganja South of Mount Zomba. We left the ship in their company on the 15th July and in two marches reached the edge of the plateau of some 3000 feet on which geographers will agree that, with common sense, the missionaries are more likely to enjoy good health while pursuing their benevolent enterprise than they would be on any of the adjacent lowlands. Here we were mortified to find that advantage had been taken of the route followed by Dr Kirk from the Shire to Tette to institute an extensive system of slave hunting in the very country to which the bishop and his associates had come. the first party met had eighty four captives. As it was possible that they might have been bought, they were asked how they came to be bound and led in that way towards Tette. It turned out that a marauding party of a tribe named Ajawa or Ajauwa had been incited by the Tette people to attack village after village of Manganja, kill the men and sell the women and children to them. During the course of the enquiry the adventurers escaped into the forest, and the best thing that could be done was to present these and the captives of three other Portuguese parties to the bishop to try what he could make of them. Altogether they numbered about one hundred and forty souls -
[0002]

chiefly women and children. After all who choose to have the Mission have departed, a little flock probably of a hundred will remain free from parental control and from contamination with heathenism.

No modern mission has been more auspiciously commenced. Not even the London Mission in Madagascar when King Radama presented a large body of youths for instruction, for the instruction was to subserve his own political ends. the new mission may therefore well be upon its metal to shew fruits at least equal to those of which the Independents can tell, and which long after all the departure of all the missionaries from Madagascar, have stood the test of bloody persecutions. Placed as they are in the Centre of the slave market with all our hearts we wish them success. * see narrative of Johns & Freeman; Ellis insists.

The spot selected for a temporary residence is, to the eye, about 15 miles south [the middle of] Mount Zomba. It is on the banks of a stream about 10 yards wide called Magomero - and will serve ~~better~~ [more extended] acquaintance with the country enables them to choose a better. The Manganja - (pronounced Mañ-nja never Mangganja) have so little organization that the destruction of one village after another produced no union for mutual defense. Their paramount chief, who lives on the Shire, did nothing but help those who were carrying off his people across that river. The nation seemed in no ways surprised at his supineness. the only effort made was to send for a chief who is believed to ensure victory by his sorceries - and the bravery of the Manganja of which we recieved such highly coloured accounts from the Portuguese, shewed itself in universal flight before the Ajawa. It was plain that if these marauders were not induced to desist the fine fertile country would [0003] soon be inhabited by the missionaries alone. With a view to stop the effusion of more blood we set off to hold a parley with the Ajawa, and found them at the base of Mount Zomba. Unfortunately we came upon them in the very moment of victory for they were burning three villages, and a long line of captives laden with plunder were moving along to the temporary residence of the plunderers. Here the bishop offered up a solemn & fervent prayer & with the accents of his prayer we could hear the sad wail for the dead, and the shrill screams of joy over the victory - a panic seized the captives [or carriers] as we first appeared in sight - all dashed down their loads and fled. but the Ajawa soon demanded if we came peaceably. Our assurances in the affirmative were neutralized by some Manganja

followers calling out, "Our Chibisa (the great sorcerer) has come". And most unfortunately the effect of this foolish call in depriving us of the protection of our English name was not realized until afterwards. Elated too with continued success they probably thought that a small party of about twenty would prove such an easy prey, that they began to shoot us with their poisoned arrows. Even slowly retiring from their village was considered only evidence of fear, and they crowded round to within fifty yards, and but for recourse to our firearms in self defence would soon have cut us all off. We So little did we anticipate this, the English name having hitherto served to ensure respect, that we had barely ammunition to serve our purpose. the Manganja followers alone suffered from the arrows and guns of the Ajawa. After this small band of sixty or eighty robbers were driven off other bodies of Ajawa have been employed by the people of Tette and ~~to me~~ it seems evident that it is intended to root out the mission without the authorities being in any way compromised. We have some reason to believe that the guns were handled by Portuguese [slaves]
[0004]

Returning to the ship at Dakanamoio Island we began the carriage of a boat past Murchison's Cataract on the 6th of August. And in three weeks placed her on the Upper Shire in Lat. 15°15' 20" S. The cataracts begin in 15° 55' S. So we have 35 or 40' of land carriage. The Western bank was followed that being smoother than the Eastern. In the worst parts a few small trees cut down opened a path for our shouting assistants who kindly considered the boat as a certificate of peaceful intentions to them at least. Launched on the Upper Shire we were virtually on the Lake, for there is but little difference of level. It has little current, and is all of good depth. Before entering the Lake proper in 14° 25' we pass through the Lakelet Pamalombe - ten or twelve miles long and five or six broad. It is nearly surrounded by a broad belt of Papayrus so densely planted we could scarcely find an opening to the shore. the plant is eight or ten feet high and air is excluded where it grows and so much sulphuretted hydrogen gas evolved the white paint of [n] the bottom of the boat was blackened. Myriads of Mosquitoes

shewed, as I think they always do, the presence of malaria, and warned us off to the more healthy shores of the Lake Nyassa. We sailed into it on the 2^d September and felt refreshed by the greater coolness of the air in contact with this large body of water.

the depth was the first point of interest and while skirting the Western shore about a mile out, we found, as the Upper Shire was from 9 to 15 feet, the Lake deepened from 9 to fifteen fathoms. then as we rounded the grand mountainous promontery, Cape [0005]

Maclear, we could feel no bottom with our leadline of 35 fathoms or 210 feet. as we subsequently wended our way along the Western shore which is just a sucess [ion] of bays, we found that where the bottom was sandy at a mile from the land the depth varied from six to fourteen fathoms. In a rocky bay about Lat. 11° 40' S. we had bottom at 100 fathoms, but a mile out of it we found none with a fishing line of 116 fathoms or 696 feet, but this was unsatisfactory as the line broke in coming up - according to our present knowledge a ship could find anchorage only near the shore.

Reverting to the Southern end we found the tongue of the Lake from which the Shire flows to be about 30 miles long and ten or twelve broad. Rounding Cape Maclear Westwards we enter another arm which stretches Southwards some 18 miles, and is from 6 to 12 miles broad. these arms of the Lake give the Southern [end] a forked appearance, and with the help of a little imagination it may be likened to the boot shape of Italy. It is narrowest about the ankle - 18 or 20 miles From this it widens to the North, and in the upper third or fourth it is fifty or sixty miles broad. It's length is over 200 [(or) (225)] miles. But we were there at a very unfavourable period of the year. the "smokes" filled the air with an impenetrable haze, and the Equinoctial gales rendered it impossible for us to cross to the Eastern side. As the sun rose behind mountains sketches and bearings of these at different Latitudes enabled us to secure approximate measurements of its width - there are several crossing places as at Tsenga and Molamba and about the beginning of the upper third they get over by taking advantage of the island Chizumora, but

further north they go round the end instead, though that takes several days. Like all narrow seas surrounded as this is by mountains, tremendous swells get up very suddenly. On one of these occasions [0006]

we were caught a mile from the shore and could neither advance nor recede - the men all became so sea sick & they could scarcely be made to keep the boat's head to the sea. Terrific rollers with perpendicular sides, and hairy heads came across the Lake, but fortunately broke either before they reached or had passed us. We were riding at anchor in seven fathoms. the boat behaved admirably during the six weary hours we were detained there, but one roller breaking on her would have ended our exploration. After this we trusted implicitly to the opinions of our seaman John Neil, and often sat cowering for days together waiting for the surf to go down. We had to beach the boat every night to save her from being swamped at anchor - and did we not believe that the frequent storms were peculiar to that period of the year would call Nyassa "the Lake of storms". No current could be detected. the sounding line shewed no deflection from the perpendicular. The boat swing at her anchor whenever the slightest breath of wind blew her - and patches of water loving grass which the natives anchor over fishing creels to attract the fish by the shade, invariably shewed the direction of the wind alone - the natives are aware however that a long continued gale raises the water a few inches on the shore to which it blows, and then of course it must return to its level. We tried hard for [to] find a current, for we hope to - navigate the Lake ourselves, and "an unknown current" is the plank by which many lubbers who lose their ships are saved. the height of the water varies between the wet and dry seasons about three feet. Five rivers flow into it from the West. they are from 15 to 30 yards wide and some require canoes in crossing. but unitedly they do not account for [evaporation and] the Shire's perennial flow. A large river may come in further north, but great was my disappointment in not finding a river that would lessen the longitude towards the country of the Makololo. Many torrents - stagnant when we passed - discharge much water in the rainy season. the water [0007]

is fresh, but somewhat earthy tasted and hard - this may not be the case when the Lake is full - the water never becomes hot as in the Shire & Zambesi. We

were there during the hottest period of the year - and we could bathe in its delightful water whenever we chose, for the alligators though enormous fellows, are well fed on fish and seldom kill men. they capture people in the Zambesi chiefly when the water is discoloured and they cannot see their natural prey. Fish abound in Nyassa and the vast population on its shores all engage in catching them with trawling nets - creels, hooks, torches or poison. As the sun declines groups of natives in hundreds sit and gossip under the shady trees near the water's edge waiting till the surf goes down. then launching their canoes they commence trawling, and often continue their labours most of the night. Toiling in a state of nudity they too suffer from fever, but their skins are much more torpid in function than ours - our beards grow as much in a week as their wool does in a month. Hence "conformity to the customs of the natives" which people sometimes enjoin, would require a modification of our highly excitable skins - the son of the celebrated traveller Mungo Park is said to have gone about Sierra Leone in a sheet like the Fulahs and conformity to native customs soon terminated fatally.

the numbers of people we saw on the Lake exceeded all I have observed elsewhere. Probably the rains will draw off many to their agriculture. In the South West we have the Maravi. then as we go North we come among the Marimba - then the Matumboka or Atimboka - Makusa and Mañkambira - they are essentially one people - with one language, and much the same appearance. All like the Manganja are marked with circatrices in straight lines which crossing each other form lozenge [or triangular] shaped devices - but the Matumboka raise the skin [into] heart like lumps, and file their teeth to points - there is a slight difference in the dialects spoken, but all understand [0008] each other: and the Manganja language serves every where. The name Marimba might be applied to them all. We never heard the name Wanyassa except among Arabs. The prefix Wa belongs to the North - the Abisa or Awisa [or Babisa] never call themselves Wabisa. there are Marimba on the East coast and Auguru. We heard Ajawa firing cannon on that side near the Southern end. they are probably marauders engaged in slave hunting.

the people are all clothed with the inner bark of a species of acacia, steeped, & beaten till it is soft. the fair sex are to use the very mildest term, really very plain. the lips, large enough if let alone are pierced and distended with quartz stones till they are hideous - the men are better looking than the women. We were quite as great curiosities to them, as the hippopotamus was to the highly civilized who live on the banks of the Thames. They were upon the whole civil. At one village only were they impudent, and they were a little "elevated" by beer. Twice they went the length of lifting up the edge of our sail which we used as a tent as boys do the curtains of travelling menageries at home. but they did not cross the line I made on the sand when we were at meals. they spoke of us indeed as "Chirombo" - wild beasts, but they had no idea that they were understood. no fines were levied nor dues demanded.

When about half way up the Lake an Arab dhow lately built to carry slaves across fled from us to the Eastern shore. In the sphere to which this vessel's operations extended the people were worse - expert thieves possibly from the East coast crept up to our sleeping places about 4 oclock in the morning and made off with what clothing they could lay their hands on - no food was to be had except what we could shoot. Fortunately elephants and hippopotami were tame. At 11° 40 we entered the borders of a tribe of Zulus called Mazitu or Mazite who came originally from

[0009]

the South opposite Sofala or Inhambane.

Here the shores of the Lake were strewn with skeletons and putrid bodies of the slain. Our land party dreaded meeting the inflictors of the terrible vengeance of which the evidences everywhere met the eye, without a European in their company. So I left the boat, and a mistake separated us from it three days - the country is mountainous and the spurs of the mountains come sheer down to the Lake. While toiling along up and down steep ravines, our most strenuous efforts could not make five miles a day [in a straight line] - the boat had gone on twenty miles and a storm prevented its return. We met seven Mazite who seemed as much afraid of me as the men were of them. I went to them unarmed - they wished me to sit in the sun while they sat in

the shade, and rattled their shields, (a proceeding that inspires terror among the natives) when I refused, and came & sat down beside them, they refused to take me to the boat or to their chief - thought that my note book was a pistol, and on parting sped away up the hills like frightened deer. the country had been well peopled, but new skeletons lay in every hut among broken pots - and other utensils - no food could be found and, but for four goats we had with us, we should have starved. On the second day the land party gave in, but taking two of the best, I pushed on after the boat, and on the morning of the fourth day met it coming back. the last Latitude taken was Lat. 11° 44' S. the boat had gone about 24' North of that. the Northing made on shore was less than that, but from elevations of over a thousand feet, and from the boat at least 20 miles more were seen. So we may venture [0010]

to assert that the Lake extends into the southern borders of the tenth degree of South Latitude - our provisions were expended - the land desolate except a few pirates on detached rocks off the coast. the people inhospitable - our land party had turned, and without ~~them~~ [it] an accident to the boat would have proved fatal to us all.

This was the first time I [had] turned without accomplishing what I [had] set out to do - but turn we must though in sight of the large mountain masses looming in the distance in which the Lake probably ends. We pulled back in the boat in one day what [on land] with the most heart-breaking toil, I had accomplished in three - and a good fellow called Marango laded us with all the different kinds of food he had, and regretted that we could not spend a whole day with him drinking beer.

The information collected about the Rovuma affords a good illustration of the instability of the foundation on which [much] speculative geography stands - one intelligent native, with apparently no motive for misleading us, asserted most positively that our boat could sail out of the Lake into the river. Another - that it must be carried a few yards. While a third would maintain that the land carried was at least fifty miles. It would at that season of the year [have] been foolhardiness to cross the Lake, ~~and~~ to gain certainty for ourselves. In three out of

four storms our little boat could not have lived.
We met two Arabs who had come down from
Katanga in the far interior to buy calico with
ivory at the Lake. One had lived in the interior
14 and the other 16 years. They drew Nyassa discharging
towards the South and Tanganyika towards
the North - which last we know from Major
[0011]
Burton to be nonsense. they reported another Lake
called Moelo, and say that the Loapola [or Luapula] flows
into it. I wonder who will be set down as the
discoverer of that after the English have been there.

the fish in the Lake are very abundant. this
may be the reason why the alligators are so tame.
They are [as already remarked] always most destructive to human life
when the Zambesi is discoloured, and they
cannot procure their usual diet of fish -
One fish shaped like trout ascends the rivers
to spawn. It is very good, having somewhat
the flavour of herring - clouds exactly like
columns of smoke floated over the Lake
and led us to conjecture that they arose
from the burning of grass on the opposite
shore - but passing through one of these
clouds we found that it consisted of insects
no larger than our smallest gnats - they
are called Kungo and are collected and boiled
into cakes which reminded me by their flavour
of roasted locusts, but the taste is fishy.
this is probably the smallest winged insect
used as food by man. Locusts are here
unknown.

the only trade there on the Lake is in slaves. the
people do not attempt to kill elephants or hippo-
potami with their bows and arrows, and
both animals are remarkably tame - slaves
were often offered to us for sale. the cotton
grown on the upper part of the Lake is of a
remarkably fine quality. We could only ~~reply~~ [state]
that we should soon come in a larger vessel
and purchase their cotton. and judging
from the quantity we have purchased
from a small portion of the Shire and that
[0012]
not in crop time the produce from Nyassa
with its remarkably extended coast line will in
the course of a year or two be very considerable.
The actions however of the Portuguese slave
hunters on our footsteps have a more depressing

effect on our spirits than all the physical obstacles we have to encounter or than the Fever itself.

David Livingstone

P.S. On returning to the Upper Shire we had a good view of the country East of it and I suspect that we have been misled as to the length of the Lake Shirwa or Tamanda for the country near the Lake Nyassa is all mountainous a level patch however exists from about $14^{\circ} 40'$ to $40^{\circ} 50'$ S. and it is probable that here the hippopotami cross from the river to the Lake - the native information was correct enough I believe only they looked on the Upper Shire as part of Lake Nyinyesi or Nyassa while we took the Lake proper as its real beginning. We never have had time to examine the Lake Shirwa, but think that 20 or 30 miles may have to be cut off its length in the maps.

When we reached the upper most cataract we slung our boat to a branch of a fine shady tree about ten feet from the ground - the elephants which abound there may disturb it but nothing else will. We then walked past the cataracts having completed our trip of 600 miles going & coming in three months. Our next work is carrying a steamer which we expect in pieces by a road made by ourselves past the cataracts.
D.L.