

Letter to Lord Palmerston, 15 January 1861

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

[0001]

Private

Kongone mouth of the Zambesi

15 January 1861

Viscount Palmerston,

12 ap 1861

My Lord

We have lately taken the Makololo who came with me to Tette back to their own country, as we were in honour bound to do, though it involved a march of over 600 miles on foot. the most important geographical points observed were the extension of the coal field which begins below Tette nearly up to the Falls of Victoria and these same falls themselves. the coal will probably play an important part in the future of the Cape Colony though by a rather short sighted treaty with the Boers, our traders are debarred at present from the trade of that region. By a second visit to the falls & by careful measurement I am inclined to call them the most wonderful in the world. they are about twice the depth of Niagara, and if I recollect rightly considerably broader or 1860 yards. That is, more than an English mile. then the water falls into a crack which is prolonged [diagram of a river] in a most remarkable zig zag manner. the promontories formed by the wavy form of the crack are exactly the same level as the bed of the river above the falls and you can walk

[0002]

along facing the the falls at the first promontory or in the others with the river some 300 feet below and on each side of you jammed at the bottom of the crack in some 20 or 30 yards We saw the columns of vapour which come up out of the fissure twenty miles off, and though it was the period of extreme low water there were eight hundred feet of water actually falling. this, in a country set down by speculative geographers as "interminable

sandy plains into which rivers ran and were lost.” is sufficiently interesting for it may be inferred that the world did not know what Africa was, or what it is capable of becoming. When in Africa formerly, I had no more idea of writing a book on it than your Lordship has of becoming an elephant hunter. I now see many things which then escaped my notice, and this is especially the case in the matter of cotton. In the central districts I could not recollect having seen the plant, but we now saw it so large that boys climb up the trees, and of a quality which can only be produced in some parts of South America. All the specimens we have sent home to Manchester have [^] [been declared] of higher value than the common cultivated kinds of America. It would be a mistake to distribute foreign seed. Indeed while in America it must always be treated as an exotic, here it is in its native country

[0003]

and the annual burning of the grass does not destroy it. I am exceedingly glad to hear that a mission from the English Universities is to be established in the Interior which in addition to Christian instruction will labour to introduce lawful trade. That in cotton will be the most easily established the more especially if the missionaries like the monks previous to the period of their corruption do not disdain to hold the plough. We mean to try and find an entrance to the Interior of the country exterior to the Portuguese claims for it is impossible to do anything among them. this is to be the first service of our new vessel which I am very thankful to hear your Government has granted. We are now down here expecting its arrival every day. We are surrounded by swamps for at least a hundred miles - eight miles of our vicinity consists of the deadly mangrove swamp which is believed to be the very hot bed of fever, and which, as often as the tide retires emits most offensive effluvia. I do not mention this to magnify the service, but as a sort of introduction to what I am sure you will be glad to learn, that we believe we now know the remedy for Fever.

With this remedy we find the disease no worse than a common cold - and you know what used to be the consequence of sleeping ashore among the mangroves.

[0004]

the first time I employed it was in the case of my own children in 1850 at Lake Ngami, and I have never found it to fail in a single case since. I was however not sure that it would prove efficacious in Europeans generally until the ample experience of this Expedition demonstrated it. It is noticed near the end of my book but people are so often deceived in medicine that I felt it would look quackish if I spoke positively. on reaching Victoria Falls we heard for the first time that a party of London missionaries had been cut off by fever at Linyanti and this took place at the very time that we were in the way, and curing severe cases in Europeans so quickly that our march on foot was rarely interrupted more than a day or two - I found too the proper medicines for its composition in my waggon which has been kept for me seven years within a few hundred yards of their graves. their unhappy fate made me resolve to say more about it. the medicines employed are common ones. I have communicated it formerly to Lord John Russell and should it prove as useful in the West as we have found it in the East a saving of human life will be effected

I hope to have something more interesting to communicate on our return from the Rovuma, and am exceedingly pleased to hear that you and Lady Palmerston take a kind interest in my proceedings. Your encouraging note of 30th Sept^r 1859 reached me only a month ago. I am My Lord, Yours Faithfully

David Livingstone

[D^r Livingstone

15/1/61

cure for fever]