

## Letter to John Kirk, 18 March 1858

*David Livingstone*

Published by Livingstone Online ([livingstoneonline.org](http://livingstoneonline.org)), 2020

[0001]

(1) MS 19  
12 Screw Steamship Pearl  
at Sea off Madeira  
18 March 1858

D<sup>r</sup> John Kirk  
Sir

The main object of the Expedition to which you are appointed Economic Botanist and Medical Officer is to extend the knowledge already attained of the geography and mineral and agricultural resources of Eastern and Central Africa, to improve our acquaintance with the inhabitants, and to engage them to apply their energies

[0002]

to industrial pursuits, and to the cultivation of their lands with a view to the production of raw material to be exported to England in return for British manufactures; and it may be hoped that by encouraging the natives to occupy themselves in the development of the resources of their country a considerable advance may be made towards the extinction of the slave trade, as the natives will not be long in discovering that the former will eventually become a

more certain source of profit  
than the latter.

2. It is intended that the  
Expedition should pass

[0003]

through the malarious district  
at the lower portion of the  
Zambesi river as quickly  
as possible, and it will  
be necessary for you to  
put into practice those  
precautionary measures  
against fever by the use  
of Quinine which the  
experience of the Niger  
Expedition, and your  
own Judgment may  
suggest as likely to secure  
the health of your  
companions -

3. The efforts of every member  
of the Expedition will probably  
be required to facilitate the  
transport of the luggage  
to and beyond Tett the most

[0004]

advanced post of civilization  
but the chief power in the  
country adjacent being in the  
hands of two or three influent[...][ial]  
chiefs, it will be our duty to  
visit them and invite them  
to turn the attention of their  
people to the cultivation of  
cotton by giving them a  
supply of better seed than  
that which they already  
possess, and also to explain  
the benefit that they would  
derive from an exchange of  
the natural productions of  
Africa as Ivory, cotton, oil[,]  
beeswax, Cauze &c - for the  
manufactures of Europe, and  
generally to hold out every

encouragement in order to induce them to give up the warlike and predatory habit

[0005]

(2)  
and substitute the more peace-able pursuits of agriculture and commerce; the time occupied in attending to these matters, will enable you, if we find it to be consistent with your personal safety, to glean a general idea of the resources of the country to the North of Tett and to ascertain in as full detail as the time will allow the nature of the plant called Buaze, paying particular attention to the probable amount to which it and any other fibrous substances might be obtained, you will be good enough to furnish me with a Report thereon for transmission home to the Foreign Office-

[0006]

4. Your attention is particularly requested to the discovery of dyestuffs, gums, and medicinal substances, in the hope that should either these or fibrous tissues exist in quantities sufficient to warrant commercial enterprise you may aid in the great work of supplanting by lawful commerce the odious traffic in slaves - It is gratifying to me to feel assured that this object commends itself to your mind as a most important and noble one, and I have the pleasure of handing you a

copy of a sketch of the  
principle duties expected of  
you in the botanical depart-  
-ment drawn up by that

[0007]

eminent traveller and  
Botanist D<sup>r</sup> J.D. Hooker  
whose success in reflecting  
honour on our country  
I heartily wish you may  
equal, and requesting,  
for this part of our travels  
at least, your earnest and  
exclusive attention to the same,  
other objects of interest will  
no doubt press on your  
notice, but considering that  
the botany of this region  
is nearly unexplored - that  
there is a danger of over-  
[-]working yourself - that  
your energies will be greater  
in the second than in the  
first year - and that the  
primary objects of the  
Expedition are to gain  
accurate information  
respecting the vegetable and

[0008]

and mineral resources of [...]  
country, I trust you will  
see the propriety of limiti[...][ng]  
for a time the range of  
your pursuits.  
5. Our stay in the vici[...][nity]  
of Tett must necessarily be  
short because it is essen[...][tial]  
to proceed at an early perio[...][d]  
to the rapid Kebra basa [...]  
Chicova to ascertain the  
possibility of passing it [...]  
the river is still comparati[...][tively]  
high and thus avoid the  
necessity of taking the  
Launch to pieces for port[...]

The people near to the Portuguese settlements who have been in contact with slave trade not being so trustworthy as those farther inland have not been subjected to the prejudicial influence

[0009]

(3)  
of such communication, it will be unadvisable to make any distant excursions - Our energies must be bent to the establishment of a depôt at some eligible spot beyond the confluence of the Kafue and Zambesi - Having reached a tolerable elevation and examined the country adjacent it will be advisable after obtaining the consent of any natives who may lay claim to the soil to set up the iron house to serve as a central station = As the spot selected will probably be on the side of one of the hills which flank the River and sufficiently high to secure salubrity, a small plot of ground may at that altitude be planted with wheat and

[0010]

European vegetables as an experiment, and also in order to promote the comfort and health of the Expedition = While another small spot at a lower level may be planted with cotton and sugar cane, and given in charge to the headman of any village adjacent in order to induce the natives to take an interest in the Result.

6. The central depot once established and intercourse with the natives set on foot, a more extended range of scientific observation will then be adviseable - You may then follow out as opportunity offers the instructions on Zoology from Professor Appendix N° 2 Owen contained in Appendix N° 2. and without discarding your botanical labours collect

[0011]

any new or rare animals birds fishes or insects that may be met with in excursions which in company with the Makololo may safely be made, and the results be deposited at the central station

7. Although these explorations and collections are very desirable, you will understand that Her Majesty's Government attach more importance to the moral influence which may be exerted on the mind of the natives by a well regulated and orderly household of Europeans setting an example of consistent moral conduct to all who may

[0012]

congregate around the settlement - Treating the people with kindness and relieving their wants - teaching them to make experiments in agriculture - explaining to them the more simple arts - imparting to them religious instruction as far as they are capable of

receiving it, and inculcating  
peace and goodwill to  
each other

8. One especial means  
of gaining their favour will  
be by giving them the benefit  
of your medical skill and  
remedial aid - they possess  
medical men among themselves  
who are generally the most  
observant people to be met  
with = It is desirable to be at a  
times on good terms with them

[0013]

(4)  
In order to this slight complaints,  
except among the very poor,  
ought to be referred to their  
care, and severe cases before  
being undertaken should be  
enquired into of the doctor himself  
and no disparaging remark  
ever made on the previous  
treatment in the presence of the  
patient - This line of conduct  
will lead to the more urgent  
cases only being referred to you;  
time and medicine will both  
be saved while your influence  
will be extended. Never  
neglect the opportunity which  
the bed of sickness presents  
of saying a few kind words  
in a natural respectful  
manner and imitate as in  
as far as you can the conduct  
of the Great Physician whose  
followers we profess to be -

[0014]

9. The Expedition is well  
supplied with arms and ammunition  
and it will be necessary at  
times to use these in order to  
obtain supplies of food as  
well as specimens of animals  
for the purposes of natural

history. In many parts of  
the country which we hope  
to traverse the larger animals  
exist in great numbers  
and being comparatively  
tame may be easily secured.  
I would earnestly press on  
you the duty of a sacred  
regard to life and never  
to destroy it unless some  
justifiable end is to be answered  
by its extinction - The most  
vital part ought to be aimed  
at, and no shot fired unless  
the animal be within a range  
that renders it probable that

[0015]

the mortal part will be struck.  
The wanton waste of animal  
life which I have witnessed  
from night hunting and  
from ferocious but  
childlike abuse of instruments  
of destruction, as well as the  
wish that the habits of certain  
races of animated creation  
which are evidently destined  
at no very distant date  
to extinction, should be  
calmly and philosophically  
observed while there remains  
the opportunity, make me  
anxious that none of my  
companions should be  
guilty of similar abominations  
10. It is hoped that we  
may never have occasion  
to use our arms for protection  
from the natives, but the  
best security from attack

[0016]

consists in upright condu[...][ct]  
and the natives seeing that w[...][e]  
are prepared to meet it - At  
the same time you are strictly

enjoined to exercise the  
utmost forbearance toward  
the people, and while retaini[...][ng]  
proper firmness in the  
event of any mis-understan[...][ding]  
to conciliate as far as {...}  
possibly can be admitted  
with safety to our own party  
11. It is unnecessary  
for me to enjoin the strictes[...][t]  
justice in dealing with the  
people - This your own  
principles will lead you  
invariably to follow, but  
it is decidedly necessary  
to be careful not to appea[...][r]  
to overreach or insult an[...][y]  
one - Care must be taken  
in every case in which

[0017]

(5)  
a native is to be employed  
that the terms be well under[-]  
-stood and a little patience  
in settling the amount of  
remuneration in the presence  
of witnesses and the exact  
number of persons  
engaged will prevent that  
heartburning and discontent  
which otherwise may ensue  
Let the payment be invariably  
made into the hands of the  
man who has performed  
the work - Unless this is  
done, the idea of property  
in the labour of the lower  
classes of the population  
is apt to be engendered in  
the minds of the underchiefs,  
but by direct payment  
a most important doctrine  
is widely inculcated and  
in process of time each man

[0018]

comes to feel that he owes  
subjection to the head chief  
alone and is otherwise a  
free subject -

12. The chiefs of tribes and  
leading men of villages ought  
always to be treated with  
great respect and nothing  
should be done to weaken their  
authority - Any present of  
food should be accepted  
frankly - It is impolite to  
allow the ancient custom  
of feeding strangers to go into  
disuse - We come among  
them as members of a superior  
race, and servants of a Govern-  
-ment that desires to elevate  
the more degraded portions  
of the human family - We  
are also adherents of a holy  
benign religion and may by  
wise patient efforts be the  
harbingers of peace to a

[0019]

hitherto distracted and trodden  
down race - No great result  
is ever attained without  
patient and long continued  
efforts. In this enterprise  
in which we have the  
honour to be engaged,  
sympathy, consideration and  
kindness which when viewed  
in detail may seem thrown  
away if steadily persisted  
in, are sure ultimately to  
exercise a commanding  
influence. Depend upon it  
a kind word or deed is  
never lost.

12 13 You will have access  
to Koelle's polly glotta Africana.  
Bleeks vocabulary of the  
languages of Mosambique  
and an Analysis of the  
Sechuana tongue, and you  
are to endeavour to master

the latter language as it

[0020]

is generally spoken in the Makololo country and its acquisition will materialize and aid you in all your pursuits should opportunity offer you are expected to collect vocabularies of other dialects using the system already employed in the Sechuana - taking the English consonants and giving the vowels the sound they have in Italian Spanish & in most European languages.

14. You are distinctly to understand that your services are engaged for two years unless any unforeseen accident should happen to the Expedition, when you will be set free as soon as an opportunity is afforded for returning to England-

[0021]

(6)

15. In the event of my being prostrated by illness or any accident rendered incapable of conducting the Expedition, the charge of it will devolve on Commander Bedingfeld, If he too should fail it will devolve on you, and then on M<sup>r</sup> Charles Livingstone, but immediate information of such an event is if possible to be transmitted to England for further instructions.

16. You are at liberty to consult a copy of the

original instructions

[0022]

I hold from Her Majesty's Government, and it is hoped that you will enter cordially into the spirit of them and so far as circumstances will allow endeavour to carry them into effect.

17 Finally, you are strictly enjoined to take the greatest care of your own health and that of the Expedition. My own experience teaches the necessity of more than ordinary attention to the state of the alimentary canal - Constipation is almost sure to bring on fever - and it would be well if you kindly explain to the different members the necessity of timely remedial

[0023]

aid to overcome any tendency to it especially if accompanied by dreaming, drowsiness, want of appetite or unpleasant taste in the mouth in the mornings. If Quinine combined with a mild aperient be administered, this precautionary measure will often ward off an attack of this formidable disease - Feeling the fullest confidence in your zeal in the great cause of African civilization and rejoicing in being associated with you in this noble work, I heartily commit you and the cause in which

[0024]

you will I hope be an  
influential Pioneer to  
the safe keeping of  
the Almighty Disposer  
of Events.

I am your  
Most Obedient Servant  
David Livingstone