

Letter to Edmund Gabriel, 4 June 1859

David Livingstone

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org), 2017

[0001]

[...]

[Hand pointing to the added text.] Look to the end for the beginning.

found the people all friendly,
we left the vessel in charge
of the Quarter master and stoker
with a chief named Chibisa
(Lat. 16°2' S. Long. 35° E.) and
with D^r Kirk and thirteen-
Makololo proceeded on foot

[0002]

[...]chiefly North and along the
banks of the Shire; We were
in a mountainous country
and the observations Enclosure N^o 1. of the
Aneroid Barometer registered
by D^r Kirk shew that we

[0003]

We got on well enough with the Portuguese but
when any of them get drunk we hear that they dont like the
expedition - We are hoping to get a vessel to take us up the
rapids if not then we go on our own pious & independent
daily 9 gained some hundreds of
feet of elevation - The river besides
rushing over several cateracts
has generally a current as rapid
as a millrace. About Lat. 15°30'
South it is only about thirty yards
wide and the channel being
but little below the level of the
banks, it gave the idea of
water power without dams
sufficient to drive all the
mills in England. Our route
was much more tortuous than
the river because we were

obliged to go from one headman's village to another, and much delay is occasioned by the formalities necessary to convince every little great man that we are not a company of marauders. Chibisa is the only man who did not feel it incumbent on him to collect all his people together before

[0004]

giving us an audience, but he possesses a firm belief in his own inherent dignity and he told us that his father communicated an influence to him where by "all who heard him speak feared his words". He spoke of it as one would a fact in Natural History. and we formed that he possesses great influence in the country North[-]wards from which he is traditionally descended - the influence of his name through a man he sent was of essential benefit. Our progress was however slow for after a fortnight's journey from the ship we were not much more than forty miles distant.

We had come in sight of a lofty mountain named Dzomba or Zomba and on crossing the southern talus

[0005]

2/of this mountain we first got a distant view of ^ a part of Lake Shirwa at the foot of a range of lofty mountains in the East. We had traced the Shire up to the Northern end of Zomba, and were prevented by a marsh from following it further on that side. On coming round its southern flank

we were informed that the river we had left so near, had no connections with Lake Shirwa - We then proceeded Eastwards and on the 18th April reached its shores - a goodly sight it is to see, for it is - surrounded by lofty mountains, and its broad blue waters look like an arm of the sea. There is no outlet known; a great many streams run into it

[0006]

for the adjacent country is well watered - The Palombe and Sombane flow in from the South - The water has a bitter taste but is drinkable - Fish abound, and so do alligators and hippopotami. We saw the waves breaking on the rocks on the shore as in the sea and when the southern wind blows strongly the water retires sufficiently from the southern shore as to enable the people to catch fish in weirs planted there

The Lake is of a pear shape only the narrow end is prolonged some thirty miles from the body - There is an inhabited mountain near the beginning of the narrow part. The broad part is about (25) twenty five

If you could send me a bag of Palm tree nuts - you would confer a benefit - Here there are none - I am about to send Buarye trees and seeds to Mora - also another tree

[0007]

the seed of which yields both an oil & hard fat. The Buarye yields

a crop annually by being pollarded - yet the Portuguese wont collect it - they attend to ivory alone - and are born donkies and worse. They think a "compania" will make them all rich while they lie on their backs smoking
or (30) thirty miles, and when we ascended some way up a hill (Pirimiti) and looked away to the S.S.E. we had 26° of watery horizon with two mountain tops rising in the blue distance like little islands fifty or sixty miles away - The natives use large canoes, and count four days journey as the length but when the wind blows strongly they can accomplish it in two. It is therefore not an over estimate to say it is sixty (60) or seventy (70) miles long, exclusive of the southern narrow portion of thirty miles

The height of the Lake above Chibisa's land where we left the ship was 1800 feet or in round numbers 2000 feet above the level of the sea. Zomba mountain is quite 6000 feet

[0008]

high and inhabited. We could see cultivated patches from below. Milanje range is inhabited too, but another range on the Eastern side of the Lake seems over six thousand feet and so bold and rugged it looks inaccessible - The whole region is an elevated one. In crossing the Southern talus of Zomba we were 3400 feet above the ship at Chibisa's and the great mass of the mountain itself rose on our left higher (apparently) than Morambala which by ascending we ascertained to be 4000 feet high - our

estimate is therefore moderate
To a spectator in the far North
it will appear as standing in
the Lake - It is not actually
on its shores but it separates
the Shirwa and the Shire vallies

[0009]

The Highland region in which the Lake is situated is so
appropriate as a mission field that I have written to the
Church Missionary Society recommending it - they have long
been trying to find a field in Eastern Africa
3/and as the natives report
Lake Shirwa to be separated
from a much larger Lake,
Nyinyesi, by a strip of
comparatively level land
we see the general correctness
so far, of information
collected by the Rev^d Erkhardt
of the church missionary
Society. Nyinyesi is also
called the Great Nyanja,
but this word is applied
to any collection of water, and
even to rivers; Nyinyesi=
"stars" seems preferable.

The whole region seemed
well, though not densely peopled
with Mang-anja who inhabit
both banks of the Shire from
Morambala up to Chibisa;
but the Eastern bank and
adjacent mountains beyond

[0010]

him; The western bank above
the same chief is inhabited
by the Maravi- There are
none of this tribe anywhere
near Shirwa, so it would
appear improper to identify
it with the "Lake Maravi"
of the maps; nor can we
set it down as that mentioned by
Sehor Candido of Tette as forty five
days S.S.W. of that point.

No Portuguese even pretends to know anything about it. I think it necessary to state this, because Blue Book after the first European had for 1856 or [185]7 crossed the continent the honour was claimed by a Portuguese Minister for two blackmen ("feirantes pretos" according to the History of Angola & Portuguese Archives) who in the memory of a lady now living at Tette came thither but proceeded no further - They failed by 300 miles of what was claimed for them, and had they

[0011]

gone over land to Mosambique must have mentioned surely either Nyinyesi or Shirwa, if not the passage between them. We made frequent enquires among the people if they had ever been visited by white men before and the invariable answer was in the negative - A black slave trader with woolly hair had once visited the part but the discovery is claimed for D^E Kirk and myself as Europeans, and we do not enter into competition with black people, nor with secret discoveries locked up in Archives.

I take the liberty of giving the foregoing explanation because the Portuguese are in the habit of depreciating our explorations by declaring that they have full information about the whole country in the Archives, and the Portuguese minister adopted the same tone to Lord Clarendon

[This part is made rather milder in the real despatch]

[0012]

and referred to Bowdich's examination

thereof though he found out the
very fact I have stated. The
Portuguese dare not enter the Shire
The only expedition they ever sent
up was beaten back by the natives
before they had ascended 25 miles
We have gone one hundred and fifty
miles, and never came into
collision with any one.

The Manganja cultivate the
soil very extensively, and the land
is exceedingly rich; The grass
is generally from six to eight feet
high and overhanging the paths
which are only about a foot wide
There is a perpetual patter on the
face in walking - A few yards
distance from a companion
hides him completely, and guides
are absolutely necessary, it being
absolutely impossible to see, on
entering a path, where it will
lead, Even the hills though
very stoney are very fertile and
gardens are common high up their
sides and on their tops-

You have a piece of plate at M^r Horsfall's ready for M^{rs}
Gabriel whenever that lady takes you under her wing - My
wife is at Kuruman with her parents to be confined

[0013]

The London Missionary Society did not behave itself to me
and now abuses me for turning consul - What they will say
when they know I have turned "skipper" I dont know - Would
they turn black in the face
Cotton is cultivated largely and the
farther we went it appeared to be
of the greater importance as an
object of culture, though only the
women were well clothed - Every
one seemed to spin and weave it
even chiefs may be seen with
the spindle and bag which serves
as a distaff, and the process of
manufacture is the most tedious
and rude that can be conceived - the
cotton undergoes five processes

before it comes to the loom - time
is of no value - They have two
varieties of the plant - one indigenous -
yields cotton more like wool than
that of other countries - It is very
strong and rough in the hand - The
other is from Foreign seed and yields
a cotton which renders it unnecessary
to furnish the people with American
seed. A point in its culture worth
noticing is the time for planting
has been selected so that the plants
remain in the ground during the
winter, and five months from
sowing it comes to maturity

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before the rains commence or
insects come forth to damage
the crop.

The Manganja have no
domestic animals except sheep
goats and fowls. We get abundance
of provisions at a cheap rate -
They have no ivory - but few
wild animals; And say that they
abound among the Maravi
West of the Shire. Their weapons
are large bows and poisoned arrows
with iron heads. Every one carries
a knife - and almost every village
has a durnace for smelting iron
spears were rarely seen but very
well made and of excellent iron
Both sexes are tattooed in straight
raised lines radiating from various
points, and all file their teeth
with stones so as to leave them
of a semilunar shape

[Livingstone draws a tooth with a semi -circular indentation.] - The
women perforate the upper lip
close to the nose and enlarge the
opening till they can insert a
ring of ivory of two inches diameter
Some ladies of fashion have the
lip drawn out so the ring comes
down below the chin and the mouth

We caught a young elephant coming down the river
but one of the Makololo in excitement cut its proboscis so as at

last to cause its death - It lived two days and to use the language of the Newspapers when tearfully pathetic. "In spite of the unwearied

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caution of the medical gentlemen in attendance the vital spark cut its stick" - It would have been a great curiosity at home as no African elephant has in modern times been seen in England.

appears through the upper lip - All were timid - Men whom we met suddenly among the long grass threw down their burdens and ran away It is probable that our dress is as uncouth to them as their nakedness and lip rings are to us, for when we entered a village the fowls would take to wing and leave their chickens. & The women rushed into their huts & shut the doors in terror -

When at Lake Shirwa the people pointed out a pass in the end of the mountain range Milanji through which a tribe called Anguru, came to attack them with guns. The Manganja have no fire-arms except a rude kind of pistol made by themselves for the purpose of making a noise at funerals- gunpowder was enquired for in order to this alone - We came close to a large party of Bajana slave traders who are in the habit of taking slaves down to Quilimane but they persuaded the people to mislead us so that we did not see them. Some of the women

[0016]

told the Makololo that Bajana said that English would stop their trade and no more foreign cloth be brought into the country. The chiefs tried to justify their cooperation in the traffic by saying "only criminals were sold." No one attempted to treat

imprudently except some of these
Bajana slavetraders and they
changed their conduct instantly
only learning that we were
English and not the Portuguese
with whom they had been
accustomed to do business.

My Dear Friend Gabriel River Shire

The foregoing is the rough copy 4 June 1859
of a despatch giving an account of the discovery
of a magnificent Lake called Shirwa - I have
written on all my paper - so if you are not
please with a mutilation you must send
it back and I shall write it over again. Shirwa
has no known outlet and it has only five
or six miles of partition between it and Nyanja
or Nyinyesi= The stars which reaches pretty
well up to the equator - The Southern portion
of Shirwa is only about 30 miles distant
from the navigable Shire= The Portuguese
know nothing about it - We have had some
fever but very mild David Livingstone

[0017]

If is only by remembering that there is a PGreat Power above overruling all
that one can possess one's soul in patience - Love to Schut & Demony
and to your Marabou in the yard.

10 2 after 1859

I did not see the Blue Book till lately
in which the Portuguese claimed the honour
of first traversing the continent for two
black men - Shirwa lies some forty or
fifty miles on each side of the Latitude
of Mosambique - How is it that these
feirantes pretos as the History of Angola
calls them did not cross or come near
it - An old lady at Tette remembers
Baptista & Jose coming to Tette - black
men with the wool dressed Londa fashi[...]
and Lond swords on their shoulders I[...]
must know farther consequently failed
by some 400 miles of going across
Africa-But they want all to appear
theirs so we dont tell them how near
Shirwa is to them nor how it may be
approached by the Shirwa - We go back
next month towards Nyinyesi - We have
had no European news for a twelve month

so dont know if Burton has reached
Nyanja= I am of the decided opinion now
that a colony of our own people must
be planted in the Interior for any good to
be done - French emigration in chains goes
on from Quilimane regularly - Secard is
superseded by Governors under French influence

[0018]

Per HMS Buffalo
Edmund Gabriel, Esquire.
At St. Paul de Loanda
West Coast of Africa
D^r Livingstone

Will Admiral Grey kindly forward this
at his convenience