

Letter to The Duke of Wellington, [March 1860?]

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

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[0001]

A Letter from David Livingstone to the Second Duke of Wellington.
(Both the address at the head of the letter and the signature at the foot have been removed).

My Lord Duke,

I have refrained from writing to thank you for your bountiful supply of Filters, because until now I had nothing of interest to communicate. We are now returning from tracing this river up to its point of emergence from the hitherto undiscovered Lake Nyassa or Nyinyesi. We had a march of 250 miles on foot in the hottest period of the year - that called in West Africa the "smokes" when instead of scraping all together as you poor English farmers do - tens of thousands of acres of tall grass are burned off and the atmosphere takes on somewhat the appearance of a London fog. But the discovery is worth all our toil and is of more importance than at first sight appears, for we have opened

[...]

the crops, and instead of the unmerciful toil required in America one sowing of foreign (probably American) seed, already introduced into many districts by the natives themselves, serves for three years crops even through the plants are burnt off. There may be evils to counterbalance these advantages but I am as yet ignorant of them.

Well, the Shire, a branch of the Zambesi which I did not contemplate ascending is easily navigable for a steamer at least one hundred miles from its confluence. Then we have 33 miles of cataracts and above them the river is itself again right into the Lake in Lat. 14° 23' South. Above the cataracts the land is arranged into three terraces of various heights from 1200 feet to 3000 feet. On these we have changes of climate within a few miles of each other. On the last or 3000 terrace rises Mount Zomba which we ascended and found to be between 7000 and 8000 feet high. In the lower terrace, or shire valley which resembles exactly the valley of the Nile at Cairo, it was hot and stiffling (sic). One day took us up 3000 feet - pleasantly cool and great abundance of running rills of deliciously cool water. On Zomba it was cold, but even here there is cultivation. On the lower terraces cotton is cultivated very extensively but chiefly of the indiginous variety which feels more like wool than cotton and requires to be sown annually. Well these climates would keep Europeans in health, and we flatter ourselves into the belief

[0002]

that we can cure fever quickly even in the lowlands without in general loss of strength to the patient. I long greatly to see some of our own honest poor out here. They would do good to themselves, and help to free our country from the stain of dependence on slave labour. Beyond this part we have the land between the Lakes - Shirwa or Tamandua and Nyassa[...] trade from the central regions must cross the isthmus in order to get past the Lakes without embarking on ether. We met a large slaving party there - the most blackguard looking lot I ever saw - they had an immense number of slaves. On learning that we were English they slipped off by night, probably thinking the same of us as we did of them. The Lake at its southern end is 8 or 10 miles broad. It had a heavy swell on it though there was no wind and as it gives of a large river like the Shire, which never varies more than 2 or 3 feet from the dry to the wet season, it must be a large body itself. But we could not explore it, for we had left Mr. Macgregor Laird's sham vessel in a sinking state, and had to hasten back to it. Funnel, Furnace, Deck and bottom all became honey-combed after only 12 months wear - this is not the only hindrance and annoyance this gentleman has inflicted on us.

Many thanks for your kind present of Filters. I entrusted my naval officer with the duty of selection but fear that he took all ~~that~~ he could get hold of. We have still abundant and they are very useful.

(signature missing)

The letter is crossed "Dr. Livingstone's letter, March 1860".