

Letter to John Washington, 15 May 1862

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

[0001]

Shupanga 15th May 1862

Dear Captain Washington

In prospect of our Johanna men leaving in the end of February and our soon getting up to the cataracts I took two quartermasters Thomas Magrath & George Wheatcroft from the Gorgon for the Lady Nyassa and one leading stoker James King with one 1st class stoker Michael Nolan - also one ordinary seaman.

Whitehead believing that they would be necessary for the safety of the vessel till fresh Johanna men for whom I have applied to M^r Sunley H. M. Consul should arrive. I considered that we could scarcely get on in the transport of the sections without some men on whom we could depend. With a view to aid M^r Rae in any breakages that might occur in the overland passage I took William Macleod an excellent smith and Augustus Waldman a cooper civilians on the passage to the Cape i.e. seven whites instead of six Johanna men. The latter we have been unable to send away though they were to serve but one year as a trial but we expect a ship after 20th currt to recieve them

[0002]

In consequence of our long detention down in the lowlands and the fact that some of the men have in spite of everything got vile Portuguese spirits we have had an unusual amount of sickness and the smallest quantity of work as the result. Wheatcroft an inveterate old drunkard was disrated by Captain Wilson before he left, and for drunkenness and most disgusting language to M^r Young I reduced him to single

pay, and will hand him over to the next ship that calls. Nolan - always sick & useless when for a day or so he is put off the list - has never done well in any ship he has been in. He must go with Wheatcroft.

David Gwilliam our other Quartermaster has been a most useful hardworking man - has had very fair health and never spared himself but got drunk and as M^r Hardisty compelled King always to remain in attendance on him doing anything or nothing. Gwilliam like an old fool used foul language to Hardisty by way of standing up for the oppressed - used foul and disgusting epithets and took hold of Hardisty by the beard. H. very naturally struck him to free himself the evidence is quite conclusive against Gwilliam and I am obliged to hand him off as the Captain may advise for court martial. I am sorry to part with him as away from drink he is invaluable

[0003]

John Hutchins Q^r Master has been a long time with us & generally very well behaved but he has had dysentery twice the last time so severely that though is working and active medical opinion says it will not be just to the man to keep him longer. He must be invalided William Rowe has been leading stoker and storekeeper - drove the Ma Robert after M^r Rae left and kept our stores with the strictest honesty. His services have been very valuable. When M^r May came with the Pioneer I hoped to follow my work chiefly on shore while M^r M. did what could be done in the ship. I looked to Rowe to manage our domestic affairs ashore and continued the storekeeper's salary of £150 with that view. Now, that a person of his probity would be extremely serviceable to us at either the upper or lower end of the cataracts I am sorry to find that he wishes to go home I dont think it well to detain him. His time in the navy is nearly out and he complains of a pain in his side from

a pleurisy long before he came to us.
He offers to come out when free
from the navy but I shall not require
him then.

If the Johanna men come we
shall get on very well without Wheatcroft

[0004]

Nolan and Waldman - but two
Quartermasters seem to be necessary
instead of Gwilliam and Hutchins
M^r Rae says a common stoker will
serve him as well as Rowe. We shall
part with Whitehead too to reduce
the Europeans as low as possible
the Johanna [men] never get fever. We
never had so much insubordination
as [during] these last three months - and it is
quite inexcusable as M^r Young
is a thorough disciplinarian and
looks sharply after them. I com-
plained to the Governor of Quillimane
about the Portuguese officer at
Kongone converting what his
Government calls a custom
house into a grog shop, and he
reprimanded him and referred the
case to the Governor General of
Mosambique.

Magrath promises to turn out a
very good man and so does Goldsmith
who exchanged with John Neil A. B.
Macleod the smith is a capital
mechanic and a good steady man
and John Reid is equally deserving
no one ever took anything like the amount
of labour off my hands as M^r Young.

[0005]

I mentioned in a letter which went
by the Gorgon in April the strange turn in
M^r Hardisty's conduct, and foresaw
that he would make himself as disagreeable
as possible till he got away. It was so
different from his previous mode of
working that I felt confounded by it. It is
all plain now, you had gauranteed him
for twelve months only, but forgot to let me
know. At the end of that time he had
allowed the engines to go thoroughly out of
repair & wished to have done with them.

Instead of telling me so, he tried to provoke me by impertinence at table before Captain Wilson [& his officers] - going quite out of his way even, to contradict me when he was taking no other part in the conversation. I took no notice of it, except as I told you, agreeing with the captains wish to tell the Admiral & let him send another engineer. Well, hoping to be soon out of the delta I gladly accepted the help offered by the officers of the Gorgon to lead & help us up the cataracts M^r Hardisty said that ten tons of coals were sufficient for our purpose - but unknown to me had the feed pump broken in January, and he had two men pumping in cold water into the boilers in February. This caused a great waste of fuel - till seeing M^r H. lying asleep on the Engine skylight I asked what was the matter with the engines that we could not go more than 1/2 a mile an hour - "Its the list over" said he and soon after went into the [sick] list - saying to Meller I think I am going to have fever.

[0006]

I asked M^r Rae to go down and he soon made her speed increase, mended the pump pin which was broken in about three hours and saved the poor fellows the unmerciful toil of pumping. M^r Rae has told me since I found out the state of the engines that he never in his life saw engines in a worse state. The packing in the different parts had never been renewed, and the nuts were screwed home. "He did not like to interfere" Well we were seventeen days down at the sea during the whole of which time M^r Hardisty did absolutely nothing. We towed out the brig Hetty Ellen, and when on the middle of the bar the engines failed us for a time and we were nearly in the breakers. When we returned he took off the cover of the ~~eondenser~~ [air pump] and going down on the Inspection day I saw the plunger packing covered with 1/4 inch sand all coloured green by rubbing on the inside of the brass cylinder. It [namely the inside of the air pump [...]] was grievously worn away. The [...] had not been packed for 20 months, and air had been sucked in instead of water - the consequence

was the old packing was like tinder and had to be picked out with a knife, and the India rubber valves were burned curled up and would not act. No wonder then we could not get away from the Delta - [...] In time] I loaded her rather more heavily than when we took three weeks to get up to Shupanga, and we went up in three days. She drew

[0007]

over five feet too. We went down again and took all the remaining things of the ~~Pioneer~~ Lady Nyassa - were again as deep and had [purposely] a list too from using one bunker's coals exclusively for a while. We did the distance in three days of ten hours each and but for the loss of a good half day by searching for a passage where the channel had changed, would have done it in about 24 hours steaming. The ten tons of coals were expended in the first case when we were a little over half the distance to Shupanga - then the expense of purchasing wood - and cutting it was enormous for we had to send up to Shupanga for our fuel & hire canoes to bring it down. Four months in the Delta where we should not have been more than a week has entailed an unusual amount of sickness upon us. Fever & dysentery have never left us till now, but fortunately with no fatality except that which has darkened all my horizon. I have said nothing nor will I say aught of harshness to Mr Hardisty. He behaved well up to the time that unknown to me he felt himself unequal to managing the Engines. He never had charge before except as a third Engineer in the navy.

If we had not ran aground in January the sand would not have got in then - the fault may therefore

[0008]

be traced to what cannot be avoided in a river where the channel shifts but the pump ought on touching to be

disconnected at once, and the boiler supplied by the donkey engine. Instead of which the pump was allowed to work till it was choked by sand & broke - [the donkey E. being idle]. Then as M^r H. said the sand would work itself out of the ~~eondenser~~ [air pump] but instead of taking it out himself he allowed the materials to be worn and damaged. I trust you will not consider me wrong in letting him go. With him it is a perpetual attempt to thwart M^r Young by keeping the engine stokers away from every other work. When we are going he stalks about the deck the whole day, & never goes below to the Engines - and while I write he sits washing his clothes. M^r Rae ill of dysentery and the Lady Nyassa standing still though nearly ready for launching - the four stokers kept out of the way doing I know not what. A parcel of tools was bought by M^r James Young of Glasgow & sent to the Pioneer for M^r Rae. M^r H. will not lend them even. I am not disposed to quarrel with anyone but I feel it rather hard to have the work hindered in this way. I am &
David Livingstone