

Letter to John Kirk, 18 March 1858

David Livingstone

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org), 2020

[0001]

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

D^r 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 them-
selves in the development of
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 com-
-mercial 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^r 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 Portugu[...][ese]
settlements who have been
in contact with slave trade
not being so trustworthy a[...][s]
those farther inland wh[...][o]
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
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 observa-
-tion 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 a-nimals
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 settle-
-ment - 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 faa[...][r]
as they are capable of

recieving it, and inculcating
peace and goodwill to
each other

8. One especial means
of gaining their favour wil[...][l]
be by giving them the benef[...][it]
of your medical skill and
remedial aid - they possess
medical men among themselv[...][es]
who are generally the most
observant people to be met
with = It is desirable to be at a[...][ll]
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.

42 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 material[...][ize]
aid you in all your pursu[...][its]
should opportunity offer you[...][u]
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^r 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 pre-cautionary 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