

## Letter to H. Bartle E. Frere, July 1868

*Livingstone, David, 1813-1873*

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

[0001]

4. Letter from D<sup>r</sup> Livingstone to  
Sir Bartle Frere

NearLake Bangweolo.

South Central Africa July 1868

My dear Sir Bartle

When I wrote to  
you to in February 1867, I had  
the impression that I was  
then on the watershed  
between the Zambesi & either  
the Congo or ~~the~~Nile. Further  
observation now leads me  
to believe that impression to  
have been correct, & from  
what I have myself seen,  
together with what I have  
heard from intelligent  
natives - I think that I can  
safely assert that the chief  
sources of the Nile rise between  
10° and 12° South Latitude:  
or nearly in the position  
assigned to them by Ptolomy  
whose river Bhapta is  
probably the Rovuma. I  
cannot yet speak positively  
of the parts West & N.N. West  
of Tanganyika because  
these have not yet come  
under my observation  
but if you will read the  
following short sketch of  
what I have seen you  
will

[0002]

will see that the springs  
of the Nile have hitherto  
been sought for very much  
too far to the North.

Leaving the valley of the

Loangwa at 12° South we climbed up what seemed to be a great map of mountains, but it turned out to be the southern edge of an elevated region the height of which is from 4000 to 6000 feet above the level of the sea - this upland may be roughly said to cover a space south of Lake Tanganyika of some 350 miles square - It is generally covered with dense forest - has an undulating surface - a rich soil - is well watered with numerous rivulets, & for Africa is cold. It slopes towards the North & West but I have not seen any part of it under 3000 feet of altitude - The country of Usango situated East of the space indicated is also an upland and affords pasturage for the immense herds of the cattle of the Basango (Wasango of the Arabs) a very light coloured race very friendly with strangers. Usango forms one the eastern side

[0003]  
side of the southern end of a great but still elevated valley. The other or Western side is formed by what are called the Kone mountains beyond the copper mines of Katanga. - Still further West & beyond the Kone Range or plateau rises our old acquaintance the Zambesi by the name Zambaji. Referring back to 12° South - It was rarely possible to obtain even a latitude but accidentally awaking one morning after we were fairly on the upland I found a

star which shewed lat.  $11^{\circ}$   
56 south - and next day  
we crossed two rivulets  
running North - As we  
advanced brooks became  
numerous - some went  
backwards or sideways into  
the Loangwa & with it to join  
the Zambesi at Zumbo -  
but the greatest number went  
North or Nor-West into  
the river Chambeze. This, misled  
by a map calling it an  
offhand manner "Zambesi,  
Eastern branch" - I took to  
be the river so indicated  
but the Chambeze with  
all its branches flows from  
the

[0004]

the side into the centre of  
the great Nile valley - It is  
remarkable as helping to form  
three lakes and changing  
its name three times in  
the 500 or 600 miles of its  
course - First of all it is  
the Chambeze which I  
crossed in  $10^{\circ} 34'$  south -  
I crossed several of its  
confluents both on its South  
& North quite as large as  
the Isis at Oxford but running  
faster & having hippopotami  
in them. I mention these  
animals because when  
navigating the Zambesi  
I steered always boldly on  
to where these beasts lay  
sure of never finding less  
than eight feet of water -  
The Chambeze flows into  
Lake Bangweolo, & on  
coming out of it assumes  
the name Luapula. Luapula -  
flows down north past the  
town of Cazembe and then  
enters Lake Moero. On emerging  
from it the name Lualaba

is taken. In passing on N.  
N. West it becomes very  
large and forms Wenge in  
the country West of  
Tanganyika.  
I have seen it only where it  
leaves Moero by a crack in  
the

[0005]  
the mountains of Rua & where  
it comes out again and am  
sure it is sufficient to form  
Wenge whether it is a Lake  
with many islands in it  
or a Punjaub if I may use  
the word before the waters  
are all gathered up by the  
Lupira a large river which  
drains the Western side  
of the great valley and having  
its sources between 11° and 12° S.  
Beyond Wenge & Wenge itself  
is purely native information,  
and some believe that  
when Lupira takes it up  
it flows N.N.W. into a  
large lake named Chowambe  
which I conjecture to be that  
discovered by M<sup>r</sup> Baker,  
others think that it goes  
into Tanganyika & flows  
thence into Chowambe  
by river named Loanda.  
I suspend my judgment  
but think if the immense  
amount of water I have  
seen going North does  
not flow past Lake  
Tanganyika on the West  
it must have an exit &  
in all probability it is  
by the Loanda-

Referring again to the  
Upland I found it divided  
into

[0006]  
into districts - Lobisa - Lobemba

Wungu- Itawa- Lopere -  
Kabuire - Lunda- & Rua  
the people are known by  
putting Ba- instead of  
the initial letter syllable  
for country Lo or U - the  
Arabs use Wa instead of  
Ba as that is Luaheli -  
On the slope North & in the  
Banglungu country I discovered  
Lake Liemba on 2<sup>nd</sup> April  
1867. It lies in a hollow with  
precipitous sides 2000 feet  
down. It is extremely  
beautiful, sides, top & bottom  
being [richly] clothed with trees  
& other vegetation. Elephants  
buffaloes and antelopes feed  
on the steep slopes, fish &  
hippopotami swarm in  
the waters - two rocky islands  
are inhabited by fishermen  
who besides fishing cultivate  
the ground & rear goats  
the Lake is not large,  
from 18 to 20 miles broad,  
and from 30 to 40 long -  
Four good-sized rivers flow  
into it and many "burns",  
Scotia for brooks, which  
form pretty cascades as  
they leap down the  
bright red clay schist rocks -  
It goes away in a riverlike  
prolongation

[0007]  
prolongation two miles wide  
N.N.W. it is said to Tanganyika  
Were it not 2800 feet above  
the sea I would consider it  
an arm of the Lake but  
Speke makes it 1844 feet  
only. I tried to follow -  
this arm but was prevented  
by war. A large party of  
Arab traders from Zanzibar  
had been attacked by the  
Chief of Itawa. I set off  
to go round about the

disturbed district met  
the Arabs and having  
shewed them Seyed Majid's  
letter was at once supplied  
with cloth beads & provisions  
thanks to your good offices  
with the Sultan I have  
been treated by all the  
Arabs with the greatest  
kindness and consideration.  
The heads of the party  
readily perceived that a  
continuance of hostilities  
meant shutting up the ivory  
market - so peace was made  
but the process required 3 1/2  
months. They would not allow  
me to go into any danger  
so I had to remain at a  
village 4700 feet above the  
sea & employ my time in  
the pig's employment of  
taking

[0008]  
taking on fat. When we did move  
we went some way West  
with my Arab friends & I  
am glad that I saw their  
mode of ivory & slavetrading  
It was such a contrast to  
that of the ruffians from  
Kilwa & the Portuguese from  
Tette. On leaving them  
we came to Moeru on the  
8<sup>th</sup> Nov<sup>r</sup> 1867. This in the  
Northern part is from 20  
to 33 miles broad - Further  
south it is at least 60 miles  
in width & it is 50 miles  
long, ranges of tree-covered  
mountains flank it on both  
sides - We passed up its  
Eastern shore & visited  
Cazembe who has several  
times been visited by  
Portuguese. I remained  
40 days with Cazembe &  
might have come on to  
Bangweolo but the rains

had set in & this Lake  
was reported to be very  
unhealthy - not having a  
grain of any kind of medicine  
and as fever without  
treatment produced fits of  
totalinsensibility & loss of  
power over the muscles of  
the back I thought it would  
be unwise to venture.  
Went

[0009]

Went North intending to go  
to Ujiji for goods & letters  
not having heard a word  
of any kind from anywhere  
for two years, but I was  
brought to a stand at a  
distance of thirteen [days] from  
Tanganyika by the  
superabundance of water  
in the country in front.  
A native party came through  
& described the waters as  
often thigh & waste deep  
and sleeping places difficult  
to find. This inundation  
lasts till May or June. When  
I became utterly tired of  
inactivity I doubled back  
on my course to Cazembe  
in April and that you  
may understand the  
nature of the flood that  
here annually enacts the  
part of the Nile further  
down I may say that  
two rivulets each from  
30 to 40 yards broad flow  
into the North end of Moero  
One had a quarter and the  
other half a mile of flood  
on each bank - from thigh  
to waist deep. They were  
crossed by bridges - Then  
one of them had flooded  
a plain abreast of Moero  
and

[0010]

and we had four hours of  
plunging in waters & black  
mud. The last mile was  
the worst though the rest  
had many deep ruts into  
which from not seeing  
them we plunged and  
sent up a rush of hundreds  
of bubbles to the surface  
all charged with a frightful  
odour. Before getting out  
to the clean sandy beach  
of Moero the flood water  
was up high on the chest.  
Then we had to wade 4  
brooks thigh deep - cross a  
river 80 yards broad with  
300 yards of flood on  
its Western bank so deep  
we had to keep to the  
canoes till within 50  
yards of the higher  
grounds - Four other brooks  
had to be forded ere we  
reached Cazembe. One  
the Chungu was the scene  
of D<sup>e</sup> Lourda's death. He  
was the only Portuguese of  
any scientific acquirements  
and was fifty miles wrong  
in Latitude alone. Probably  
fever clouded his mind  
when he observed and  
anyone who knows what  
that implies will readily  
excuse

[0011]

excuse any mistake he may  
have made. The Chunga  
went high up on the chest  
and one had to walk on  
tiptoe to avoid swimming.  
Only four of my attendants  
would come. The others  
absconded on various pretexts  
the fact is they are all tired  
of this everlasting tramping

and so am I. Nothing could  
be bought but the veriest  
necessities - no paper only  
a couple of note-books &  
the Bible. I have borrowed  
this and another sheet from  
an Arab trader. The other  
is for Lord Clarendon & they  
will go by a party proceeding  
to the coast through Usango.  
I would go myself if it were  
not for an inveterate dislike  
to give up what I have  
undertaken without  
finishing it. I am often  
distressed in thinking of a  
son whom I left at the  
University of Glasgow. He was  
to be 2 years there then spend  
a year or more in Germany  
for French & German before  
trying the civil service exam-  
ination for India. He will  
now be in especial need of  
my counsel & assistance and  
here

[0012]

here I am at Bangweolo.  
His elder brother after being  
well educated wandered  
into the American war & we  
know no more of him after  
an engagement before Richmond.  
Possibly Sir Charles Wood in  
consideration of my services  
might do something to fix  
this one. I never asked  
anything for myself Lord  
Palmerston sent M<sup>r</sup> Hayward  
a Queen's Counsel to me before  
I left home this time to ask  
"what he could do for me as  
"he was most anxious to serve  
me" I don't know how it  
was, but it never once occurred  
to me till I was in here  
that he meant anything  
for myself. I replied that  
if he could open the

Portuguese ports in East Africa  
to free trade this was the  
greatest boon he could  
confer. I thought only of  
my work & not of myself  
or children. I feel more at  
liberty in telling you of  
my domestic anxiety and  
my fears lest Tom should  
go to the examination  
unprepared because you  
have a family yourself  
and will sympathize with me.  
I shall

[0013]  
shall give Lord Clarendon  
the same geographical information  
as I have given you, & as  
I have not the conscience  
to ask more paper from  
my Arab friend I shall  
ask Miss Frere to favour me  
by writing to my daughter  
a little of the above & sending  
it to M<sup>rs</sup> Murray who will  
know where she is. Agnes  
is to tell Tom not to go in  
for examination till he  
is well prepared and he  
may take a year more of  
education where he may  
have found the most  
benefit. I had written you  
a long letter which now  
lies at Kabuire - the  
foregoing contains the  
substance of it - Miss Frere  
must take this into consideration if annoyed  
at my asking her to write  
to a stranger in such a climate  
as that of India. I regret  
that the Nile has prevented  
me from following out  
my aspirations for the benefit  
of the people. I sometimes  
comfort myself by the hope  
that by making this country  
& its inhabitants better known  
& occasionally imparting a little

knowledge

[0014]

knowledge I may be working  
in accordance with the plans  
of the all embracing Providence  
for the good time coming  
yet. At other times I feel as if  
serving a few insane geographers  
who will count me a man  
& a brother. There is a large  
tribe of Troglodites in Rua with  
excavations thirty miles in length  
& a running rill passing along  
the entire street. They ascribe these  
rock dwellings to the hand of the  
Deity - the "writings" in them are  
drawings of animals if it had  
been letters I must have gone to  
see them. People very black strong  
& outer angle of eyes upwards.

The summary of sources I give Lord  
C. as flowing into Chambeze, Luapula  
Lualaba & the Lakes are thirteen in  
all & are larger than the Isis at Oxford  
& Avon at Hamilton. Five in another  
line of drainage & five in a third  
receptacle make thirty three in all.  
These do not include "burns". Lofie has  
eleven of them from five to fifteen  
yards wide & perennial -

I did get a bit paper & wrote to Agnes  
so Miss Frere is absolved from the  
penance. Love to Lady Frere & her family  
(signed)  
David Livingstone-