

Letter to George Grey, 1 June 1859

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

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[0001]

River Shire 1st June

1859

Private N^o 6

My Dear Sir George

We have lately discovered a very fine Lake by going up this river in the steam Launch about one hundred miles and then marching some fifty more on foot. It is called Shirwa and Lake Ngami is a mere pond in comparison It is moreover particularly interesting from the fact reported by the natives on its shores that it is separated by a strip of land of only five or six miles in width from Nyanja or rather Lake Nyinyesi = the stars - which Burton has gone to explore. We could hear nothing of his party at Shirwa and having got no European news since you

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kindly sent some copies of the "Times" last year we are quite in the dark as to whether he has succeeded or not. Lake Shirwa has no outlet and its waters are bitter but drinkable. It abounds in fishes Leeches alligators & hippopotami. We discovered also by examining partially a branch of the Shire called Ruo that one portion of Shirwa is not more than 30 miles distant from a point that may easily be reached by this Launch which by Newspaper measurement draws 13 inches, and actually 31 inches - the Lake Shirwa is very grand. It is

surrounded on all sides by lofty green mountains - Dzomba or as people nearest it say Zomba is over 6000 feet high of same shape as Table mountain but inhabited on the top others are equally high but inaccessible It is a high land region - the Lake itself being about 2000 ft above the sea

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It is 20 or 30 miles wide - and 50 or 60 long - On going some way up a hill we saw in the far distance two mountain tops rising like little islands on a watery horizon - An inhabited mountain island stands near where we first came to it - From the size of the waves it is supposed to be deep - M^r Maclear will shew you the map.

D^r Kirk and I with 15 Makololo formed the land party - the country is well peopled and very much like Londa in the middle of the country - many streams rising out of bogs - the vegetation nearly identical also. Never saw so much cotton grown as among the Mang-anja of the Shire & Shirwa valleys - all spin and weave it. These are the Latitudes which I have always pointed out as the cotton and sugar lands they are pre-eminently so - but

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such is the disinterestedness of some people that labour is exported to Bourbon instead of being employed here - The only trade the people have is that of slaves; and the only symptoms of impudence we met were from a party of Bajaua slave traders but they changed their deportment instantly on hearing that we were English and not Portuguese - There are no Maravi at or near Shirwa - They are all West of the Shire so this Lake can scarcely be called "Lake Maravi - ~~but~~ the Portuguese know nothing of it. but the Minister who

claimed (Blue book for 1857) the honour of first traversing the African continent for two black men with Portuguese names - must explain why they did not cross Shirwa - It lies some forty or fifty miles on each side of the Latitude of Mosambique -

(They came to Tette only & lacked at least 400 miles of Mosambique). We go back to Shirwa in July and may make a push for Nyinyesi but say nothing at present about it. We have not told the Portuguese how near Shirwa is to them - We let that come to them from our own Government but they mean to claim all by setting up a station forthwith at the mouth of this river! David Livingstone