

Letter to George Grey, 19 February 1859

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[0001]

Tette 19th February 1859

No 4

Private

My Dear Sir George

In my last I told
you of our visit to Kebra basa
and I am happy now to be able
to inform you that it has been
visited again since the water
began to rise and the reports
of M^r C. Livingstone and M^r
Baines fully confirm what
I advanced as to effect of a
flood. Several of the cataracts
which at low water seemed
very serious obstacles are
rendered so smooth that but
for the adjacent mountains
having been sketched they
would not have been recognized

A Rev^d D^r Russel of Maynooth College gave me a Bunda poem
from Angola. I think if you could apply through him to the college
at Goa, India you would get some thing in this dialect

[0002]

but a steamer capable of stemming
the main current is necessary for
the ascent. The river is now 15 feet
above low water mark in November
and as it is expected to rise considerably
more I felt inclined to take advantage
of it and haul this vessel through
but besides the risk of doubling her
up she can carry so little cargo
we would soon be without
supplies after we had succeeded.
We shall therefore work for a while
on this side the rapid - and as a
beginning I may mention that

we went up the Shire about the beginning of January and found it a good navigable river for at least one hundred miles from its confluence - The Mountain Morambala is 4000 ft high and has a wonderfully well cultivated large top - Lemon trees grow quite wild in the woods & so do oranges & pine apples. There are several

[0003]

fine little fountains with water slightly chalybeate - the people independent & very hospitable. The view from the top of the Shire winding across an extended plain inhabited by real Lotophagi is magnificent and as you may judge from the height we have quite a different climate from that of the plains The vegetation is very like that of Londa & Angola - We have also a fine hot sulphureous fountain at the base (174°) yet no advantage has been taken of this splendid sanatorium by the Portuguese - The valley of the Shire at one part abounds in Elephants and if you come to see us about January I undertake to shew five hundred of these noble animals grazing on one plain We saw more than that - and as there are branches of the river which

[0004]

form islands we sometimes chased them with this vessel. They had magnificent tusks - I think that they are attracted down from the hills by the sweet fruit of wild Palmyras of which there are fine forests there. The people were very suspicious of us never having been visited by Europeans before but treated us civilly. Our wooding parties

were never molested - yet a
gaurd was set over us both night
and day. They are well armed
with bows and poisoned
arrows. The women insert an
ornament exactly the size and
shape of the rings for table napkins
into the upper lip - the effect
is frightful - It is a most unaccountable
ornament. They cultivate largely on
the upper third of the Shire vally
and we purchased abundance of
provisions at a cheap rate besides
specimens of their cotton & cotton yarn

[0005]

They have two kinds of cotton GL:L30(4) and
both very good in quality.

Our first object was to
gain their confidence and
seeing them so suspicious,
though we had pretty certain
information of the Shire
becoming smooth again
beyond the cataract which
stopped our progress and
that Arabs from Zanzibar
were in the habit of coming
down in canoes from
Lake Nyanja we thought
it imprudent to leave the
vessel in their power
and go overland. We leave
them to allow our first
visit to have its effect
and in the course of a
month return to them again

I have got a portion of the Lord's prayer - & Ave Maria from an
old blind woman. Another old lady here remembers the two black
traders coming here from Angola on whom the Portuguese lay their claims
for having crossed the continent - they never went to the coast so she says

[0006]

The reason why the Portuguese
have not gone farther up than
about Morambala is probably
the steady rapidity of the current

(2½ knots) there are no still reaches and with the heavy Zambesi canoes it is difficult to get on in a current. The people too have a bad name - they are said to have killed some native traders. In 1856 when I was coming down past the mouth of the Shire I was told that an expedition had been sent up but was unable to go far because the river was blocked up with duckweed - quantities of that were then coming out of the river but at 25 miles from the confluence the duckweed ceases so the Expedition could not have gone far

[0007]

Above that the river widens a little but it is free from sand banks and deep. Indeed it may be said to be superior to the Zambesi for steam navigation. We could go on at night even.

This is our most unhealthy season. Fever is fatal on the coast. Here we have some of it but no one dies in consequence. Three of our party have had touches of it but are better. This is the edge of the high healthy lands where I have still every reason to believe that Europeans might live in safety. We are longing somewhat for news having recieved none except the papers you were kind enough to send us by the Lynx.

[0008]

I have litle hopes of doing any good with the people under or in contact with the Portuguese - A year or more must

elapse ere they recover from the
effects of their late war - but I think
more highly of the capabilities of the
country for the produce England
stands most in need of than ever
I could collect a waggon load or two
of Indigo from the streets of Tette
tomorrow - D^r Kirk made some
with it and cotton though burned
down annually springs up ~~annually~~
as brisk as ever - The people here
make sugar, of this I was not aware
before. We have put up our little
engine to shew what machinery
can do: her first work was to saw
up planks to make a boat - which
Major Secard our best friend was
about to build. We try sugar cane as soon
as it is ready to cut
I am &c
David Livingstone
I have been trying to get the Lord's prayer
as translated by the Jesuits into Tette dialect