

Letter to John Washington, 6 January 1862

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

[0001]

River Shire

6th January

1862

Private

My Dear Captain Washington

We have lost at least

three months by the Pioneer being too deep and too long for these East African rivers. I am not disposed to find fault with her as a ship for she is an excellent, strong, and well furnished vessel. She is besides a comfortable home for us when we are on board, but lighten her as we may, she touches at five feet. I saw enough of her in the Rovuma to make me believe that she will not do there except in running up in flood and remaining till next season. In the Shire we have abundance of water for her the whole year, up to the Elephant marsh. Above that it is 4 1/2 feet. We warped her through this for the sake of the Missionaries, and to secure a healthy spot for those who should remain in her while we were away, but we could not come down again till the water rose, for a bank forms at once on our lee as soon as she touches. If it were possible for you to sell her to those Australians to whom you wrote respecting a steamer for surveying, and give us another [an iron one] with

[0002]

the price drawing when loaded not more than three feet we should be able to navigate all the rivers on this coast Speed is not of much consequence but light draught most certainly is. I mention this not by way of grumbling but in the belief if you can do anything to make us more efficient, you will continue

your goodness to us. She leaks not a drop. Engines perfect except a little damage to the paddle wheels, and you could recommend her for strength, in hulk & machinery.

We shall warp her up again to the cataracts, and keep there till we launch the other on Nyassa. A letter from Col^l Rigby to Sir George Grey says that "if it should ever be found possible to put a steamer on Lake Nyassa it will cut off the chief supply of slaves to the East Coast." To effect this I earnestly pray that the Almighty may spare my life. In view of having succeeded and wishing for an outlet for the cotton away from the Portuguese a steamer of light draught would be an immense advantage. I lay the matter before you and I know that you will not put it as if I did not know what I would be at next. If it cannot be done we shall do the best we can with the Pioneer.

I see that M. Chaillu has brought home some sixty new birds and that they will be bought by the British Museum

[0003]

M^r C Livingstone & D^r Kirk have made collections of birds, insects, and plants - which are sent home to be kept at the Kew Museum till they arrive themselves. they know that the British Museum has the choice of all, for not taking charge of the collections [myself] I always said that these were Government property - and to first offer must be made to the Museum. It occurs to me that many of our birds may be new & might be substituted for those to be bought if the Museum authorities would only examine, and take what they wished - the plants are registered by D^r Hooker and I suppose that all may be left with him till the arrival of the collector whose knowledge of the plants will be most advantageous in classification.

the Portuguese have got a small steamer similar to the Ma Robert for the Zambesi this is to secure "all merchandise for the river to be under the national flag", as she will look after the big canoes the necessity

for securing our own outlet by Rovuma becomes every day more decided. If you hear of any disaster befalling us please suspend your judgment till you hear from us. I shall give you the earliest information possible. I say this because

[0004]

the Portuguese continually get up unfavourable reports - such as that one or two of us has been killed by the natives or we are floundered on a rock - lately a report was rife at Mozambique that we were aground in the Zambesi - and again that we were sticking between two rocks in the Shire - the only thing untoward is that delay I have mentioned in page 1st of this. We have lost time by waiting till the river rose in a part to which it may be said we ought not to have gone.

Thanks for M^r Petherick's speech = our work will be more of a stationary nature for some time to come. Will you send us Maury's work? and anything African the Viscount de Sáda Bandeira has published all that the Portuguese minister could muster of geography "ancient & modern" of this region. It is all from our maps except the Loangua (of Zumbo - Zambesi called Arroangoa by the Portuguese) which is made to come out of the North end of Nyassa! While Shire arises N.W. of the cataracts! I have only seen a tracing from his map.

M^r Hardisty valued the carpenter's tools at £4-10. and we keep them for use.

the river is up and we go down as fast as we can cut wood - never saw Shire bringing down so much rubbish & so discoloured before David Livingstone