

Letter to John Washington, 13 September 1858

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

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[0001]

[On the [...]]

A grant has been made by the
Cape Parliament for the path through Kuruman
you suggested. M^r Moffat has undertaken it.]

Tette 13th Sept^r 1858

Private

My Dear Captain Washington

I thank you a thousand
times for the wise precaution you took of
placing Captain Duncan on a proper understanding
with Bedingfeld before we left Liverpool
But for that we could not have lived with
Bedingfeld in whom I am sorry to say I have
been completely mistaken. I confess
that you saw much farther than I did when you
disapproved of my haste in naming him
for whenever he was free from sea-
sickness he quarrelled with some one. First
the engineer and but for Captain Duncan's
kind interposition we should have been
deprived of the best man that Tod & Macgregor
of Glasgow could give us. He offered to go
as a stoker in the Pearl rather than be abused
by Bedingfeld's tongue. That over B. shirked
the Bar of the Luabo unless I ordered him
again he having written orders to the effect
in his possession - He quarrelled with
Duncan and every time the Pearl got into
difficulty there Bedingfeld came on board
& had a public altercation with Duncan
before the crew of the latter - At Row

[0002]

Nº 4. I put a stop to it by saying - "Captain
Bedingfeld I must have no more of these
public altercations." He retired to write his
resignation and delivered it to me that evening
I would have sent him home by the Hermes
but Captain Gordon being still with us told
me it was done in a temporary fit of anger
and he would be happy to be the medium of
withdrawing it. I allowed him to withdraw

it but he at once asserted that he had done quite right in writing it - that he had been slighted - not consulted as man of his high position ought to have been &. &c. He had a fifth altercation with Duncan and though he had my written orders to pilot the Pearl out of the river and I had promised to see that done he told Duncan with some bitter taunts that "the Launch should not go down if he could help it notwithstanding my promise. To effect this he reported to me that the rivet heads were rusting off (after five weeks service only) and that she could not go down to the mouth of the Kongone without making it probable that she would never get up here. He wrote a protest to that effect, and when I examined the rivet heads and asked him to shew which were rusting off - He got on his high horse saying that he had always been associated with gentlemen Did I doubt his word - you are not a gentleman. (referring to my early life)

[0003]

He wanted to convert the Launch into a separate command asserting to me her total incapacity to carry anything. "I can tow but I cant carry anything." (I brought up four tons in her this trip) and turned out the luggage to other members from what he called "my cabin" the only accommodation the party had. He then gave in another resignation and boasted to D^r Kirk and others that he had done so - then twice expressed sorrow to myself that I had not accepted it. He evidently thought himself indispensable and the airs he put on no tongue can tell. Would you believe that the fact of his having a higher salary than I have was constantly quoted as evidence of his high position and attainments while he absolutely could do nothing except take a latitude constantly boasting of being a man of business and that you had said to him that I was not a man of business he shewed his talent by ordering everything he could think of. Imagine my consternation on seeing ninety casks of Kroomen's possessions turned out of the Pearl. Well not being easily abashed I proposed carrying a little in the Launch as the Portuguese were engaged in a war & could not help us. No, no, he could tow only. It required

nine trips to carry our 25 tons of luggage
thus but by loading the Launch with two
tons we could removed all in five - he
seemed then to think it necessary to prove
that his work was excessively difficult -
ran the launch aground every dozen miles -
kept her excessively dirty - pointedly refused

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in presence of M^r Thornton to have anything
to do with making a systematic arrangement
for the expenditure of the Kroomen's provisions
and at last when M^r Baines ran her aground
as he was taking his dinner Bedingfeld said
to M^r Rae - "I saw that, and let them, do you
think they could do without me." As he was
thwarting the progress of the Expedition while
ostentatiously promoting it, and I had borne
with his insubordination - carping, complaining
and raising objections at every step - besides
taunting me with not having accepted his
resignation I made arrangements with
Colonel Nunes to have him safely conveyed
to Kilimane - lodged there comfortably in
my former quarters till a man of war
should call and then gave him my acceptance
of his resignation which he recieved by
dancing and singing and calling the Kroomen
together said - "Ah I shall soon be out at
Sierra Leone in charge of a man of war
and will know to whom to give jobs"
He had often boasted that if that should
happen which had now come to pass all
the Kroomen would go with him. They now
came and told me that when Governor
Hill told the head man to select 11 men of
war's Kroomen he readily found them
but on finding at our arrival that Bedingfeld
was to command all that party deserted
except three and now that he was dismissed
they would do anything for me. As he

[0005]

had previously tried to raise a clamour
by standing up for the Kroomen to get
their Sundays and stop the steamer for
their proper time for meals, while I was
straining every nerve and never resting
on that day unless we were all together
the country being in a state of war and
the healthy season passing quickly away

I felt very glad to find that this dodge
of his had failed too. and mounting the
paddle box myself made a quicker passage
up to Shupanga than he ever did and
never once touched the ground. I then tried
D^r Kirk and he being equally successful
you may expect Bedingfeld home
to nurse his dignity where it will do
no harm. I came up here in seventeen
days from Shupanga though the water
is nearly at its lowest and we spent
five days in one part where the river
is nearly four miles broad seeking a
passage and one half of our time was
spent in cutting wood. Above Lupata
all is fine though many sand banks are
there but the river is in one channel &
we ran up with both steam & sails -
Here we are visited with as much
interest as you do the Leviathan and
I have got about two tons of coal in

[0006]

her the first ever dug in Zambesia.
I go down to bring up all my companions
tomorrow. Kebra basa is maintained to be
not a waterfall but a number of rocks
jutting out of the stream. There is a narrow
deep channel which at some parts is
rendered tortuous. If I can blast away
some of those that stand in the wrong
places I shall not grudge a few hundred
pounds of powder and a few months
toil though I dont promise to turn
quarryman. My men, poor fellows
clustered around me and caught hold of
me in a sort of convulsive way while
some screamed with joy. I never shed
a tears but they now ran down my
cheeks involuntarily. Thirty of them died
of small pox, and six were lately killed
by a rebel in his stockade at the mouth
of the Luenya - for these all our hearts
are very sore. They have a great stock
of pigs and tell me that they were often
taunted by the Tett people saying that I
would never return. Many have taken
unto themselves wives and all have lots
of beads which they have gained by wood
cutting and intend to take home. I have
entered poor Sekwebu's confidential servant

as a Krooman and I gave all the rest two fathoms of cloth each. I shall give other

[0007]

other things when the luggage is up according to your instructions.

Your remember the Ban was rejected by Bedingfeld. I feel positive that she is exactly what we need here - the Launch whose engine ought to be called the Asthmatic draws 2 ft 6 or 7 when loaded and instead of "very little wood being required" we give her 1 1/2 cwt of dry lignum vitae each hour. B's report from Liverpool was erroneous and I found it out only after our coals were done. With wood alone we never get five knots out of her. The canoes slowly punting along pass us and look back at us to our infinite disgust. The engine is badly constructed the boiler tubes being placed below the fire & on one side - so one side of the boiler is cool while the other is hot and five hours are necessary to get up steam. There is no steam chest and though I protested than ten horse was too little no more was given because forsooth an old cylinder cast for a low pressure was for the sake of saving expense employed

[0008]

The feed pipe is longer than the other instead of being smaller and while I say that the vessel herself is not a bad one Laird has treated us shamefully with the engine. I was passive about the Ban as indeed I was about many other things when I had a naval officer to attend to these things I now remember that B. was very anxious that I should apply for a second master and when I refused he condemned the Ban on the report of some unknown carpenter. It is impossible not to suspect something was wrong when we found Bedingfeld suffered so much from seasickness which he says grows upon him that he could not have navigated her out. He has frequently boasted of having been twice

tried by court-martial & once [& punished]dismissed
~~the navy~~. A clever thing he did was to
write a "log" after his resignation was
accepted from the private journal of
M^r Baines, and apply to me for a sextant
chronometer &c. by way of making
himself appear only suspended, so as to
claim his pay but I told him it
was stopped on the 31st July - this was
the only thing that brought him to his
senses.

I am &c. David Livingstone