

Letter to William C. Oswell, 4 April 1856

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Tete or Nyungwe on the

Zambesi. East Africa

4th April 1856

Mr Dear Mr Oswel

I now begin a letter to you
after having written to many others from this place
not because I think it necessary for I hope
soon to have viva voce communication with
you, but to ease my conscience of a feeling
that it was not right to make you among the
last. I would not write while in Angola for
dysentery reduced me very low then all my
letters maps &c. which were penned in much
weakness went to the bottom in the mail
packet and I had to employ as much of
the time I could spare in returning to Cassange
in repairing that loss. I almost expected
you at Loanda but not having recieved
a single letter from England while there
though I requested my friends to address to
that city, I suppose you must have
concluded like others that I should never
reach it. I would have been very glad
of your company though from having
been sorely tried by a missionary companion
once, I never feel disposed to despond in
prospect of being alone. Londa would have
been miserable for you as well as it was
for me. for there is no game larger
than mice, not a vulture even not
a crow, and the food is nearly pure starch
Manioc meal and roots with occasionally
that you know as Lobebelebe. the lower

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part of the person wetted two or three times
daily in passing streams which are unlike any
I ever saw before. the stream itself may be
from 6 to 10 feet broad only but that or more
in depth, and it flows in a marsh of from
100 to 500 yards broad. this is covered over
with tufts of grass separated from one to three

or four feet from each other. the intervening spaces are covered with a pellicle of tender water plants. If you step right on the top of the bunch of grass, all right but they are often conical and one steps on the side and down he goes up to the thigh in soft black slush. the oxen had generally all four legs down at once and how they got through at all seems quite wonderful. the stream is nothing as it generally had a bridge over it but the bogs were terrible and delayed us very much. It is a remarkably well watered country. Bogs however and forest will prevent waggons from traversing it anywhere near our path. On this account I came back to try this side and you will be glad to hear I am thus far on my way down.

We reached this a month ago pretty well tired. I assure you for tsetse destroyed all the oxen and not having wherewithal to buy a canoe I had to march on foot. We had plenty of game all the way and the men killed some with their assegais I was very unsuccessful from being unable to steady the gun. I never saw anything like the numbers of elephants and buffaloes we had on the Kafue which is the name of the Bashuk river near the confluence, and all wonderfully tame. Pigs by families stood looking at us often and lions are so abundant the natives

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make all their garden huts on trees. they don't kill them as their chiefs pretend to become meta - morphosed into those animals. The inhabitants are very numerous compared to what we have seen in the south, and are a strong muscular race of negroes. the tsetse preventing them from possessing cattle. they delight much in agriculture and the soil being very fertile they can raise immense quantities of grain. their laws are very stringent you would scarcely relish that respecting elephants and eilands. the half which [...] [...] ground belongs to the Lord of the soil & [...] cannot take his portion even [...] comes and gives him permission [...] lying tusk alone is his. they have [...] fighting for the last two years with [...] Portuguese and burned up all the surrounding villas and many of houses of Tete itself. Indeed Tete is in ruins. So

D^oQuilimane not much better. Senior is buffeted by true caffres here called Landeens. (Landinis). the population on the Eastern side of the continent possesses much of the Zulu character, and is unlike the poor cowardly Bechuanas whom some honour with the Caffre name. I could never avoid laughing in my sleeve to hear Murray for instance say "these Kyaffres" as if he really were near any of those "magnificent savages" they were headed by two men of Portuguese and Asiatic extraction and are unconquered still. Trade is nearly quite stagnant though elephants abound close to this and even lower down

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there is abundance of gold, coal and iron the country is fertile producing everything except tea. the river is magnificent. At the foot it was measured at 500 fathoms or 1000 yards and it is often broader. but becomes spoiled among the deltas near Quilimane. It is very deadly there too. Indeed I have waited a month here in order to pass through the deltas in a better month than march. I then go to England.

I have never recieved a line from you since you went to England. You must be very busy surely. Are you in Love or What? Got but one short note from my wife, from others nothing. they must all have been thinking I was dead and well out of the way. Believe me your very

Affectionate David Livingstone

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