**TNA FO 63/1352**

**Casement to Lord Salisbury**

**18 December 1898**

The Most Honourable

The Marquess of Salisbury KG etc

Foreign Office

London

On board the "Gretchen Bohlen"

Boma

18th December 1898

Separate.

My Lord,

I have the honour to report that I arrived in the Congo river on the 11th instant and at Boma on the 13th instant when I visited Monsieur Fuchs, the Vice Governor who is at present Acting Governor General in the absence up country of the Vice Governor Wangermee.

The next day my visit was returned by Monsieur Fuchs.

On the 16th instant my steamer went on to Matadi which I found had grown considerably since my last visit in 1895.

Here I called upon the French Vice Consul Monsieur St. Agne whom I found with his wife residing in an official residence built by his government upon a plot of ground granted for this purpose by the Congo State authorities.

Monsieur St. Agne returned my visit at the English Mission House where I stayed during the steamer's detention at Matadi, and I received from this gentleman as from the missionaries, much cordial hospitality during my brief stay.

I gathered from private sources that considerable numbers of French officers and men and large quantities of ammunition said to be all destined for Bahr-El Ghazal, have been recently dispatched from Matadi by railway; but it was impossible in the short time at my disposal to exactly ascertain the value of these statements.

One of them claiming to be reliable was that a truckload of shells for quick firing cannon amounting to ten thousand kilograms, had been forwarded the day before my arrival by the French trading house on behalf of the French Government.

It is stated that the French steamers conveying these men and materials do not always call at Boma when ascending the Congo, but proceed straight from the sea to Matadi.

Another statement made to me at Matadi was to the effect that quite recently a large consignment of valuable presents, intended for native chiefs in the French territory, had been lost by the railway company between Matadi and Stanley Pool and that a claim for thirty thousand francs, the value of these goods, is now being preferred by the French house against the Congo railway.

Complaint against the manner of working the railway seems common enough.

Both Boma and Matadi show signs of continuous improvement and development.

At the former place, which I am assured has now been definitely fixed on as the State capital a railway to ?? the timber and ground nut country of Mayombe to the north has been begun.

About ten kilometres of track from Boma are said to have been already levelled; but there are as yet no signs of metalling of bridge construction.

At Matadi quite a town now lies on the rocky slope of the river shore where only a few years ago stretched a pitiless waste of bare sunburnt rock showing but scant traces of vegetation and none of humanity.

Today the improvised town here numbers perhaps two thousand five hundred to three thousand persons, a large number of whom are British subjects, either from Lagos, The Gold Coast or Sierra Leone.

Want of attention as to how these and the other native workers of railway and government built their haphazard dwellings led to an inevitable overcrowding in this part of the town; and I suspect a very inadequate supervision of their manner of living, which is generally conceived in defiance of sanitary laws induced an outbreak of small pox which has only recently come to an end after having caused many deaths.

One good, however, resulted in that the Railway Company burnt all the infected houses, if such these incongruous dwellings could be called, constructed as they were, and other survivors still often are of pieces of old iron and lids and sides of provisions cases, with bunches of grass and even articles of cast off wearing apparel serving wherever necessary to shut out any light and air.

Some of the coloured British subjects have built for themselves more substantial residences and both at Boma and Matadi these men form a respectable element of the community.

I have the honour to be with the highest respect,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most obedient humble servant,

Roger Casement.