

Letter to Agnes Livingstone 1, 29 April 1862

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

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[0001]

We burned large quantities of clothing & selected what was best
for Ann's children & for Agnes

Shupanga 29th April

1862

My Dear Mother

With a sore sore heart I
give you the sad news that my dear
Mary died here on the 27th. This unlooked
for bereavement quite crushes and
takes the heart out of me. Everything
else that happened in my career only
made the mind rise to overcome it,
but this takes away all my strength.
If you knew how I loved & trusted
her you might realize my loss. I try to
bow to the stroke as from the Lord who
gave and who has taken away but
there are regrets which will follow
me to my dying day. If I had done so
and so. &c &c. My arrangements
were all disarranged beyond my control
you may have heard how earnestly
I pushed through the unhealthy low-
lands with the first party though I
foresaw some bellowing about breaking

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the Sabbath - and saved them all. Then
I delayed Bishop Mackenzie's party for
three months in order [that] they might not be
exposed in the lowlands as he subsequently
exposed himself and was cut off. When
I permitted my dear dear Mary to join me
again, I ordered the new steamer fitted
expressly for her comfort to be made to
sail out - then on reaching the Kongone
to cut wood, and steam up at whatever
time she arrived; this would have in-
volved but a three or four days exposure
but my orders were departed from,
and the steamer came out in a brig in

pieces. Even then it looked as if we should get quickly through for Captain Wilson volunteered with about ninety men and officers to take us up to the cataracts. but the engineer had neglected the engines. they were full of sand, and not knowing this we were three weeks in coming this far, which distance we have done before and since in three days. We could not go further and resolved to put the vessel together here. Then the Gorgon

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whose Captain & officers were with us, were driven off in a hurricane, and we had to wait 17 days at Kongone for her return. It would have broken Mary's heart to send her away then. She had some little touches of fever but so quickly got over that I felt no alarm. They rather served to make us confident that she would not be much troubled with the disease. But on the 20th she had spasms in her stomach and then bilious colic but moved about not much the worse. It was relieved by a mustard poultice on the stomach. then vomiting ensued which nothing could stop. This is the worst form of fever we have for the remedies are rejected. Enough of quinine was got in to affect her ears but nothing ever moved the liver. She vomited only the water she drank on the 25th I had to lift her up when she wanted anything. I tended her night and day myself, and she expressed herself pleased with my services. I trust she had also the tender care of

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an Almighty arm around her. On the morning of the 27th she began to moan and said "I am not in pain but cannot help moaning from a feeling of distressing weakness." She thought the room hot and I opened the window about 3 A.M. A Portuguese had sent us four melons the day before, and she being fond of them I had fed her with the heart of one during the night & it seemed to stop the vomiting. When day

broke I began to fear the worst and soon
after on lifting her up to drink she had
lost the power of drinking except from
a spoon as she lay. I burst into tears
and said "My dearie My dearie you are
going to leave me" "Are you resting on
Jesus" I had to speak loud to make her
hear as her ears were affected by the
quinine. I think she understood for
she looked thoughtfully up towards
Heaven. I regret exceedingly that I did
not employ writing for as her voice
was lost her hearing came back. &
[vice versa] I found she was quite sensible for on
asking are you in pain she said no

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Several times she made a great effort
to say it. D^e Kirk and I used every
effort to make the liver act but it never
did. She became jaundiced in the whites
of the eyes and lay nearly insensible
but answered my kisses till within half
an hour of departing. After commending
her soul to him who himself passed through
the gate of death, M^r Stewart leading
our prayer, she sooned breathed heavily.
Then lying with her mouth a little open
she gently shut it & breathed no more.
She was falling asleep in Jesus.

I look to her previous experience
and life for comfort, and thank
God for his mercy, there we have it.
On leaving England the parting with
her dear family & especially the little
one I have never seen, she seems to
have fallen into a gloomy desponding
state but happily Rev^d James
Stewart of the Free Church was there.
and she opened her mind to him. The
course he adopted in counselling her

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was the means of bringing back peace of
mind and trust in our Saviour
A letter she wrote then is very consoling
and another to myself at a subsequent
period relieves my mind from all
anxiety as to her present state though
it does not I must confess assuage
the grief I feel for her loss at a period

when the prospects seemed so fair for
much comfort & usefulness in her
society. You will appreciate a
prayer I found in her hand writing
though tied up with sheets of notes
of a sermon, and another which
says bitter things against her own
kindness of heart.

Accept our Lord as I am, and
make me such as thou wouldst
have me to be

He who taught her to value & use this prayer
did not leave his gracious work unfinished

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M^r Rae made the coffin that night.
the dear body was washed by D^r Kirk &
M^r Stewart and wound up in sheets.
When we put it in the coffin it struck
us all as the image of her father. The
sailors wished to mount guard but there
was no need for it. Next morning she
still looked her father's picture but deeply
jaundiced. The men dug her grave
beneath a Prasbab tree 60 feet in
circumference, and begged to guard her
remains till the grave was built up
This we allowed. The natives all seemed
to sympathize with us. The Portuguese
wished to fire guns but I refused - The
burial service was read by M^r Stewart
and I did not restrain my tears for she
deserved them. A good good wife
and mother was she. God have
pity on the children. She was so
much beloved by them. We find
that she had made practical preparation
for making us all comfortable
on board the Lady Nyassa. She was

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before we were lonely on Lake Nyassa

much respected by all the officers of the
Gorgon. They would do anything for her.
When they met this vessel at Mozambique
Captain Wilson offered his cabin in that
fine large vessel. not much less than your
forehouse - but she insisted rather that
Miss Mackenzie and M^{rs} Burrup should

go. The kind eagerness evinced to favour M^{rs} L. awakened envy in more pretentious. She was such a contrast to those who wanted everything done for them that I felt prouder than ever of her. I enjoyed her society during the three short months we were together it was the Lord who gave and He has taken away. I wish to say sincerely blessed be his name. I regret as there are always regrets after our loved ones are gone. That no slander which unfortunately reached her ears from missionary gossip & others, had an influence [on me] in allowing her to come - a Doctor of Divinity said when her devotion to her family was praised - "O she is no good. She is here because her husband cannot live with her." the last day will tell another tale. Affy David Livingstone