

Letter to Agnes Livingstone 1, 29 April 1862

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

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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 lowlands 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 involved 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^e 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