

## Letter to Unknown, 12 February 1871

*Livingstone, David, 1813-1873*

Published by Livingstone Online ([livingstoneonline.org](http://livingstoneonline.org))

[0001]

12: February 1871.

Bambarre:Manyuema:

(Useful to Finlay - for the geographical data) a few passages marked in the margin may be had.)

P:S: I cut this off the end of a packet of quinine from Kirk, the first I have had for years, to say that I am sorry to be in a manner compelled to speak rather disparagingly of the opinions of my - Predecessors in exploration but the discovery of the sources of the Nile was asserted so positively and withal so honestly that in making a similar claim some explanation is

[0002]

is necessary. Poor Speke's grand mistake was, the eager pursuit of a foregone conclusion. When he discovered the Victoria Nyanza or Okara he at once leaped to the conclusion that therein lay the sources of the river of Egypt. "20,000 square miles of water" confused by sheer immensity. He did not know that according to intelligent suaheli, who have lived many years

East of Okara that Lake  
Barings, Lake Kavirondo,  
and Lake Naibash and Lake  
Okara have been run into  
one huge Victoria Lake.  
He

[0003]

He seems never to have  
allowed a doubt to  
arise in his mind as  
to the correctness of his  
first conclusion No  
sooner however did he  
and Grant turn their faces  
to their Nyanza to prove  
it true than they turned  
their backs on the sources  
of the Nile which are 500  
miles further up the Great  
Nile Valley than the most  
southern point of the  
Victoria Lake. When they  
saw that the little river  
that issues out of it though  
termed the White Nile:  
would not account for  
that great ~~River~~ stream  
instead

[0004]

instead of conjecturing  
"a back water" to eke it  
out but for devotion to  
the foregone conclusion  
they would have come  
westward into the trough  
of the Great Valley to find  
out what did account  
for the river of Egypt  
and there not to mention  
Albert Nyanza or lower  
Tanganyika the upper  
part of which, Speke  
had already partici-  
pated in discovering  
he would have found  
Webb's Lualaba not  
80 or 90 yards broad.

(I speak from memory:)  
but never less than from  
2000

[0005]  
2000 to 4000 yards -  
sometimes 8000 yards  
wide and always deep.  
And again still further  
West and still in the -  
Great Valley Bartle Frere's  
and Young's Lualabas  
of similar large proportions  
The true head waters of  
the Nile telling of a copious  
supply of water for the  
inundations and for  
the enormous evaporation  
of a river in Latitude  
and Longitude from the  
sources to the sea of about  
three thousand miles I  
sympathize with all real  
explorers & admire the  
splendid achievements  
of Speke, Grant and Baker  
the

[0006]  
the last named came  
further up the Great  
valley than any other in  
modern times, but turned  
when about seven hundred  
miles short of the sources  
the second Egyptian ex-  
pedition under D<sup>r</sup> Arnauld  
and Sabatier turned when  
a round thousand miles  
short of the same point  
no one awakens my  
admiration more than  
the Dutch Lady explorer.  
She had provided with  
such wise foresight a  
steamer with means of  
both land and water  
exploration and proceeded  
so far in spite of the

severest domestic - affliction

[0007]

affliction, the loss of  
her two Aunts by fever  
persevering so nobly  
until she was assured  
that Speke and Grant  
had already found  
in the Victoria Nyanza  
the sources she sought  
that but for being foiled  
by an honest enough state-  
ment she must inevitably  
by boat or on land have  
discovered the caput Nile  
I cannot concieve of a  
lady of her indomitable  
courage turning short of  
Banguelo. We great  
he donkeys say exploration  
was not becoming her sex  
Considering [that] some 1600 years  
have elapsed since former  
or

[0008]

or ancient travellers  
came here and Kings, Emperors  
philosophers. All the great  
minds of antiquity longed  
in vain to know the fountains  
whence flow'd the famous  
river. Exploration does  
not seem to have been  
very becoming the other  
sex either. I know -  
nothing about her save  
what has appeared in  
the papers:

(signed:) David Livingstone: