“Dr. Livingstone, I presume?”

Although this phrase continues to resontate today, many people with not be familiar with the original context.

David Livingstone (1813-1873) was a Scottish Victorian explorer, missionary, abolitionist and many, many more things.

In late November 1871, he was in a small village called Ujiji on the eastern shore of Lake Tanganyika.

A few months previously, Livingstone had been in the heart of Africa, in the Congo.

There, on the banks of the Lualaba River (a tributary of the Congo River), he passed several months in a small village called Nyangwe.

Livingstone hoped to sail down the Lualaba River in order to determine whether it was connected to the Nile (it isn’t, but Livingstone didn’t know that).

If it was, Livingstone had a chance of becoming the first European individual in history to decisively identify the mythical “source” of the Nile.

Unfortunately, John H. Speke, another British explorer, had already visited the real source of the Nile, Lake Victoria, in 1858 … but that’s another story.

In 1871, the Congo was an area where Arab and African traders from Zanzibar where actively seeking ivory for the world market and enaging in the Central African slave trade.

One day Livingstone went into the local market in Nyangwe just as a few of these traders, led by one Dugumbe, began to aruge with some of the sellers.

In his 1871 Field Diary, Livingstone described the scene that ensued thus:

"I saw three of Dugumbe[']s people with guns in the market place with wonder but thought it ignorance and retired - when 50 yards off two guns were fired and a general flight took place - goods thrown away in terror firing on the helpless canoes took place = a long line of heads in the wate shewed the numbers that would perish for they could not swim two miles shot after shot followed on the terrified fugitives = great numbers died"

Livingstone, an ardent abolitionist, was shocked by the massacre.

Rather than continue exploring to the west and north-west, he turned back and headed east towards Ujiji, the village on the shore of Lake Tanganyika.

He arrived dispirited, only to discover that his store of supplies in the village had been pilfered.

Things looked bleak indeed, and Livingstone wondered how he would continue his explorations.

Yet one day soon afterwards, one of Livingstone’s African attendants came running to tell Livingstone that he had seen a large party approaching the village.

Livingstone went to greet the caravan, which consisted of Arabs, Africans, and other individuals and which carried an American flag.

One individual stepped forward.

This was Henry Morton Stanley, a Welshman masquerading as an America (again, that’s a story for another time), who had been dispatched by the *New York Herald* to “find Livingstone” as the outsie world had not heard from the Scottish explorer in a long time.

Seeing an individual that fit Livingstone’s description, Stanley said, “Dr. Livingsotne, I presume?”

The rest is history.

Although Livingstone never resolved the question of the source of the Nile and died in Africa before returning to Britain again, Stanley’s story about finding Livingstone became a sensation on both sides of the Atlantic.

Thanks to Stanley’s newspaper articles and his book *How I Found Livingstone in Central Africa* (1872), Livingstone became a saint in the public imagination, especially in Britain.

Livingstone’s experiences (especially the massacre in the marketplace) and his writings inspired British abolitionists, helped stop the Central and East African slave trades, and eventually led to the British enforced closure of the notorious Zanzibar slave market.

Moreover, after death, Livingstone’s body was returned to Britain and he is today buried beneath the central aisle in Westminster Abbey, one of the most prestigious burial locations in Britain.