

Letter to Agnes Livingstone 3, 22, 29 January, 6 February 1866

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

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[0001]

Crossing the Line in

Long. 49° E. 22nd Januar

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1866

My Dear Nannie

I begin a letter now
in order to be part ready
when we come to Zanzibar which may be in a week
hence. We are getting on
pretty well but such a
rolling ship never was
known by the name of
a pleasure yacht. I suppose
she was sold in England because she was so
lively. As soon as we
sit down to dinner

[0002]

our entire attention is taken
up in balancing the soup
plates. If you forget the
vessel in your hand, the
other vessel gives a lurch.
and the greasy fluid flows
into your lap. Fancy a
comfortable old gentleman
[about my size] taking a bath while she is
playing her beastly pranks.
One bucket of salt water
is all he can venture to put
in. One moment he is
holding on by the sides to
avoid sliding to the other
end. the next the mad
fluid sloshes up to his
chest & mouth, and the
mice in their holes & the

[0003]

very flies on the wall laugh
at him. Most of the marine
sepoys were sick. You
would have been a victim
unless you had tried the
new remedy of a bag of
pounded ice along the spine,
which sounds as hopeful
as the old cure for tooth-
ache, namely, "take a mouth-
ful of cold water & sit on the
fire till it boils. You
will suffer no more from
toothache " We have had no-
thing to attract our attention
in coming over this wide
waste of waters - a sea broke
one of the boats so that half of
it was swept away & two
seedies or black sailors were
taken with it. The life buoys

[0004]

were thrown to them and a
boat lowered & they were
picked up. All the sailors
are [either] Lascars or Seedies. They
get confused in any
emergency. The Captain
had to go & shew them every
rope to be hauled when
taking in sail, and I took
the wheel and brought her
"up in the wind" while the
above affair took place.
This stopped the ship's course
otherwise we should have
left the poor fellows hope-
lessly out of sight. A
shark took a bite at the
revolving vane of the
patent log today. He
left some pieces of the

[0005]

enamel of his teeth in the
brass, and probably has the
toothache; you will of
course sympathize with
him. The vane revolves
in the water and the number

of revolutions are registered
in a little machine in
front of it so that the
distance travelled over is
known. It trails behind the
ship.

If you ask M^r Murray
to send by M^r Conyningham
” Buckland’s curiosities of
natural history”,and M^r
Gladstones address to the
Edinburgh students it will
save me writing to him
[0006]

When you return home you
will be scrutinized to see if
you are spoiled. You have
only to act naturally &
kindly to all your old
friends to disarm their
prejudices. I think you
will find the Youngs true
friends. M^{rs} Williamson
of Widdicombe hill near
Bath writes to me that
she would like to shew you
her plans for the benefit
of poor orphans. If you
thought of going to Bath
it might be well to get
all the insight you could
into that, and every other
good work. It is well to be
[0007]

able to take a comprehensive
view of all benevolent
enterprises, and resolve
to do our duty in life in
some way or other for
we cannot live for our-
selves alone. A life of self-
ishness is one of misery.
and it is unlike that of
our blessed saviour who
pleased not himself. He
followed not his own
will even, but the will of
his father in Heaven. I have
read with much pleasure
a book called ”Rose Douglas”

It is the life of a minister's
daughter with fictitious
names, but all true. She
was near Lanark and
came through Hamilton you
[0008]
had better read it if you come
in contact with it.

I would not stop too long
at Newstead Abbey. Travelling
about is very expensive. If Tom & Oswald go again to
Mull you had better go with
them.

What a mistake to say any
thing about the Marsaueaux
wine before the review
was written. If I say now
that it was very good. It
really had something very
sparkling in it, M^rCaillate
will see that I am dreading
his Review, But I main-
tain that I only depreiated it
as a means of writing
not for drinking. No. No!
[0009]
You did not mention
what you considered most
precious on the night of the
fire, so I dreamed that I
saw one young lady hug-
ging a German Grammar
to her bosom - another with
a pair of curling tongs - a
toothpick and a pinafore.
Another with a bunch of
used up postage stamps &
autographs in a crinoline
turned upside down, and
a fourth lifted up Madame
Hocede & insisted on carrying
her as her most precious
baggage. Her name which I
did not catch will go down to
posterity alongside of the ladies
who each carried out her
husband from the besieged city
& took care never to let him
[0010]

hear the last of it afterwards.
I am so penetrated with admiration of her that I enclose the wing of a flying fish for her. It lighted among us last night while we were at dinner coming right through the skylight - You will make use of this fact in the high flying speech which you will deliver there in French

If the "Anties" would get M^rYoungs lawyer to manage the affair of the house they would get a double storeyed one built for them some where else but they wont take advice. They put no accounts down - make no memoranda so are at the mercy of any one who gives them a fair story I cannot interfere further

[0011]

than to ask M^r Young to help them. Janet will say "Oh aye its a in my heed" & no documents are necessary. I question if the ground is theirs. I wanted them to get all acccounts settled in 1858. with some lawyer fellow from whom instead of the town council they got the fen, but they only vexed me with their fencing my questions & shall never say a word to them about it again.

Write a note to R.L. Tracey esq. Ritchie Stewart & co. Bombay and say that I desired you to give him ~~my~~[(your)] address in reference to the money he has been kind enough

[0012]

to invest. It wont be put

in your name until perhaps
twelve months hence. If
much above £2000 then
you had better make the
surplus stand for Anna
Mary. You will give
him your address say half
a year hence.

Zanzibar 29th we arrived
here yesterday & found that
9 of my buffaloes had
died. It is a bad climate
for both man & beast
2 males 2 cows & 2
calves alone remain to
try the experiment with
the Tsetse. We went today
to call on the Sultan. His Highness met us at
the bottom of the stairs
[0013]

and as he shook hands
a brass band which he
got at Bombay blared
forth "God Save the Queen"
This was excessively ludicrous
but I maintained sufficient
official gravity. After
coffee & sherbert we came
away and the wretched
band now struck up "The
British Grenadiers" as if
the fact of my being only
5 ft 8 & Brebner about
2 inches lower ought not
to have suggested "Wee
Willie Winkle" as more
appropriate. I was ready
to explode but got out of
sight before giving way
to cachinations
[0014]

There can be no doubt of
the Baron Van der Decken's
death. He was excessively
aggressive. & over bearing
entertaining the utmost
contempt for the natives
and taking pains on all
occasions to shew that

contempt. His Hauteur
was accompanied with
great stinginess in small
matters. This was the
more remarkable in-
asmuch as he bought two
steamers from his own
pocket. but these were
to confer honour on
himself as an explorer
he imagined that I had
gone into the Juba with
[0015]

the Lady Nyassa instead of
to Bombay & raged against
me like a wild bull in
a net. Imagining that I
had purposefully forestalled
him in his exploration.
I saw the water discoloured
8 miles out from the
Juba as fluent to Bombay
but I had only three men
on whom I could depend
and I felt it would not be
wise to go in so short
handed. The poor man
had so much contempt
for the natives that up to
the moment when they
pinioned him he never
believed they dared lay
a finger on the Noch weil
geboren Baron. He went
[...]

[0016]
rage before he was killed
to demand why provisions
had not been sent regularly
now this in their own
country & other things which
we shall never know
was simply insanity, but
we must say nothing
6 February The Sultan had
toothache - a gum boil too.
but this afternoon the Thule
is to be taken over. He salutes
the English flag ere we haul
it down 21 guns & then the
wasp Captain Bradshaw

salutes the Sultan's flag
as it runs up. Plenty of
powder burned. The Penguin
comes some 3 weeks hence
to take me to Rovuma
God bless you dear Nannie
[...]