

## Letter to Agnes Livingstone 1, 29 April 1862

*Livingstone, David, 1813-1873*

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

[0001]

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

Shupanga 29<sup>th</sup> April

1862

My Dear Mother

With a sore sore heart I  
give you the sad news that my dear  
Mary died here on the 27<sup>th</sup>. 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

[0002]

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

[0003]

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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 25<sup>th</sup> 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

[0004]

an Almighty arm around her. On the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> 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

[0005]

Several times she made a great effort  
to say it. D<sup>r</sup> 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<sup>r</sup> 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<sup>d</sup> James  
Stewart of the Free Church was there.  
and she opened her mind to him. The  
course he adopted in counselling her

[0006]

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

[0007]

M<sup>r</sup> Rae made the coffin that night.  
the dear body was washed by D<sup>r</sup> Kirk &  
M<sup>r</sup> 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<sup>r</sup> 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

[0008]

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<sup>rs</sup> Burrup should  
go. The kind eagerness evinced to favour  
M<sup>rs</sup> L. awakened envy in more pre-

tentious. 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