

BC 151 C 10. 17

Johnnie C. Bleck

Charlton House,

Mowbray

N Cape Town.

Sept^r 6th 1875.



G.M.S.S. collection

A.M.

S/A

My dear Sir George Grey,

I trust that the few lines which my Sister Lucy wrote to you by the mail steamer of the 25th August may come safely into your hands. Much press of writing for that mail rendered me unable to fulfill what had otherwise been my intention, viz, to try & tell you my self of my great & sudden loss.

But whether my Sister's letter reaches you or not, you will doubtless
yrs

know before receiving this from me that he to whom you have been so kind & true a friend through all these long years has been taken to his rest.

I think it must be from seeming to know so much of you from him, while so little of my own personal knowledge, which makes it so very difficult for me to write to you of all this. I cannot write to you as a stranger, for I know how much he loved and trusted you, besides feeling deeply grateful myself for your unvaried goodness to him; and yet, save through him, I feel that I have

no personal right to address you as a friend. If therefore anything should seem abrupt to you in this my letter I ask your pardon for it before hand; and will now try to tell you as clearly, & as shortly as may be, of all regarding him which I think you may most care to know.

I cannot tell how much you may of learnt, through the letters which he tried to send you whenever an opportunity occurred, as to the way in which my husband's health had been gradually failing during the last two years and a half. At first after

our return from England nearly six years ago, at least so soon as he had recovered from the weakening effects of the indifferent food on board the steamer &c., - he began to get much better, especially after the receipt of ^{your} kind letter of Dec^r 1869, announcing to him that a pension of £150 p^a had been granted him from the Civil List, had set his mind at rest on pecuniary matters, & he saw himself free to devote all his leisure to the prosecution of his much loved work.

For several years after ^{this} I continued much more hopeful as to his dear life, and it seemed as though the heavy shadow

shadow which had hung like a cloud over all the earlier years of our married life was lifted for a while. It is true that he never became strong, or able to enjoy the freedom of action which that gives, & which I am sure he must have sorely missed, tho' bearing it ^{at} - like any other thing which he saw to be inevitable, - so very patiently; And of course we both knew how much depended for him upon daily care.

Still any one who had seen him then, in his vigorous enjoyment of all in daily work & life which was still possible to him, would I think have thought hopefully of its probable

long continuance. For several years we went each summer for a month's change to Kalk Bay. The rest & sea air seemed to agree so well with him, & I was also so glad to prevent, if possible, his daily attendance in Cape Town during the month of February, which always seems with its dust & exhausting heat to be our most dangerous summer month for those in weak health. But in the summer of '73 we were not able wisely to manage our usual migration, (owing to my being personally unfit just then for all the fatigue &c which that involves,) - I tried to get him to come with me for

a fortnight's change to Hather Sea Point, just we two of ourselves, but found he was only giving into the feeling so well himself as not personally to care idea for my sake, he always so much disliked being away from the little ones & missing his natural home life, and was intending to come daily to Cape Town per tramway car to his work. One felt this wd be merely a change for the worse, & so I gave it up, but persuaded him to take a holiday at home ~~that~~ he might be out of the intense heat at Cape Town. And he had been so much better of late years, & was ^{also} so unusually bright & well that summer, that I never feared ^{that} the want of this usual change

would affect his health injuriously.

---- Sept 7th But as soon as our Cape winter set in that year we all noticed that he did not show his usual power of recovering from the one or two colds which in spite of all precaution he would take during its continuance. When summer came and he could be much of the day in the fresh air he became quite comfortably well again, & able for the long walks each ⁱⁿ summer evening, which he so greatly delighted, generally accompanied by Edith (our eldest child) & occasionally by us all.

But in the end of January, just before we started for our month's change to Halk Bay he again caught a heavy influenza like cold which much hampered his enjoyment of our stay there & made me very anxious.

He had only just finally recovered from it when we left Halk Bay at the end

end of February, but seemed to have gained a little added strength from the rest & sea air even in spite of this great drawback.

Early in March however the Grey library became one day full of choking smoke from weeds which were burning in the Botanical gardens & this caused him to cough very violently which brought on some signs of hemorrhage. He came home at once & I sent for our doctor who did not like the look of things.

After some days all wrong symptoms having ceased he returned to the library to work, but not feeling quite easy about him I went also to Cape Town that morning, which was fortunate, as, during its course,

Mr W. Gibbon again began to burn weeds, with the same bad results as before to my dear ~~Husband~~, whom I was then able to take ^{extra} quietly home without fatigue to himself — The hemorrhage did not continue much or become ^{apparently} severe. & he soon was again ^{as usual}.

But he evidently did not feel well, for some few weeks afterwards he said to me very earnestly one day how much he wished the doctor would tell him the truth about himself, &c, adding "I want to know whether it will be weeks, or months,"

and saying, that could he but know how he really was, he could then tell what ~~of~~ things to try quickly to finish off, & what to lay quietly on one side.

I undertook to speak to ^{our} doctor for him, saying that I thought he would tell me truth, i.e. his real opinion on the subject, & that ^{at} all events one could only try.

D^r Stewart was very frank with me when I ~~questioned~~ told him D^r Black's earnest wish on the matter, for which I have always felt grateful to him.

He said (as nearly as I can remember his words) that ever since he had attended my ~~Husband~~ professionally he had considered his life a very precarious one. That were there any mischief going on now (i.e. then) in the weak (left) lung part of which, he explained, could ~~not~~ ^{no} longer perform its proper functions, the termination of his life could only be a question of time. But that

as

there was no active disease going
on then, Dr Bleek might live on
for very many years still, (Dr Stewart
knew both how careful my husband
was in things regarding his health, &
also was good care we all tried to take
of him ^{at home,} in many ways, with good success)
but that he was very weak, & did any
untoward combination of circumstances
occur, — were any active hemorrhage
to set in, even to such a comparatively
small extent as a healthy man wd
be sure to recover from, my husband
would have no chance of getting over
it; or again, if he caught a very heavy
cold (implying I think if the same attacked
his chest) he would not get over it.

You can perhaps dimly fancy
what it was to hear ones worst fears
thus

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put into clear words, & gravely en-
dorsed by the weight both of general
professional knowledge & of ^{the} special
cleverness in cases of chest disease
which Dr Stewart seems to possess —

I told dear Wilhelm the sense
of what Stewart had said, tho' of
course putting it into my gentle words.

~~But~~ I knew that, bad as it was, it
was not so bad as his own worst
apprehensions regarding his physical
state; and ^{also} that to a nature like his,
any thg was better than the fret
of anxious uncertainty on such
a subject. It was some months
after this, when he had become stronger
again, & able to enjoy quiet walks
with me, & talk without fatigue,
that

he shewed me a codicil to our joint will which he had written three ^{at a time when I also was ill,} years previously, ~~and~~ spoke earnestly with me regarding its contents, & generally speaking, as to what I ought to do regarding our children &c in the event of his being taken from us.

In old days we had settled that I should take our children home to Germany for their education; but of later years we had begun to doubt the wisdom of such a step, as, tho' not at all sickly children, they evidently have not strong constitutions. The wish too, that

he had so strongly, that, if possible, we (my sister Lucy & myself,) should

keep on the Bushman work in which he had been so deeply interested ^{ever} since we took the first Bushman prisoner to live on our place in Aug^r 70, & at which my sister Lucy & himself had ever since been more or less constantly employed, was of course an additional reason for my living on here.

I to keep up the household, & manage the practical matters connected with having Bushmen (men or women) on the place, & Lucy to continue & work well out "their" "joint Bushman Studies," to quote his own words.

He also wished me to keep together here all his books papers &c for the

continuance of the work begun
by him, & ~~also~~ to publish gradually
some of his posthumous papers,
(in the codicil)
asking my sister Lucy to help me in
the latter. He also adds (regarding
his wish that I should publish these
papers) "and I trust that partly for
this purpose, and partly as an
acknowledgment of what little I
have done, the pension graciously
granted to me by her Majesty the
Queen will also be continued to
my wife". Regarding this latter thing
he also then advised me as to the
probably best steps to take in ap=
plying for it &c, knowing that be=
yond the interest of my own small for=
tune, settled on me by his wish at the
time of our marriage, I should have
nothing

nothing certain⁵

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to depend upon for the mainte=
nance & education of our children,
& that this interest (roughly speaking
about £125. per an.) would of course be
insufficient. He also told me to try
here to get the small yearly grant
which our Parliament has voted for
several years past, continued to me
for the personal expenses of the
Bushmen, whom we should ^{at} con=
tinue to need for the work. "This
grant has not been more than barely
enough for the actual expenses of
the Bushman; leaving of course nothing
over for printing &c the material col=
lected in the course of the work; & not
even covering the incidental expenses
caused by having this extra foreign
element in our household."

I think this is about all which

then passed between us, save his repeated telling me, that, tho' he told me all this, as his opinion of what might be best & wisest for me to do, if left alone; yet that I must by no means consider myself bound, or even hampered in thought, by any of his expressed wishes; for that, as it was impossible for him to foresee what would be the exact circumstances in which we should be left, I should be safer, & able to decide more wisely for all our children, ^{also for} all the other things, which he left trusting in my care, did I mainly try to look all ~~these~~ circumstances fully in the face, & ^{then} calmly decide what, under them, was the best to be done. He used to say so earnestly to me "Only don't loose your head and you will come all right."

After that time we again left this subject mainly alone until a few words he said about it some six or eight weeks ago. He continued comfortably better in health until one showery day last spring (Cape spring, therefore in Sept or Oct^r) he ventured to Cape Town contrary to his usual custom during last winter, Dr Stewart having advised him to stay at home on very damp or rainy days. But Mr Maskew's eldest son lay dangerously ill, & the assistant in Public Library happened to be away, so my husband did not like to leave the poor old man quite alone there in his trouble, far less to trouble him with the Grey Library keys. A heavy cold was the result of this imprudence (the second he had had that season) &

he was very long in shaking it off.

I began almost to fear it never would leave him. We had also just then an anxiety of a different kind upon us viz: notice from our landlord to leave the house where we had been ever since November /69, as he wished to sell it. Besides generally much disliking the idea of buying a house, or having any of that kind of property out here. in his own precarious state of health, my husband saw that, much as for many reasons we should dread a removal, it could not be helped; since Mr Braunger's house, in which we were, was too old to be a good investment, besides being thatched, - w^h to him, with all his precious books & manuscripts, was a great objection. Landlords seemed to have a mania for selling last year & we could

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find no healthy house, to be let, which would hold our number (which of late years has varied from twelve to eighteen persons). We therefore at last decided to buy another house in this same village (Mowbray) which fortunately for us came into the market just then. and we moved into it early in February. How thankful I was when this removal was safely accomplished, without apparent harm to my husband's health I cannot say; for it was doubly difficult to guard him from dangerous draughts or too sudden changes of temperature at such a time, to say nothing of my fear of his overexerting himself in his constant endeavours to help, or spare us fatigue.

One thing was trying him sadly just then, & that was the knowledge

that his dear Mother lay dangerously, if not hopelessly, ill. I think your dear Sir George must have noticed from many little things what a united family my husband's was, & especially how he cared about his Mother.

The news of her death (on the 13th February, aged 72 years,) reached us in the middle of March. For a while this sorrow visibly affected his strength; but it was very good for him that we were in this new house, as every day brought up questions connected with it in house or garden which he had to help decide, & I think these new interests helped him in the struggle he was so bravely making with his own feelings. For about two months, ^{after this time was over} he began to be so much better in many little ways, -

able to work hard for hours together at the continuation of his Grammar, another part of which he was anxious to bring out as soon as practicable, and shewing, also, ^{so many} other evidences of returning strength, that I trusted the good effects of this very airy healthy house were beginning to tell, and that he might again pass safely ^{through} our, to him, trying winter season.

"D^r Stewart advised him to go ^{daily} later to Cape Town, thro' this winter, even on fine days, i.e. leaving Snow-
dray at eleven instead of half past nine o'clock, so as to avoid the oft times raw morning air; and, of his own accord, he began to return home an hour earlier each afternoon, i.e. by the 3, instead of the 4 o'clock train.

As, in the shadow of the Devil's Peak in which Snowbray lies, it becomes damp & cold by the latter hour. & each year his increasing weakness had made him increasingly sensitive to sudden changes of temperature. But it so mischanced that towards the middle of June some poor people in Cape Town whom we had known in old days in Natal & whom he was therefore interested in helping for that reason as well as on the common ground of humanity, were in great trouble, & in his efforts on their behalf he was detained in Cape Town an hour later than usual.

I think this happened two days
evening

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(continued left)
15th 7

evening. After his return home the second day he complained of having felt it so very damp & cold here at Snowbray whilst walking up from the Station to our house; & it soon became apparent that he had caught a heavy cold.

16th June he remained at home on acct of this, & much cold, sore & throat &c kept him prisoner for a week. On the 24th being better he again was at the Library. But the following morning while sitting busily working at his Grammar symptoms of hemorrhage began, which, tho' they did not become severe, made Dr Stewart evidently anxious, & we lasted more

or up for some ten days during which he had of course to keep absolutely quiet, besides using the indicated remedies. On the 4th July Stewart pronounced him convalescent, but told him to take even much more care than usual for another fortnight, encouraging him however to go out of doors whenever the weather was genial. On the 17th July he went again to the library, & continued to do so whenever the weather safely allowed of it up to the 14th August which was his last day there.

But, tho' he had so far recovered, ~~and~~ there were many little things about his health & ways which kept

me very anxious, & made me look with painful longing for our trying winter weather to be over, & the dry summer warmth to come & do him good. On Sunday 15th he was very bright & well (tho still in some ways showing the signs of weakness w^h I did not like) & much enjoyed the society of a Polish Botanist who came by invitation to spend the day with us. That night he did not sleep even as well as ^{had been} usual with him since the late illness, but the next day Monday was again both very bright & happy, & unusually busy; helping me with our quarterly acct, & writing on Bushman Reports, & sorting the words of his Bushman Dictionary (or rather lists) ready for us to begin pasting on sheets

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for him in readiness for printing the same whenever funds could be got for that purpose. He joined us at all our meals (same breakfast, which since this illness he always had alone in our sunny drawing room) & played with the children in the evening &c, even more than usual - The only thing was that twice in the day (at early & late dinner) he complained of feeling 'so tired', & seemed as if the trouble of eating meat (on which he always so greatly depended for keeping up his strength) was almost too much for him.

Between I went to our room that night (1/4 to 11) he was already in bed, but still awake & spoke to me occasionally both while I was putting ready the little comforts he might want during the night, & also several times after I put out my candle at 11 & lay down beside him. Seeming quite as

well as usual. But then, before either of us had fallen asleep, a want of power in moving his right arm attracted my attention, & I spoke to him, but received no answer. Striking a light I saw he was awake & looking at me, & that he tried to speak but could not. When he saw (or felt) that the effort was vain, a sort of wondering half puffed look came into his eyes & then a very sweet smile - but he never (visibly) tried to speak again. As he seemed ^{somewhat} faint too I asked him to take a little wine which was at hand & he did so. I wanted to be able to leave him for a moment to call 3 Sisters (who slept upstairs, we down,) & send for the Dr., but dared not leave him in this

faint state. Presently he became physically distressed, & violent sickness began; but he evidently was quite conscious, - shewing in little ways his fear lest I should hurt myself by the effort of raising him. See in my present bodily condition, & approving, or negativing, some things ^{with} which we tried to help him.

So we became in one of the hells of sickness. I hastily called my sister, one to send for Dr., & the other came to stay with me. He seemed relieved that I was no longer alone, we thought, tho' with the increasing weakness, & terribly increasing difficulty of breathing there was less power each minute of indicating any thing to us, as he had

done earlier. By 10 minutes before 12 Dr. Stewart was here. He first said, after taking note of the symptoms, "He is very ill" - a few minutes later "There is nothing which we can do". And then explained that suffusion of the lungs was taking place, owing to internal hemorrhage caused by some weak place in the left lung having suddenly given way. But added "You must not think he is suffering" (the poor creature, was terrible to hear, tho' in all else, save some little movement of the hands, he lay so still) & said that unconsciously had already set in.

Dr. Stewart kindly remained however - - - At about 1/4 past 2 am (17th August)

all was over.

So far as the awful suddenness with which this long impending blow fell and allow one to think or feel ^{some pain,} any ^{thing,} I think my chief thought (some dread at my poor little ones' waking hour & what must then come upon them too) was thankfulness that my darling had had so short a time to suffer.

But Oh dear Sir George, perhaps you can dimly fancy what our empty home & life is now he is gone.

For the work which he has left us to do, & for the sake of my dear little ones, (now 4 in number but if all goes well with me in the coming December probably 5,) I try to bear & do as I ought just now, & to deserve the great trust which I know he had in me & which has made him leave

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leave every thing in my hands) who are living with me my sisters (my own two elder sisters Fanny & Lucy, the latter being the one who has so long & greatly helped my dear husband in all ways in his power in Bushman studies or literary work) & one younger half-sister) are most kind & loving - & help me greatly in all ways - and my husband's friends have come forward, with offers of such help as a home of lonely women may need, in a way that has touched us deeply. This house is our own (mine & the children's) so we stay on here, at any rate for another six months, & I hope

hermanently. I am trying,
as he told me I must, for a
continuance to me (for our children's
education & to help in publishing
his posthumous papers) of
the Civil War Pension - & hope
for some success at least there.

Had you dear Sir George
not been so very far away from
Europe I should have ventured
to solicit your friendly
countenance & aid in this
matter - as it is I do only
put it in Ernst Bunsen's
hands (a friend of his & also

a trustee under our marriage
settlement).

But I must end as it is
past time.

Asking your forgiveness
for the bad writing & your
friendly acceptance of my
intention in writing you
this long letter

I am, dear Sir George
gratefully yours
Fanny C. Black.