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Dear Mr Humphreys,

Hilda and I should love to run across to Johannesburg and see you both again, and I should love to do some delving in your library; but Hilda is expecting an infant early in June, so she is not keen to travel about, and I too do not want to go too far away just now. I wonder if you could be so extremely kind as to help me and turn up a book in your magnificent collection. But to make things really difficult I don't know its title, or even whether it exists!

Last year, you may remember, Hilda and I came across some pieces of a stone cross just up by Dieris, at Tsubertz. The Historical Monuments Commission of South-West Africa wishes to reconstruct the thing, but before doing so naturally wishes to be positive about the shape. We have something to go on, because an American collector of Africana, Mr Quentin Keynes, has in his possession a journal written by Capt Thompson, captain of H.M.S. Nautilus, which visited Angra Pequena in 1786; and Capt. Thompson actually drew a water-colour sketch of the cross — Mr Keynes has lent me a photograph of it. The sketch however is disconcerting — the appearance of the cross is considerably different from what we had anticipated. We are very anxious to try and find other descriptions of the cross.

Numbers of ships visited Angra Pequena in the earlier part of the 19th century & described the remains of the cross; but remain, only they see, for by then it had been shattered. I know of only one other ship to visit the bay in the 18th century, before the Navillus. Thompson in his journal describes a spot he saw at the entrance to Angra Pequena bay, which bore an inscription on a board, commemorating the visit of a French frigate, under one Bart, on 16 May 17-- "but the remainder of the year is quite defaced, however this served to corroborate an account which I had heard of Monsr. Bart's having visited this place in the Venus, French Frigate, in the year 1733, and had made a survey of the bay, and harbour, and which was lately published by Mr Dalrymple from the original manuscript." One would guess the obvious Dalrymple to be Alexander Dalrymple, whose "Voyage chiefly in the South Atlantic Ocean" was published in 1775. There is no copy of this work in our miserable State Library in Pretoria, but Mr Keynes has looked one up in the New York Public Library, and tells me that there is no reference in it to Bart.

Have you by any chance in your library anything written by a Dalrymple in the 18th century? If you have, I would if you would be so very kind - to look up the index, and see if Bart's name appears; and if by any chance he examined the cross. I am most anxious to have another description of it, to corroborate Thompson's sketch. I should be most grateful,

Incidentally, Mr. Keynes has recently acquired  
 "another copy of Thompson's manuscript, without any  
 sketches, but with some short additions throughout in  
 Thompson's hand." He adds in a letter to me, "In the  
 back of my mind on the thought that perhaps some  
 South African museum, library, or private collector would  
 like eventually to take it off my hands." In view of  
 its peculiar interest to South West Africa I think that  
 that territory should have first refusal. If the administra-  
 tion there doesn't want it, I shall give him the names  
 of several libraries and collectors in South Africa that he  
 might approach. Would you mind if I gave him your  
 address? I have no idea what he will be wanting for  
 the manuscript — it may be something astronomical,  
 but he is an entertaining and enlightening conversationalist.  
 He is a grandson (or is it a great-grandson?) of Charles  
 Darwin; and a contributor to the National Geographic  
 Magazine — I hold neither against him.

In my spare time I have started a serious  
 work on a history of the exploration of South Africa from  
 1805 to 1890. I shall be very grateful if I may come  
 and do some work in your library later this year.

Hilda joins me in sending you and your wife  
 our warmest regards.

Yours sincerely,

Eric Axelsson

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