

The Victorians

Livingstone's journals - Victoria Falls

An extract from the journals of Dr David Livingstone

We proceeded next morning, 9th August, 1860, to see the Victoria Falls. 'Mosi-oa-tunya' is the Makololo name and means 'Smoke that Thunders.'

We embarked in canoes, belonging to Tuba Mokoro. For some miles the river was smooth and tranquil, and we glided pleasantly over water clear as crystal, and past lovely islands densely covered with a tropical vegetation. But our attention was quickly called to the dangerous rapids, down which Tuba might unintentionally shoot us. To confess the truth, these roaring rapids could scarcely fail to cause some uneasiness in the minds of new-comers. Both hippopotami and elephants have been known to be swept over the Falls, and of course, smashed to pulp.

At times it seemed as if nothing could save us from the rocks which jutted out of the water; but just at the very nick of time, Tuba passed the word to the steersman, and we glided swiftly past the threatened danger.

We landed at the head of Garden Island, which is situated near the middle of the river and on the lip of the Falls. On reaching that lip, and peering over the giddy height, the wondrous character of the magnificent cascade at once burst upon us.





It is rather a hopeless task to endeavour to convey an idea of it in words, since an accomplished painter, even by a number of views, could but impart a faint impression of the glorious scene.

Garden Island, when the river is low, commands the best view of the Great Fall chasm, as also of the promontory opposite, with its grove of large evergreen trees, and brilliant rainbows of three-quarters of a circle, two, three, and sometimes even four in number, resting on the face of the vast perpendicular rock, down which tiny streams are always running to be swept again back by the upward rushing vapour.

The whole body of water rolls clear over, quite unbroken; but, after a descent of ten or more feet, the entire mass suddenly becomes like a huge sheet of driven snow. Pieces of water leap off it in the form of comets with tails streaming behind, till the whole snowy sheet becomes myriads of rushing, leaping, aqueous comets.

Much of the spray, rising to the west of Garden Island, falls on the grove of evergreen trees opposite; and from their leaves, heavy drops are for ever falling, running down the steep face of rock, are blown off and turned back, up into the column from which they have just descended. The morning sun gilds these columns of watery smoke with all the glowing colours of double or treble rainbows.

