

**A LETTER TO THE PUBLISHER OF
THE QUARTERLY REVIEW, AND
OF "A DISSERTATION ON THE
COURSE AND PROBABLE
TERMINATION OF THE NIGER"**

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A Letter to the Publisher of the Quarterly Review, and of "A Dissertation on the course and probable termination of the Niger" by Rufane Shaw Donkin

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RUFANE SHAW DONKIN

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A LETTER, &c.

SIR,

Instead of addressing myself to such abstract and undefinable beings as “ Mr. Editor,” or “ Mr. Writer of such and such an Article,” I address myself to you as a substantive, definable personage—cognizant of right and wrong, truth and falsehood—and whose name stands legibly printed in the title-page of every number of the Quarterly Review.

To you, therefore, as a matter of mere business, connected indeed a little with our moral system, I put the following question :—

Do you not think that it would conduce more

to a publisher's interest, as a mere matter of pounds, shillings, and pence, that a work in which he has embarked under the declared intention of conveying a *true* account of forthcoming publications, and of directing the critical and moral taste of the public, should be conducted on the principles of truth and fair showing, rather than on those of trickery, false colouring, misquotation, and unfair suppression?

Supposing, as I do, that you will at once answer the above in the affirmative, I shall proceed to show you that in your last, the 81st number of the Quarterly Review, you have been made the instrument of sending forth to the world an article, (the 8th,) in which Messrs. Beechey's late Travels have been brought forward as decisive authority in confutation of my theory of the Niger, but of which work whole pages which made directly in favour of my arguments were suppressed—in which 8th article I have been made to say what I have nowhere said—and, lastly, to crown the whole, a

passage from Messrs. Beechey's work has been *misquoted*, and made to bear against me, whereas that passage, when restored, tells decidedly in my favour.

All this has been done in your last number, in a way to which I have seen no parallel since the days of Lauder.

As to my book, I will say nothing about it here, but leave it at present to its fate, to call your attention to the more important question, of whether or not the 8th article of your last number be not *intended* as well as calculated to mislead the public by the manner in which Messrs. Beechey's work on the Greater Syrtis and the Cyrenaica is quoted, or rather *not* quoted, but appealed to in proof against my dissertation?

I leave this question, as to the *intention*, to you to answer; but if I were once convinced that there was *intention* to deceive, the character of your Review would undergo a total change in my eyes; for I have been always led to think that the Quarterly Review had assumed

for its leading characteristic, a principle calculated to confer on it a renown

“ Above all Greek—above all Roman fame ”—

namely, that of upholding the public morals, not more by its admonitions and its religious exhortations, (some of which have almost a pastoral character,) than by its own strict adherence to the great moral principles of truth and honesty, so as to enable its readers to say—

“ Its bright example strengthens all its laws.”

But it is time to proceed to the business in hand.

In the 8th article of the 81st number of the Quarterly Review, and at the 238th page, is the following passage.

“ We have said, and truly said, that Sir Rufane is a scholar, and hence arises his predilection for ancient classical authorities, and his disregard of modern ones ; but the ‘ best may err,’ especially if they undertake to build a system and run it up in too great haste.

“ Had he just glanced at the account of a Jour-
“ ney round the Shores of the Syrtis, by the
“ two Beecheys, instead of consulting Solinus,
“ he would have found that ‘ those plashy quick-
“ sands,’ and the terrible objects which this
“ and other ancient writers have described,
“ were absolute nonentities, as far as the *shores*
“ are concerned—the dangers were in the gulf.
“ The elder Beechey traversed every foot of the
“ shore, and assures us, that the idea which
“ appears to have been entertained by the an-
“ cients of the soil of the Greater Syrtis, is not
“ confirmed by an inspection of the country.
“ At the bottom of this gulf the two brothers
“ found no sandy plains, no river, no ‘ plashy
“ quicksands,’ no ‘*perflabilem terram*,’ no creek
“ nor inlet towards the desert; but a straight
“ line of coast, for a whole day’s journey, of
“ hard ground, with a good firm footing; the
“ only sand, that which was blown up from the
“ beech into ridges; and beyond these, on the
“ skirts of the desert, a range of hills of solid
“ stone, from four to six hundred feet in height.
“ Thus, then, perishes that mighty subarena-

“ ceous stream, by the help of which all our
 “ ‘geographical difficulties,’ with regard to the
 “ ‘termination of the Niger,’ were to be set-
 “ tled—” by which last sentence the writer evi-
 dently means that Messrs. Beechey’s testimony
 is absolutely fatal to—what? “ why to the set-
 “ tling of all our geographical difficulties in
 “ regard to the ‘Termination of the Niger;’ ”
 which words are placed in inverted commas, as
 if they were *MINE*—and would not any body in
 reading the foregoing passage, suppose that I
must have, some where, promised some wonderful
 panacea to all difficulties about the *termination*
 of the Niger? whereas, in truth, there is not a
 single passage in my whole work which implies
 that any “ geographical difficulties ” were to be
settled by my hypothetical termination of the
 Niger: on the contrary, every line of my work
 about the *termination* of that river is given as
conjectural, from the very title page, by the word
 “ *probable,*” down to the last page of my book.
 But this sample of making me say what I never
 have said, will prepare the reader in some de-
 gree for what follows.

I will now ask you, Mr. Publisher, or any other man of common fairness and sound intellect, if the above whole passage about Messrs. Beechey's book, from which your Review professes to quote, be not meant to convey to the public a distinct idea, that Captain Beechey, after having "traversed every foot of the shore," found nothing, and afforded nothing in his account of the Syrtis, but refutations of my idle theory of the Niger entering the gulf of the Great Syrtis? that all my suppositions as to the state of its *shores* were false? that Captain Beechey had travelled *throughout* on firm ground? and that between the Great Syrtis and the Great Desert, to the south, was interposed a range of rocky hills from four hundred to six hundred feet high, so situated as to form an insuperable barrier to any river running from the interior towards the Syrtis? I ask—can any man of plain sense, taking the whole passage, as given above from the Quarterly, come to any *other* conclusions than those I have just stated? and is not the whole passage *calculated* to bring the reader