

## Letter to John Blanche, 20 January 1859

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[0001]

Zambesi River, Africa.

Private  
20<sup>th</sup> January 1859

My dear M<sup>r</sup> Blanche  
I ought to have written  
you long ago in acknowledgement  
of your very kind & truly useful &  
handsome present. It was not  
without many a sore tug at my  
conscience either, but I have been  
so occupied that I really could not  
perform that duty. I was provided  
with a naval officer to assist in  
the navigation of this river, but  
the gentleman thinking that we  
could not do without him took  
on such airs about the position  
he ought to occupy though incapable  
of making the simplest scientific  
observations that we were obliged  
to send him about his business.  
I then became "skipper" myself  
and as we have been furnished  
with a badly constructed engine  
[0002]

my time has been swallowed up with  
pursuits I never contemplated on leaving  
England. These have prevented me from  
doing my duty to many of my friends  
at home. Some of the hard hearted  
will never forgive me but such  
I conclude you are not or else you  
would never have spontaneously  
served me in the way you have  
done. I value the revolver very  
highly and entreat you to accept  
my warmest thanks for it and  
for the kindly feelings which  
prompted your generous present.  
I have not yet had an opportunity  
of trying it on game. I have been

too much confined to the ship.  
but I feel sure it will be an  
exceedingly useful instrument. The  
stock enables one to take a steady  
aim and the size of the ball is  
sufficient for all small animals.

About ten days ago we were up the  
River Shire 100 miles and came  
among enormous herds of Elephants  
on a swampy plain through which  
[0003]

the river winds giving off many  
departing & re-entering branches. We  
chased some of them with the steamer  
and but for an unlucky storm  
of rain which set in when we caught  
one in the water we should have  
secured him. It was too large of  
course to try a revolver on but  
some weapon of the kind with a  
larger ball would surely have  
been very effective. We gave him  
many shots with the Enfield rifle.  
Then several days afterwards found  
him lame and plied him with the  
same but lost him in the storm  
twice we were within fifty yards &  
were very anxious to have him  
as fuel for our engine. The plain  
was 20 or 30 miles broad and not  
a tree could be got near the river  
The bones of another elephant which  
the natives had picked clean helped  
us nicely, hence our desire to get  
the one referred to. The shire is  
deep and well adapted for navigation  
We were the first visitors the people  
ever had & they seemed very suspicious  
[0004]

but brought fowls bananas and cotton  
yarn for sale. They use bows and poisoned  
arrows and only once offered to shoot  
at us. There was something comical  
in seeing them place their arrows  
ready to shoot utterly unconscious of  
the nature of the arms we carried. We  
had no encounter- never had & hope  
we never may, but it is well to be pre-  
pared. and thanks to you I am very much  
so, but still, not so much as to make  
me in the least desirous of using a

weapon against my fellow man.

This river is filling now and a goodly sight it is to see. A large vessel could now, as I stated at home come up with ease to Tette. I chose the healthy time of year for coming, though that was not the most favourable for navigation, and you will be glad to hear that my precautions have been completely successful. We have had no fever except among the Kroomen. You will remember the case of the Great Niger Expedition- the difference is cause for much thankfulness to the Almighty disposer of events. Please present my kind salutations to your son and believe yours gratefully

David Livingstone