

## Letter to John Blanche, 20 January 1859

*Livingstone, David, 1813-1873*

Published by Livingstone Online ([livingstoneonline.org](http://livingstoneonline.org)), 2017

[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 men.

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 thank-  
-fulness to the Almighty disposer of  
events. Please present my kind  
salutations to your son and believe  
yours gratefully

David Livingstone