

Letter to John Blanche, 20 January 1859

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Zambesi River, Africa.

Private20th January 1859

My dear M^r 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

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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

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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

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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