

*NYASA-LAND.*<sup>1</sup>

SIR HARRY JOHNSTON has had a unique opportunity, and he has made the most of it. Most areas in Africa over which European protectorates have been established during the past twenty years are vast in size, varied in population, as a rule unhealthy in climate, and commercially unprofitable. In the Congo Free State, Rhodesia, British East Africa, Damaraland, German East Africa and Eritrea, all the best efforts of the administration have been necessarily devoted to a struggle against almost insuperable difficulties. In these cases the leaven of European yeast is so small in proportion to the vast bulk of African meal, that one part of the mass has begun to putrefy before the rest has lightened.

It fell, however, to Sir H. H. Johnston's lot to administer a district of exceptional promise, in which a group of Scotch planters and missionaries had been settled for many years. He found a number of men willing to help, and already possessing a considerable knowledge of the country and people. The protectorate is comparatively small and compact; and yet it includes



FIG. 1.—Captain Sclater's road to Katunga in process of making.

a varied series of soils and climates. Most of the district is—for tropical Africa—fairly healthy. The natives are all Bantu. The Administrator was well backed financially, and had the implicit confidence of the Foreign Office officials. Hence he had an opportunity for developing the country on experimental lines that might make it a model for the larger and more chaotic European protectorates. How far Sir H. H. Johnston has succeeded in this task is shown in the magnificent work which he has published at the end of his term of office in Nyasaland. That is, however, a political question, which need not therefore be considered here, and we may at once pass to the consideration of the section of the work of scientific interest. For Sir Harry Johnston is fortunately a man of culture and scientific tastes, which his position gave him opportunity to satisfy. Hence at the end of his term of office in Nyasaland he has

been able to publish a monograph upon the country, describing its history, its climate, its people, fauna and flora. The Germans have made great progress with an elaborate monograph upon German East Africa; but that is the work of a large staff of officers, whereas Sir Harry Johnston's is a one-man book, based on the studies carried out by a busy official during the intervals of administrative worries.

The title of the work, "British Central Africa," is somewhat confusing, as the author uses the name in two different senses: on the title-page and maps it includes all the British territories between the Zambesi on the south, and German East Africa and the Congo Free State on the north. It was in this sense that the term was originally proposed, at a time when it was hoped that the Blantyre Highlands would have been the administrative centre for a vast British territory, which would have connected British East Africa with the British dominions south of the Zambesi. Sometimes in the book the name British Central Africa is used in its original sense, and sometimes only as a synonym of Nyasaland Protectorate; excluding the western five-sixths of the country, which

in 1894 were transferred to the administration of the British South Africa Company. Thus on pp. 152-154 there is a summary of "the present method of administration of British Central Africa," in which only the Nyasaland Protectorate is considered. Any one who failed to recognise the double sense in which the author uses his title, might infer that no progress has been made in the administration of the vast territory to the west of Nyasaland. It would, perhaps, have been as well to have entitled the book the "Nyasaland Protectorate," for the monographic treatment, which is its main merit, is entirely limited to that area. The great western territories are often referred to; but so scanty is the treatment they receive, that the name of that hardworking administrator Major Forbes is not even mentioned.

The book opens with a series of graphic descriptions of the various types of country included in British Central Africa, using the term in its wider sense. The author vividly depicts the beauties of the jungle-bordered rivers, of the scrub-covered foot hills, of the cypress forests near the mountain summits, of the meadowland on the high plateau, of the rough, craggy, granite kopjes, and of the squall-tossed lake. Included among the word pictures of these beautiful scenes is a graphic sketch of the death-bed of a mining prospector, which would not be out of place in a religious tract.

The second chapter gives a short account of the physical geography of the country, accompanied by three admirable maps and a series of excellent illustrations. The political history follows. There is a brief summary from prehistoric times up to 1889. One interesting suggestion here advanced is that the ancestors of the existing Bantu inhabitants of Southern Africa first invaded the region south of Lake Chad about 2000 years ago—a conclusion based on the wide distribution of the native name for fowl. After 1889 the history naturally becomes more detailed, for then began Sir H. H.

<sup>1</sup> "British Central Africa. An Attempt to give some Account of a Portion of the Territories under British Influence North of the Zambesi." By Harry H. Johnston, K.C.B., F.Z.S., &c. 8vo. Pp. xix + 544, with 6 maps and 220 illustrations. (London: Methuen and Co., 1897.)

Johnston's connection with the settlement. Chapters follow on the slave trade and on the European settlers; future additions to the ranks of the latter are advised in an appendix that civilisation has reached a stage in the Shire Highlands which makes a dress suit more useful than a pith helmet. A special chapter is devoted to the missionaries, to whom the country owes much; the debt is fully acknowledged, but the missionaries are reproached for the cant and the inaccurate reports written to "gammon" the British public.

The last four chapters of the book deal with the natural history. The botanical section includes a valuable list of Nyasaland plants compiled by Mr. J. H. Burkill. The first collections were made by Sir John Kirk in 1861 and 1862; and judging from the frequent repetition of the names of collectors in the catalogue, the three principal subsequent contributors have been Prof. G. F. Scott-Elliot and Messrs. J. Buchanan and A. Whyte. The general chapter on the flora calls attention to the most conspicuous and interesting plants; the remark of most general interest in this section is the author's repeated protest against Dr. Russel Wallace's well-known view that the tropics have less gorgeous displays of bloom than temperate regions, an impression, Sir Harry Johnston remarks, "formed from an exclusive acquaintance with the dense forests of Tropical America and Malaya."

The zoological chapter consists of lists of the animals, most of which have been determined by the staff of the zoological department of the Natural History Museum, with general notes by Sir Harry Johnston. The lists of insects are relatively the shortest, but the author confesses to "a sweeping hatred of the insect race" "It is surprising, to my thinking," he remarks, "that our asylums are not mainly filled with entomologists driven to *dementia* by the study of this horrible class." He says he cannot call to mind "one insect that is of any benefit to man . . . with the doubtful exception of the bees and the Cochineal Aphid," ignoring, therefore, the scavenging function of the flies, the chemical and medicinal products of the galls, the silkworm, and other such invaluable servants of man. The author appears most interested in the mammals, among his notes on which some original suggestions are made. With the author's usual courage, he runs a tilt against zoological nomenclature; he objects to Burchell's zebra being regarded as the type of the species "merely because it was the first one to be discovered"; and then renames the species *Equus tigrinus*. The varieties *burchelli*, *chapmani*, and *granti* he regards as only varieties of *Equus tigrinus*; while the name *Equus crawshayi*, that of the Nyasaland zebra, is ignored altogether. Sir Harry Johnston's views on phylogeny are as much his own as his methods of nomenclature. He publishes (p. 310) a diagram showing "the origin and relationships of modern groups of Horned Ruminants." According to this novel diagram the giraffe, which is usually regarded as a descendant of *Sivatherium*, is represented as one of the offspring of the Chevrotains. The prongbuck, definitely included by the author among the antlered ruminants, is shown as a branch of the giraffe stem. All the antelopes, sheep, and goats and the musk-ox are derived from the Capricorns, a group which is again a direct descendant from the Tragulidæ or Chevrotains. Early in the work the author tells us that our views on the relations of African mammals may be at any time "upset by unlooked-for discoveries," and too late in the day illustrates this view by referring to *Nesopithecus* (*sic*), a discovery which he describes as of "the most extraordinary importance and interest," apparently unacquainted with the recent literature of the subject.

The last section of the monograph describes the people, and here the author speaks as an expert as well

as an enthusiast. The section includes a most valuable series of vocabularies, and detailed descriptions of the people and their habits. Some of the descriptions, indeed, are probably too detailed; much is recorded, though half veiled in dog Latin, which might have been more appropriately relegated to the pages of a strictly anthropological journal, instead of being published in a work the rest of which is suitable for general circulation.

The author's eulogy of his colleagues, notably the present Commissioner Mr. Alfred Sharpe, and his tribute to the chivalrous courtesy with which the Portuguese always behaved in their relations with him, are instances of the author's tact and fairness, and they illustrate the spirit in which the work is written. The book is in every way worthy of Sir Harry Johnston's industry and scientific attainments, and will remain the most enduring memorial of his seven years' work in the development of the most promising of our tropical African possessions. Moreover, the illustrations, two of which



FIG. 2.—A Male Reedbuck's Head.

are here reproduced by the courtesy of the publishers, are probably the best ever issued in an English book on Africa.

#### CHRISTMAS MUMMERS.

PROBABLY not a few readers of NATURE have, while staying over Christmas at a country house, been asked into the hall during the evening of Christmas Eve to witness a strange and fantastic rural performance called the mummers' play, and probably, too, they have promptly dismissed the whole thing as an idle and unmeaning piece of country folly. They would have noted, perhaps, the rude dialogue, the characters of St. George, the Prince of Paradine, and the King of Egypt; and they would have concluded that the performance was a faint echo of some miracle play of the Middle Ages, when the Church adopted this means of teaching the people.

Alike in the dismissal and in the uncaredful noting of the characters, these observers of the country folk would have been wrong. The Christmas mumming play is worth attention, and more than mere casual attention.