

The Geographical Journal.

No. 3.

MARCH, 1895.

VOL. V.

THE BRITISH CENTRAL AFRICA PROTECTORATE.*

By H. H. JOHNSTON, C.B., H.M. Commissioner in British Central Africa.

FOUR years ago I had the honour of addressing the Royal Geographical Society on "British Central Africa." To-night I have been invited to read another paper before you, and this time its title is "The British Central Africa Protectorate," which will show you that in four years the geographical interest of this country has become largely increased by political developments. That, indeed, is one of the chiefest features of interest attaching to the Royal Geographical Society; the measures which it takes to enlighten the public mind on the subject of geography so often lead, by a natural and proper sequence, to an increased political interest being taken in regions which, but for the strenuous efforts of this Society, would have been little if at all known to the British public, and this increased political interest not unfrequently receives the Government's seal and sanction by the incorporation of these recently discovered regions within the mighty scope of the British Empire.

There are still happily among us, and no doubt present in this audience to-night, not a few persons who have listened to the wonder-tales of Livingstone, Burton, Speke, and Grant; possibly also to the addresses of Barth and Baikie. Would it not have added one hundred-fold to the interest with which they hung on the words of these remarkable explorers had they known that before many decades had elapsed the greater part of the Zambezi, the lakes of Nyasa, Mweru, Bangweolo, and a portion of Tanganyika, would have been included within the British Empire; that the kingdom of Buganda would have become a

* Paper read at the Royal Geographical Society, November 12, 1894. Map, p. 288.
No. III.—MARCH, 1895.]

British Protectorate; and that the seemingly wild predictions of Dr. Barth and the hopes of Dr. Baikie would have been realized in the placing of the richest regions of the Niger and the Benue under a British Protectorate and a chartered company? These reflections, therefore, may perhaps enhance our interest in the proceedings of this Society, and the researches of explorers will be more eagerly followed than heretofore, because of the possible relation they may bear to the empire that we are at last beginning to value and to understand.

In my remarks to-night I am going to credit my audience with a fairly retentive memory. I shall assume that a large proportion of those persons present either listened to my address of four years ago or read it when printed in the Society's *Proceedings*, and I shall endeavour not to fatigue you with a twice-told tale, but to take up other phases of the British Central Africa Protectorate not dealt with in my earlier paper; and as I have little fresh to say from personal observation about the sphere of influence beyond the Protectorate, I shall confine my remarks to a more minute description of certain districts within the limits of the Protectorate; for you must understand that in British Central Africa there is a distinction between the regions round Lake Nyasa, which are known as the British Protectorate, and the countries to the west and north, which are within the British "Sphere of Influence." The Protectorate is administered by the Imperial Government through its Commissioner and Consul-General, and the Sphere of Influence beyond is supervised by the British South Africa Chartered Company through the same individual.

I had visited this country, as you know, in 1889 and 1890; I returned there to found an administration in the early summer of 1891. I will try in a few words to sketch out the conditions of the Protectorate, political and otherwise, as I found it when I landed at Chiromo on July 16, 1891. The Lower Shire district was still in the possession of the Portuguese, though it was to be handed over to us in pursuance of the Anglo-Portuguese Convention. This was a marshy country, with only one European occasionally residing at a half-formed station, and with a native population scarcely exceeding one thousand. The country had become almost uninhabited through the raids of certain of the Makololo chiefs and some powerful tribes north of the Zambezi in rebellion against the Portuguese. The Ruo district was fairly quiet, and the town of Chiromo had just been founded, and consisted of five reed houses and one street. In the Mlanje district there was practically chaos. The chiefs of the aggressive Yao tribes (of whom more anon) had taken complete possession of this rich district, the few European planters were menaced in their lives and property, and the only mission station had to be abandoned. In the Zomba district incessant slave-raids were being carried on by a Yao chief named Kawinga. One of these, undertaken in May, 1891 (as stated by the Rev. Horace Waller on good

exhale one of the strongest, sweetest, and most penetrating of flower scents. The fan palm is either a species of borassus or of hyphœne. The trunk is grey, smooth, and column-like; the fronds are often shaped with a slight whorl or twist, and are a cool, blue, glaucous green. The fruit of the hyphœne is a golden brown, and about the size of a closed fist. The borassus nuts are a dark brownish green, and as large as a child's head. The outer covering of the hyphœne fruit has a faint, sweet taste, something like gingerbread. It is much sought after by elephants, who, to obtain it, will drag down palm after palm.

The rest of the plain is high grass—in the summer-time like a waving green sea, with the white plumes of the reeds seeming to be flecks of



FIG. 7.—GORGE IN MOUNT MLANJE.

foam. At this season these plains are almost impassable, except along the beaten tracks; but for seven months in the year the grass is either burnt down and reduced to blackened stumps by the bush fires or dries up into a golden straw, which permits of freer movements. Among these great tufts of yellow grass the tawny lions lurk, and when one is crossing these plains in pursuit of game, it is by no means an uncommon incident for a rush and a scurry to take place in the dry herbage, and for one or several lions to reveal themselves to the startled sportsman.

Under the sparse shade of the acacias or the palms, the black buffaloes will stand chewing the cud and whisking off the flies with their tails. They have usually favourite resting-places near some