

SAVAGE LIFE IN THE WILDS OF AFRICA.

THE wilds of Africa at present consist of thousands upon thousands of miles, not barren and sandy wastes like the desert of Sahara, but generally rich and fruitful, producing tropical plants

in abundance, well watered, either by the vast river Livingstone, which stretches across the entire continent to the great lakes, or by other streams flowing from or into those lakes or towards the sea.

It is in these regions that exploration has been busy during the last few years. Speke, Grant, Burton, Cameron, Livingstone, Stanley, and others have given us a clear idea now of those parts which a quarter of a century ago were only known by report, and respecting which our information was uncertain, and often false.

It is well for the explorer seeking to travel through the states of Africa to be provided with the means of holding his own, or he may meet with considerable resistance from the petty kings and chieftains who abound, and who are generally of a most grasping disposition, ready to lay claim to a lion's share of the traveller's goods, and if their demand be not complied with, to try and extort by foul means what they fail to get by fair. Thus when Grant was marching through the jungle to join Speke he was met by messengers from a certain Sultan M'Yonga, who insisted on his staying the day at his village. This Grant refused to do, and set the people of his expedition in motion; but he had not gone far when he was attacked by the Sultan's warriors, and after a short struggle his undisciplined followers gave way and fled into the

jungle, leaving all his merchandise at the mercy of the barbarous horde who had molested him.

However, as it happened, the Sultan sent him back a considerable quantity of his goods the same day, with a message that the attack had been

made *by mistake*, and that he had punished one of his men for it by cutting off his hand!

The African monarchs do not, of course, know the value of money, and it is therefore necessary to be provided with goods the value of which they understand. Shells, beads, cloth, brass wire, and particularly guns, powder, and, if they can get it, spirits are the commodities they delight in.

This same king who had molested Grant came to Stanley when he was on his way to Lake Tanganyika, and demanded an inordinate tribute, before permission to proceed could be granted. But Stanley being in command of a better equipped expedition than his predecessor at once refused, and gave but a moderate present, which he coupled with a hint that as the guns of his men were loaded



AN AFRICAN CHIEF.

it might be rather dangerous for M'Yonga to endeavour to delay his advance.

Now I dare say you would think an invitation from an African king to stay in his village a very favourable sign amongst a people who are often very hostile to strangers travelling through their country. And should the king himself come to greet you on your arrival, and make you sundry presents of oxen, goats, palm wine, beer, bananas, tomatoes, new potatoes, &c., the height of pleasurable expectation would certainly be fulfilled. But there is generally a dreadful "skeleton in the cupboard" behind all this, for before you left you

would be expected to give large presents to the king, his chiefs, and to every one who could squeeze anything out of you. In fact, the probability is that you would go away with little or nothing if you had not the power to resist the demands made.

One of the greatest and most renowned of monarchs in the neighbourhood of the great lakes is King Mtesa, who made fast friends with Stanley on his recent expedition, and has also been visited by several European travellers at different periods. For an African, this man is most enlightened. In early youth he was a despot of the worst description—implacable, barbarous, cruel, and revengeful. He was, however, converted to the Mahometan faith by one of his Arab visitors, and the doctrines of Islam softened to some degree his savage nature.

During Stanley's sojourn at his capital the explorer found opportunities of telling him the story of the Gospel, and Mtesa was greatly interested in hearing for the first time of the wonderful love of Christ for sinners. He did not, however, discard Islamism and embrace Christianity without testing the two systems of religion in a very practical manner. He explained to his chiefs what each religion did for its converts. On the one hand, the Arabs who were Mahometans bought slaves, whom they treated cruelly, and their dealings were not marked by truthfulness or justice; on the other hand, all those whom he had known who professed Christianity refused to take slaves, treated the blacks kindly, and were honest and truthful. Therefore the king decided the Christian religion must be the best, and accordingly embraced it.

Of course Mtesa could not change his nature immediately, any more than he could change the colour of his skin, and it is impossible to expect that he will altogether abandon his savage ways for many years to come; but already a great difference exists between the young and barbarous king who put to death all his relations who were likely to stand in his way when he came to the throne, and the man who, even when he had tied one of his enemies to the stake and was going to burn him, was induced to forego his dreadful purpose.

A mission has lately been sent to Mtesa's capital, which it is hoped may be the means of converting many of his people to Christianity.

The amount of awe which an African despot inspires is scarcely credible, unless we take into consideration that one word or look from him means the ruin or death of a subject, however lofty may be his position. The chiefs bow and prostrate themselves in true barbarous style before

their king; his smallest wish receives attention, and all, from the highest to the lowest, are watchful to anticipate, if possible, his desires. But woe to that man who offends him! His life is not worth an hour's purchase, for the king is generally attended by executioners, who are men of prompt and energetic habits.

One of the most heartrending sights which meets the eyes of Europeans travelling through Africa is the evidence of traffic in slaves. Livingstone, in his travels, relates again and again how he found slaves who, falling ill, had been deserted by their masters, and left to starve in the wilderness; others who, unable to carry their burdens, were cruelly tied to trees, and thus perished; while not unfrequently bodies of slaves were found who had been killed by their owners, rather than allow them to fall into the hands of other traders, in case they had recovered. The Arabs who purchase the slaves in the interior drive them bound together, and carrying heavy burdens, to the coast, and when, through exhaustion, they can proceed no further, often dispose of them in the way I have described. In most cases these slaves have been purchased from the greedily disposed potentates who rule over the tribes of the interior for a small sum, forty yards of cloth being considered in some regions an excessive price for an able-bodied slave.

The greatest variety of disposition is noticeable amongst the tribes of Central Africa. In some cases the people are kind and gentle, ready to help, willing to trade, anxious to make the acquaintance of peaceable strangers, hospitable and industrious. In other instances the savage nature is seen in all its worst features, the people are suspicious, treacherous, refusing to hold any converse with the traveller or trader, quarrelsome, pugnacious, and inhospitable. In some places the natives are not at all averse to cannibalism; but this shocking custom, happily, does not prevail amongst any of the more enlightened tribes. The appearance of the natives is equally diverse. Whilst in the countries bordering on the coasts may be found the strong, stalwart warrior, spear in hand, wearing rings, bracelets, and ornaments in great variety, the features and aspect of the inhabitants of many inland tribes are repulsive in the extreme.

African warfare is, amongst all the different tribes, a most dreadful and frequent occupation. The nations are generally at war either in small or large bands, and when they are thus engaged the utmost cruelty prevails. Oftentimes a village will be surrounded, and men, women, and children put to death, the houses burnt, and the place left a blackened wilderness. Instances are not wanting,

however, of nations who carry on their wars with much show and little bloodshed, with violent abuse but few blows ; a tribe will declare war against a neighbouring one for a slight or serious provocation, muster its soldiers, march with an imposing array, and find their enemies in a similar condition ; but neither party has the least inclination to fight, and a peace is probably concluded in a most amicable way, on the matter under dispute being compromised. One cannot but admire the good sense of such an arrangement, though the people are generally arrant cowards and thieves all the same !

In the construction of their houses and villages the Africans display considerable ingenuity. Many of the houses are built of cane, with well-thatched roofs, and are by no means uncomfortable.

It is by no means uncommon to find the natives clever workmen as blacksmiths or carpenters ; and a variety of articles are produced of a most curious and interesting character. Spears and knives, tools, chairs, spoons, benches, and many other useful and ornamental articles, are manufactured

with great skill. There is, too, a good deal of trading among the natives ; markets are held, goods are bartered, and much bargaining goes on in the disposal of merchandise.

Central Africa abounds in vast forests, *some* of which are impenetrable by reason of the undergrowth which has grown up without hindrance for centuries, and which would now require an army of sappers and miners to clear a way through ; and you can form some idea of the difficulties of piercing a way through such a jungle when I mention that the grass grows to a height of ten or twelve feet, and is correspondingly thick, reminding one, indeed, of the grass which Gulliver found in Brobdingnag, while the branches of the trees are so interwoven that the sun is powerless to penetrate them, and thus the forest is rendered thick, gloomy, and dark as night.

Of course such forests are uninhabited ; but the time may not be far distant when its vast stores of timber will find its way to European markets, and when the treasures of Central Africa may be made of service to all the world.

CHILDREN'S LAUGHTER.

RIGHT dear to my heart is the song of the birds,

In the glen or the coppice, the hedgerow
or tree ;

But yet dearer still, and a joy lacking words,
Is the laughter of childhood, so blithe and so free !

The strains of the harp and the organ's deep swell
Have enchantment for me of surpassing delight ;
But sweeter than orchestral music the spell
Of the laughter of childhood, so ringing and
bright !

The chimes that with eventide summon to prayer,
Or the peals of wild harmony, cheering all hearts
On festival day, are but nought to compare
To the joy which the laughter of childhood
imparts !

Oh ! sweet is applause when a triumph is gained,
And the welkin re-echoes with rapturous cries ;
But sweeter, yea, nobler, so pure, unconstrained,
Is the laughter of childhood, that scorneth
disguise !

So blithe and so free, and so ringing and bright,
It hath virtue to scatter the clouds of dull
thought :

Then laugh, happy children ! Laugh on, it is right ;
For the laughter of children from heaven is taught !

But laugh not at those who are crooked or lame ;
Or whom God hath deprived of their health or
their mind ;
Oh, laugh not at *sin*, nor at sorrow, nor shame—
For the laughter of children for *good* is
designed.

Your innocent mirth and your gambols should
tell
Of a heart wherein goodness and gentleness
reign ;
If love in the soul in supremacy dwell,
Then the laughter of childhood will never give
pain.

Laugh on, merry children ! God gave you the
power ;
Be your laughter as balm to the weary, the old.
Laugh on while you may ; fill with gladness the
hour ;
Nor the *love* from the laughter of childhood
withhold.

For dear to my heart are your jubilant cries ;
Once again I seem youthful in heart and in
voice.

Hurrah, then, for laughter ! For no one denies
In the laughter of childhood 'tis good to rejoice !

EDWIN CHARLES WRENFORD.