

him his wine-cup, or brush off a speck should it fall on the king; they appeared to exercise some sacred functions about the court, and were supposed to divine every event. They could obtain interviews and show their influence when no other party could prevail, and were the most haughty women-queens in the land, bowing to, or acknowledging *none*. They dressed fantastically, and like every individual present, exquisitely clean and tidy, with natural wreaths of flowers, stuffed lizards-shells, heads, or seeds, dresses of salmon-tinted bark cloths, to their ankles, aprons, perhaps two or three of the shining black, white, or red skin of a kid. For hours would they sit in this state waiting upon the king, until he chose to terminate his levee by retiring. Although the people are polite, full of etiquette and grace to another court, many curious and barbarous customs prevail in Uganda—one is, that if a page does not convey properly the king's orders, or misconveys them, the poor boy has his intellect sharpened by having one or both ears cut off—maimed boys and handless men, not seemingly disgraced, were therefore not at all uncommon, and on his seeing my hand, it at once struck him that I had been a page, for he asked me. He punishes by fine, torture or death—the lives of men and women are taken for the most trivial offences—a common saying being that he never looks bright, or no business can be done till the day has commenced with a few being led to execution. Not a day passed without our hearing of, or actually seeing *some* poor victim. A miserable young girl, or handsome woman, from the palace gates might be seen walking down the road perfectly alone and unheeded by passers-by, wailing *nya-wo*, &c., mother, in the most bitter, agonizing tones, perhaps bleeding from a spear wound, and mournfully following a single palace guard, walking fifty yards in front of her to the place of execution; others would have a whip-cord round the wrist and follow the man along like a dog, while others pull, I have seen most reluctantly, against the cord by which they are being led to death, screaming most cruelly. Princesses by birth had several privileges—they could not be executed like others—and the king's sister, the handsomest girl in the palace, had the privilege of also being his wife. At the close of the levee, a drawing-room would be held in another court. No one was admitted except ourselves and interpreters, because the public, on pain of death, dare not look at the queens. His Majesty, seated on a camp chair, would be surrounded by about two hundred of his wives (squatting on the ground,) a sister at his feet to talk nonsense or confidentially to him. Conversation would turn upon guns, when a queen would fly to bring in his; or on our route; or upon our strange appearance. Such interviews would last a couple of hours, and were generally enlivened by bands of drums or flutes, or a buffoon singing comic strains outside the enclosure. He returned my call the day after my first interview. I heard the sound of a rushing mob outside the fence of our hut, when in bounded the young king, bareheaded, clearing the fences, dressed in an open chintz jacket, no shirt, and loose white trousers trimmed with red, and looking, not the swell of yesterday, but the picture of a negro black-guard. He was followed by twenty lads and boys, his brothers, carrying guns, sticks, dead vultures,

and other birds which he had shot. One or two were heavily ironed, feet and hands; another had a wide-awake of leather on; all were as jolly as only Africans can be. Giving him a chair outside the hut, he rapidly turned over the leaves of a sketch-book, stared wildly about, asked whether his likeness had yet been done, whether we had seen the birds he had shot, ordered me to shew my head uncovered to his brothers, who squatted round him, tearing at a sugar-cane in the most ravenous manner. In a moment he was off to shoot and enjoy himself, followed by the rabble of brothers, each struggling to get in front of and precede him. He had gone pic-nicking, having changed his dirty or torn clothes from a box load carried on a boy's head and returned to his palace by torch-light, the tremendous rattling din of the Queskoro on the palace drums accompanying his instruments. In marching through his country you are escorted by forty or fifty of his army, and a gallant captain who has his drummer to beat the reville, company's call, alarm, or assembly, is in command. The drummers are generally very smart fellows, as they must follow the captain and his dog wherever adventure may lead them. You are the guest of the king, and must never pay the people for anything, and every house must be deserted instantly on your arrival. Leaving, to speak figuratively, the wines in the cellar, the dinner in the kitchen, the wardrobe and granaries full, the fruit in the garden, and the goats in the fields; all these things are at once laid hands on, then commences the chasing of fowls, goats, or sheep, and ransacking of houses. Squabbling and fighting begins almost before you arrive in your camp for the day. In fact it was a villainous system of oppression, but no redress could be had as these were the orders of His Majesty to eat and take whatever you liked, but not to pocket or carry away. Payment in clothes, guns, and other presents from one having thus plundered his peasantry, was made to him alone. The villages in the vicinity of the palace being occupied by the favourites of the court were alone exempt from this taxation; the ferry-men's houses, the very men who were to row us across the Katonga river, had their fowls seized and put on board the boats.

Captain Grant was frequently applauded while reading his paper, and at its close sat down amidst loud cheering.

THE SUN'S DISTANCE FROM THE EARTH.*

It may occasion surprise to many who are accustomed to read of the precision now attained in the science and practice of astronomy when it is stated that there are strong grounds for supposing the generally received value of that great unit of celestial measures—the mean distance of the earth from the sun—to be materially in error, and that in fact, we are nearer to the central luminary by some 4,000,000 miles than for many years past has been commonly believed. The results of various researches during the last ten years appear, however, to point to the same conclusion, and under the impression that the subject may be deemed one of more than scientific interest, I have drawn up a very popular outline of the actual state

* Addressed to the Editor of the London Times by J. R. Hind, F.R.S.