

King Prempeh and The Golden Stool

IN TWO PARTS

Part I

By J. A. Rogers

MANY now living will recall the stirring story of King Prempeh and the Golden Stool—how for several months during 1900 the civilized world waited with breathless interest to learn of certain events that were happening in King Prempeh's capital, Coomassie.

I said King Prempeh and the Golden Stool, but if one is to deal with them in order of importance, it would be better to say: The Golden Stool and King Prempeh, for it is the former that is the real hero of this story.

King Prempeh's people, the Ashantis, gave him up readily enough when overawed by British cannon, but when an English governor expressed his desire only to sit on the Golden Stool, England had a costly little war on her hands. The governor and his wife nearly losing their lives while a good many other white people lost theirs.

Great Warriors.

The Ashantis are the most warlike people in West Africa. Their history dates back to the dimmest antiquity and some historians say that they are the descendants of those civilized Ethiopians who were driven southwards by the conquering Egyptians as told by Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus, ancient historians.

As to the Ashantis, many of them, like the Brahmins, believe that they came directly from heaven.

The Ashantis, along with other peoples on the Gold Coast, had traded with the Phoenicians before Christ was born, and with Europe for hundreds of years. Ashanti trade with France began in 1366, and with England in 1672. Further, it is asserted that black men from this region had been coming

over to America long before Columbus. At least that is the theory set forth by Prof. Weiner of Harvard University in his book: "Africa and the Discovery of America."

The Gold Coast is so called because of the quantity of fine gold to be found in its streams and even in the streets of the towns after the rainy season. It was gold and the slave trade that had first brought the Europeans there. A large proportion of the Negroes who were brought to the New World came from this region.

The Ashantis are a very proud people, and not without cause. For two centuries they had not only dominated their neighbors but had fought off the Europeans who sought to take away their country.

The British and the Dutch were both compelled to pay tribute to the Ashanti kings, and several British expeditions sent against them were defeated.

Expedition Annihilated

In 1823, a British expedition commanded by Sir Charles MacCarthy was killed to a man. A cast of Sir Charles's skull was made in gold and used as a drinking cup by King Kwaka, while the skull itself was placed in the fetish-house. (A fetish house is the equivalent of the church in civilized lands.)

For the next four years the British tried to conquer Ashanti in vain, and finally had to make a treaty by which they paid rent for the land they held. "The white man" laughed King Kwaka, "bring many cannon to the bush, but the bush is stronger than the cannon."

In wealth, the Ashantis also ranked with the richest peoples in Africa. Thomas Bowditch, who went to make a treaty with them for England, said in his report:

"The chiefs, as did their superior captains and attendants, wore Ashanti cloths of extravagant price made from the costly foreign silks which had been unravelled to weave them . . . and massive gold necklaces intricately wrought.

"Some wore necklaces reaching to the navel, entirely of aggrly beads; a band of gold and beads encircled the knees from which several strings of the same depended; small circles of gold, like guineas, rings, and casts of animals were strung around their ankles . . . and rude lumps of rock-gold hung from their left wrists which were so heavily laden as to be supported on the heads of the hand-somest boys.

"Gold and silver pipes and canes dazzled the eyes. Wolves' and rams' heads, large as life, cast in gold were suspended from their gold-handled



He looks a regal figure on a lofty throne with a huge velvet umbrella standing over him.

swords which were held around them in great numbers."

Dutch Pushed Out

Prior to 1874 this powerful black nation had over-run the whole of the Gold Coast and had finally forced out the Dutch. In 1873 an Ashanti army of 45,000 fighting men laid

siege to Elmina, a fortified town and castle, seven miles from the coast. They were led by King Kofi Kali Kali, distinguished equally as a warrior and a spendthrift.

Over 3,000 Wives

King Kofi's favorite sport was to throw gold nuggets among his wives

and watch the scramble for them. The Ashanti kings held the work records for the number of wives. On was forced by tradition to maintain 3333.

In 1873, the Ashantis, however, me

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THE LIFE OF BERT WILLIAMS No. 14 . . .

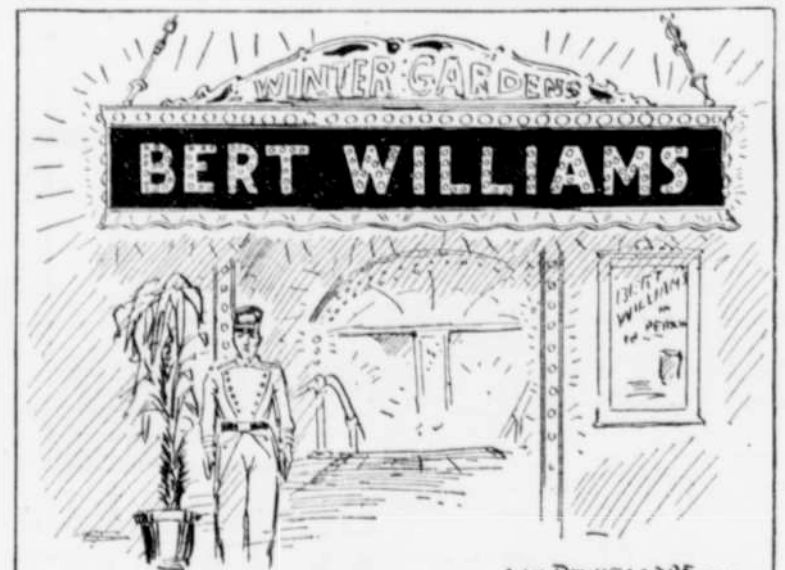
Text by BEN DAVIS, JR
Drawn by A. W. RENNEGARBE



For a long time, he was associated with Leon Errol, and did a famous scene with him in which he was a porter in Grand Central Station carrying Errol's baggage. This never failed to create an uproar in Bert's audiences.



The inimitable W. C. Fields was also associated with him for four years and they became close friends.



In 1920 his name blazed over the door of Winter Garden in bold electric lights. He had become the drawing card of the greatest American Revue