

King Prempeh and The Golden Stool

PART II

THE QUEST OF THE GOLDEN STOOL

By J. A. Rogers.

(Continued from last week)

AFTER King Prempeh's surrender the invaders broke into his palace in search of loot. All they found of value was about \$10,000 in gold. His celebrated dinner service of Dutch silver was gone. So were his golden hat and his golden chair of state; also the golden sword, Mponpon-su, on which the chiefs swore allegiance, and the Golden Stool.

This, above all, was what they sought.

For, the Golden Stool was not only the emblem, par excellence, of the Kings of Ashanti, but it was the symbol of Ashanti power. No matter what happened, the Ashantis felt secure so long as they had it.

This was why the Ashantis had yielded. They did not wish to take the sacred stool into a war which they felt sure they would lose.

Cleverly Carved.

The Golden Stool was a masterpiece of African art—that art which is the fertilizing force of European art today. It was carved out of teak, and overlaid with gold; and the African goldsmiths, who are among the cleverest artists in the world, had lavished their choicest skill on it.

It had been made three centuries before, and its beautification had gone on with the years. Almost every monarch since Osei Tutu had added some gem or bit of ornament, until its crude value stood at millions of dollars.

Its most sinister bit of decoration were two casts of the head of King Adinkera of the Fantis. King Adinkera, hearing of the Golden Stool, had had one made like it; whereupon, Bonsu, king of the Ashantis, made war on him, and capturing him, cut off his head. Melting down the imitation stool, he made the death-masks, which he hung, one on either side of the Golden Stool.

So sacred was the Golden Stool held that even the king, himself, could not sit on it. At certain ceremonials, when its power was to be invoked, the king would make pretense of sitting on it three times, after which he would sit on the chair of state, resting his arm only on the Golden Stool.

Stool a Sacred Emblem.

All of which seems a lot of fuss to make over what we civilized folk will call a fetish. But the Golden Stool was to the Ashantis what the Stars and Stripes is to the American or the Union Jack to an Englishman. Just as the President of the United States would not think of sitting purposely on the American flag, so the Ashanti king held his stool sacrosanct.

One hundred and eighty-two years before the Ameri-



The blazing houses, some of which the rebels had fired, cast a lurid light on the surging mass of humanity.

can flag was made, the Ashantis had been using the Golden Stool as their symbol.

Some years ago when the Princess Mary was to be married, the queen-mothers of Ashanti sent her a silver stool as a present. The senior queen-mother in giving over the stool to Lady Guggisberg, wife of the governor, said:

"This stool does not contain our soul as the Golden Stool does, but it contains all the love of the queen-mothers."

In short, the Golden Stool was to the Ashantis what the Ark of the Covenant was to the ancient Jews. It was their soul, their rallying point, and they felt that their God, or gods, would be with them as long as they had it.

It will be understood, therefore, why the British were so anxious to get it, but search as they would it could not be found. On their coming it had been hid in the bush with the rest of the royal treasure.

Hiding Place Discovered

Four years passed and in spite of all rewards and attempted bribery, it lay hid. During these years, all seemed quiet in Ashanti. Not even the battles being fought by Samory, Black Napoleon of the Soudan, against the French, near by, seemed to disturb the tranquillity.

Then, one day, news came that the hiding place of the Golden Stool had been discovered. A lame boy named Esumi had come to Accra and offered to point out the spot to Governor Sir Frederick Hodgson.

The governor sent an armed expedition after it, but when the boy neared the supposed place, he was so paralyzed with fear that they were forced to return without it.

The governor thereupon decided to go to Coomassie in the hope of prevailing upon the Ashantis to turn it over to him. Arriving there with Lady Hodgson and his staff, he embled the chiefs and exhorted them to be loyal, promising them British friendship and protection.

But perhaps no peace talk in history ever had such opposite effect; for, in the course of his speech the governor had said:

"What must I do to the man, whoever he is, who has failed to give to the Queen, who is the paramount power in this country, the Golden Stool to which she is entitled?"

"Where is the Golden Stool? Why am I not sitting on the Golden Stool at this moment? I am representative of the paramount power, why have you not relegated to me this chair? Why did you not take the opportunity of my coming to Coomassie to bring the Golden Stool and give it to me to sit on?"

The Crowning Insult

Sir Frederick's words fell on a ghastly silence. The Ashantis could hardly believe their own ears. To give this hated invader their most sacred emblem to sit on—this symbol of all their past glory—this sacred object which contained the spirits of their dead kings from Osei Tutu to Kwaka Dua II!

Verily, it was the crowning insult. That same night the chiefs met in

the tent of Opuku and drank fetich his wife, and the other Europeans found themselves besieged in Coomassie. Surrounding the fort, tens of thousands of Ashanti warriors chanted: "The governor came to Coomassie on a peace palaver. He demanded money from us and sent white men to bring him the Golden Stool!"

The Ashantis Rebel

A few days later, the Ashantis rose in rebellion, and Governor Hodgson

his wife, and the other Europeans found themselves besieged in Coomassie.

Surrounding the fort, tens of thousands of Ashanti warriors chanted: "The governor came to Coomassie on a peace palaver. He demanded money from us and sent white men to bring him the Golden Stool!"

Continued on page four

The "Voodoo Woman" Speaks

By Ruby Berkeley Goodwin

CAN A WOMAN combine a career? It is generally assumed that she cannot, and for that reason many men marry professional women with the understanding that the wife will give up, or at least subordinate, her interests to those of her husband.

Mrs. A. C. Harris Bilbrew is the daughter of the late Rev. S. L. Harris, formerly of Texas, but for the past nineteen years she has been a resident of Los Angeles.

"Hearts in Dixie" is a distinct triumph for Mrs. Bilbrew, both as an actor and musical director. Appearing for the first time upon the screen, her role was the very exacting one of the Voodoo Woman. Critics say that she gave a superb interpretation of the part.

The Bilbrew chorus of sixty trained voices which furnished the spirituals and folk songs throughout the production are proof of her ability as (Continued on page four)



Mrs. A. C. Harris Bilbrew, versatile actress, who played the part of the "voodoo" woman in "Hearts in Dixie."

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