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978-1-108-02330-6 - Journal of Various Visits to the Kingdoms of Ashanti,
Aku, and Dahomi, in Western Africa

Thomas Birch Freeman and John Beecham

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION.

ASHANTI* is a powerful kingdom contiguous to the Gold Coast, in Western Africa. Kumási, the capital, it has been calculated, is more than one hundred and thirty miles from Cape-Coast Castle in an horizontal direction, but the distance is much greater by the pathway through the forest. It is a very considerable place, and is surrounded by numerous towns and villages, which contain a great number of inhabitants. The entire population of Ashánti, with all its dependencies, has been estimated at upwards of four millions.

The martial exploits of the Ashántis in the countries on the coast, since the commencement of the present century, have rendered their national name familiar in Europe. The Fantis, who were originally an inland people, subject to the Ashánti crown, having, in the year 1807, afforded protection to Chibbu and Apoutai, two of the vassal Chiefs of Osai Tutu Quamina, King of Ashánti, who had rebelled against his authority, the King invaded Fanti with a powerful army. In the first instance, he appeared solicitous to obtain possession of the two rebel Chiefs by amicable means; but he

* Although we retain the aspirate and the initial A in Ashánti, they are scarcely sounded by the natives, who pronounce the name of their country very nearly as the English would express S-a-n-t-y.

The vowel signs of the Ashánti alphabet have the same sounds as in Italian.

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became so exasperated by the insults and indignities which were offered to him, that he formed the resolution entirely to extirpate the Fantis. Orders were accordingly issued to spare neither man, woman, nor child; and the country in the rear of the advancing army became, in consequence, a scene of utter desolation. Having signally wreaked his vengeance upon Abrah, the seat of Government, where his messengers had been barbarously murdered; the King, with one half of his army, pursued the retreating enemy towards the coast; while the other half were employed in destroying the towns as they passed along, leaving none of the people alive, except some of the highest rank, who were reserved to experience more refined cruelties on the return of the conqueror to Kumási.

The advanced guard of the army, led on by the Viceroy or Tributary King of Denkera, first obtained sight of the sea in the neighbourhood of Cormantine. This town was destroyed, and the Dutch fort taken possession of, by the Ashántis. The successes of the invaders now began to excite uneasy apprehensions at Anamabu; and Mr. White, the Governor of the fort, humanely endeavoured to put a stop to the further effusion of blood, by friendly explanations. But vain was the attempt. The King had bound himself by "the great oath," that he would not go back to his capital without the heads of Chibbu and Apoutai; who, after the destruction of Abrah, had, in the first instance, taken refuge at Anamabu, which was then the largest town upon that part of the coast. As the Ashántis approached, they, however, retired to Cape Coast, on the invitation of the natives of that place. When the King presented himself before Anamabu, he found that the inhabitants had drawn out their forces to meet him; but they soon gave way, and were pursued to the

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

3

very walls of the fort, which afforded them only slender protection. The cannon were shortly rendered useless, as the Ashánti marksmen picked off the soldiers as fast as they appeared at an embrasure, or showed their heads above the ramparts; and, before the close of the day, the efforts of the little garrison were exclusively confined to the defence of the gate, which the enemy attempted to force or burn. At least eight thousand of the natives perished in the contest, and Mr. White, the Governor of the fort, was severely wounded. After two or three days, the King prepared to renew the attack upon the fort, with six thousand men selected for the occasion; but in the morning of the day on which he had vowed to seat himself, "by the help of his gods," in the Governor's chair, a white flag was lowered from the walls. A negotiation ensued. The Chief Governor, Torrane, went over from Cape-Coast Castle, and concluded a treaty of peace. Apoutai made his escape, but Chibbu was delivered up to the King, who withdrew his army, carrying with him many of the surviving inhabitants, as his prisoners. In the rejoicing which afterwards took place at the capital, the wretched Chibbu suffered the most exquisite torments, and his head became one of the principal decorations of the death-drum of the King.

In the year 1811, Fanti experienced a second invasion from the Ashántis; and a third in 1816, when Cape Coast underwent a long blockade. These repeated attacks inflicted great miseries upon the Fantis, and thousands were dragged into the interior to be sacrificed to the superstitions of the conquerors.

To avert a continued succession of such calamities, an embassy was sent to Kumási; and Mr. Bowdich, who was placed at its head, after the recall of Mr. James, concluded a treaty with the King. Mr. Hutchinson

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

was left behind as Resident in Ashánti, but returned to Cape Coast on the eve of the war with Gaman.

After this, Mr. Dupuis was sent by the British Government to Kumási, invested with consular powers. He concluded a second treaty, and returned to Cape Coast with numerous presents, accompanied by Ambassadors to the King of England.

New misunderstandings however arose, and an Ashánti army again marched towards the coast, at the close of the year 1823. Sir Charles M'Carthy took the field against them, with the most encouraging prospect of success; for, besides a strong body of regular troops which was under his command, many Chiefs threw off their allegiance to Ashánti, and all the districts on the sea-coast, west of the Volta, were in arms, to the amount of thirty thousand warriors. But disastrous was the result of the first campaign. The Governor, with a division of the army, having crossed the Prah, advanced into the Wassaw country, where he engaged the Ashántis, and experienced a complete defeat. Sir Charles himself, after having been severely wounded, fell into the hands of the enemy, who cut off his head, and preserved it in the usual manner. His heart was eaten by the principal Ashánti Chiefs, in order that they might, as they imagined, imbibe his bravery; and his flesh, having been dried, was divided, together with his bones, amongst the men of consequence in the army, who kept their respective shares about their persons, as charms to inspire them with courage.

In the month of May following, the new King, Osai Ockoto, (the brother of Osai Tutu Quamina, who had died soon after the commencement of the war,) came down to his army, at the head of a strong reinforcement, with the avowed intention to destroy Cape-Coast Castle, and drive the English into the sea. After some

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

5

hard fighting, and when the Ashánti army had suffered the loss of many thousands of men, by the ravages of disease, and the want of provisions, the King drew off his forces in the direction of Anamabu. The last and decisive battle was fought about the middle of the year 1826, twenty-four miles north-east of Akráh; when the British and their allies gained the victory, and took the Ashánti camp and baggage. After this battle, negotiations were commenced; but, owing to various causes, it was not until the month of April, 1831, that a treaty of peace was signed, when the King sent one of his sons, and a son of the preceding King, as hostages, with six hundred ounces of gold, to be lodged at Cape-Coast Castle, as a security for the performance, on his part, of the conditions of the treaty, for the term of six years. At the end of six years, the gold was returned; and the present King, Quako Duah, who had in the mean time succeeded his brother, Osai Ockoto, consented that his nephews, who had been given up as hostages, should be sent to England for education.

It was shortly after the execution of this treaty, that the land which had been so awfully desolated by war, was visited, in the order of Divine Providence, with the blessings of the Gospel of peace. The Wesleyan Missionary Committee were led to accept the generous offer of Captain Potter, of Bristol, to take a Missionary in his vessel, free of expense to the Society; and, in the year 1834, the Rev. Joseph Dunwell was sent on a visit of observation to Cape-Coast Castle. He was welcomed by many of the natives with gratitude and affection; and his faithful labours among them were crowned with signal success. The work which thus so auspiciously commenced, since his lamented death has extended along the Gold Coast eastward, as far as Akráh, and westward to Dixcove; several chapels have

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[More information](#)

been built; and upwards of six hundred converts from Heathenism have been united in church-fellowship.

Interesting as this Mission appears, when viewed in its beneficial effects upon the natives of the Gold Coast, it, however, rises in importance when regarded as the means by which the way has been opened for the introduction of the Gospel into Ashánti. A beneficial influence was exerted by Mr. Dunwell's ministry upon the two Ashánti hostages, before they were brought by the Government to this country, where they completed their education under the care of the Rev. Thomas Pyne, a Clergyman of the Established Church. And the establishment of the Mission at length furnished the facilities by which the Rev. Mr. Freeman was enabled to visit Kumási, in the commencement of the year 1839.

On the receipt, at the Wesleyan Mission-House in London, of Mr. Freeman's Journal of his visit, the question, "What shall be done?" became the subject of grave consideration on the part of the Missionary Committee, under whose direction Mr. Freeman acted. The ordinary annual income of the Society was already pledged for the support of existing Missions; and yet the Committee durst not take upon themselves the responsibility of refusing to *attempt*, at least, the establishment of a Mission in Ashánti. It was at length resolved, that Mr. Freeman should be allowed to return home for a time, partly for the purpose of recruiting his health, but more particularly with a view to a special effort being made, in order to raise the funds necessary for the new undertaking; and two Missionaries were immediately sent to relieve him, for a time, from his laborious duties at the Gold Coast. On the arrival of the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Mycock, and the Rev. Mr. Brooking, Mr. Freeman, therefore, came to England, accompanied by Mr. William De Graft, a native convert,

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

7

and was the bearer of a message from the King of Ashánti, who requested that his two nephews might be immediately sent home; the contemplated establishment of a Christian school at Kumási having rendered him very anxious to see them.

The results of Mr. Freeman's visit to several of the principal towns in Great Britain and Ireland were of the most gratifying description. Members of the Church of England, some of whom are in the higher walks of life, and Christians of other religious denominations, as well as the members of the Wesleyan community, responded to the novel and deeply-interesting appeal; and, by these united exertions, the proposed sum of £5,000 was placed at the disposal of the Wesleyan Committee, to enable them to send with Mr. Freeman, on his return, six additional Missionaries, in order to strengthen the existing establishments at the Gold Coast, and to commence a new Mission in the kingdom of Ashánti. Arrangements were made in due season for their outfit and departure; and, at Mr. Freeman's suggestion, the Committee agreed so far to comply with the established African custom of offering presents, as to send for the King's acceptance and use, a suitable carriage, which was noticed with approbation by Her Most Gracious Majesty and His Royal Highness Prince Albert, to whose inspection it was submitted by Mr. Sims, the builder. In the month of December, 1840, the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Freeman embarked at Gravesend, on board the "Osborne," accompanied by the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Hesk, the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Shipman, the Revs. Messrs. Watson, Walden, and Thackwray, and Mr. William De Graft, whom the Committee had received as a regular agent of the Society, to be hereafter wholly employed in the work of the Mission; and, after a few days, the party left the Channel, followed by the

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best wishes and ardent prayers of thousands who had become deeply interested in their arduous enterprise.

On their arrival at the Gold Coast, Mr. Freeman began to make the necessary preparations for proceeding to Kumási, at the proper season of the year. While thus employed, he received a severe shock from the decease of his beloved wife, who was eminently calculated, by her piety and talents, to aid him in his important operations; and this bereavement was followed by other inroads of disease and death into the Mission family. At the close of the rainy season, he was enabled to complete his arrangements, and started for the Ashánti capital, accompanied by the two Ashánti Princes, William Quantamissah and John Ansah, (who had returned to the Coast in one of the vessels of the Niger expedition,) Henry Smith, Esq., a resident at Cape-Coast, and the Rev. Mr. Brooking.

The results of this journey, as detailed in Mr. Freeman's Second Journal, are of a very gratifying character. The Mission in Ashánti has been commenced under circumstances still more satisfactory than could have been reasonably anticipated, from the narrative, encouraging as it was, of his former visit to Kumási; circumstances which warrant the hope, that a considerable measure of success will be realized at no distant period. After the reader has perused the heart-stirring description which Mr. Freeman gives of his reception, and the opening prospects of the new Mission, he will not be surprised that Mr. Freeman should manifest an intense desire, that adequate means should be provided to improve the opportunities which present themselves. He will not wonder that the Missionary who nobly "jeopard his life unto the death in the high places of the" West African Mission "field," and who has the most vivid perception of the glorious victories which are

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[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

9

likely, with suitable aid, to be effected in furtherance of the kingdom of Christ, should thus give expression to his benevolent feelings, in one of his recent letters addressed to the Wesleyan Missionary Committee :—

“O that we had more help here! What distressing obstacles it throws in the way of our usefulness! England is doing nothing, as yet, compared with what she ought to do. O that God would raise up another successful ‘Peter the Hermit,’ to call Christian England, and her Christian allies of Europe, to engage more effectually in a grand spiritual warfare; not in order to rescue a lifeless sepulchre from the hands of heretics, but to snatch millions of immortal spirits, in Africa, from the iron grasp of Satan, and thus transform the ancient chivalry of Britain into burning zeal for the glory of the God of heaven, in the evangelization of the degraded posterity of Ham! In this, success would be certain; and the Christian Crusader, if I may be allowed to call him by that name, would enjoy a present reward, in the happy consciousness that he was saving souls from death. I trust the day is not far distant when some mightier movements will take place in the Christian camp, and when England will do something for Africa worthy of her knowledge, her piety, and her greatness. Her energies are inexhaustible, and she is at present *doing comparatively nothing.*”

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[More information](#)

FIRST JOURNAL

OF THE

REV. THOMAS B. FREEMAN.

(Addressed to the Secretaries of the Wesleyan Missionary Society.)

CHAPTER I.

OBJECT OF THE JOURNEY—DIFFICULTIES, AND REMOVAL—ANAMABU—
DOMONASI—YANKUMASI—ASIN CHIBBU—MANSU—PREACHES TO THE
CHIEF—FESSU—ERAKU—RIVER PRAH—ENTERS THE ASHANTI TERRI-
TORY—ASINS—ANSO—QUISAH—FOMUNAH—PREACHES TO KORINCHI,
THE CHIEF—HUMAN SACRIFICES—SUPERSTITIOUS OBSERVANCES.

REV. AND DEAR SIRS,

ACCORDING to the promise in my last, I embrace the opportunity of sending you, per brig "Maclean," a copy of my Journal during my recent Mission to Ashánti, with a few accompanying remarks.

Before I commence, however, I beg leave briefly to state my object in undertaking such a work, and the prospects I had at my setting out.

Ever since my arrival on this Station, I had felt very anxious to visit Kumási, the capital of Ashánti, and residence of the King. The tales of horror, wretchedness, and cruelty which I had often heard respecting the Ashántis, wrought in my mind the deepest commiseration, and a constant restlessness to commence Missionary operations among them.

Opposed to this project were, First, The fears of a large majority of our members, as to the results of such