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Ashanti and the gold coast

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fell out with sunstroke, and my photographic films and stationery warped so with the heat that they could hardly be manipulated.

The Wadi el Ghan, where I camped, is the southern prolongation of the important Wadi el Haera, which leads direct to the capital. No greater contrast can, however, be imagined than that between this and the Wadi Doga, by which I entered the hills. Here, instead of a wide green plain surrounded by hills, I found a wild and romantic ravine. As we picked our way among crags and boulders, I could not but admire the varied contours of the scenes before me. Here, by the stagnant pools left from the winter torrents, great sections of pudding-stone could be seen overlapped by limestone. There, from the torrent bed, now dry and stony, rose grand cliffs of limestone and sandstone pierced in one or two places by caves, which I could see were used as dwellings; and at one place rose a cliff of ochreous clay, coloured a deep red with iron ore.

At about ten miles from my camp in Wadi el Ghan, the Wadi el Haera widens out and the traveller finds himself on the plain. Here lie three curious isolated hills, which, rising from a level plain, look exactly like islands. Indeed, the whole of the Tarhuna and Gharian ranges, rising as they do in a long line of bluffs, instantly reminds the observer of sea cliffs, and the sensation on arriving at them from Tripoli is exactly that of approaching the coast from the sea. I venture indeed to suggest to those who study the geology of North Africa that this indeed is really the history of this region, and that once the waves of the Mediterranean covered both desert strip and green plain, and washed the Tarhuna and Gharian hills.

The three isolated hills, my guide said, were called Battus, M'dawar, and Mamureh, in which I am by no means sure he was correct. Barth's map marks them as Bates, Smaera, and Gedæa; and Captain Lyon describes Bates and Smeeran as close together.

The distance from the mouth of Wadi el Haera to Tripoli is about seventeen hours' travelling at camel speed, or about forty-two miles. About half-way a track falls into the fertile Wadi Mejenin, a wide depression in the plain, more highly cultivated than any part I had yet seen. About ten miles beyond Bir el Sbeia, in this wadi, the sandy desert patch is encountered, and this continues up to the palm groves of the capital.

ASHANTI AND THE GOLD COAST.

By W. SCOTT DALGLEISH, M.A., LL.D.

(*With Map.*)

THERE was good reason to believe that the Ashanti war of 1873-74, which ended in the defeat of the king's troops, in the burning of Kumassi, his capital, and in the infliction of a heavy fine, had given the Ashanti a sharp lesson which they would not soon forget. Unfortunately that belief has been belied. The old trouble has broken out again, and last month a British force was despatched to the Gold Coast to repeat the

treatment which, twenty-one years ago, was thought to have been final—so difficult is it to apply to savage races the ordinary calculations of diplomacy.

It is not the purpose of this article to give a history of our relations with Ashanti, to narrate the incidents of the last war, or even to go with any detail into the circumstances which have made the present war necessary. These matters may be left to the historian, the diplomatist, and their necessary concomitant the newspaper correspondent. It may, however, enable the readers of a geographical magazine to follow with greater interest and intelligence the progress of events, if we put before them a brief description of the physical aspect of the country which our troops have to traverse, of its climatic conditions, of its commercial resources, and of the character and customs of its people.

This information is the more pertinent because the causes, both of the last war and of the present one, are to a large extent geographical. Ashanti forms the hinterland of the British Gold Coast Protectorate, and the chief grievance of the Ashanti for a quarter of a century has been that the British Protectorate has formed a strict barrier between them and the sea, and has thus interfered with their trade, both legitimate and illegitimate, especially the latter. And here it is necessary to refer briefly to one or two historical facts which have a bearing on this point. Down to 1850, the Danes and the Dutch, as well as the British, had settlements on the Gold Coast, and it was obviously of advantage to the Ashanti that there were three rival European powers on the Coast, whom they could play off against one another in making terms for the conduct of trade, and for other privileges. But, in 1850, the British Government purchased the Danish forts, and in 1871 that Government concluded a convention with the Netherlands by which the Dutch settlements were transferred to Great Britain. Thus the entire Gold Coast, from Aflao, beyond the river Volta on the east, to Newtown beyond Apollonia on the west, became practically British territory, and the Ashanti were hemmed in seawards by a single and formidable European power. Their position was very similar to that of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State in South Africa; but it was aggravated by complications. There were tribal jealousies between the Ashanti and the Fanti and the Elmina, and these jealousies were intensified when the Fanti and the Elmina and other tribes near the Guinea Coast were brought within the British Protectorate. These were the proximate, if not the direct, causes of the war of 1873.

The defeat and failure of King Kwoffi Kari-kari (popularly known as Koffu Kalkali) led to his dethronement in 1874, and he was succeeded by his brother Mensah in the following year. Mensah's cruelties led to his dethronement in 1883, and he was succeeded by his nephew Kwaku Dua II. in accordance with a law common to the Ashanti and the Fanti, that the son of the sister of the king inherits in preference to his direct descendants. Kwaku Dua II. died after reigning only a few months, and he was succeeded by his brother Kwaku Dua III., or Prempeh, the present sovereign. The disturbed state of the country during his reign has called for British intervention in the interest of peaceful trade. Sir Francis Scott's mission in 1893 appeared to be

successful, but the troubles broke out again. King Prempeh was at no pains to conceal his anti-British feeling; and he was perhaps emboldened by the idea that he might make better terms with the rulers of French Guinea. At this point the British Government required him to receive a British Resident at his court. That demand he rejected in April 1895; and, as subsequent negotiations failed to bring him to terms, the present expedition has been undertaken in order to enforce the claim.

Now a few geographical facts may lead to a better understanding of what is to follow. The first fact to be noted is that the Gold Coast lies wholly within the Torrid Zone, its most southerly point—Cape Three Points—being rather less than 5° north of the Equator. It has therefore a tropical climate, and as the heat is accompanied with a great amount of moisture, both on the coast and in the inland forest region, the climate is very unhealthy, and is especially trying and dangerous to Europeans. The wet season—or rather seasons, for there are two, the one from April to July, the other from October to the end of November—is the more severe, though the temperature is then lower. The dry season, extending from December to March, though more trying in respect of the greater heat, is less unhealthy because of the dryness, and of the prevalence of the Harmattan wind.¹ Small-pox and dysentery are the scourges from which the country suffers most, and the latter often attacks Europeans.²

The present expedition has been timed, it will be seen, so as to give it the benefit of the dry season. It may also effect its purpose in time to allow the produce of the present year to be sent down to the coast before the recurrence of the wet season in April—a point to which West African traders attach a good deal of importance.

The British Crown Colony and Protectorate of the Gold Coast extend along the coast of Upper Guinea for 350 miles, while the average breadth inland is 50 miles, the maximum being 150 miles. The area of the Crown Colony, consisting of the lands adjacent to the settlements on the coast, is 15,000 square miles. The total area, including the Protectorate, is estimated at 46,600 square miles, or about two-thirds of the area of England and Wales, with a population of a million and a half, of which only 200 (some say 150) are Europeans.³

The British Protectorate forms a compact wedge between French Guinea on the west and the German Protectorate east of the river Volta. It includes a number of dependent native States. Those on the coast, from west to east, are Apollonia, Ahanta, Denkera, Fanti (Tshi group), Akra (Ga), and Awuna (Ewe); while inland there are Wassau, Tufel, Assin, Akim, Akwamu (Tshi), and Krobo (Ga). All these are south of the river Prah. North of the Prah are Upper Denkera and Ashanti, which includes the Adansi, Dadiasi, and other tribes.⁴

¹ C. P. Lucas, *Historical Geography of the British Colonies*, vol. iii. p. 207.

² *Fanti and Ashanti*, by Brackenbury and Huyshe, pp. 84-85.

³ Lucas, and *Statesman's Year-Book*. Other authorities estimate the sea-board at 250 miles, and the area at 20,000. See Huyshe, p. 94.

⁴ The Tshi-speaking tribes, among which is the Ashanti, and the Ewe-speaking natives are described by Major Ellis in *The Tshi-speaking Peoples of the Gold Coast of West Africa* and *The Ewe-speaking Peoples of the Gold Coast of West Africa*.

The chief British settlements on the coast—from west to east—are Newtown, Axim, Dixcove, Elmina, Cape Coast Castle, the former, and Akra, the present, headquarters of the British power;¹ between which lie Anamaboe and Saltpond, the latter being one of the chief commercial centres of the colony.²

The coast is absolutely destitute of harbours. It is sandy and surf-beaten, and ships can find safe anchorage only by lying a mile or two from the shore. This, however, involves very little risk, as the coast is free from stormy winds. Mr. H. M. Stanley draws the following picture of the coast and its surf-storms:

"By hugging the shore closely we were enabled to detect beauties that are never seen by passengers travelling on the steamers. Tiny nut-brown villages modestly hiding under a depth of green plantain fronds, and stately silk cotton-trees, which upheld their glorious crowns of vivid green foliage more than fifty feet above the tallest palm-tree; depths of shrubbery wherein every plant struggled for life and breathing-space with its neighbour, through which the eyes attempted to penetrate in vain beyond a few feet; tracts of tall wavy grasses, tiger, spear, and cane, fit lurking-places for any wild beast of prey, varied by bosky dells, lengthy winding ravines literally choked with vegetation, and hills on the slope of which perhaps rested a village of a timid suspicious sub-tribe. And if the eye, ever in search of the picturesque and novel, ever roving for strange scenes, chanced to fall on the long line of surf, and the ear listened to the sonorous deep-sounding thunder, the mind recurred to the Psalmist's expressive words: 'They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.'

"The surf on the African coast is ever a wonder and a danger. There is no other coast in any part of the world a thousand miles in length without possessing a cove or harbour where a ship could anchor secure from being rocked by the surf waves. Try along the whole of the Grain, Ivory, the Gold, and Slave Coasts, and there is not one port. But fortunately for ships trading to these places, there is seldom a hurricane or a gale blowing, so that they are able to anchor about a mile from shore. There is never any dead calm. The sea is ruffled in the morning, by the breeze from oceanward: during the night it is moved by the land breeze, so that ships anchoring in the roadsteads are ever to be seen rolling uneasily; they are never at rest. Unceasingly the long line of waves is to be traced, rolling onwards towards the shore, gathering strength as they advance nearer, until, receiving the ebbing waters flowing from the beach from preceding seas, there is a simultaneous coiling and rolling, and at once the long line of water is precipitated with a furious roar on the land. Where the water meets a rock a tall tower of spray and foam is suddenly reared, the wave line is broken and is in mad confusion. Where the beach is smooth sand, you may trace a straight unbroken line of foam nearly a mile long.

"One may easily understand then the trouble and annoyance trade

¹ A. B. Ellis, *A History of the Gold Coast of West Africa*. Map.

² Lucas, p. 205.

undergoes on such an inhospitable coast. An ordinary ship's boat is useless; it would be a drowning matter for a crew of sailors unaccustomed to the surf to attempt to land anywhere along the coast between Sherbro and Lagos, a distance of nearly 1200 miles. The mouths of the insignificant rivers which feed the sea along this distance offer just as dangerous impediments to an ordinary ship's boat as the beach does. A long line of mighty breakers run across the mouth of each river and form a bar, which is almost certain death to cross, except in boats especially constructed for the peculiar work, and native canoes. These surf-boats have no straight stems or sterns, the keel is in the shape of a bow, which allows the advancing wave to be well under the boat before its crest lifts it aloft to precipitate it in the deep trough left in the track. A straight-stemmed boat cuts the wave, and its divided crest as it falls unites and swamps it. Many and many a poor sailor, ignorant of these things, has lost the number of his mess on this coast, and the history of trade on it is fraught with many a doleful tale."¹

Though gold gave its name to this part of the Guinea Coast, and though it certainly abounds in the alluvial form in the region, especially in Wassau and Ashanti, it is no longer, if it ever was, the leading product. "As an article of export it ranks far below palm-oil and rubber."² "No Johannesburg has yet sprung up upon the Gold Coast, if only because the mining industry is sadly hampered by want of roads and of facilities of transport."³ "Timber, mainly mahogany, is exported in increasing amount from Axim, Dixcove, Chama, and Secondee."⁴ The trade of the Gold Coast has latterly made great strides. The average yearly value of the exports in the years from 1886 to 1891 was £477,000. In 1892 the value rose to £665,000, of which nearly three-fourths represented trade with the United Kingdom, which also contributes two-thirds of the imports, amounting in 1892 to £597,000. Cotton goods head the imports, the second place being taken, unfortunately, by rum, which comes mainly from the United States. Of the exports, 42 per cent. consist of palm-oil and palm kernels, 25 per cent. of indiarubber, and only 15 per cent. of gold.⁵

The following are the returns of the leading exports for 1893:⁶—

Palm-oil,	.	.	.	£178,954
Palm kernels,	.	.	.	183,910
Total palm,				£362,864
Indiarubber,	.	.	.	218,162
Other kernels,	.	.	.	80,721
Gold-dust,	.	.	.	79,099
Total,				£740,846

These figures show that the trade of the Gold Coast is steadily increasing, and that it is deserving of attention. According to *The Statesman's Year-Book*, the gold workings are now being systematically developed.

¹ *Coomassie and Magdala*, pp. 73, 74.

² Lucas, p. 207.

³ *Ibid.* p. 208.

⁴ Lucas, p. 209.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 210.

⁶ *Statesman's Year-Book*.

Something now falls to be said of the nature of the country. There are only two routes (for they can scarcely be called roads) from the coast to Kumassi—the one, from Cape Coast Castle, is that followed by Sir Garnet Wolseley in 1873; the other, from Akra, coincides with that taken by Sir John Glover in his flank march from the south-east in the same year. These lines of march were simply war-paths hewn through dense bush and forest, impenetrable to man in their natural state. Two other roads are used by the Ashanti for trade purposes, the one passing through Wassau, the other, the most westerly of all, leading to Apollonia and Axim.

In the neighbourhood of Cape Coast Castle, the coast shows stretches of reddish land covered with vegetation, broken by dwarf cliffs and scours, and lined on the shore with clean sand. Behind this there is a background of undulating hills, paps, and hummocks, all covered with dense bush. Farther north, the rising ground is covered with forests of great trees—cottonwood, ironwood, dum palm, bamboo, and papaw—cottonwood-trees forming the most prominent feature, as they reach a height of 150 feet, with 50 feet of circumference. The tropical plants include cotton, indigo, coffee, rice, sugar-cane, maize, yams, plantains, bananas, cassavas, guavas, and pine-apples. Flowering shrubs, convolvuli, and exquisite parasitical plants abound in tropical profusion.¹

Here is Mr. Stanley's description of the forest region of Mansu, about thirty miles north of Cape Coast Castle:—

"The forest grew denser, loftier; there were cotton-woods of extraordinary height, and girth, and lengthy prolongations of buttresses to support the colossal stems; there were sturdy teaks with lower crowns of foliage, and tamarinds spreading out in broad terraces of lighter green, gum-trees upreared their dark foliage, and slender palm-trees shot their graceful heads to view, all of which become more frequent, assume taller proportions and greater girth, as we move on. The road is all a glade; an impervious depth of leafage, formed by the commingling branches overhead, shelters us from the sun. The engineers have done their work so well that it becomes a pleasure to walk on the smooth, broad road, though there are parts where the corduroys make it unpleasant for a short time. Steeps and descents, up and down hills, vary the uniformity of the level forest land and jungle; a few rippling streams which we have to cross during the day are not unpicturesque reliefs to eyes jaded with the flanking walls of vegetation. . . . Perhaps a truer idea of this country may be gained if I state that from Cape Coast to Mansu the land, if stripped of its thick garniture of forest and jungle, would appear to be undulating, some land-waves higher than others, some troughs, or hollows, or dells, deeper than others; but there is a general uniformity of undulation, all of which is covered with forest, undergrowth of all tropical trees, and plants. This intense block-like mass of vegetation spreads out on each side of the road, and the road, shaded by the commingling and embracing branches, is more like a tunnel than a highway. . . . The march to Sutah, and thence to Yan Coomassie (Assin), was through a

¹ *Fanti and Ashanti*, p. 112.

forest, where powers of description fail. In density and wild luxuriance it eclipsed everything I have ever seen in Africa. I do not suppose that anything in Brazil even can give one a more thorough realisation of tropical luxuriance than a march through the district that intervenes between Yan Coomassie (Assin) and Mansu."¹

The following is Mr. Stanley's description of the hills, and of the view from the summit :—

"From the summit of the Adansi hills we obtained a better idea of the nature of the country which we had left behind than we had while traversing it, and the nature of that portion which we are destined to travel through in a few days if we proceed to Coomassie was revealed to us.

"The Adansi hills appear to be a line of truncated hills, rising to an equal altitude, and spreading out crescent-shaped eastward and westward, inclining northerly, as if to hem in that land in which we are informed Coomassie lies. Each hill is wooded, each dip and depression of land is wooded, high land and low land; far and near, north, south, east, and west, everywhere the forest land of Ashantee north of the Adansi hills heaves and rolls, wave after wave, varicoloured and uneven, now a ridge, then a hollow. South it bears the same aspect; west it is a line of peaks; east it is alike.

"At our feet, as we gaze down from a height of 1500 feet above sea level, that contiguous to us presents us with a beautiful play and mixture of colours, the mixture of the sere with the green, and the rich autumn hue with the spring. There are terraces of tamarinds, great wide-spreading branches like parachutes, globes of silk cotton with pale green leaves, round uprising towers of teak leafage, flat extents of ordinary vegetation, deep hollows, which plantain and palm fronds combine to fill, until the eye, tracing the variety and form of the foliage, insensibly is carried away to where the colour of the vegetation is lost amidst purple haze and blue ether.

"This scene is similar to that which might be obtained by a sail in a balloon from Cape Coast to Coomassie. The eye could not pierce through the heavy drifts of foliage heaped up in ridges, globes, pyramids, or the thick carpet which covers the hollows. Indeed, looking down from this height on such a scene, the power or force of the eyesight is compelled to give way to that of the mind; for, after an ineffectual effort of the eyesight, 'tis the mind which observes here. It is the unbroken expanse of foliage that baffles the eye, subdues its power and vitality, and compels the mind to an indolent and careless observation of the whole."²

The forest region is continued without variation, apart from the billowy nature of the land surface, southward to the river Prah, which forms the southern boundary of the kingdom of Ashanti. It is thus described by Captain Huyshe :—

"The Prah river rises in a mountain between Akeya and Quahoo (two provinces lying N. and N.E. of Coomassie), near a little *croom*

¹ *Coomassie and Magdala*, pp. 116-120.

² *Ibid.* pp. 161-162.

called Sumtassoo. It is looked upon as a tutelary god, or fetich, and is generally called 'Bossom Prah,' or the Sacred Prah. Human sacrifices are made to it at its spring-head, said to be a large gaping rock half-way up the mountain. Its course is first southerly, then south-west, until a few miles beyond the town of Prah-sue, where it bends again to the south, and falls into the sea at Chamah, 25 miles west of Cape Coast Castle.

"At the mouth there is a somewhat dangerous bar, with a depth of water varying according to the season from three to five feet. In the rainy season the current is constantly running out; in the dry season there is a three hours' flood and nine hours' ebb. The river is navigable for small craft for some distance—about two days' journey—when navigation is stopped by rapids and waterfalls, occasioned by a tract of hilly country. For about 60 miles of its course, counting from its bend at Prah-sue *up-stream* in an N.E. direction, it forms the boundary between Ashanti and the British Protectorate.

"Opposite Prah-sue the river Prah flows between steep banks 40 to 60 feet high, with a strong current of three or four miles per hour; and is estimated to be from 4 to 7 feet deep, and 40, 80, and 100 yards broad—a discrepancy doubtless owing to the season of the year, and the amount of the previous rainfall. The ford is below some shelving rocks in the centre of the river, and crosses in a slanting direction *up-stream*: the bottom is a rich clay, free from pebble, and covered with a bed of light sand. At this point it is described as being a 'noble' river, flowing through a richly-wooded country, with beautiful scenery resembling the Thames at Richmond!"¹

The next physical feature of the country that claims attention is the ridge of the Adansi hills, 40 miles north of the Prah. These hills are thus described by Captain Huyshe:—

"The Adansi or Moinsey range of hills constitute by far the most serious physical obstruction between Cape Coast Castle and Coomassie; indeed they are the only hills worthy of the name. Very little is known as to their extent. . . . The hills cross the Coomassie road at about thirty-nine miles N. of the Prah, the ascent on the south side being abrupt, rugged, and broken into deep gullies. On the summit, 1600 feet above the sea-level, is a small undulating table-land of only a few hundred yards in extent, and there the path leads down the north slope at a much more favourable incline, the country on that side being at a higher elevation than that on the south side.

"There are said to be two other paths across this range besides the main route: one, called the King's Road (because it is usually followed by the king of Ashanti), leaves the main path near the village and stream of Anseh, and passing round to the eastward, rejoins the path at Fomanah; the other leaves the main path at the foot of the ascent, and passes round to the westward. It therefore appears probable that the point at which the main path crosses the hills is the steepest and worst, though perhaps the most direct; and that a more feasible road might be found on one side or the other—illustrating the old proverb, that, 'the longest way round is the shortest way home.'"²

¹ *Fanti and Ashanti*, pp. 113-115.

² *Ibid.* pp. 116-117.

The forest land extends northward to some 40 or 50 miles beyond Kumassi, where it gives place to vast plains reaching to the Kong country.

It may be inferred from this that Ashanti, as regards its physical character, differs but little from the countries lying south of it. It is said to have an area of 70,000 square miles, and its chief characteristic is that it is covered with dense and all but impenetrable bush and forest. Clearings have of course been made where villages are built, and these are numerous north of the Adansi hills. The largest of these clearings is on the site of Kumassi, the capital, which is described as an oblong, measuring four miles in circuit. Though built on the side of a hill of ironstone,¹ its surroundings are said to be swampy and unhealthy, owing to the overflowing of a small river which flows beside it. Hence there arise dense fogs which cover the city in the morning and the evening. The dysentery thus caused is most apt to attack natives coming from the coast.

Before the burning of the town in 1874, its streets were described as broad and clean, and ornamented with banyan-trees that afforded welcome shade. The principal buildings were the king's palace, which was solidly built of quarried stone, and covered an area of five acres; the fortress, called Bantammah, containing the royal treasures and the tombs of the kings, as well as the munitions of war; and the king's summer palace, situate about two miles north-east of the city. The ordinary houses consist of wattle-work walls plastered with clay and white-washed, and with roofs of palm-leaves.

Of the taste displayed by the Ashanti in their workmanship and their homes, Mr. Stanley speaks strongly. He says:—

"Many little things which we see about us evince the taste and industry of the Ashantees. Take one of their stools, for instance, and examine it. Formerly it was one square block of white wood, very like sycamore. An artisan has chiselled and shaped a beautiful stool which any drawing-room might possess for its unique shape, design, and perfection of workmanship. The seat is crescent-shaped, the ends of which when we are seated in it come up half-way to the hips; a central column, beautifully carved, resting on a flat board twelve or fifteen inches in length by about eight in breadth, supports it; on each side of the column is a side support chipped until it resembles a lace-work pattern. There is art in this stool, and whether it is original with the Ashantees, or borrowed from strangers, it is certainly a most interesting specimen of woodwork, the whole of which is cut from a solid block of wood. I think I have seen the shape of a stool similar to it painted on one of the tombs of Thebes.

"Take again this soup or water ladle, and regard the designs which ornament the handle. A European turner would be proud of the work, yet all that finical carving and cutting was done with an iron knife of native manufacture. Yonder are some specimens of earthenware, the figures on which are very praiseworthy, and here at my

¹ *Fanti and Ashanti*, p. 120.

feet are sandals excellently done; nay, you might almost declare upon oath that they are as good as anything worn by a middle-class Turk or Egyptian. Sandals! At the mere repetition of the word one's thoughts revert to the inhabitants of Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor. Why not to Tunis, Tripoli, the Touaregs of the desert, to the Moors of Timbuctoo? Then, if these sandals of such shape are one of the necessities which intimacy with Moorish visitors taught the Ashantees, why may not this elaborate scroll and flower design on the walls have been an æsthetic taste imparted to them by the Moors? Is it only an ingenious deduction, or may it not be likely that this semi-civilised taste has been imparted to them by long contact with Moors?"¹

And here is an inventory of Ashanti furniture drawn by the same practised hand:—

"An examination of the interior of the houses revealed to us much of the domestic life of the Ashantees. We saw the sleeping apartments, those set apart for reception, and those used for store rooms. These last were filled with a strange medley of articles—hide chairs, carved stools, hide bedsteads, wooden basins, pipes, drums, snuff-mills, ladles, platters, spoons, large earthenware crockery, bolsters stuffed with silk cotton, antelope skins, bags of leopard skins, rolls upon rolls of hard-pressed tobacco, a heap of Indian corn on the cob, spiked walking-staffs, iron knives and cleavers, curious teak boxes studded over with brass tacks, old locks, keys, gun flints, leathern pouches and belts, forsaken accoutrements and disused rusted guns, and many more things too numerous for detail.

"Some of the houses contained long suspicious rolls covered with long grass and tightly bound, which, on being opened, were discovered to be dried corpses of chiefs or heads of influential families. There were six of these bodies found altogether, but as soon as they were discovered they were taken out of the houses and deposited in the jungle."²

One of the most curious customs of the Ashanti, and indeed of all the native tribes at the Gold Coast, is that of intramural sepulture. They bury their corpses in the basement of their dwelling-houses, in the same way as the tombs of the kings are in the vaults of the Bantammah. The arrangement may suit the notion of keeping the quick and the dead near each other; but it is open to the gravest objection on sanitary grounds.

The Ashanti follow the custom of the Jews and other Oriental peoples in adhering to the system of polygamy, a system which is destructive of domestic life and purity. The king, it is said, has always 3333 wives—a mystical number which appears to have some subtle significance.³

The most shocking feature of Ashanti life is the prevalent custom of human sacrifice. Governor Hill says that "it is revolting to humanity to know that, as a common average, at least 3000 persons are sacrificed annually to their superstitious rites, and, on some occasions, 3000 have been slaughtered on one royal grave."⁴ On this subject, Colonel Ellis has the following passage:—

¹ *Coomassie and Magdala*, pp. 167, 168.

³ *Fanti and Ashanti*, p. 105.

² *Ibid.* p. 170.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 25.

"In September of the same year (1881) a report reached Cape Coast that King Mensa had put two hundred young girls to death, in order to use their blood for kneading the clay required for the repairs of his palace, and this aroused some attention in England, as by Article 8 of the Treaty of Fomana, the king had promised to do all in his power to check human sacrifices. The truth of the report was denied; but though the particulars were inexact, there is no doubt that human sacrifices on a large scale had taken place, the occasion being the death of Yah Affileh, sister of the queen-mother. She was buried at Bantama, and for four weeks, girls and women, in parties of ten or twelve, were put to death; while at the termination of the funeral ceremonies, her tomb was built up of clay kneaded with human blood. Up to this time the 8th Article of the Treaty of Fomana had really been a dead letter, and Captain Lonsdale reported that human sacrifices frequently took place in Kumassi, though generally in secret. The necessity of putting a stop to these practices had been impressed upon Buakji Tintin, who was intrusted with a message to that effect to the king; but it afterwards transpired that he falsely rendered it, and told Mensa that persons who had spoken disrespectfully of the king and the royal family, or had broken the great oath, or committed adultery, might be reserved for sacrifice."¹

As to the theory of this custom, Mr. Stanley makes the following suggestion:—

"The road was marked with the dead fallen in the affair of the morning; and each village had its human sacrifice lying in the middle of the path, for the purpose of affrighting the conquerors. The sacrifice was of either sex, sometimes a young man, sometimes a woman. The head, severed from the body, was turned to meet the advancing army, the body was evenly laid out with the feet towards Coomassie. This laying out in this manner meant no doubt, '*Regard this face, white men, ye whose feet are hurrying on to our capital, and learn the fate awaiting you.*'"²

And to this may be added his gruesome picture of the Golgotha of Coomassie:—

"After some thirty paces we arrived before the dreadful scene, but it was almost impossible to stop longer than to take a general view of the great Golgotha. We saw some thirty or forty decapitated bodies in the last stages of corruption, and countless skulls which lay piled in heaps and scattered over a wide extent. The stoutest heart and the most stoical mind might have been appalled.

"Bowdich, in 1817, speaks of this death-grove, and we heard along the road from Cape Coast hither strange reports of it. M. Bonat says he has seen some two or three hundred slaves slain at one time, as customary after the death of the king's sister, and during his long residence as a prisoner in Coomassie he has frequently seen as many as a dozen slaves executed in the most barbarous manner and dragged to the grove, now filled with the relics of the butcheries which have been

¹ A. B. Ellis, *A History of the West Coast of Africa*, pp. 371-2.

² *Coomassie and Magdala*, p. 213.

Scale 1 = 4,000,000

English Miles

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Meridian of 0 Greenwich

going on year after year. If it is true that about a thousand slaves, offenders, rebels, and others are executed annually, we may form an approximate idea of the number of victims which have contributed to swell the terrible death-roll of the Coomassie Golgotha since the time of Sy Tutu, the founder of the present dynasty, who established his capital here in the middle of the eighteenth century. At the rate of a thousand victims a year, it would be no exaggeration to say that over 120,000 people must have been slain for 'custom' since Ashanti became a kingdom!"¹

It is thus evident that, though the practice of offering human sacrifices may have been discontinued for a time, in accordance with the treaty of 1874, it was resumed; and there is no doubt that the civil troubles and dynastic feuds of recent years have been attended with much cruelty and bloodshed. There are, therefore, humane as well as political reasons for putting a check on the sanguinary rule of the tyrants of Kumassi; and a British Protectorate over the country would probably be effective for that purpose.

HAUSALAND

By the Rev. CH. H. ROBINSON, M.A.

(*With a Map.*)

AFRICA has been crossed and recrossed so many times within the last twenty-five years, and so much light has as a result been shed even into its darkest recesses, that it seems scarcely credible that there should still remain a people so numerous as to form one per cent. of the whole population of the globe, whose country and language are still almost completely unknown, at least as far as the general public are concerned. Nor can the neglect with which this people has so long been treated be justified by the fact that they are so low in the scale of civilisation, or their country so devoid of interest, that the study of them and of their surroundings might not unreasonably be postponed till the rest of Africa has been opened up. So far, indeed, is this from being the case, that, in the opinion of any who have had an opportunity of instituting a comparison, the Hausas are superior both intellectually and physically to all other natives of Equatorial Africa. The reason why they have been so long neglected is that their country has been, and to a certain extent still is, cut off from intercourse with Europeans by two physical obstacles of more than ordinary magnitude. Hausaland proper extends, roughly speaking, from latitude 8° N. to 14° N., and from longitude 4° E. to 11° E. Of the two possible ways by which a traveller from the coast can approach this territory, the shortest and most obvious is to ascend the river Niger for 300 miles and thence proceed overland; the distance to

¹ *Coomassie and Magdala*, pp. 231-2.