

ASHANTI.

A LECTURE DELIVERED AT THE ROYAL CANADIAN ARTILLERY INSTITUTE,
QUEBEC, BY CAPTAIN ERNEST F. WURTELE, R.L.

MR. CHAIRMAN AND GENTLEMEN,—Having had the honor of an invitation, from the president of the Royal Canadian Military Institute, to either deliver a lecture or read a paper before the members of this institute, I have in accordance therewith adopted the latter, and have selected for a subject "Ashanti." In so doing I have in a measure been influenced by the interest which naturally devolves upon the name in question, due to the prominent manner in which it has been brought before the public during a great number of years, and more especially in connection with the two expeditions which were made to Kumassi, its capital, the one in 1873-1874, under the command of the present Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, Lord Wolseley, and the other of recent occurrence under the command of Sir Francis Scott.

To introduce the subject properly, it will be necessary to devote a few minutes to a general, though brief, account of the possessions on the west coast of Africa.

The British possessions in West Africa are: The Gambia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast and Lagos. In the strict sense of the word, they are not colonies, but merely trading settlements, in which the products of the neighboring countries are collected and exchanged for European goods. The climate is such that Europeans cannot live there permanently and even the negro inhabitants suffer greatly from malarial fever, as it is damp, hot, malarial and unhealthy. The west coast of Africa has been frequented by traders since it was first explored by the Portuguese in the latter part of the 15th century.

In the 17th century the chief maritime nations of Europe, except the Spaniards, had forts or factories established on the coast, from which they used to supply slaves to their plantations in the West Indies and in America.

At the commencement of the present century these nations agreed to put down the slave trade, which considerably diminished the importance of the coast. The Dutch and the Danes relinquished their possessions, and although the French and Portuguese retained theirs, the English were practically without any serious rivalry in the development of a legitimate trade in tropical products, to take the place of the slave trade. Within the last few years the French have been spending large sums, and making strenuous efforts to found a great French Empire in north-western Africa. The Germans have formed a settlement on the Guinea Coast, in the immediate neighborhood of the British possessions, and more to the south the king of the Belgians has founded the Congo Free State.

The products of the Gold Coast are chiefly sent to England. Gold is found in considerable quantities, as well as ivory, monkey-skins, camwood, oil and rubber. The principal export is palm oil. The imports are, textiles, alcohol and hardware.

Ashanti lies behind the states which occupy the Gold Coast. It is the most powerful and commercial of any on the western shore of the continent.

The nation of Ashanti, which made such a mark in the history of the Gold Coast, was heard of at the close of the 17th cen-

tury. At that time the Ashanti king ruled over a small extent of territory around Kumassi, the kingdom being considered of little importance. In 1701 the king of Ashanti defeated the Denkeras in two great battles, overran and pillaged the whole of Denkeria and finally annexed the greater portion of it to Ashanti. The system of military discipline even at that time was characteristic of Ashanti. The subjection of Denkeria was the first of a long series of conquests which raised Ashanti to the position of paramount power upon the Gold Coast. At the commencement of the 19th century the whole of the Gold Coast was under Ashanti rule with the exception of the states on the seaboard.

Although the Ashanti could conquer, they could not govern, and their authority over the tributary states was more nominal than real. Their custom after subduing a kingdom was to leave the king semi-independent, merely exacting a fixed annual sum as a tribute, and military service in time of war. They established no garrisons in the conquered territories, appointed no governors or residents and did not attempt in the least to blend with the people. When a tributary king considered himself strong enough to throw off the allegiance to Ashanti, he did so. The Ashanti king maintained his authority by repeated invasions of the tributary states, the people of which were not bound to their conquerors either by sentiment or interest.

With a view to leading up to the events connected with the expedition of 1873-74, it will only be necessary to deal with the intervening period inasmuch as regards the principal events connected therewith and the chief points affected. This will be done in as brief a manner as possible, consistent with the importance of the subject.

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