

Fare thee well, the Coast of Gold! – Sample Chapter

ACCRA was in festive mood; there was a colourful display of pomp and fanfare everywhere. Traditional chiefs, from all parts of the country, arrived, clothed in colourful traditional regalia. Most displayed crowns, chains, bracelets of gold.

“It’s not for nought that the country was named ‘the Gold Coast’ by the Europeans”, Kakra said to himself on seeing such a wealth of gold on display.

Queen Gold Coast, one might say, was bidding farewell to the world with a final magnificent display of her golden attributes.

Traditional dancers from various areas of the country – north, south, east and west – put on various displays of traditional dancing amidst the rhythmic sounds of various traditional instruments – large and small.

Everywhere, the shouts and screams of “Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!” could be heard.

The general sense of goodwill prevailing in the country seemed to have infected almost everyone. The food hawkers were offering their food cheaply, almost for free: “Special offer today, in commemoration of our freedom, freedom!” they called out to the crowd.

Not only were the food vendors generous! The drivers of the tro-tro vehicles that ferried commuters to their various destinations in the city were offering rides on their vehicles for next to nothing.

In order to catch a good view of the podium, Kakra headed for the Old Polo Grounds, the large open arena adjacent to the Arts Centre, where the grand ceremony was to take place, quite early in the evening, well ahead of the scheduled start time of a few minutes before midnight.

On his arrival, he met a huge gathering of people, the extent of which he had never dreamt of. Without exaggeration, the area was already filled with well over half a million elated individuals, awaiting with tense expectation the simultaneous demise of the Gold Coast and birth of the new nation, Ghana.

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Back at Kojokrom, almost the whole village, with the exception of those who were either too weak or too frail to do so, had converged at the town centre, around a bonfire. On this very auspicious occasion, even sceptics like Panin were caught up in the euphoria of the moment. Amina caught up with him.

“Long live Ghana!” she cried at the top of her voice.

“Long live Ghana!” Panin shouted back.

“I am so delighted, words cannot describe my joy! Indeed, the privilege to be part of this momentous day in our national history is wonderful!”

“I am indeed thankful to Almighty God, for the opportunity to witness such a momentous occasion!”

“Well, let’s pray for His favour for our land – for its peace and prosperity!”

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An extraordinary meeting of the Gold Coast Legislative Assembly was called in the night. At the ceremony, Nkrumah and his ministers who had served prison terms during the independence movement, wore their prison caps, symbolising their brave perseverance in their struggle to win Ghana's freedom.

Just before midnight, the meeting of the Legislative Assembly was symbolically adjourned to the cheers of the crowd waiting outside.

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At midnight, the siren at the nearby post office sounded the hour. The massive crowd surged back and forth in waves as they struggled to create space for the principal actors – Kwame Nkrumah and other leading CPP members, Kojo Botsio, Casely-Hayford, Komla Gbedemah, Nathaniel Welbeck– to make their way to the podium.

Soon there they were, on the dais, the five of them, each dressed in a traditional smock, their respective heads adorned with a small white cap. In the distance from where he stood, the podium appeared to Kakra like an illuminated island in a sea of dark heads.

Loud cries of “Freedom, Freedom, Freedom!” came from the multitude as the four figures mounted the stage. The chanting went on for a short while.

Finally, Nkrumah, almost overcome with emotion, began to address them:

“At long last, the battle has ended! And thus, Ghana, your beloved country is free forever!

“And yet again, I want to take the opportunity to thank the people of this country; the youth, the farmers, the women who have so nobly fought and won the battle.

“Also, I want to thank the valiant ex-servicemen who have so cooperated with me in this mighty task of freeing our country from foreign rule and imperialism.

“And, as I pointed out... from now on, today, we must change our attitudes and our minds. We must realise that from now on we are no longer a colonial nation but free and independent people.

“But also, as I pointed out, that also entails hard work. That new African is ready to fight his own battles and show that after all the black man is capable of managing his own affairs.

“We are going to demonstrate to the world, to the other nations, that we are prepared to lay our foundation – our own African personality.

“As I said to the Assembly a few minutes ago, I made a point that we are going to create our own African personality and identity. It is the only way we can show the world that we are ready for our own battles.

“But today, may I call upon you all, that on this great day we all remember that nothing can be done unless it has the purport and support of God.

“We have won the battle and again rededicate ourselves... Our Independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of Africa.

“Let us now, fellow Ghanaians, ask for God's blessing for only two

seconds, and in your thousands and millions.

"I want to ask you to pause for only one minute and give thanks to Almighty God for having led us through our difficulties, imprisonments, hardships and sufferings, to have brought us to our end of troubles today. [A minute of silence ensued.]

"Ghana is free forever! And here I will ask the band to play the Ghana National Anthem.

"Reshaping Ghana's destiny, I am depending on the millions of the country, and the chiefs and the people, to help me to reshape the destiny of this country. We are prepared to pick it up and make it a nation that will be respected by every nation in the world.

"We know we are going to have difficult beginnings, but again, I am relying on your support ... I am relying upon your hard work.

"Seeing you in this ... It doesn't matter how far my eyes go, I can see that you are here in your millions. And my last warning to you is that you are to stand firm behind us so that we can prove to the world that when the African is given a chance, he can show the world that he is somebody!

"We have awakened. We will not sleep anymore. Today, from now on, there is a new African in the world!"

Moments later, he urged everyone present to stand up.

"I urge everyone to take off their hats, if they are wearing one, as the national anthem, yes the anthem of our beloved Ghana, is played for the first time!"

Having said this, he removed the small cap on his head.

As the national anthem played, the Union Jack was lowered and the new Ghana flag, with horizontal red, yellow and green bands and a black star in the centre, was hoisted. President Nkrumah, overcome by his emotions, wiped away the tears flowing freely down his cheeks with the handkerchief he was holding.

A good deal of fireworks were shot into the sky. As they soared into the heavens they illuminated the dark tropical night sky.

Kakra was ecstatic with joy. Though he had not been to school, his time in the army and his subsequent interaction with the English had helped him acquire a reasonably good command of the English language, so he had no trouble following the speech.

"Great speech!" he shouted after the President had ended his speech.

"Yes indeed!" a young lady of about his age, clothed flamboyantly in a dress bearing the red, yellow and green colours of the national flag, concurred.

"Let's prove to the world that when the African is given a chance, he can show the world that he is somebody! I agree fully with you, Kwame!"

After a short break, she began to sing aloud:

"Kwame eeh, Kwame Nkrumah show boy, I want to see you, Kwame Nkrumah show boy!" She jumped repeatedly and gesticulated as she sang.

A fairly large crowd remained behind after the main event. To the sound of what had then become known as the Independence Song, Ghana we now have freedom, by the leading Highlife artist E.T. Mensah, which emanated from the loudspeakers placed at vantage points throughout

the arena – they danced and danced and danced through the first few hours of the birth of the new country: Ghana we now have freedom! It was around four in the morning when Kakra left for his makeshift accommodation. On his arrival, he realised there was hardly any space left on the floor for him. The number of those present was almost double what he saw on his earlier visit. Fortunately, he nevertheless managed to find some space to squeeze his body into. Moments later he was lost in deep sleep.

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