



King Khama, Emperor Joe, and the Great White Queen: Victorian Britain through African Eyes

Neil Parsons

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In 1895 three African chiefs, dressed in the finest British clothing available, began a tour of the British Isles. That tour foiled Cecil Rhodes' grand plan for Africa and culminated in the Chamberlain Settlement, the document that indirectly led to the independence of present-day Botswana. King Khama, Emperor Joe, and the Great White Queen is the story of this bizarre journey, one of the most neglected events in British Victorian history, here revealed for the first time in its full detail and cultural complexity. The chiefs initially went to England to persuade Queen Victoria not to give their lands to ruthless Rhodes and his British South Africa Company. Abandoned by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, and denied an audience with the queen, the three rulers decided to tour the British Isles to plead their case to the populace. Appealing to the middle-class morality of Victorian society, the chiefs were remarkably successful in gaining support, eventually swaying Chamberlain into drafting the agreement that secured their territories against the encroachment of Rhodesia. Historian Neil Parsons has reconstructed this journey with the help of African archival materials and news clippings from British papers, garnered from the clippings service the chiefs had the foresight to employ. In equal parts narrative of pilgrimage, voyage of discovery, and colonial resistance, King Khama, Emperor Joe, and the Great White Queen provides a view from the other side of colonialism and imperialism. It demonstrates the nuances of cultural and religious interaction between Africans and Europeans, and it does so with the richness and depth of a fully realized novel.

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