In Africa divine kings are still to be found performing ritual functions even under the changed conditions of modern times. Attention is drawn here to two of the most prominent peoples of West Africa, the Ashanti of the Gold Coast and the Yoruba of Nigeria.

The kings, now often called "chiefs" or "paramount chiefs", were addressed as "kings" by early European travellers and administrators until this present century. They were sovereign rulers, divine kings, both traditional and charismatic, in Weber's terms. Some of them ruled over a million and more people.

The Ashanti state is composed of a number of divisions called Oman ("nation"), comprising a capital town and a number of villages. The chief is the Omanhene. Over the whole state is the Asantehene, the king of Ashanti with his capital at Kumasi. The kings and chiefs are chosen from the royal lineage, any male member thereof being eligible; but the candidate has to be physically perfect. The Queen Mother (the apparently insignificant old woman who Mary Kingsley said would crouch behind the throne and mutter, "Do not listen to the white man, it is bad for you"), nominates a suitable candidate for the kingship. He has to be approved both by the elders and by the commoners. The latter have a saying, "a prince does not install a King"; that is the prerogative of the commoners who will serve him.

A king can be dethroned, or destooled, by those who have elected him, that is ultimately by the common people. This may be done for chronic drunkenness, cruelty, impotence or madness. Nowadays both election and destoolment must also have the approval of the Governor.

The Ashanti religion gives great place to the cult of the ancestors, and this has been brought out by modern writers 1). The king acts as

1) See R. S. RATTRAY, Ashanti, and Religion and Art in Ashanti, and my West African Religion.
intermediary between the royal ancestors and the whole nation. Both smaller chiefs and the king of the whole state are enstooled in similar fashion. The chief-elect is taken to the stool-house, where are the stools of his ancestors, blackened with soot and with the blood and oil of sacrifices. He is lowered and raised three times upon the stool of his most famous ancestor, thus being brought into contact with him. The Asantehene is held by three special officials and lowered and raised three times over the Golden Stool.

The Golden Stool of Ashanti is now famous. It was made by a priest Anotchi, in the reign of king Osei Tutu (1700-1730). The stool is said to have descended from heaven in a black cloud, landing on Anotchi's knees. The priest declared that the stool contained the soul (sunsun) of the Ashanti state. It was covered with gold, and later golden fetters and death masks of captive kings were attached to it. The stool was not a throne and was never sat upon. This was the mistake made by Sir Frederic Hodgson in 1900, when he demanded that the Golden Stool should be brought out so that he could sit on it. This demand precipitated the Ashanti revolt. The stool then disappeared and was only rediscovered by accident in 1921 and desecrated by the labourers who found it. Thanks to the knowledge and intervention of Captain Rattray a further revolt was prevented, and the Golden Stool was restored to its place of honour at Kumasi.

From the moment of enstoolment the chief or king becomes sacred and is surrounded by many taboos. His bare foot, or any part of his body, must never touch the ground lest it come into conflict with the spirit of the earth. The power of a tyrant could be broken by whipping off his sandals or making his bare buttocks touch the ground; similarly the Golden Stool must never touch the earth but stand on an elephant's skin. The king must take care not to stumble, and on state occasions his feet are lifted for him by an official when he walks. He must never hit or be struck by anybody. He should not eat or drink in public, and if he does drink then a cloth is held before him. Anything he spills in drinking is given to his cup-bearers. He has to enjoy perfect health, is watched over by doctors, and is sent early to bed.

The physical perfection of the king has been mentioned. Noble children have their heads massaged, a baby's bones being kept soft with hot towels, so as to produce a wide skull which is supposed to give greater dignity. The king's body is supposed to be soft and