

Princess Dinubolu

On Thursday 27th February 1908, the Essex Newsman printed this poem for you, which was written by the poet Claude Greening...

*Dusky damsel, Dinubolu,
Darksome-hued Princess,
Gainst the charms of Kate or Lulu
May you win success!*

*Mirthful, merry-mooded maiden,
Moulded wondrous fair
(Dark, I mean) how splendour-laden
Is your ebon hair!*

*Cheerful, chocolate-coloured creature,
Compeer of the best.
Why should not your grace of feature,
Triumph o'er the rest?*

*Dinubolu, damsel dusky,
Dressed in taste and style,
Many a throat will be a quite husky
Cheering your sweet smile!*

*Buxom, bouncing, brilliant beauty,
Boasting lustrous eyes,
If Southend performs its duty-
Yours must be the prize!*

We don't know exactly when but some time before this poem was written, you sent a telegram from Great Yarmouth to Mr Bacon, the manager at the Kursaal in Southend, it read;

"Was not allowed to compete in the Beauty Show here on account of colour; have you a rule barring me? I am a light chocolate, reply Post Office, Princess Dinubolu".

The telegram reply back to you, read: *"Don't enter, local prejudice."*

But in August that year, you came to Southend and entered the Beauty competition.

Tuesday, August 18th, The Evening Standard reported the following...

Beauty Show at Southend

Much interest is being evinced at Southend in the beauty show, which will be open to the public at the Kursaal, at eight o'clock tomorrow night. Of the ninety competitors, one-third are girls belonging to the town and neighbourhood, and another third will come from London: while of the remainder, there will be candidates from all parts of England, from France and from America. Indeed, a lady of rank, from far-off Senegal, is anxious to be allowed to take her chance in the novel competition. "This show." The Standard went on further to report, "promises to be more successful than any yet held.

Here's what Mr Bacon told the Standard when questioned whether colour would be a bar to entry...

Two years ago, we had a baby show, and among the competitors was a black, ugly, little nigger. I have seen many ugly babies in my time, black and white, but never have I seen one to beat this. Of course, I permitted the entry. Nobody could dream it was likely to win, but the way the audience plumped for it was a thing I have never ceased to wonder at. Did it win? Of course, it did; it came right out on top and for weeks afterwards, I was absolutely mobbed whenever I went out. Why couldn't you give the prize to a baby of your own colour? What do you mean by it? How could you dare was the cry, and all this time it was the audience who decided the winner. Anyhow, I am taking no risks this time. Princess Dinubolu has my sympathy - my heart sympathy - but I do not propose to take the responsibility of permitting her to compete. The decision will be made by a local committee, headed, I hope by the mayor.

Now we certainly don't know if James Colbert Ingram, the Mayor of Southend at the time, headed this committee, but we know that you were permitted to enter.

Apparently, news of your arrival spread around Southend in fifteen minutes. Mr Bacon reserved a first-class seat on the train for you, but they said you travelled third class in an attempt to avoid reporters. And Mr Bacon's publicity also included driving you around the town in an open carriage before taking you to stay in the Palace Hotel, which we now call the Park Inn Hotel.

Did you realise how many newspapers around the country reported your story? And where did you get that story from when you told a reporter that you bury your whole body in the sand as a beauty regime to enhance your charms?

The Sheffield Daily Telegraph, The Torquay Times, The Berkshire Chronicle... The Yorkshire Evening Post, headlined 'Light Chocolate or White?' The Aberdeen Daily Journal proclaimed your request to enter had put the manager in a delicate position. The Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucestershire Graphic reported that a '*curious development had arisen in connection with the Southend Kursaal Beauty Show.*'

But the most staggering I believe, was reported in the Yarmouth Independent, it read...

Yarmouth has gained in a singular advertisement for the potency of its sands from a distinguished beauty - a disappointed competitor in one of our local beauty shows, so I learn from the Daily Chronicle, - no less in importance than a Royal personage, Princess Dinubolu of Senegal. She had given out the intelligence that she has been refused entry to our beauty show; and on her arrival at Southend, the Kursaal authorities were broadminded enough to ignore the barrier of colour and welcomed her to the beauty competition. So that it was too much colour that was the matter in Yarmouth! Still, the Princess harboured no grudge against our town; indeed, she paid us a considerable compliment in the course of an interview with the correspondence of the Daily Chronicle. The pressman, jumping alertly to the hub of her ambition asked, "Can you give me a recipe for beauty?" "Ah, you laugh," she replied, "for my beauty bath is very different from that of an English girl. For months I have been staying in Yarmouth, as there is such beautiful sand there, and every morning I have buried to my neck in sand. Nothing makes

the skin so velvety. The belles of my own country believe very much in sand baths." Well, there, to think that we have for months been flocking to our sands in thousands and never noticed that head! And to think that for all of us, however plain we may be, there is nothing like our sand to make the skin velvety. We've got to live to learn.

Princess Dinubolu, you did not win this Southend Beauty show, but I know you were strong, witty and confident, and you held your head high and proud in Southend.

Princess Dinubolu, I SALUTE YOU.

Words written by Elsa James