

# Ethiopia Today

THE MAKING OF A MODERN STATE

by GEORGE PADMORE

IT is less than ten years ago that Ethiopia suddenly emerged out of a condition of isolation. Since then, her orientation towards modernity and her relationship with the capitalist countries of the West has been so rapid, that she is today a full-fledged member of the League of Nations, and maintains embassies in such important capitals as London, Paris, Rome, Berlin and Washington.

The Emperor Haile Sillasié was the first ruler of Ethiopia to leave the mountain fastness of his country and to tour Europe in 1924. He made such a striking impression upon those with whom he came in contact, that on the occasion of his coronation on November 2, 1930, all of the leading powers of Europe and America vied with each other in showering compliments upon this last independent dark-skinned monarch of Africa.

Today, the eyes of the white world, especially England, France, Italy and America, are once more focussed on this black empire, in consequence of the recent commercial treaty between Ethiopia and Japan; an alliance which might have tremendous and far-reaching importance, not only for Ethiopia, but for all *Black Africa*.

That is why European powers with African colonies are all anxiously watching the new developments between Japan, the most aggressive imperialist state in the world today, and her new African ally.

In passing, it is worth while to note certain similarities between these two countries.

Both are among the oldest empires in the world. The Japanese claim that theirs was founded in 66 B.C. by the first Emperor Jimmu Tenno, and that the dynasty established by him still reigns up to this day.

The Ethiopians, whose history is one ranging over thousands of years, claim a line of sovereigns dating back to 4,530 B.C. In this list of over 300 rulers is included that celebrated historic character, the Queen of Sheba, from whose son by Solomon, Menelik I, the present dynasty claims direct descent.

Japan, although an industrialised capitalist country, is still politically dominated by the feudal class from whom the military caste, the real rulers of Japan, are recruited. Ethiopia, on the other hand, is essentially a feudal land, ruled over by powerful princes, known as Rases, who, like those of Japan, form the military caste, the dominant elements in the affairs of the nation. The present rulers of both countries—the Japanese "Son of Heaven" and the Ethiopian "Lion of Judea"—are more than ornamental monarchs. They are both in their respective spheres important personages, wielding such absolute power over their peoples which in Europe it would have been difficult for the Occidental mind to understand, were we not living in an age of Fascist dictatorships.

Furthermore, the Ethiopians, like the Japanese, are a proud and independent people, jealous of their national freedom and conscious of the fact that they were the first non-European peoples since the Haitian Revolution to defeat the white race at arms—the Abyssinians over Imperial Italy in 1896; Japan over Czarist Russia in 1905.

Last, but not least, the Ethiopians, like the Japanese, knowing that all other colored people are under the yoke of white imperialist domination, are very suspicious of the white man. This, apart from economic and political reasons to be discussed later, is an important psychological factor which must be taken into consideration in explaining the new eastward orientation in the foreign policy of Ethiopia towards Japan. However, before dealing with this aspect of the question, it is necessary to give a brief historic review of Ethiopia, and of the social and economic forces at work towards the making of a modern state.

With the exception of the little west coast Republic of Liberia, Ethiopia, or, to give it its more popular name, Abyssinia, is the last remaining independent black State in Africa. Even Liberia is economically

## Ethiopia Today

mortgaged to the Firestone Rubber Company, thanks to the machinations of Yankee dollar diplomacy.

Ethiopia lies in the north-eastern corner of the Continent, between the Italian colony of Eritrea on the north, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan on the west, Uganda and Kenya on the south, British, French and Italian Somaliland on the east. It covers an area of about 350,000 square miles, or more than one and a half times the size of France. The country is divided into a number of States, or provinces, the chief of which are: Gore, Tigre, Gondar, Donakil and Lastra in the north-east; Amhara, Gogam and Shoa in the center; Kaffa in the south and Hara in the south-east.

The geographical location of Ethiopia also plays a very important factor in influencing its foreign policy. Anyone familiar with Ethiopia and its people knows that although they might find it convenient to participate at Geneva, they will never feel quite at home. They will always have their eyes on their white neighbours, Great Britain, France and Italy. For they feel that white men who enslave black men in other parts of Africa cannot at the same time love black folks in Ethiopia. Any people in their place would be equally distrustful. This has already created much friction between Ethiopia, Great Britain and Italy.

The political structure of Ethiopian society is feudal. Each province is under a *Ras*, who holds sovereignty over minor chiefs within his principality. All the Rases in turn swear fidelity to the Emperor, whose official title is Kadowawi, *i.e.* The Power of Trinity, King of Kings.

Ethnologically, Ethiopia is a land of mixed races. Although the Ethiopians are a dark-skinned people, they are made up of a number of racial strains—Hamitic, Semitic and Negroid—reflecting social, linguistic and religious differences. According to Diodorus Siculus, "the Ethiopians conceived themselves to be of greater antiquity than any other nation; and it is probable that, born under the sun's bath, its warmth may have ripened them earlier than other men. They suppose themselves also to be the inventors of divine worship, of festivals, of solemn assemblies, and every religious practice. They affirm that the Egyptians are one of their colonies."

The total population of Ethiopia is estimated to be between ten and thirteen million, comprising Amherics, Gallas, Danakils, Guragues, Somalis, Falashas, Shankallas and several other smaller ethnic groups, including several thousand black Jews. There are more than seventy languages spoken throughout Ethiopia, but *Amaric*, which has over 250 alphabetical characters, is the official language of the State. The Amherics, who number about 3 million, inhabit the provinces of Amhara, Gogam and Sheo, where they constitute, politically and socially, the dominant class.

Ethiopian society, based as it is upon a feudal structure, can roughly be divided into four main classes: (1) the nobility, headed by the Emperor, the great feudal princes (*Rases*), military chieftains and ministers of State; (2) the clergy, adherents of the Coptic faith, the oriental branch of the Christian Church, at the head of which is the *Abune* or Archbishop, who until a few years ago was appointed by the Patriarch of Alexandria; (3) soldiers and free men; and (4) slaves and serfs.

The ruling dynasty, the Rases and the clergy are exclusively Amherics. They are the only people who can read and write; for illiteracy is widespread in Abyssinia. The Amherics, who were Christians at a time when the so-called Aryans were still savages, can always be distinguished from other Abyssinians by their distinctive dress, which consists of a tight-fitting tunic with long sleeves and trousers, held tight at the ankles, made out of white cotton or silk according to the wealth and station of the individual. They also wear a long, broad-shouldered mantle held tight at the neck by a lion's mane. The wealthier ones sport patent leather shoes and broad felt sun hats, which combine to give them a rather picturesque appearance.

The poorer Amherics, however, generally go about bare-headed. The love of liberty among Amherics in general is so pronounced, that every man, rich or poor, owns a gun, which he struts around with, with the same seeming pride that a Londoner takes in his umbrella.

The other non-Christian Abyssinians, Moslems, Jews and pagans, who inhabit the Northern and Southern Provinces, wear less clothes than the Amherics and are usually armed with long, home-made knives, spears, and other primitive weapons.

Apart from the Abyssinians there are several thousand foreigners, mostly Greeks, Armenians, Arabs and East Indians, in Addis Ababa, the capital, where they conduct restaurants, cafés and shops.

Since wealth, position and power are determined by the amount of land and serfs one possesses, the Church, which has controlled over one-third of the land since the thirteenth century, and the feudal lords combine to form a mighty bulwark of reaction.



*Haile Sillassie, Emperor of Ethiopia*

This was no easy job. Revolt after revolt flared up. But Menelik finally curbed the Rasas and united the various provinces under a strong military dictatorship, presided over by men loyal to him.

He modernised his army, which became an effective weapon, not only in maintaining internal peace and order, but such that in 1896, at the head of 150,000 men he vanquished, with a thoroughness both devastating and complete, the Italians at the battle of *Adowa*.

Menelik died in 1913 and was succeeded by his grandson, Lij Yasu, whose reign, however, was characterised by misrule and chaos. The son of a daughter of Menelik and Ras Micel, chief of Wallo-Gallas, a Mohammedan people, Lij Yasu had strong Pan-Islamic tendencies. This led him into constant conflict with the Amherics and his other non-Moslem subjects.

When the World War broke out, Lij Yasu began to give open political expression to his Mohammedan sympathies by intriguing with Turkey, Germany and the "Mad Mullah" of the Sudan against Great Britain. The British found a more sympathetic ally in the present Emperor, who at that time was known as *Ras Tafari*. With the aid of the British and the Entente Powers, Tafari mobilised an army among the Amherics and declared a revolt against Lij Yasu. A bloody civil war followed which cost over fifty thousand lives. The forces of the Emperor and his father were completely vanquished at Segono in 1916. Lij Yasu was captured and made a state prisoner. Since then, he has made occasional attempts to regain his throne; the last effort being in 1932, when he escaped from his custodians and started a rebellion in Gaffan across the Blue Nile, which, however, was quickly crushed by the Government forces.

After the deposition of Lij Yasu in 1916, *Waizuru Zanditu*, another daughter of Menelik II, was proclaimed Empress. She was crowned on February 11, 1917. *Tafari*, as leader of the anti-Yasu movement, was named Heir to the Throne and Regent. Eleven years afterwards, on October 7, 1928, he was proclaimed Emperor and Joint Ruler with the Empress, Zanditu, and on her death in 1930 crowned sole ruler of Ethiopia. During the lifetime of the Empress Tafari tried to make innovations, but found little support from his co-ruler, who was strongly under the influence of the reactionary elements, especially the clergy and the foreign intriguers at the Royal Court. It was only after her death that the Emperor

## Ethiopia Today

was able to launch far-reaching reforms. It was in order to acquaint himself with modern conditions that he made his European tour in 1924.

Tafari is a man of broad vision, an indefatigable worker, imbued with modern ideas, and with readiness to learn. Since his return home he has invited a number of foreign advisers and technical experts to Addis Ababa to co-operate with him.

As an agricultural country, Abyssinia is completely dependent upon the outer world for all manufactured commodities. Outside the capital, a town of about 100,000 inhabitants, all productive activities are carried on by mediaeval methods. What little cloth is made is ginned by hand, on home-made looms, operated with the feet. Agricultural implements are centuries old. Roads are mere bridle paths. The automobile, telephone, radio, electricity and other amenities which we are wont to associate with modern life are unknown outside of Addis Ababa. The truth is, Abyssinia today hardly differs from what it was thousands of years ago—a beautiful, rich plateau, varying in elevation from 5,000 to 10,000 feet, with gorgeous scenery, fertile valleys, teeming with coffee and other tropical products, and unexploited mineral resources. In short, a veritable Eldorado!

The fundamental question before enlightened Abyssinians is: How can these natural resources be developed without flooding the country with rapacious foreign capitalist exploiters, and at the same time safeguarding its national independence?

Men by far more experienced in the intricacies of imperialism and the manipulations of international finance-capital have not been able to solve this problem, except Soviet Russia, the only country with a non-capitalist economic system. Liberia and Haiti, before Ethiopia, also had to face this problem. The world knows what has been the result. These Republics, like many others, are today mortgaged to Wall Street bankers, and their rulers are mere puppets in the hands of powerful financial interests.

With all these factors in mind, the Emperor of Abyssinia is trying to steer his ship of State. The sea upon which he has embarked is a stormy one. Shoals are many and he has few competent navigators of his own upon whom to rely. Furthermore, the ubiquitous imperialist sharks, thanks to the world economic crisis, are more rapacious than ever. Whether the Ethiopian ship will arrive at its destination safely, only history will tell.

Our task here is to set forth as briefly as possible the main lines of approach which the Emperor is pursuing in effecting a change in the industrial and social reorganisation of Ethiopia. The latter is absolutely dependent upon the former. For unless the present feudal economic structure of the country is changed, slavery and serfdom, still widespread, can never be liquidated—the League of Nations' resolutions notwithstanding. Slavery as a social institution has its roots in the economic structure and can only be abolished by changing the economic system. That is why the Ethiopian experiment is of such tremendous importance for the thousands of men and women now held in bondage.

In order better to cope with the problems of reform the whole State apparatus has undergone drastic changes within recent years. This is particularly noticeable in the army; for in a country like Abyssinia, where the provincial governors to a large extent are still semi-independent rulers, with large armed forces at their disposal, a well-disciplined centralised army, loyal and devoted to the person of the Emperor, is the only force capable of guaranteeing peace and order.

The standing army is about 100,000 men, exclusive of the feudal retainers of the various chiefs. The head of the national army is called *Fatwari*, whose function is similar to that of the Minister of War in other countries. There are many foreign military instructors in Abyssinia, most of whom are Belgians. A Frenchman, however, is in charge of the organisation of the air force.

The civil departments are headed by a council of twenty-two ministers. They are supposed to assist the Emperor, but many of these people are staunch upholders of the *ancien régime*, and as such not very enthusiastic about innovations. The Emperor is, however, gradually isolating these people, by replacing them with younger and more loyal men. Among the ministries recently instituted are: Education and Public Health, to which are attached young American Negro specialists.

An anti-slavery department has also been created under the direct supervision of the Emperor, for the purpose of gradually emancipating the slaves and adjusting them to the new social order under construction. Already a decree has been passed declaring all children of slave parents freed.

In order to avoid the danger of open revolt and possible overthrow by the reactionary elements—a danger not to be underestimated, especially when one recalls the fate of Amanhullah, King of Afghanistan—the Emperor is not only adopting the policy of "gradualism," but at the same time has sent a number of students abroad to be trained at the public expense. It is to these young men that he looks for future leadership. Most of them are studying medicine, engineering, scientific agriculture, economics and

## Ethiopia Today

military science in France, Italy, England and the United States. Haile Sillasié realises only too well that the future of his country depends upon the youth.

In the meanwhile, a few concessions have been given to foreign capitalists. For example, the Passo, a French company, is now working platinum mines; while an Italian company is exploiting potash deposits in the North-Eastern Province. Three Belgian companies are cultivating coffee, and a French syndicate is developing cotton.

The only railway in the country is a line running from the capital, through French Somaliland, to Jibouti, on the Gulf of Aden, Abyssinia's only outlet to the sea. It is owned by the French-Ethiopian Company, a joint-stock company formed in 1896, but the management is largely in the hands of the French. This railway is already the cause of much jealousy between Italy and France. It may one day be another "Chinese-Eastern Railway," and the cause of conflict between Abyssinia and these powers. In the meanwhile, France enjoys a monopoly of Abyssinian trade.

The official currency in Ethiopia is the Maria Theresa dollar, worth about 50 cents. A Menelik dollar of the same denomination also circulates in the country. The Bank of Abyssinia, founded in 1905 under the chairmanship of the Governor of the National Bank of Egypt, with a subscribed capital of 500,000 pounds, and 12,500 pounds paid up, has recently been taken over by the Ethiopian Government and reorganised.

The foreign policy of Ethiopia can be characterised by two main features: maintaining friendly relationships with all powers, especially her immediate neighbours, Great Britain, France and Italy, on the one hand, while at the same time exploiting the deep-rooted jealousies and economic contradictions among these imperialist powers.

Space prevents us from going into this subject in great detail. However, a few recent examples in the sphere of foreign relationship will suffice to prove our contention. For instance, one of the first things the Emperor did after assuming control of foreign affairs was to renew the 1906 Treaty which Menelik II had signed with Great Britain, France and Italy. According to the terms of this treaty, these powers agreed to respect the sovereignty of Ethiopia and to refrain from intervention in her internal affairs.

Another convention of the same date provides for the prohibition and regulation of the importation of arms and ammunition into Ethiopia. This is a very important treaty, for hitherto it had been the policy of those powers, interested in keeping Ethiopia internally divided, to supply the various Rases and tribal chiefs with arms, just as is being done in China today among the war lords.

Furthermore, in order to keep a watchful eye on international affairs, especially the Slave Question, which directly affects his country, the Emperor entered the League of Nations in 1923. Five years later he re-established diplomatic relationship with the United States, after an interruption of twenty years. Diplomatic relationship has also been established and commercial ties strengthened with most of the European powers.

A few years ago the Ethiopians created quite a consternation at Geneva when they accused Great Britain and Italy of violating their pledge not to enter into secret agreement to obtain dominating influence in Abyssinia complementary to each other. Italy has ambitions for colonial expansion and railroad construction in North-East Africa, while Great Britain has her eyes on the waters of the Blue Nile, which has its source in Lake Tessa, in Ethiopia. British cotton growers in the Sudan and Egypt would like to control Tessa, for, by damming it, extra water could be available for irrigation purposes.

After this exposure at the League of Nations, the Chancelleries in Rome and London denied the charge, but it was afterwards revealed that such an agreement did really exist. African suspicion against the white European powers—a thing very easily kindled—was running high in Addis Ababa, especially against the British, who were considered the greater intriguers. The Ethiopians broke off relationship with the British engineers who were negotiating for the building of the dam, and made a sharp orientation in their foreign policy towards the United States.

The Yankees were not slow in welcoming the overtures made to them. The Wall Street bankers saw good business in the project of the dam, and another opportunity of challenging their British rivals in Africa. A special Ethiopian mission went to the United States in 1928, where Hoover and the politicians in Washington were so enthusiastic that shortly afterwards a Minister Plenipotentiary was despatched to Addis Ababa. His arrival there marked the beginning of American rivalry against the Europeans for commercial privileges.

This whole series of incidents marked Ethiopia's first victory in foreign affairs. For the time being, the

## Ethiopia Today

secret alliance between Great Britain and Italy for spheres of influence in Abyssinia was abandoned, and the old imperialist rivals, Great Britain and America, were again at each other's throats.

For some time things looked rather dark for the European powers in Ethiopia. Americans became the most popular foreigners in Addis Ababa. Despite all the assurances of the British that they never intended to impair the sovereignty of the country, by guaranteeing the Ethiopians special conditions, such as riparian rights, substantial rents, the building of roads, employment of native labour at high wages, etc., etc., they were unable to remove the suspicion of the blacks—a heritage of Britain's colonial policy among the darker races. Finally they had to give up the project.

In the meanwhile, the J. G. White Engineering Company of New York was able to allay the fears of the Ethiopians and to complete the preliminary terms of the contract for building the dam. The British, suffering a complete defeat, began to invoke the Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty of 1902, which, they claimed, provides that their consent is first necessary if the dam is to be constructed. The Ethiopians, however, do not seem to be much perturbed over the alleged claims of the British Foreign Office.

The Italians, realising the blunder which they made by entering into a secret alliance with Great Britain, tried to get back into the good graces of the Ethiopians. They have always been very anxious to offset the influence of the French, who enjoy a monopoly in transporting Abyssinian imports and exports over the Jibouti-Addis-Ababa railway.

Taking advantage of the coronation of the Emperor of Ethiopia in 1930, Mussolini despatched Prince Umberto, the heir to the Italian throne, and his cousin, the Duke of Abruzzi, to Addis Ababa. They, however, were not alone. England sent Prince Henry, Duke of Gloucester, third son of King George, while those countries which did not have royal emissaries, despatched high Ministers of State and foreign diplomats as their representatives.

The occasion was a real European caravan moving East. It must certainly have reminded the Ethiopians of those bygone days when their ruler, the Queen of Sheba, and her black entourage journeyed to the Court of Solomon. The Italians are the only ones who seem to have achieved any tangible results. Knowing the love which the Ethiopians have for arms, a fact no doubt emphasised by the memories of Adawa, the Italian mission brought among other gifts a five-ton tank for the Emperor. This seems to have had the desired effect; for by the time the coronation festivities came to a close, they were granted the long-desired railway concession. According to the terms of this treaty a line will be constructed from the north-eastern frontier of Ethiopia to the Italian port of Assab on the Red Sea, where special port facilities will be given to Ethiopia. More important still will be the construction of a line running parallel to the French line to Addis Ababa. This railway when completed will greatly affect the monopoly which the French now enjoy by diverting the trade of Central and Northern Ethiopia over the Italian line. Furthermore, it will open up new avenues of trade to the Italians in Ethiopia and thereby sharpen Franco-Italian economic rivalry in this part of Africa.

The latest move of Ethiopia in the sphere of foreign diplomacy is the commercial treaty recently signed with Japan. The Japanese trade delegation which visited Ethiopia in 1932 has secured a concession of 1,600,000 acres of land for the purpose of cultivating cotton and settling emigrants. The climate of Ethiopia is supposed to be more suitable for Japanese farmers than that of Manchuria with its rigorous winters. This whole commercial alliance grows out of the sharpening of the Anglo-Japanese rivalry for economic domination of the textile markets of the Far East and even East and South Africa. The Japanese capitalists are trying to free themselves from their present dependence upon America and Britain for their supplies of raw cotton. They hope to do this by developing large-scale cotton plantations in Ethiopia. It is stated in well-informed quarters that in return for this concession Japan will help in the programme of industrialising Ethiopia and the reorganising of her military forces.

The Japanese press has given much publicity to the Ethiopian-Japanese alliance, pointing out that it is in the interest of both of these colored nations to establish the closest ties against white imperialism. Because of the racial dangers involved, the European powers in Africa are watching the situation closely.

It is to be hoped that the Ethiopians have no illusions about the Japanese imperialists, who in their internal and external policies are quite as ruthless as the white imperialist nations. The Japanese ruling class, like all other capitalists, are no respecters of race, color or creed, although it might suit their present needs to pose as the "defenders" and "champions" of the darker races. Their record, however, has been too dramatically written in the blood of millions of Koreans and Chinese for us to have any doubts about their true character.

However, judging from the present financial difficulties of Japan—thanks to her military adventurists—

## Ethiopia Today

the economic bottom of the Mikado's throne might collapse before General Araki, the present military "dictator," begins to apply his doctrine of Kama, "the Royal Way," on the Ethiopians.

All this is to the future! Meanwhile, Ethiopia having definitely turned her back upon the past, is gradually reconstructing her national life, in the course of which she will undoubtedly throw much light on her great history. For already, Italian engineers engaged in road building have discovered the site of King Solomon's mines which had been lost to the world for over four thousand years.

*Semper novi quid ex Africa!*