

ABYSSINIA: THE ETHIOPIAN RAILWAY AND THE POWERS

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Abyssinia: The Ethiopian Railway and the Powers by T. Lennox Gilmour

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T. LENNOX GILMOUR

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AND THE POWERS**

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The Ethiopian Railway

and

The Powers.

Being a narrative of recent events in the
Ethiopian Empire nearly affecting the rela-
tions between Great Britain and France, and
the maintenance of the Entente Cordiale.

Thomas
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PREFACE.

THE question of the Ethiopian Railway has hitherto attracted much less attention in this country than in France. Yet it has an important, and may have a vital, bearing on the relations between the two countries, and on the maintenance of the *entente cordiale*. In these circumstances it seems to me desirable that the facts of the situation should be more widely known, and that the British public should have placed at its disposal such material as is available for a considered judgment on this question. No collection of official papers has been published either by the French Government or by our own; but I have brought together in an Appendix various documents which will contribute to a right understanding of the subject. In the body of the pamphlet I have endeavoured to give a general idea of the course of recent events, of the present position of affairs, and of the points at issue.

T. L. G.

3, ELM COURT,
TEMPLE, E.C.

Christmas, 1905.

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ABYSSINIA.

CHAPTER I.

ABYSSINIA occupies in some respects a unique position among the native kingdoms of Africa. With the doubtful exception of Morocco, it is the only African state of any importance which has succeeded in maintaining its independence during the European invasion of the continent, begun some three decades ago. That Abyssinia is not to-day under the tutelage of any European Power is due, in the main, to the remarkable man who, in 1889, succeeded Johannes II. as Emperor. Menelik II., Negusa Negus, Lion of Judah, King of Kings of Ethiopia, as his Majesty is designated in official documents, was, before he established his right to the larger dignity, King of Shoa, the most southern of the confederacy of kingdoms which together constitute the empire of Ethiopia.

But the fact that Abyssinia has escaped the fate of so many other African kingdoms has not secured it from the troubles which necessarily attend the contact of a less civilised state with its more highly civilised neighbours. For some years past Adis Abeba, the

Abyssinian capital, has been the arena of a diplomatic struggle in which the representatives of Great Britain, France, and Italy have played the most conspicuous part. Quite recently the appointment of a German Consul-General to reside at the Abyssinian Court has introduced a new element into Abyssinian politics, and may lead to important modifications in the relations of Abyssinia with the rest of the world.

This appears, therefore, to be an opportune moment to attempt to give a brief account of the present political situation in Abyssinia, the more so as there has not been for many years any publication of official papers relating to Abyssinian affairs, and the sources from which reliable information can be obtained are consequently severely restricted.

In 1889, when Menelik assumed the title of Emperor, he had already had some intercourse with Europeans—principally Italians and Frenchmen. The southern frontiers of the Emperor's dominions, where Abyssinian territory meets the British East Africa Protectorate, are still undefined, but in 1889 the frontiers of Abyssinia were undefined in every direction. The position of Menelik's European neighbours was briefly this. France had begun in 1884 to take active steps to establish her influence at Obock, and four years later had settled on Jibutil as her future port on the Somali coast. In 1883 Italy had established her protectorate on the Danakil coast, and had signed a treaty of peace and friendship with Menelik as King of Shoa. As regards Great Britain, *the presence of the Khalifa in the Egyptian Sudan*

prevented any regular intercourse on the side of the Nile Valley between the Anglo-Egyptian and Abyssinian authorities, while the points of contact between Great Britain and Abyssinia to the south and east were equally remote. When, in 1889, Menelik claimed the wider Imperial honours he was glad to sign a treaty of commerce and friendship with Italy. The Treaty of Uchali, signed on the 2nd May, 1889, contained an article worded as follows:—

“His Majesty the King of Kings of Ethiopia consents to avail himself of the Italian Government for any negotiations which he may enter into with any other Powers or Governments.”

The interpretation of this clause soon gave rise to a serious divergence of opinion between the new Emperor and the Italian Government. Italy claimed that it gave her a protectorate over Abyssinia. The claim was recognised by Great Britain, but from the first Menelik peremptorily rejected this interpretation, and contended that there was nothing in the treaty which derogated from the rights of Abyssinia to be regarded as an independent Sovereign State. M. Lagarde, the present French Minister at Adis Abeba, had been named first Administrator of the French Somaliland Protectorate. He was quick to see the important rôle which Abyssinia was destined to play in the future of North-eastern Africa, and the advantages which France might derive from establishing friendly relations with the Emperor. France did not acknowledge the Italian claim to a protectorate, and there can be no doubt that at this critical