

WHAT NEXT IN ABYSSINIA?

Problems For The Liberators

(Written for "The Listener" by the REV. W. S. ROLLINGS)

Lions still roam in Abyssinian lands. When Haile Selassie visited Europe in 1924 he presented King George with a lion, the traditional royal Abyssinian gift to princes and rulers.

Lions were privileged quadrupeds in the Imperial Palace at Addis Ababa, and their cubs were pets of the household. The highest military award in Abyssinia is the bestowal of a collar made of lion's mane. The official title of the Emperor contains the words "Conquering Lion of Judah." The lion is shown on the imperial seal.



THE Conquering Lion of Judah: Emperor Haile Selassie of Abyssinia, with his consort, the Empress Menen and their two sons. A photograph taken on the occasion of Haile Selassie's coronation

IN the mountain empire of Abyssinia the British Lion with the "Conquering Lion of Judah" is engaged on a lion's task.

Mr. Churchill warned Mussolini that Britain would tear his African Empire in pieces. This Britain is rapidly doing.

The magnitude of the task may be measured by the scale of distances. It involved as a preliminary the conquest of Somaliland, a stretch of East Africa with a coast line of 1,000 miles on the Indian Ocean. From the north the subjugation of Eritrea, stretching for 600 miles along the Red Sea Coast, and backed by highlands rising from six to nine thousand feet reaching inland to the Sudan border, was another essential.

Abyssinia itself has a frontier of 3,000 miles, and an area six times that of Britain. Yet simultaneously with the opening of campaigns in Somaliland and Eritrea, Allied Forces entered Abyssinia itself at three points: Haile Selassie and Abyssinia patriots from the west, a British column from the north, while South African troops struck in from Kenya.

Between the northern and southern commands there was a distance of 2,000 miles. Supplies and equipment had to be organised from the interior. To provide transport, guard lines of communication with bases, maintain the services, provide reinforcements, was a colossal task. Yet with the co-operation of the R.A.F., and later of the Navy, the daring venture has been followed by astounding victories.

Somaliland and Eritrean capitals are in British hands; and, when Massawa falls, the entire East African coastline from Suez to Kenya (with the exception of a small strip of French Somaliland), 2,500 miles will be under the control of the British Navy.

Geography and Climate

The terrain of the country has added to the immensity of the task. Abyssinia is a mountain kingdom. The mass of its sixteen million people live on highlands of from six to nine thousand feet above sea level. These highlands are broken by canyons which drop from three to four thousand feet. Mountain scarps and peaks rise to a height of up to 15,500 feet above sea level. The Eritrean highlands geographically belong to Abyssinia; and Keren is typical of its terrain. The calendar also plays a vital part in military strategy.

In the rainy season the weather forms an impassable barrier against attack. The lesser or spring rains fall in March and April. But the great rains come in monsoons from the Indian Ocean with unfailing regularity from mid-June to the end of September. Then water falls from the clouds in cascades. The whole country becomes a quagmire, and raging torrents pour down the bridgeless valleys.

Thus the time element has been a vital factor in the campaign. The goal of victory had to be achieved before the weather broke.

The Goal in Sight

Great achievements lie behind, yet great tasks are still ahead to challenge the Allied Forces.

Garrisoning conquered territory, guarding lines of communications, expanding transport distances, the need for a constant stream of reinforcements—all these make heavy demands.

Yet the prospects justify considered optimism. Our five armies now inside Abyssinia are pressing on the heels of a beaten and demoralised foe.

The people are hostile to Fascist rule and welcome the invading armies as liberators.

The native Fascist levies are showing mutiny, and an army divided against itself cannot stand.

The control of the sea by the Navy assured supplies of equipment and munitions which now pour in from India.

The victorious army which swept through Somaliland, captured Harar (Selassie's birthplace) and Dire-dawa, swept across the gorge of the Awash River, and has now occupied Addis Ababa.

Addis Ababa, Menelik's "New Flower," was founded in 1892. Unlike Harar, which is a walled city with twelve towers, it has no natural or strategic defences.

"The Lion of Judah"

In 1930, amidst scenes of imperial splendour, Ras Tafari Makonnen, in St. George's Cathedral in Addis Ababa, was appointed Emperor Haile Selassie by the Abouana (Archbishop). The Duke of Gloucester represented Britain, and presented Selassie with a pair of silver sceptres as a coronation gift.

At the close of the coronation ceremony he and the Queen divested themselves of their imperial robes, laid aside crown and ring, sceptre and orb; and, dressed in simple garments of white silk, entered the sanctuary. There they knelt before the altar and sealed their coronation vows by receiving the sacrament.

Shall he regain the imperial throne?

Undoubtedly an Allied victory will restore to him the sceptre. He suffered as a victim of international lawlessness. His armies were defeated under conditions (poison gas, etc.) little short of massacre. In exile he bore himself with dignity and restraint. Many of the chiefs have pledged to him their loyalty. He has the backing of the Ethiopian nobility and people. He has the solid support of the church, which in Abyssinia stands next to the throne.

He has also the officially declared approval of Britain and (outside the Axis) the sympathy of the world; and his restoration would accord with international law.

Challenging Tasks

Haile Selassie bears a good record as an enlightened and progressive ruler who started his backward country on the path of reform.

Chief of the problems he will have to face will be the adjustment of the imperial administration to the rule of the chiefs who have always been jealous of any attempt to restrict their traditional powers.

There are social problems which call for action. The country in spite of a healthful climate, reeks with dire disease, due to the habits of the people and their verminous huts. They also lack education.

A national health service and popular education were reforms on which Selassie had made a start before his exile.

An international commission would probably be appointed to assist him in tasks of readjusting organisation and administration of his restored empire; while an international loan might enable him to establish a national defence system, and open up one of the most fertile regions of the earth to modern agriculture, industry, and commerce.

The chief problem at the close of the war will not concern emancipated Abyssinia, but the destiny of the Italian colonies and peoples.

CHANGING SOCIETY

New Winter Course Series From 1YA

If we, as democratic citizens, are concerned with redeeming democracy from its present crucial position, we must learn to understand to the best of our ability the evolution and the workings of our society. By so doing, we can become intelligent and effective rulers of our destiny. To stimulate the understanding and interest of the ordinary listener in these elusive ideas is the primary object of the second series of Winter Course talks, "Changing Society," which will begin from 1YA on April 24.

Planning the series is Professor A. B. Fitt, who holds the chair of education at Auckland University College. Professor Fitt obtained his Ph.D. degree at the University of Leipzig, the home of the philosopher Leibnitz and also famous at the time Professor Fitt was there for the then unique experimental laboratory of the psychologist Wundt.

Professor Fitt's first talk will be on the "Changing State" and his last, "Is Man Changing?" will be a discussion on the ever-popular theme, the possibility that "human nature" is evolving. Other talks will be contributed to the series by P. Martin Smith, who is to speak on "The Changing Family" and "The Changing Conception of Property"; Eric Price, who describes "Change in the Community"; and H. R. Rodwell, who takes an opposing point of view in his talk on "Change in Environment."

In the phrase of Prof. Fitt, these speakers are not "manipulators of society, but sociologists." In other words, they do not describe methods by which society can be changed. They rather portray the actual conditions under which society has evolved to its present position, thus providing the listener with a basis of forecast as to its future evolution.