



MENELIK-AND-HIS-PEOPLE

- BY -
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HERE is Menelik of Ethiopia, victor over Italian regiments with Gatling guns and smokeless powder—a homely, pock-marked man, whose skin is black; whose hair is turning white, for he has passed the fifty-year point; massive in chest, strong in tread (though of a clumsy gait), with keen, restless eyes under threatening brows—a warrior in mien and build, as in fact. There is much of contradiction in Menelik, for tradition makes him a Hebrew by descent, from Solomon and Sheba's Queen, and yet he shows no sign of the Jew; straight nose and thick lips, sternness of glance, with kindness in the smile, a fighter and a patriarch, a Christian king in Africa.

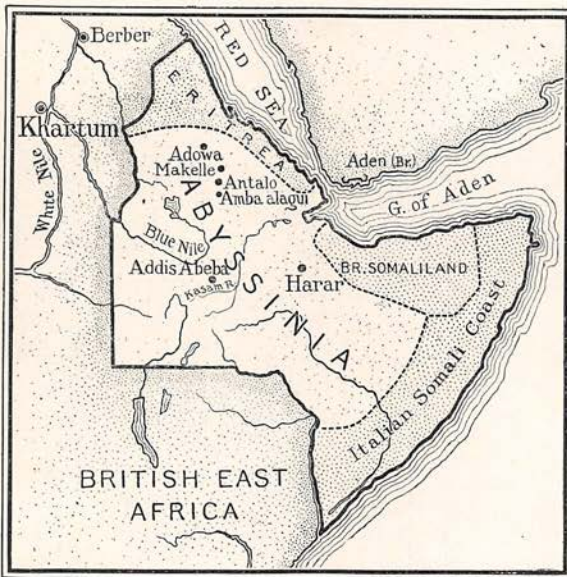
Let no man think of this man as a ruler of negroes; say rather a ruler of dark-skinned Romans, some many shades lighter than himself, with classic cut of features, high brows, thin lips, straight hair, a purer type by far than Menelik himself, who shows a mingling

of races, wherefrom, it may be, comes his strength. These Ethiopians wear the garment worn in Caesar's time, their *chemma* being quite the Roman toga in form and way of draping. They go bareheaded for the most part, though some bind their brows with a white turban, and barefooted; that is, all save Menelik, who alone in the realm has

taken to European shoes and European hat—symbols, one may believe, of his friendliness to Western innovations.

A country of lions and rugged men this Ethiopia, as the people call it, not Abyssinia, which is a disparaging word in use among the Arabs. An Ethiopian worthy to wear in battle the lion's skin that Menelik gives to the bravest must be one who can go three days without food, fighting the while

or journeying over deserts and mountains; one who cares nothing for pain or death. It is a custom among these men, after battle or warlike manœuvres, to squat down on the ground in long line and fire their rifles in the air, barrels up, butts between the knees; no blank cartridges here, but balls that wound or kill whomsoever they strike in the



MAP OF ABYSSINIA AND ADJACENT COUNTRIES.

descent. A cannon shot gives signal, and forthwith the firing starts far down the line, rolling nearer and nearer, until it swells into a roar of musketry about the Emperor himself, then dies away at the farther side. And the bullets come down upon soldiers or citizens as may be; for this firing, like as not, takes place in a crowded city.

"Would it not be wise, your Majesty," asked a French traveller, aghast at this reckless procedure, "to use blank cartridges?"

"Why so?" asked Menelik.

"It would economise rifle balls and save life."

"I do not mind losing a few rifle balls, if it makes my people despise them."

The Italians found at Adowa what these soldiers think of rifle balls; saw them come bounding on in the charge, pierced through and through with Mauser bullets, and go on fighting; saw the Emperor himself toward the close rush in, waving his sword, and kill

with his own hands. The Abyssinians (to use the accepted word) go into battle with modern rifles, and know how to use them; but in the heat of action their spirit is to throw these down and come at the enemy man to man with sabre and shield. Each one carries on his left arm a convex buckler made of hippopotamus hide, so thick and tough that often a swift-flying projectile is deflected by it. Of 21,000 men, blacks and whites, who fought in this battle on the Italian side, about 1,000 escaped, about 3,000 were made prisoners, and the rest were killed.

And at Amba Alagui, which preceded their final disaster, the Italians found out what it means to fight an army that knows not shoes, but comes at you in your fortified place with perfect feet, with toes that can grip and cling. The Italians were on a hill rising from a plateau, impregnable, as they supposed, on three sides, and guarded on the fourth by strong artillery. Against these cannon the



THE SALUTE TO MENELIK.

Drawn by George Varian. Squatting on the ground, the Ethiopian soldiers fire with ball cartridges on signal from a cannon. If people are wounded by the falling bullets, Menelik considers that they are learning not to fear rifle balls.



MENELIK II., EMPEROR OF ABYSSINIA.

From the study from life painted by Paul Buffet at Addis Abeba, the capital of Abyssinia.

black men would hurl themselves, and that would be the end of them. So reasoned the Europeans, but counted without black feet ; for what the Abyssinians did was to take the hill from the rear, straight up the precipice, doing this stealthily, so as to give no alarm. And when enough of them had gained the vantage ground behind, they swept down like a wave upon the Italians, and the day was won.

Again, at the siege of Makelle, the

Italians were able to judge what kind of a Christianity it is the Abyssinians practise. The Europeans were hemmed in by the Ras Makonnen and 15,000 soldiers. The situation was desperate, for water had been cut off and they were perishing of thirst. So the Italians sent forth their natives, 3,000 blacks, to propitiate, it might be, the Ras Makonnen, a famous Abyssinian general and cousin of Menelik. And the Ras Makonnen gave the natives drink and food, and let them

go their way. Then the whites, seeing their own case hopeless and that many were dying, came out to beg for terms, and were received by Menelik himself. "You have not been kind to me or mine," said he; "you have broken your pledged word, and drawn the sword against us. Nevertheless, I do not wish it said that Christians died here like dogs, so you may go." And he gave orders that the Italians should be cared for and supplied with mules for their journey, and he let them depart in peace.

Menelik is at once Emperor and High Priest. He bears the title of King of Kings, and a times of state wears around his head a lion's mane bound fast with green, and on this rests a crown of gold. The Christianity of the Abyssinians, which came to them about the fourth century, is no very different thing from that of some Western nations. They have priests to read the Scriptures and interpret the law; and they have made fast days, no less than 192 in the year, and observe them scrupulously. They have churches in all their cities, with mass on Sundays and services on saints' days, but attendance at these is not very general among the masses, although Menelik and his chief men attend regularly. On the other hand, the Golden Rule receives such practical and daily enforcement as is scarcely to be met with elsewhere. Let a quarrel arise between two neighbours, and the first passer-by is called upon to decide between them, his judgment being accepted as final. And time and again, in dealing with his enemies, Menelik has shown how justice should be tempered with mercy. Thieves and criminals are punished, with the approval of all, by the cutting off of a hand or a foot, which is deemed wiser and more humane than casting them into prison. And not only do those condemned to this punishment bear the sabre stroke without flinching, but they hold themselves like graven images while the bleeding stumps are afterwards thrust into boiling oil for perfect cauterisation.

To reach Menelik's capital, the city of Addis Abeba (which means "new flower"), the traveller from the eastern coast must journey hundreds of miles across the desert, then far back among rugged mountains. In theory, all this region belongs to Menelik; but practically the desert is left to independent tribes, often hostile, for the Ethiopians proper are mountaineers, and are seldom met with at low altitudes—indeed, they succumb to the fevers of the coast more easily than Europeans do.

"I came across the desert with ten soldiers to guard me," said the French artist, Paul Buffet, "with camels for beasts of burden, and mules for my men and myself to ride on. Horses would have died on the way, but mules will go several days without eating. If a carcass dropped, we would see the vultures swarm as by magic out of a clear sky, first black dots on the horizon, then coming nearer and nearer, and finally sweeping down from overhead in narrowing circles with an uncanny whistling of wings. And at night we would have the jackals and hyenas weeping and howling about our camp, and more than once we had trouble with the desert people at the springs."

M. Buffet spent about eighteen months in Menelik's kingdom, going in pursuance of the idea that there was the one place in the world where an artist might see with his own eyes how the ancient Romans used to drape their garments about them and what manner of garments these were. It is to him that I am indebted for much of the matter of this article, for he passed through Abyssinia not only with an eye to see, but with a mind to appreciate. I asked him about the lions in Abyssinia and the hunting of them.

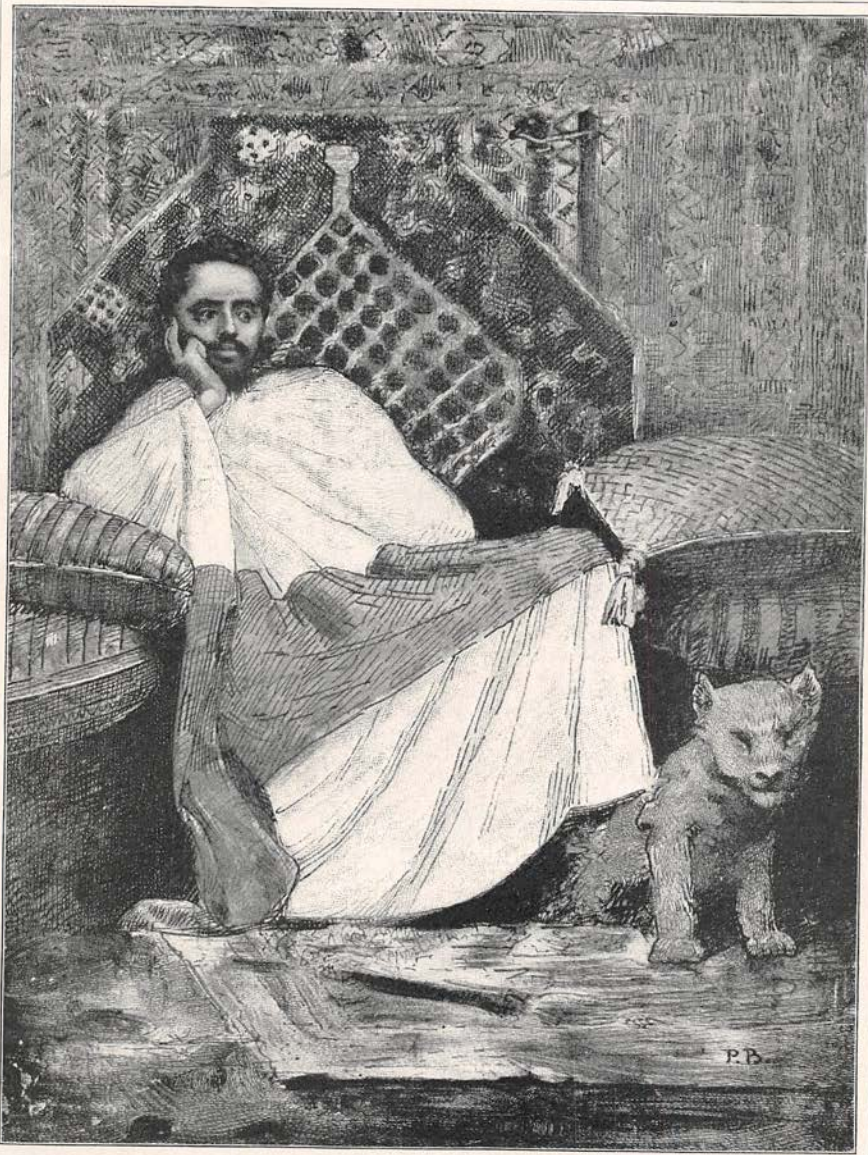
"The country abounds in lions," he said, "both in the desert and on the mountains; but the people dislike to have Europeans hunt them, partly because a lion, when its mate is killed, becomes fierce and thirsts for human blood, partly because the Abyssinians have a superstitious reverence for the lion that amounts almost to worship. When a native makes his way through a region where lions are known to be, he goes forward talking to the invisible animals, assuring them of his profound respect, of his desire to serve them, of his admiration for their courage, for their beauty, and so forth, and humbly begging for safe conduct on his journey. A story is told of a post-carrier who was trotting along across the desert beside his laden camel, when suddenly an immense lion appeared before him. The man prostrated himself in fear, and then, rising timidly again, explained to the lion that he meant no harm, but was only a poor servant carrying letters down to the coast. 'See, your honour,' he went on, opening one of the mail-bags, 'there is nothing here that you want; I have no meat at all, nothing but papers.' And the lion, so it is said, having heard the man's story, lifted his nose with an approving sniff and walked off."

There are many Abyssinians, however, who have not this awe of the lion, but will

go against him willingly, attacking him with only the spear, and often even so coming off victorious. They delight also in elephant hunting, and go into the forest in bands, pursuing the great beasts fearlessly with only their spears and ordinary rifles. And although they slay many elephants in these hunts, it must be said that the elephants

also slay many of them, and of ten who go in after ivory perhaps only five come out.

Full of original ways is Menelik. If a chief has displeased him in some slight manner, he calls him to the palace and settles the score at once with a heavy cane. He does not rebuke the offender, nor put him to public shame; but, in a truly fatherly



THE RAS MAKONNEN, A FAMOUS ABYSSINIAN GENERAL AND COUSIN OF MENELIK.

Painted from life by Paul Euffet.

way, gives him a sound beating with his own strong hands, and the chief departs the better for it. Again, instead of getting reports about happenings in the city from his policemen or other subordinates, he finds out what is going on himself with the help of a powerful pair of field-glasses. With these in hand, he spends many hours in a tower built for the purpose, from which he can sweep the principal streets and open places. And as the people never know when the Emperor may be watching them, they are careful what they do.

Then he is constantly supervising all that goes on in the palace, making his tour of inspection at all times of the day or night through the narrow streets and among the countless little straw-covered build-

ings that compose the palace—for this is really only an agglomeration of separate structures, a small city within itself, with a population of three or four thousand. Now he stops at the kitchen, which is a building by itself, and sees what the cooks are doing. Now he looks in at the treasure-house, where the gold and precious things of the kingdom are guarded; now at the saddler's and blacksmith's; now he watches the women making hydromel, and now the children chanting their reading lessons in dull sing-song. Or, again, he walks through the gardens, where acres of fruit trees are growing, many of them specially imported from Europe. He loves every detail of gardening, and is particularly interested in experiments in irrigation, fertilising, and the like. If a



AN ABYSSINIAN CAVALRYMAN ON THE WAR-PATH.

Painted from life by Paul Buffet.

Gatling gun arrives from abroad, he must set it up with his own hands and understand every detail of its working. If his watch gets out of order, he must take it apart himself and find out what the trouble is and how to remedy it. When he first saw a pair of European shoes he insisted upon having them taken apart piece by piece, so that he might have another pair made like them. When a visitor once suggested to him that these were details which he might safely leave to the care of others, Menelik replied: "If I did not look after these things myself, the waste would be enormous. The time will come, I hope, when I shall be able to leave less important things to those about me, but now nothing is unimportant."

One result of this untiring interest and

activity is that Menelik sleeps only three or four hours a day—he has no time to sleep more. He is exceedingly fond of games, especially those calling for bodily skill, and he often joins himself in the dangerous sport of javelin-throwing, in which horsemen going at full speed hurl lances at one another, often at the risk of life or limb. He is fond of rifle-shooting also; and formerly he used to amuse himself by playing with three full-grown lions which were allowed to roam free about the palace grounds, to the great disquietude of visitors. “Do they never kill anyone?” asked a European.

“Yes,” answered Menelik, “they do occasionally; but whenever one of the lions kill a man, we kill the lion.” He spoke of it as a matter of trivial moment. At the time of the great famine, about eight years ago, however, Menelik had them all killed, saying that he could not bear to feed wild beasts while his people were dying of hunger.

When Monsieur Buffet was in Abyssinia the Emperor had a young pet elephant that was allowed to wander about the city and pick up food as it pleased. This habit of the elephant's gave Monsieur Buffet a fine surprise one evening, and nearly frightened his cook into convulsions, for just as they were about to begin their evening meal, a black form appeared in the doorway of the cabin, and before anyone knew what was happening, everything eatable on the table had disappeared, including a dish of potatoes, an omelet, and an excellent chicken. Having thus satisfied his appetite, the elephant started to withdraw, but could not get through the door for the height of his head, and in his struggles to get out he all but carried off the fragile structure, like a big straw hat resting on his shoulders. When Menelik heard of this adventure he laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks. The elephant has since been sent as a gift to the President of France, and is now kept in the Paris Jardin des Plantes.

One visitor, observing that Menelik was exceedingly fond of playing draughts, told him about the game of billiards, and suggested that he should have a table brought to the palace.

“No,” said Menelik; “if it is as fascinating a game as you say, I will not have it here, because I should waste too much time playing it.”

Another traveller presented the Emperor with a phonograph, which Menelik studied with the greatest interest. “This brings Europe into Africa,” he said, much pleased;

“this is a new way of writing, so that you read with your ears instead of with your eyes.”

The traveller went on to speak of the Röntgen rays, and said that he would have brought an apparatus for producing them had he not been warned that the Abyssinian priests would object to it. “That is not true,” said Menelik. “I should be glad to have such an apparatus; we are no longer where we were twenty years ago.”

Menelik's broad-mindedness and appreciation of the value to his country of knowledge from without is shown by the welcome accorded to Europeans visiting his country, and by the fact that several Europeans have filled posts of importance in his service.

One of the best times for seeing Menelik and his chief men is at the weekly gathering at the palace, the Sunday feasting, when the Emperor literally feeds his people. At ten o'clock in the morning, after the religious service, the great pillared dining-room is crowded with men (no women are received). They come in two hundred at a time, and seat themselves in groups, cross-legged, on the floor, heads bare, feet bare, some wearing a silken tunic under the *chemma*—these the richer ones—others wearing the *chemma* alone, and each showing more or less of his body as his social standing allows, for in Abyssinia, in proportion as a man is accounted proud and great he covers up his body; and so it is that Menelik alone, in all the gathering, wears over his *chemma* a black burnoose (a hooded cape reaching to the ankles), and shoes upon his feet (made in France), and a ribbon around his head, and lifts a fold of his *chemma* so as to hide the lower part of his face. Not that Menelik attaches great importance to pomps and ceremonies—indeed, he often laughs at them—but this is a custom of the country.

And on this occasion custom requires the Emperor to sit alone on an *alga*, a curtained and cushioned divan, spread with Persian tapestries. In a circle on the floor, guarding this divan, sit the generals, but rise to their feet whenever the Emperor makes sign that he will put food into his mouth, it being a matter of strict etiquette that no one shall look upon his superior when he is in the act of eating. Having risen, the generals hold up their *chemmas* with zealous care before their faces, thus forming from hand to hand a screen of white and red (the colours of the *chemmas*) that hides the Emperor both from the generals themselves and from the mass of the company, sitting outside their circle, while the Emperor takes bread or meat.

Meanwhile attendants are moving about from group to group distributing hydromel (honey wine) and bread. The latter is served in long, flat, oval vessels with a hollow at the centre filled with a sort of pepper sauce. One vessel of bread serves for each group, each man cutting away a chunk from the loaf and dipping it into the common well of sauce. Then great pieces of beef are brought around, quite raw, and each man cuts off a piece to his liking, and stripping it into shreds, swallows it thus with the bread. The quantity of raw beef that an Abyssinian can dispose of on such an occasion is surprising. If need be, he can live for days without meat, getting on quite well with a handful of flour, some dried peas, and a bit of pepper for his day's rations.

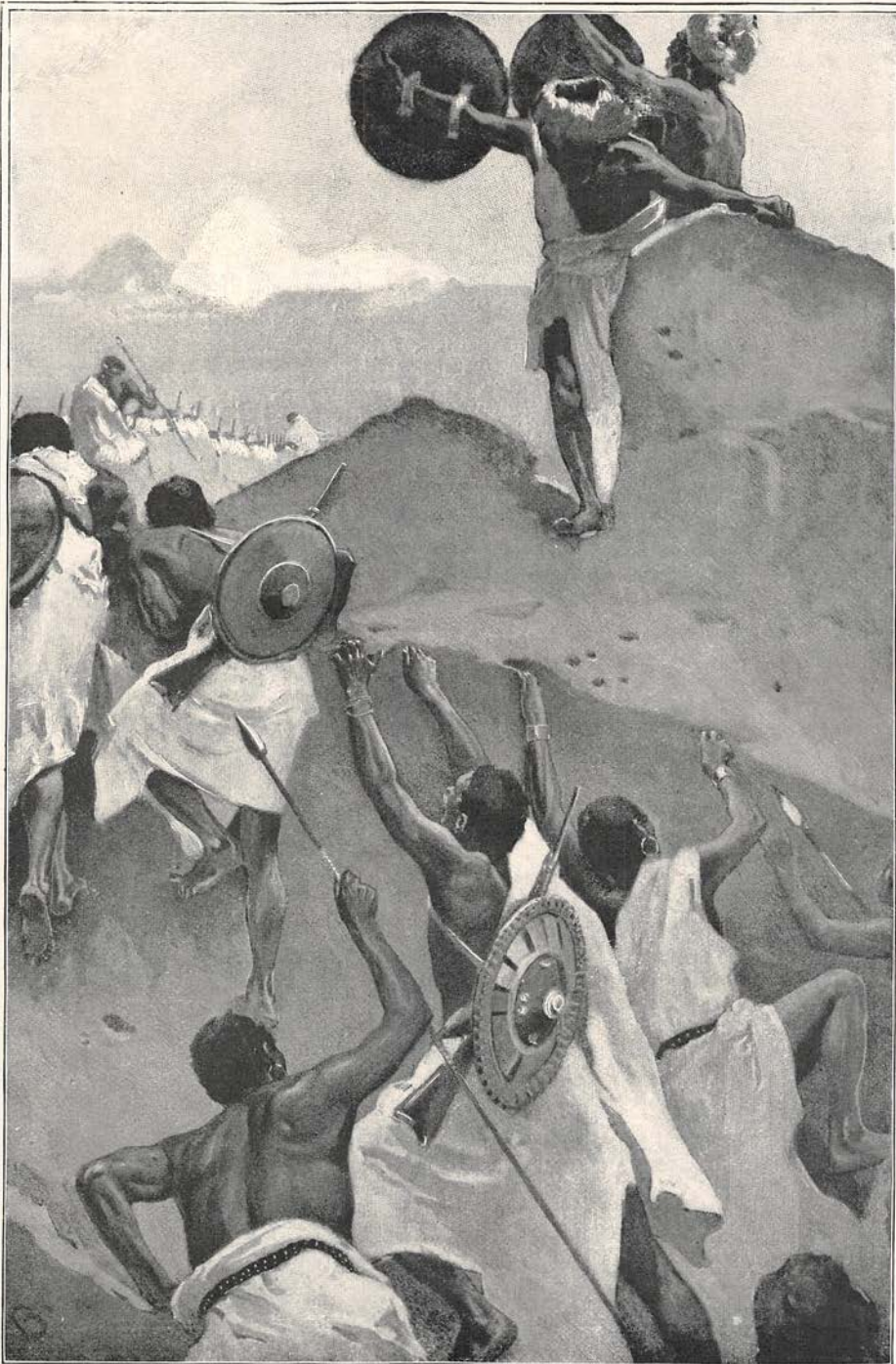
But, when the chance offers, he can eat as much meat in a day as a European would eat in ten.

The Sunday feasting occupies a great part of the day, the Emperor remaining seated on his *alja* until all who care to come have been fed, often five or six hours. While he waits he talks freely with those sitting about him, especially with any Europeans who may be present, discussing with keenest interest the latest news from the distant civilised world, and asking endless questions as to recent discoveries and inventions. Most charming in his manner at such times, his voice is sweet and insinuating, his eye full of intelligence, and altogether he impresses the visitor as a man of unusual force and understanding.



PAUL BUFFET'S CARAVAN CROSSING THE KASAM RIVER ON THE WAY FROM THE COAST TO ADDIS ABEBA.

Drawn by George Varian after a sketch from life by Paul Buffet.



THE ATTACK OF THE ABYSSINIAN WARRIORS ON THE REAR OF THE ITALIAN
ARMY AT AMBA ALAGUI.

DRAWN BY E. L. BLUMENSCHEN.