

The Fight for Abyssinia and Abyssinia's Protest to the League of Nations.

By A. F. Neumann.

Italy's endeavours to create a colonial empire at any price have led to Abyssinia's becoming within recent times the source of almost chronic conflicts between England, France and Italy, i. e., between the countries participating in the treaty of 1906. The significance, the eventual results of these conflicts will be in no way mitigated by the fact that Abyssinia, as far as England and France are concerned, is not only an object of their policy but also a trump of high value in their play for gains which have nothing in common with Abyssinia.

England has a very close interest in the Lake of Tana and in the Blue Nile, because these are very important for the watering of the cotton-plantations owned by the English in the Sudan and Egypt. It is naturally difficult to estimate whether England is really so very interested to procure immediately from the Abyssinian Government the permission to build sluices on the Nile and a highway from the frontier of the Sudan as far as the Lake of Tana. It is still remarkable that in December of 1925 the English quite unexpectedly supported those claims of Italy which in 1919 they regarded as incompatible with their own interests and that they believe it necessary to come to agreements with Italy without the knowledge of France, despite the circumstance that it would be much more favourable to them to work with France, because the clash of interests between Great Britain and France in connection with the basin of the Nile no longer exists.

The only possible explanation is that the agreements between Italy and England are on a broader basis and that Abyssinia is

the price which England is prepared to pay to gain the support of Italy in other questions. That the solution of the problem is to be found here is proved by the coincidence of the English note of December 14th, 1925, in which Italy is promised English support of her claims in Abyssinia, and the decision of the League of Nations on December 17th, 1925, in favour of England in the Mosul question. Naturally, the English Press makes no mention of the relation between Mosul and Abyssinia. On the other hand, the problem is discussed with all the more vehemence in the French Press.

France's interests in Abyssinia are chiefly centred about the railway which connects the French port of Dshibuti with the Abyssinian Capital, Adis Ababa. This line is of decisive importance to Abyssinia's export trade and affords France an especially advantageous position in Abyssinia, both economically and politically. A division of Abyssinia, which would reduce France's sphere of influence, and the construction of a new railway, such as Italy contemplates, would destroy the monopoly held by the French Dshibuti-Adis Ababa railway. At the same time, France interests in Abyssinia are not of decisive importance, inasmuch as the whole of Abyssinia's foreign trade (export and import) amounts to no more than £2,500,000 per year. In other words, France is desirous, no less than England, of using Abyssinia as a means to an end.

Even though the reasons which govern French conduct in the Abyssinian question, may not be clear, and even though the price which France requires for its support of the Italian claims may also be unknown to us, one thing is certain: Negotiations on this point are being held between Italy and France. The Italian Press protests more and more clamorously against the French attempts at extortion and against French efforts to make the Abyssinian question dependent upon the Italian claims in Tunis and Tangiers. This connection is confirmed by the communiqué of the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs of July 4th, in which the simultaneous discussion of the Abyssinian question and "a number of Mediterranean problems" is stressed, as also by the conference between Briand and the Italian ambassador in Paris, Baron Avezano.

In bringing up the Abyssinian problem, France is not pursuing its aims in Abyssinia, but in Morocco and Tunis. France would probably be willing to pay a high price, even its consent to the Italian plans in Abyssinia, if Italy would refrain from objection to French expansion in North Africa. This in no way affects the application of the Regent of Abyssinia to the League of Nations, which application the Italian and English newspapers allege to have been instigated by France; for, as may be clearly seen from a notice which appeared in the "Temps" of July 31st, 1926, it is not in the interests of France to bring the subject to the forum of the League of Nations and to discuss it before the general public. The "Temps" writes;

"Nobody can gain by making the question complicated... it is possible that negotiations might lead to the clearing up of misunderstandings in regard to the sense and the purpose of the Anglo-Italian agreement."

In the "Temps" of August 3rd, it is stated that Chamberlain's explanations in the House of Commons regarding the agreement between England and Italy may be accepted as satisfactory, although these explanations did not alter the situation. The "Temps" must, therefore, be guided by some other motive. This is the desire to prevent the affair being settled by the League of Nations. France prefers negotiations behind the scenes to the negotiations in Geneva.

On the other hand; it is not impossible that Chamberlain's statement that England does not contemplate bring pressure to bear upon Abyssinia, was a frank one. England perhaps prefers, now that it has gained a favourable solution of the Mosul question, to leave itself a free hand in regard to Abyssinia and not to bind itself to Italy. It is within the bounds of possibility that England, in contrast to Italy, will try to find through negotiations at Geneva an expedient from the somewhat uncomfortable situation into which it has got through the intricate game it has played.

The case for Italy is a very different one. Italy's colonial policy is in a large measure decided by the question of prestige and not exclusively by the economic needs of Italian Imperialism. An important part in Italy's Abyssinian plans is played by the Italian desire to incorporate West Abyssinia in the Italian sphere of influence, in order to form a connection between Eritrea and Italian Somaliland and thus create out of Italy's colonial frag-

ments a real colony. This does not mean that Italy will be prepared to pay the price which France demands, and abandon Italian efforts at expansion in North Africa, but it means that Italy is as little inclined as France to submit the affair to the forum of the League of Nations and that it finds it preferable to carry on direct negotiations for a settlement.

Abyssinia cannot, therefore, count upon the support of any of the big powers in the League of Nations. The Abyssinian problem has also not yet been placed upon the agenda of the September Session of the League of Nations. But Abyssinia has made it clear that in case of failure it will appeal to the International Court of Arbitration at the Hague. But there again it will probable not find sanction for its claims. The League of Nations is neither able nor willing to help Abyssinia; it will only display once more its function as a tool of Imperialism.