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Index

I saw a statement in the Press a few days ago that Ras Tseama was dead. I see that is said at p. 145 about the slave traffic - also the interesting part under the head of the Railway - The Road to Jimbelle regarding the efforts of the French to capture the eastern head of the traffic - the paper that was being taken by the London firm to counter them - We ought to be able to have done this for E.A.P. a good deal of trade which would otherwise find its way to the N. railway & a separate deep

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A very interesting report

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Printed for the use of the Foreign Office. March 1911.

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ABYSSINIA.

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Annual Report, 1910.

[7952]

(No. 11.)

Mr. Thesiger to Sir Edward Grey.—(Received March 4.)

Sir,

Adis Ababa, February 10, 1911.

I HAVE the honour to forward herewith my general report on Abyssinia for the year 1910.

I have, &c.

WILFRED G. THESIGER.

Enclosure.

Annual Report on Abyssinia for the year 1910.

Political Situation.

SINCE his last illness, in November 1909, the Emperor Menelek has been incapacitated from all work; although to some extent conscious of what goes on around him, and capable of recognising persons known to him, his last stroke deprived him of all power of speech and almost of motion. He has thus been unable to take any share in the Government of the country which passed into the hands of Ras Tessama, as Regent for Lij Yasu, and of the Council of Ministers. Two influences were, however, at work which deprived the Government of a large portion of their freedom of action; namely, the power of the Empress behind the throne and the belief that the Emperor might recover and demand an account of their actions.

Paralysed by this thought, and knowing the influence which the Empress Taitou exercised over the mind of her husband, the Regent allowed her to take into her own hands the direction of the Government. Nothing was done without her consent, and all appointments to the various governorships were filled by her, under the Emperor's seal, often without the mere formality of consulting the Ministers. Clever and ambitious to the last degree, and with all the power which her hold over the administration and finances of the country placed within her grasp, the Empress soon began to form a strong party of her own with the intention of securing for herself the Regency and the ultimate reversion of the kingdom for her own family. The strained relations which existed between Ras Tessama and Ras Walde Giorgis, the two most powerful chiefs of the Shean party, to a large extent disconcerted the adherents of Lij Yasu and favoured the Queen's policy, as it was unknown whether his repeated refusals to come to Adis Ababa arose from a disinclination to place himself in the power of the Empress or from an intention, when a fitting occasion should arise, of refusing to recognise Ras Tessama as Regent. This period of uncertainty was utilised by the Empress to strengthen her hold on the north by giving to her brother, Ras Wajje, Governor of Mijji, supreme power over all Tigre, where many minor governorships had already been filled by her adherents. Her position was now a very strong one: Tigre and Begemder were in the hands of her brother and nephew; Ras Hailu, of Gojjam, had been married to her cousin; and Dejas Balza, of Harrar, was utilising all the resources of one of the richest districts of Abyssinia to supply her with arms and money. Had the Emperor died at this juncture it is very possible that the Empress would have made a stroke for power, and have endeavoured to supplant Lij

Yasu, by placing her nephew, Ras Guksa, the son of Ras Wolye, on the throne. So long as Menelek lived, however, open action of this kind was impossible, as the source of her power lay in the reverence with which the Emperor was regarded, and any open violation of his known wishes would have precipitated the crisis she was anxious to postpone. The feeling, however, among the Shoa chiefs was growing so strong for restraint, and the persistent refusal of the Empress to allow Dejaz Tabor to return to the capital, and his victorious campaign against Dejaz Woldemar in Tigre, and her efforts to break up his army and oblige him to hand over his artillery to her brother, Ras Wolye, strengthened their determination to check any further encroachment on the power of the Government. News also reached them that Ras Guksa had been sending emissaries to the Soudan to find out how the possibility of his own succession to the throne would be regarded there, and immediate action was determined on. On the 11th March, the principal Shoa chiefs went to the Abuna and accused Ras Tessama of having broken his oath to the Emperor by allowing the Empress to usurp the power which had been confided to him personally to use for the benefit of Liy Yasu, and insisted upon her immediate withdrawal from politics and a restoration of the state of things as decreed by Menelek. The necessary steps for the maintenance of order and the prevention of any attempt at resistance having been carefully taken in advance, the Empress and her adherents, finding themselves isolated and outnumbered at every point, were obliged to surrender unconditionally to the terms imposed by the Shoa party. These were that the Empress herself should withdraw from public life, that the appointments she had made should be cancelled, and that the troops which she had collected in the capital should be sent to their own districts. This was at once done, and the Government, using their victory with moderation, were soon in a position to release all such of her relations and chiefs who had been arrested or confined to their houses as a precautionary measure.

Although this coup d'Etat had been peacefully effected in the capital the situation in the north remained a source of considerable anxiety. Messengers were at once dispatched to all important centres to inform the various governors of what had occurred, and to summon them to notify their adherence to the new Government. The murder of one of these messengers, Dejaz Tessama by name, by the officers of Ras Guksa, nephew to the Queen and Governor of Begemdir, showed that this anxiety was not groundless, and that any imprudence might bring about a revolt in the north under the leadership of Ras Wolye, brother to the Queen and father to Ras Guksa, who had been at once arrested and put in chains. The likelihood of such an event was increased by the fact that there was a long outstanding feud between Ras Wolye and Ras Mikael, the father of Liy Yasu, by a daughter of the Emperor Menelek, and also that little reliance could be placed upon the prudence of the former, who was known to suffer from periodical fits of illness which much resembled insanity.

The Government, therefore, appointed Ras Walde Giorgis, Governor of Tigre and the northern provinces, and ordered him to proceed at once to Debra Tabor with a strong force, and settle all the questions in dispute between the two Rasas, and at the same time to install in their various districts the officers nominated by the Government to replace those who had been illegally appointed by the Empress.

Giorgis, however, to distance and other causes, Ras Walde Giorgis only arrived at Debra Tabor in July, and for some months Ras Wolye refused to meet Dejaz Lu Beger, who was sent to settle the disputes between him and Ras Mikael. In the end, however, the patience and tact of the Government delegates was rewarded, and Ras Wolye consented to accompany them to Adis Ababa, where he arrived in November, the lesser chiefs were not slow to follow his example, and in a short time all had submitted to the Government.

Ras Wolye, however, left all his power under the leadership of his son Dejaz Anand who, whose line of action is as yet undetermined. If he obeys the orders of the Government and comes in, all probability of immediate trouble in the north may be regarded as over, and even in the contrary case it is most unlikely that his example of resistance to the central authority would be contagious.

The Government can thus be congratulated on having escaped from a very serious danger, which at one time threatened to divide Abyssinia into two factions whose rival claims could only have been decided by an appeal to force.

Ras Wolye's submission must have taken from the Empress her last hope of a return to power, and, intrigue as she may, the death of Menelek will probably see her confined in a fortress or a convent for the rest of her life.

The settlement of this question, however, must be regarded as the sole instance during the past year in which the Government, or rather the Shoa party, have

acted with unanimity or displayed firmness and tact. In all other matters this vacillation, weakness, and corruption have been only too apparent. The illness of the Emperor Menelek deprived Abyssinia of the only man who had foresight enough to perceive in a certain measure the needs of his country and at the same time sufficient strength of character to impose his will, so that under his guidance some progress was made towards civilization. His power was gained by the sword and was maintained by force, and, while never hesitating when necessary to apply to the utmost the somewhat cruel justice of the country, his judgment was often tempered by striking instances of mercy, which gained for him at once the love and fear of his subjects. The unification of the country and the task of forcing the feudal lords to recognize a central authority could only have been accomplished by a man of exceptional ability both as a soldier and a statesman, and for the maintenance and continuance of his work Abyssinia needs a ruler of equal capacity.

Ras Tessama, however, in spite of his well-merited reputation as a general, lacks both moral courage and intellectual ability, and during the past year he has shown clearly that he has not the courage of his own opinions, which are generally those of the last person with whom he has conversed, and consequently any decision which he has come to one day is liable to be reversed on the next. This weakness of which he has the excuse that he is only Regent and therefore cannot act without the consent of the council of Ministers, or without feeling sure that what he undertakes might have ordered would be approved by the Emperor Menelek if he were still in possession of his former mental vigour.

The inevitable result has been that all State business has practically come to a standstill, as no individual Minister will ever accept the responsibility of giving a definite decision in the affairs of his own department without referring the matter to the Regent, who, in his turn, invariably transfers the burden to the shoulders of the council, each member of which knows full well that, should he advocate any change in the existing order of things, his opinion will certainly be used against him by jealous colleagues or would-be holders of his office, so that as an advisory body the council is utterly useless, and it may be fairly said that since the Emperor's final illness there has been no Government. Another marked feature of the present regime is its corruption. Here, again, Ras Tessama is largely to blame. Avaricious to an exceptional degree even for Abyssinia, he has used his position to amass as much money as possible, and no case has any chance of being heard by him unless preliminary presents, in the shape of money, ivory, or other articles, have been sent in proportion to the wealth of the party interested. Although the custom of presents has always been customary in Abyssinia, it is only of late years that the practice has openly assumed the character of direct bribery, and in this respect Ras Tessama's venality has become proverbial among all classes.

With such an example it is not astonishing that all the Ministers, with the exception of Fitsurari Hapta Giorgis, are not only open to bribery, but have learned to expect them as a right, and look upon their official position merely as a means of securing their own pecuniary advantages. It must be remembered that in Abyssinia Ministers receive no salaries, and if they possess no districts of their own, those underhand gifts are their sole means of improving their positions in a country where favours have to be purchased. Although these bribes are as a rule only offered and accepted in private cases, they are bound to react on the political situation, especially at a moment like the present, when no one can say into whose hands the power will ultimately fall, or how it will be exercised on the Emperor's death.

Government with a council of Ministers under a regency has provided for the men in whose hands the power is supposed to rest a facile excuse for evading all personal responsibility in State affairs, and at the same time ample opportunity for enriching themselves at the expense of the masses in private or semi-official cases, whether European or Abyssinian.

Under these conditions it is not surprising that considerable dissatisfaction against the Government exists among the lesser chiefs and the poorer classes, and that there was, towards the close of the year, a tentative effort made to induce the Shoa chiefs to again unite in protesting against the state into which the Government had been allowed to fall. It was found, however, that the individual interests of too many persons were concerned in the maintenance of the existing state of affairs and the danger to themselves, in the event of their protest not succeeding, induced the would-be reformers to abandon their intentions.

The close of 1910 therefore left the Government established with every prospect of remaining in power for some time to come. It is, however, generally believed that

the death of the Emperor will bring about a crisis, as Ras Tessaama will be directly responsible for the Government of the country, and, no longer being able to shelter himself behind the inviolability of Menelik's seal, will have to define his own position. It is certain that the Ministry will not allow him to assume anything like the Imperial power either for himself or for Lij Yasu, but will endeavour to keep the crown in a subordinate position to the council, whose sole idea of government is as I have already shown, the evasion of all responsibility and the furtherance of their own individual interests; and it is doubtful whether the Regent has sufficient force of character even to attempt to resist their pretensions and to re-establish in some measure the one-man form of government which I believe to be alone suited to the stage of development in which Abyssinia finds itself.

A continuation of the present condition of affairs is obviously insufficient for any length of time, as it must inevitably reduce the country to a state of political anarchy, and it is earnestly to be hoped that the more serious men among the Shon chiefs like Bitwaded Lal Seged, Fitaurari Hapta Giorgis, Ras Walde Giorgis, and Ras Abata will, when the time comes, insist, either by supporting or by replacing Ras Tessaama, on the restoration of a central authority with definite powers and responsibilities.

Internal Affairs.

As regards the purely internal affairs of Abyssinia during the past year, there has been, with the exception of the already mentioned incident, but little to note.

The Somalis and Boran on the east and south have been quiet, and although there have been various reports of rising on a small scale among the Shankalias and Gallas in the district west of the Omo River, as far as can be gathered from the contradictory rumours which reach the capital, whatever fighting took place there was of small importance, and arose out of questions of tribute.

The general disposition of these subject races towards the Abyssinian Government is, from the point of view of the latter, unsatisfactory, and very naturally so. The Abyssinians look upon them merely as a source of revenue, and although as a general rule the taxation they impose upon them is not too oppressive, when any sudden cause arises they take from them without payment whatever they may want in the way of cattle, horses, mules, and food-stuffs. This injustice reacts upon the country in two ways, as it prevents these tribes, which are the sole agriculturists and cattle-breeders Abyssinia possesses, from taking any interest in the augmentation of their crops or herds, which under better circumstances, and if exportation had been encouraged, would provide a fertile source of revenue for the Government, as too simple as evidence of wealth merely serves to awaken the rapacity of the nearest Abyssinian authority, and it also creates in the centre of the kingdom a dissatisfied and a conquered population, who are aliens to and also outnumber the ruling caste.

Such a population can only be kept down by a strong hand, and it was hitherto one of the main objects of the Government to prevent the Gallas, Somalis, Danakils, and Shankalias possessing fire-arms. The laxity, however, of the present Government in this respect is only too evident, and their negligence is gradually creating a source of future danger to themselves and of considerable annoyance to their neighbours.

Arms Traffic.

There is no doubt that the restrictions imposed upon the passage of fire-arms through Jibuti have for many years been a mere farce as regards the check they impose upon this trade in Abyssinia, and do little more than secure for France a practical monopoly of the sale of rifles. It is true that no rifle can be imported without a declaration from the Ethiopian authorities that they are required for the service of the Government, but once that formality is complied with there is no means of controlling the use which that Government may make of them. It was quite customary, even in Menelik's day, to give some trader a commission to purchase so many thousand rifles of a certain pattern, and to give him for his trouble in arranging the business a certain percentage of the rifles for his own use. The trader in question would then naturally carry these rifles to the best market, and, although the Abyssinian regulations would prevent any open and direct trade to the Somalis and Gallas, the venality of their local officials and the inefficiency of their police open a dozen roads by which these arms can pass into the hands of their would-be purchasers at five and six times their original value. Resistance in these cases is unavailing, as the authorities decline altogether to abandon a practice which

experience has proved to be so advantageous to themselves personally, and deny the whole transaction, insisting that the whole sale of rifles passed into the hands of the Government, and proof to the contrary is unobtainable. Again, they can also point to the laws which exist to prevent traders established here from selling rifles, and it is true that at the present moment it is extremely difficult for any unauthorised person to buy fire-arms, either singly or in small quantities, but at the same time if any merchant desires to embark in outlying districts in the lucrative trade of selling running on a large scale it is only a question of "pushover," and he can obtain every facility to do so without fear of detection, as the officials who should prevent it are certain to have become his partners in the business.

Although no definite statistics are available as regards the number of rifles in this country it is certain that it is out of all proportion to the Abyssinian population, who would be supposed to have the right to possess fire-arms only for actual warfare.

Unless the continual supply of rifles to the Abyssinian Government through Jibuti can be checked, there is no chance whatever of preventing firearms from being freely sold to the Somalis and other frontier tribes as the Government have neither the will nor the power to suppress this trade, and are indifferent to the facilities which even they are now obliged to give to the unauthorised trader. It is to be regretted that the Government have not yet taken any steps to prevent the sale of arms among these tribes, and that they are not more generally and more judiciously taking precautionary measures which would be of great benefit to the country.

The outlook, therefore, in this respect is most apprehensive, and there seems little prospect of any improvement in the situation. The Government are naturally losing the power of enforcing its decrees in the outlying districts where the officers do almost exactly as they please, and the latter, knowing that the terms of their office may be put short of any demand by orders of recall from Addis Ababa, are all intent of making the most of their opportunities to make money, and, as gun-running is the most profitable form of investment, it would be surprising if most of them were not engaged in this trade. The misadministration of the Government and the corruption of the Ministers afford them every facility. Traders like M. Tsamoum obtain a commission to buy for the Government so many thousand rifles, by means of bribes they receive permission to retain so many rifles for themselves, the Ministers with whom they transact the business also receive a certain quantity, these few parties do to some extent on the same conditions, though nominally for use of Government troops, and each of them sells upon the most favourable conditions until eventually the rifles reach the hands of the Gallas, Somalis or Shankalias. The Ras and other Ministers naturally object to this last phase, but cannot take effective measures to stop it without making the disclosure of the short they themselves have taken in the trade, and so content themselves with issuing orders which there is no one to enforce, and with denouncing and punishing any Galla or other unauthorised person who is found with a rifle. As, however, the latter are arming themselves with the utmost intention of rising against the Abyssinians, they make up for the loss of their arms, and for every one taken from them they purchase a score.

The Railway.

With regard to commercial affairs of general interest the most important is the railway. The negotiations between the French Committee and the Ethiopian Government for the last part of the year were very complicated and kept as far as possible secret. The principal point of discussion appears, however, to have turned on the question of the ultimate control of the line, the French Government insisting that the management should be devolved upon Paris, the Abyssinians having a seat on the board, while the latter wished to reserve this proceeding.

Many months earlier seemed to have reached a deadlock and any real progress was suspended. Later in the year, however, work was resumed, and the first section of 96 miles from Dessi Dawa was given out to the contractor. The work has proceeded nevertheless very slowly, alterations were made in the plans, and the labour slowly expended was necessarily thrown away, when it was finally decided to carry the railway clear to the mountains instead of out into the desert, again an enormous yet small sum was responsible for an unprecedented rate of advance among the employees which practically stopped the work altogether. No mile has as yet been laid over this section, although all the necessary material are at Dessi Dawa.

The reports of independent witnesses who have seen these works are unanimous

in commenting on the mismanagement which apparently prevails, the unnecessary number of highly paid officials, and the small result which they have to show for year's work. The railway officials are, however, more optimistic, and express themselves satisfied with the progress made, which they declare will shortly be greatly accelerated, and maintain that this section will be open for traffic at the end of 1911.

If it would seem certain that, by bringing the line closer to the mountains, the expenses for bridging and culverts will be greatly increased, and it is certain that considerable difficulty will be experienced in dealing with the torrents that come down from the hills in the rainy season, and which are found to do considerable damage every year. The most favourable estimates of the time necessary to bring the railway to the capital vary between four and six years.

The Abyssinians, however, are, I believe, fully determined not to allow construction between Adis Ababa and the Hawash River until the railway has reached the latter point, and they also wish to build this section themselves. If they were to do so it would, considering the supply of labour at their command, certainly be to the advantage of the company, providing always that proper supervision was maintained by the French engineers over the work. This point is, however, still under discussion, and, as the question of the ultimate control would appear rather to have been passed over than definitely settled, there seems to be plenty of room for further arrangements between the two Governments in the future, all of which must depend on the ultimate completion of the line.

In considering the ultimate advantages both political and commercial, which the French hope to gain by this railway scheme it must be remembered that they cannot come into force for another five or six years during which time the country is certain to pass through a very severe crisis, with results which it is impossible to foresee. The political side of the railway question, and the influence which it may give to France, must therefore be studied with the attention it more closely defines the commercial side, however, must be faced at once. The line of the French railway is to draw all the commerce into Adis Ababa and export it to Jibuti, and to tap the trade of the east and south by caravan routes leading into various points on the line. These districts, however, are the least productive, and, as a commercial speculation, the line is doomed to failure. To make the railway a financial success it will be absolutely necessary to draw in the trade from the west and south, and to the capital, from the districts in fact over which Great Britain holds the rights for another railway construction.

In this they are aided by the preference the present Government have for seeing the various articles of trade, such as ivory and rubber, come into Adis Ababa and pay their duties here, as they can directly control the export and get into their own pockets the customs duty and the various forms of contributions in the shape of tolls and bribes for expediting delivery and so forth, instead of allowing it to go to agents and officials on the Gambela road. The latter is, however, the proper outlet for the western districts, and it is more interesting to see that this trade is not diverted from its natural port. For example, rubber, which during the past year was exported via Jibuti, could be dispatched via Gambela at a saving of 100 shillings and a similar economy could be effected with regard to the ivory.

It should therefore be our policy to offer every inducement to the traders to send out their goods by Gambela at the same time supporting whatever merchandise they require for the western trade by this route.

The Gambela

There can be, of course, no question of railway construction, which would be a most costly and unnecessary, if that is a word, required in the present condition of the main road to Adis Ababa and of the branch roads to the Gambela, before the September the 1st had come to an agreement with Ras Tessaema for the building of two bridges in the Gambela district, the officers from the South, who should also inspect the whole road to the capital and report on what bridges or ferries would be necessary to keep the whole road open during the rainy season for caravan traffic. The Regent, however, did not inform the council of this arrangement, and when Captain Abercrombie arrived at Gambela he was refused permission to carry out his work. These difficulties arose from intrigues on the part of certain persons to whose interest it was that this road should not be opened, and it was easy for them to sow

on the suspicions of the council and to induce them to oppose Ras Tessaema. After considerable discussion the matter was arranged and permission granted to bridge the Sor and Birbir Rivers, the location consenting to allow the Abyssinian Government to pay for the materials and skilled labour brought from the Soudan, and also the salary of the engineer officer.

This, it is to be hoped, will be the beginning of the proper opening up of this route, which should then be able to compete with the railway and divert a large portion of the trade through British territory. The bulk of this trade consists of rubber, hides, coffee, wax, civet, and ivory. The rubber will, I believe, be exported via Gambela in 1911, and that the warehouses which the Soudan Government contemplate building at Gambela are completed the main difficulties which now prevent the export of hides by this road should be overcome, and increased facilities will be given for the storage of coffee previous to the opening of the exportation season.

The Bank of Abyssinia have also been authorised to open a branch at Gambela, and if an arrangement could be come to with the Soudan Government to allow their consular at Gambela to act as consular also, these two innovations would add very much to the possibility of freeing the local traders from the difficulties they now meet with by checking the mismanagement which exists in this district, by preventing the imposition of illegal taxes and by protecting the interests of honest firms.

At present most of the business in these parts is in the hands of a ring of Abyssinian officials and gun-running traders, whose interest it is to prevent all development and to exclude all rivalry. These abuses, however, which impede all honest trade, must tend to disappear with the opening up of the country.

Every effort should therefore be made during the next two years, in co-operation with the Soudan Government, to effect the necessary changes to this end, which, once completed, would enable us to compete on favourable terms with the French railway for the Abyssinian trade.

Southern Frontier

As regards the southern frontier, the close of the year left the question of the new boundary still unsettled. Our main difficulties in this respect arise from the claims of the Emperor, who, whatever his faults were, was a man who would listen to reason and was open to argument. The arrangements made with him by which Major Gwyn was authorised to proceed to the frontier and commence the work of delimitation in the event of the Abyssinian commission not joining him, were, as is usual, verbal, and are now absolutely denied by the Government, who declare that the Emperor never gave permission for Major Gwyn to go to the frontier, but not to commence work until invited by the Abyssinian commission. They consequently maintain that we broke the original agreement, and delimited the frontier alone and solely with a view to our interests, and demand either a new joint commission or the permanent maintenance of the old line.

It was, of course, impossible to accede to either of these demands and the only line open was to insist that the Emperor consented to the delimitation by our commission, and to maintain that as the Abyssinians could not prevent the constant encroachments into our territory by their hunters and warriors, and had persistently broken the friendly agreement of 1907, they had made it imperative for us to insist on a new permanent line for which we were, however, prepared to give, so far as lay in our power, adequate territorial compensation.

The weak point in this argument lay in the fact that the alterations in the boundary to their favour gave them no land which they in the least coveted, and the country between any certain points which served as bases for the advance, which they thought it desirable to reserve to the Government. The real object of the Emperor's government was to give in the maintenance of the status quo, while the loss of the necessity of a permanent frontier is so big an elemental grant of an Abyssinian, and the arguments which would carry weight in any discussion with a civilized Power are thrown away on these people, who meet every attempt to argue the question in a reasonable way with a blank and obstinate stare. This has been their attitude at every meeting, and, although in private talks with individual members of the council it was possible to obtain a hesitating recognition of the fact that there was something in our arguments, and that the wells which were all important for us had no value for the Abyssinians, nevertheless, when the same point was raised before the council, their fear of accepting any responsibility would either prevent them from fully acknowledging their former views, or, if challenged, would lead them to deny altogether that they had ever had them.

The question of raids was always met by a ready acknowledgment that the frontier officers had not done their duty in the past, but that measures would be taken in future to render a repetition of these offences impossible. To a certain extent these promises have been kept, but while any agreement which leaves the security of our frontier dependent on the continued observance of such a promise is naturally susceptible to temporary observance weakens in Abyssinian eyes our argument that there has been an alteration in the line is indefensible, and complicated litigation which would be best served by a continuation of these raids in spite of the stipulations of the agreement.

With regard to Fort Harrington there should be no difficulty in transferring our right to hold this position, as the terms of the 1907 agreement state that the line runs through the summits of G. Kola, Cherra Morak, and G. Harro, which is the route it takes through G. Topras, some 7 miles south of Moyale, which is already 14 miles to the north of Fort Harrington.

This place giving to us a certain portion of the country under dispute, does not include any of the wealth which we do not already hold, and which are essential for protecting purposes.

This question was not raised during the discussions, except as far as was necessary to show the Abyssinians that we had no intention of occupying Fort Harrington, as Major Gwynne's line would give us the district, and it was desirable to keep the discussion to the main issue.

Difficulties will probably always occur in this frontier with regard to the interpretation of the terms of our agreement, in order to escape from Abyssinian taxation, and it will be necessary to make a line approaching on this point both for the future and the past, the claims put forward by the Abyssinian Government for the country of the south in Wogera, an account of that district being inhabited by Danak for many years past, cannot be maintained, as the country was settled by the Emperor's consent to the 1907 agreement, but the local Government maintain that the question of returning these Danak was left open for future discussion, but according to Captain Wood (see No. 25, p. 25 of Confidential Volume, "Abyssinia," Part VIII) it was on the latter situation this was not so.

If the Abyssinian Government were prepared to discuss the frontier question with a view to arriving at a solution satisfactory for both sides, this point could probably be settled by giving temporary compensation for the loss of revenue from taxes in the region of their country, and by making them that in future Danak settlements should not be interfered with so long as they committed no offences against the British.

The want of the present Government, however, with their lack of responsibility and their unwillingness to change which their ignorance prevents them from understanding clearly makes the question very difficult to deal with.

There is, however, no doubt that with time and patience a satisfactory solution will be arrived at, but in the meantime it will be necessary to take a strong line on the frontier. The only way of dealing with the Danak settlements as can be captured, and to ensure that the concession of the frontier is real and lasting.

The Danak

The Danak are a nomadic people who have remained in the same position since they were first mentioned in the early part of the 19th century. They are a very strong one, and hold their own in the position that by their latest agreement, the revenue derived from the rubber plantations has been what was formerly received from the rubber company, while the protection and regulation of the rubber plantations were altogether done away with, leaving an important industry to be exploited in an absolutely careless way for the benefit of one man.

The efforts, however, of the rubber company to obtain a reversion of their own and the positions of the merchants for free trade in rubber have not, however, been entirely without effect, and many of the chiefs whose districts produce rubber are working to obtain a treaty agreement, which will enable them to participate in the profits arising from this industry.

The gross profits of the rubber régime during the past year amounted to about 50,000, of which some 20,000 can be counted off for working expenses, freight, purchase of rubber, and Government dues, leaving a clear profit of 30,000.

The financial position, however, of M. Ydlibi is at the moment not a strong one, as the expenses of his lawsuit against the former company, overdrafts on the bank, and large presents to the Government have practically swallowed up his credit balance. So strong, however, is his position to attribute the necessary officials his concession is necessary, but the claims of his rivals have afforded the Government a good excuse for increasing their demands upon his purse, and it is possible that in the end M. Ydlibi will find his position untenable.

At present, however, in his favour is that he has advanced to the Government the money necessary for the purchase of the machinery for the cartridge factory, securing in return a receipt for the next four years rubber duties due by him to the Government at the rate of 4,700 per annum.

These receipts have been deposited at the bank and the machinery has been purchased, and is due to arrive at Jibuti in February 1911.

If the Government cancel his concession before the expiration of the four years they will have to pay back this sum, and their known dislike to paying out large amounts from the treasury may induce them to hesitate in doing so, but other arrangements could be made, and general opinion holds that the rubber régime cannot last out another year, but must give way to free trade.

General Situation

In looking back over the events of the year it must be acknowledged that the position of Abyssinia at the close of 1910 was not satisfactory. The Government has fallen into a state of utter disorganisation which, while profitable to the few men who hold the power, is ruinous to the best interests of the country, the consequences being that gun-running has been allowed to spread all over the outlying districts, with the result that all the subject tribes are fast becoming armed; that the central authority has been so weakened that it has become impossible to obtain a decision on any question which is not liable to be cancelled almost immediately by disputes and intrigues among the council; and that corruption has increased to an extent which makes it impossible for anyone to obtain justice or satisfaction without bribing heavily all the officials concerned.

It is universally acknowledged both by Europeans and Abyssinians that this state of things cannot continue and that a crisis will arise when the Emperor dies. Given, however, the recent improvement in his health there seems no reason why he should not linger on for years, and while this was at first an advantage as it gave time for the country to recognise Lij Yasu as the heir to the throne, it is fast becoming a disaster as, by leaving the power without the responsibility for an indefinite time in the hands of the council, it has created a belief among the members of the latter that a central autocratic power is not only not essential but is contrary to their own individual interests. Their whole aim during the past year has been to weaken the power of the regency, in which they have been assisted by the incapacity of Ras Tessaia, and to take the executive power into their own hands. In this they have practically succeeded, but as the interests of the country are in their eyes as nothing beside their own interests, the result has been, as I have said, complete disorganisation.

It is impossible to credit them with any intention of giving up their power when the Emperor's death leaves the throne vacant for Lij Yasu, and it is more than probable that Ras Tessaia will seize this occasion to give up his authority and retire to his own country with the fortune which he has amassed during his regency.

Now for the other chiefs would support Lij Yasu it is difficult to say, but there is no doubt that the Rases will be extremely anxious to curb his power, and his weakness to exercise authority over Abyssinia as a whole; and the principal Rases will want to take the orders from a Ministry composed of men of low extraction whose power arises solely from their position. If these surmises are correct, the inevitable result must be that the outlying districts will fall into the hands of the various Rases, who will claim their independence and seek first to consolidate and then to extend their power, and Abyssinia will revert to its old condition, united under a geographical name and yet separated into various kingdoms.

I do not anticipate that this break-up of the Ethiopian Empire would follow immediately on the death of the Emperor, but at the same time I consider it inevitable and as likely to be preceded by a period of misgovernment, financial difficulties, and sporadic Galla risings.