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TOWARDS THE MODERN HISTORY OF ETHIOPIA I  
THE SO-CALLED "CIVILIZING MISSION"

by Richard Greenfield\*

The works of a very motley few notwithstanding, comparatively little has so far been written on the modern history of Ethiopia. In all probability this is at least in part because Ethiopia's struggle against the territorial imperialism of Europe has been markedly different from the experience of other African countries even if her other experiences may not have been so unique as is sometimes supposed. Nevertheless Ethiopia is an African Empire and the modern history of Ethiopia is as vital to an 'African Overview' as modern histories of the struggles of indigenous peoples elsewhere on this continent. This paper is the first of, hopefully, a series in which the writer, will seek to make some little contribution to the work of Africanists and Ethiopicists by an attempt at vigorous examination of those writings which will have to be taken into account as possible source materials for that definitive study of modern Ethiopian history which is yet to be penned.

As far as Africa is concerned the Second World War began in 1935 - the fact that Britain joined in in 1939 and the Soviet Union and the United States in 1941 is incidental to the dates of the war, however profound the effects of the widening of the battlefields. Soon the 1930's and 40's, currently discussed as 'international affairs' will be incorporated into the African History text books used in the classrooms and colleges of this continent and teachers will be on the lookout for background reading. One book they may be tempted to turn to is "The Civilizing Mission", a recently published work by A.J. Barker<sup>1</sup>, which describes the international

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1. A.J. Barker: The Civilizing Mission: A History of the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935-1936, London and New York, Dial Press, 1968, 383 pp.

ferment which preceded the Italian Fascist invasion of Ethiopia (Abyssinia) 1935-6, and the invasion itself. Colonel Barker, an Englishman, has some first hand experience of Ethiopia and a sound military background from which to draw. Moreover he guides his reader through the tortuous political negotiations and deals of the '30's with considerable narrative skill. But his book - as its cover proclaims - is popular history. It is drawn in the main from secondary sources and if composed with a lively pen, it nevertheless suffers from the usual defects of popular history - errors are multitude and the relevant and available sources are by no means exhausted.

Barker's study begins with a six page "Timetable of a War" - the sequence of events in summary from November 23, 1934 through November 3, 1938. This is a useful reference frame, though it should be noted that Italian troops, anticipating orders, had entered Ethiopia in the torrid Danakil desert region near the volcano Musa Ali before October 3rd, 1935 and that Makalle was occupied by DeBono's forces only once - in November and not on October 7th of that year.

Some account of the Wal-Wal incident which sparked the conflagration is given. Italian troops were found in a fortified camp within Ethiopia and fighting ensued at the end of 1934. This discovery was made by a joint Anglo-Ethiopian Boundary Commission working in the area. The Ethiopians were very incensed and correctly fearing trouble, the British withdrew. Such was the bravery of the Ethiopian soldiers that they tried to overturn an Italian armoured car with their bare hands - however, they had eventually to withdraw having suffered heavy casualties. It is interesting to note that Barker (6) states that Fitorari Shiferra was "The officer commanding the Ethiopian escort". Certainly Italian Memoranda to the League of Nations at the time assert "A body of Abyssinian troops commanded by the Fitourari Shiferra attacked the Italian garrison" but G. Steer in Caesar in Abyssinia who was correspondent of the London Times wrote -

"The Ethiopian command were entirely unprepared. Their chief Fitorari Alemayu was shot down leaving his tent in the first five minutes..."

Shiferra, Steer states, was in fact the second-in-command and, he asserts - and here the account becomes even more detailed - since he sold his cartridges and fled to Ji-Jigga, a muslim Ethiopian, Ali Nur, actually took command. Barker's account is not dissimilar except that he states that the early casualty was the second-in-command. A footnote to his source might have helped clear up the discrepancy he introduces. Two other small points are that Dejazmatch (or Dejiak, an alternative usage in later parts of the book for this feudal title) is not absolutely synonymous with Governor. Literally 'Marshal of the (Provincial) Headquarters', it is a feudal-military title rather than an appointment - a Ras could equally well be a governor. Also the Wal-Wal fort was not the creation of the colonial Commandatore but was rebuilt from the ruins of one of Muhammad Abdille Hassan's defence works.

Barker correctly interprets Wal-Wal as the pretext rather than the root cause of the war and he therefore essays into the historical background. He properly observes of "Abyssinia" that "the two most important parts were Tigre... and Shoa" yet his map opposite (pages 16 and 17) fails to mark Shoa (Shewa). Also an extensive area of Highland Ethiopia is shaded as "the original Solomonid Kingdoms of the Habash" whatever that might mean. On the same page Kassa, who was to become the Emperor Yohannes, is described as Ras, a title which he never assumed. Nor was Emperor Tewodros his immediate predecessor. Any historical summary inevitably over-simplifies events, but even if we can pass "the death of Gordon led to the withdrawal of all British troops from the Sudan" (19) we can never accept that with the death of Yohannes "Menelik of Shoa became the strongest claimant to the throne of Tigre" (20). The strongest claimant was Mangasha, Yohannes' son, and

Menelik had no claim whatsoever.

At the end of the nineteenth century the Italians sought to establish a protectorate over Ethiopia by an interpretation of the treaty of Wachile (Ucciali). How 'honest' they were has been argued in the Journal of African History, to a degree indeed that one wonders how accessible the relevant archives are - and to whom! Barker does not quite get Menelik's rejection of this status across to the reader with enough force - extracts from some of the Emperor's other correspondence with the Khalifa or the powers of Europe might have helped. Menelik, let it be noted like Tewodros and Yohannes before him, understood the menace and the methods of European territorial imperialism. In 1891, Menelik warned that "if powers at a distance come forward to partition Africa between them I do not intend to be an indifferent spectator" - and that in a letter to the rulers of Europe. "Ethiopia needs the protection of no one" he once commented and, quoting the scriptures, added "Ethiopia stretches her hand (only) to God".

Barker describes how General Baldissera, Italian colonial governor of Eritrea then argued that Italy had to regard Menelik as an opponent. True, but in fact the former's dispatches reveal that he had come to that conclusion well before Menelik rejected these protectorate claims - one does not have to be over-sensitive to the frequent distortions of Africa's past to protest when such consistent rejection is described as "increasing truculence" (22).

There is, of course, more to the Ethiopian defeat of the Italians at the Battle of Adowa in 1896 than Barker has space to tell, particularly from the Ethiopian side. 1935-6 and World War apart, it marked a halt in the scramble for Africa, but nevertheless Barker succeeds in demonstrating its immense psychological influence on both contestants. It left Ethiopia the sole surviving fragment of independent Africa - subsequently to be discussed as a pawn in European

"sphere of influence" politics - and such discussions were not just "arrogant examples of pre-1914 imperialistic diplomacy" (27) for Barker himself describes, similar discussion much later - in the times of Haile Sellassie. The war of 1935 was an imperialist exercise - as the preposterous phrase used in the title of Barker's book illustrates - and future historians will very likely see it as a late but integral part of the scramble.

The setting of the scene also leads Barker into an assessment of the state of Ethiopia prior to the Italian invasion. The word 'Abyssinia' is not derived from the arabic for "a number of races" but from an early immigrant group (33). Nor is it correct to write "before the Italians came along most of the tips of the primitive wooden instruments used for cultivation were not shod with iron and the ploughs were merely crooked sticks". (39) The Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church is not well described as "a branch of the Coptic Sect" (41). There is no sound evidence that the Emperor Eyasu became a Muslim convert (44) - although it was in the interests of the British, the French, the Italians and of Imperial Russia to so paint him. Nor did the young Haile Sellassie actually go to school at the French Catholic Mission in Harar (45) - he was tutored. Also one wonders what the evidence is for Barker's claim that the history of Afghanistan had a great effect on Haile Sellassie's mental growth (43 and 49). Other writers, such as Geoffrey Harmsworth in Abyssinia Marches On (London, 1931) have made the same claim but none appears to substantiate it.

On the credit side, however, Barker has no illusions about the state of Ethiopian Feudalism, and despite the blemishes listed, some of his descriptions of the plight of the disease-ridden and oppressed peasantry, the existence of forms of slavery and slave traffic, the strength of the Church and the nobility and the weakness of the central government, are accurate and erudite. He writes of the early struggle of the youthful Haile Sellassie then known as Tafari Makonnen against much of the heavy

tradition of Ethiopia - perhaps the little Emperor's finest hour - and he crucially concludes by placing Ethiopia in the then international setting.

He writes that

"in 1934 Ethiopia was at the end of a phase of her development"

and the attitudes and actions of the outside world, clearly determined that this was so. He perhaps overstates his case a little when he continues

"the mutual jealousies of her powerful and predatory neighbours had allowed her to continue an independent existence for a long time",

but it was vitally true that

"when one of them, with the connivance of the others, decided that her fruit was ripe for plucking, only military and economic strength could have saved her. As she had neither, her days of independence were numbered".

In the next two chapters (pages 54-143) Barker summarizes the cruel bartering which led to the abandonment of Ethiopia by her supposed potential allies in what proved a vain hope to preserve the peace of Europe. The character and attitude of the important figures of the period are sketched with a directness that is appealing. Mussolini is seen not only as consistent but also as well informed - even secret information from the British Embassy was apparently available to him. Barker maintains that the Vatican was "bought (off)... comparatively cheaply" (67) in a manner which he provokingly brackets with the Duce's bribery of the Ethiopian Rasas (66). Pius XI, he firmly asserts was "biased toward fascism". Most Ethiopians certainly believe that, but it has seldom been so openly stated elsewhere.

Barker also understands the motives and particularly the attitudes of moral supremacy which so strengthened Europe's imperialism - but he is less convincing either when he dismisses the consistent Soviet opposition to the Duce's adventure in militaristic imperialism as merely cynical opportunism not at all conditioned by ideological considerations; or when he suggests that Japan supported Ethiopia for her own purposes without any reference to the sympathy she felt for a sister non-white empire; or when he deals with Ethiopia herself. He writes that Ethiopia "persistently adopted a disdainful attitude towards Italy's right to preferential treatment in the matter of concessions..." But Ethiopians never recognized such "rights". Most Ethiopians whose horizons permitted discussion and speculation on such issues did not even recognize Italy's colonizer status in Eritrea. As the northern Ras Alula had put this in the previous century, such claims would only be recognized by such as he "when he was governor in Rome". "Ethiopia's frontier is the sea", he had declared.

Barker interestingly comments on the amount of "Italian activity inside.. Ethiopia" just prior to the war and this point might have been worth developing. In 1935 General Virgin, a trusted Swedish advisor to the Emperor, wrote, "During recent years Italy had installed in Abyssinia a crowd of consuls and agents commerciaux in places where there was not a single Italian or any good reason for their presence". That this was allowed is surely as much to the point as the belated complaint that Barker records Haile Sellassie making about it at Geneva. The historian must ask was Ethiopia betrayed? Were some of her leaders bought? The history of 'collaboration' is a difficult and still touchy subject even after a quarter of a century, but it must be remembered that Dejazmatch Haile Sellassie Gugsa, for instance, soon afterwards did betray the centre of the Ethiopian line when he deflected, to all intents and purposes at the opening of hostilities in his home area. Captured secret Italian documents



currently becoming more widely available in microform might well throw greater light on the whole attitude of the feudal leadership. Many interesting points are raised: for it is superficial to dub a man a 'traitor' if he did not subscribe to the value systems represented by the Empire-state he is said to have betrayed. Feudal leaders in history have often put definite interests of their fiefs before any vague and wider nationalism - in Ethiopia and elsewhere. Indeed in the bitter years that were to follow it was the small landowner class - the balabats - and the peasants, who were to form the backbone of the resistance; not the leaders whom Konovaloff has called 'the grand seigneurs of the Empire'.

Sometimes, in this section particularly, Barker seems a little hurried. The quotation from the Italian General DeBono that he gives the reader on page 75, has already been used on page 70, and post Bruce and Napier, London's Whitehall was not so ignorant of Ethiopia's heritage as to consider her "an upstart African Kingdom" (88). On the other hand, possible last minute writing has permitted good use to be made of several recently published political biographies. In the chapter "Britain Vacillates" a serious omission is the failure to make specific mention of the tireless work of Sylvia Pankhurst in fostering public concern and support for Haile Sellassie and Ethiopia, but the analysis of the British government's position is perceptive.

".. a form of dual ministerial authority sprang up within the Foreign Office and Britain's policy towards Italy pursued two separate lines - one based on established treaties and the other on the League's Covenant". (103)

It is probably true that had Ethiopia taken the initiative when the Italians were in the early stages of preparation for this attack, the latter would have "been in serious difficulty" (113). Some chiefs urged this and in 1915 the Negus Mikael of Wello was considering

it, but by 1934 such action might also have led to intervention by a consortium of the colonial powers of Europe "in the interests of peace". Haile Sellasie certainly placed "too much faith in the League of Nations" (112) but his alternatives in the area of resisting colonialism were very few. One factor which Barker does not bring out is that for the Emperor to have agreed to any of the mooted transfers of territory would have involved controvancing his coronation oath and that would probably have led to his deposition by an already critical and conservative nobility.

As the "war clouds gather" (chapter 7) some lack of consistency in Barker's account emerges. Of Hoare, the British Foreign Secretary, Barker comments (he) "sadly misjudged the Duce. The extent of the futility of trying to bluff a gambler like Mussolini (particularly when the latter had access to information in the British Embassy in Rome) is perhaps more apparent now than it was in 1935" and he later says of the possibility of British naval intervention in the Mediterranean and perhaps Suez, "Britain had the cards in her right hand all right: but courage was lacking in Whitehall and Mussolini knew it". But later (181), and in contrast, he writes "The Duce was by no means certain that the British were going to refrain from active interference in his adventure..." One suspects the former interpretation is more correct. However, Barker's conclusion is sound: Ethiopia was doomed.

Haile Sellasie had ordered all Ethiopian forces to withdraw many miles from all frontiers, but nevertheless Count Aloisi could report to the Council of the League of Nations that "the warlike and aggressive spirit of Ethiopia... (was) imposing war" on Italy, (143) and the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935 began.

Barker's account of the invasion, the subsequent campaign and the occupation of Ethiopia, is perhaps the weakest part of the work, not only because of the usual crop of errors, but also because, apart from Haile Sellasie and one or two feudal chieftains, the Ethiopians

remain shadowy figures. Barker relies very heavily on the published accounts of the Italian commanders, De-Bono and Badoglio in the north and Graziani in the east and on Steer's Caesar in Abyssinia (London 1936) which incorporates one version of the war diary of Colonel Konovaloff, a white Russian military advisor with the Ethiopians (Chapter XVIII). Particularly in Chapter 14 Barker's occasional footnoting unnecessarily takes his reader to Steer via quotations in Leonard Mosley, Haile Sellassie, Conquering Lion (London 1965). But Konovaloff is available in two other versions which appear to have escaped Barker's notice - one a manuscript history and the other Con Amate del Negus (Milan 1936) which has a markedly different emphasis. Future historians must also use the letters and records of other Europeans, such as Dr. John Melly, with whose published impressions Barker is familiar, and Major Gerald Burgoyne, whose letters were recently published in the Ethiopia Observer - although all references to leprosy, critical comment on the Ethiopian Church and information otherwise considered derogatory to the Ethiopian Empire have been omitted from this version.<sup>2</sup>

More significant, however, is Barker's failure to use existing Amharic sources such as Tedessa Metcha, The Black Lion (Asmara 1943 Ethiopian Calendar) ; Takle Tsadik Mekuria, History of Ethiopia from Tewodros to Haile Sellassie (Addis Ababa 1946), Silver Jubilee (of the Ghenet Military Academy) (Addis Ababa 1922); Demisse Tolla, Journey from Time to Time - Memories of the five years of Patriotic Struggle (Addis Ababa 1947); Tazazu Haile, Haile Mariam Mammo, (Addis Ababa 1967), etc. Barker makes only one very indirect reference even to works in English published in Addis Ababa since the war. Thus, for example, when Ethiopians initiate an attack, the name of the commander is seldom given and even their chosen front has to be described in terms of the army group opposite them - i.e. in terms of the Italian defenders. (272)

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2. C. Burgoyne, "Lost Month in Ethiopia", Ethiopia Observer, Vol. XI, No.4, 1968.

Apart from the endpapers there are ten maps supporting the text, many of which are based on those published by the Italian Commanders. The important river boundary between Ethiopia and Eritrea is marked as the Mared (169) instead of Mareb. Cartographic reference to the forces of "Dejiak Damteu" (286) is ambiguous and misleading. Damteu--a Fitwari not a Dejazmatch-- died at Adowa in 1896. Both his sons, Ras Desta and Dejazmatch Abebe, were important figures in Ethiopian resistance in the south, but confusion with the father's name, probably caused by Barker's alien concept of surnames (which in another context lessens the usefulness of the index) leaves it unclear which of these leaders is meant. Also there is a map titled "Italian East Africa" (302) which fails to illustrate the most significant fact that the Italians attempted to rule all the Somali areas as one unit. Indeed the frontier shown by Barker was neither demarcated nor recognized by the Italians and this important fact was the very pretext for the whole "civilizing mission". This error is as serious as the previously noted omission of Shoa, the very focus of the Ethiopian Empire-State.

The summary of the war in these chapters is no improvement on Steer - a brilliant writer - and Barker can be very misleading. For instance, Ras Desta is described as having escaped with a Belgian - his "army of the southwest no longer existed as a fighting force and Desta himself was not seen or heard of again until the end of the war". After the defeat of the southern armies Ras Desta in fact continued the fight leading significant Patriot forces in the company of Dejazmatch Gabre Mariam and Tadema Zelleka but was captured and shot. Photographs of his mutilated body were used in a vain attempt to cow the forces of the resistance, and this became a cause célèbre. Barker's error could have been avoided had use been made of Miss Sylvia Pankhurst's New Times and Ethiopia News or later summaries in the Ethiopia Observer Vol. III, pp. 10-12 and Vol. IV, p.1 (London, 1959-60), or an article by your reviewer 'Remembering the Struggle', Makerere Journal, Vol. IX,

1964, subsequently developed into chapter 13, 'The Patriots' in Ethiopia - a New Political History (London and New York 1965). Nor, in this context, does Barker's quite extensive bibliography even list Angelo Del Boca, La Guerra d' Abissinia, 1935-41, (Milan, 1965) which more recently has been translated into English by P.D. Cummins as The Ethiopian War 1935-41 (London and Chicago 1969).

Since the publisher claims that Barker's discussion of this 'notorious war' is 'the most comprehensive' then he invites close examination. This follows. War drums in Ethiopia were not used to relay messages in the manner of the talking drums of West Africa (p.145); not all Ethiopians considered themselves the sons of Solomon (p.147); it was Haile Sellassie's civil leaders not his "advisors", who drew their strength from his ideas (p.147); it is quite untrue that "considerations of fire power, mobility and aircraft just did not interest" the Ethiopians (p.147) for Haile Sellassie had used airplanes in 1930 against Gugsu Wolie. But the world ganged up against Ethiopia in 1935 to obstruct any application of their interest in modern weaponry. "Amharan tribesmen" (p.151) would be better rendered just "Amhara" and "Gojjams" as "Gojams" (p.304) and it begs a lot of questions to write of 1935 that "in three decades the Ethiopian feudal system had degenerated". Dr. Workneh Martin (p.152) was of Ethiopian descent and not an Anglo-Indian. What is meant by the reference "the Duce's generals were old men, men molded by the past, whose personal recollections included Adowa and the tragic fate of Baratieri?" (p.155) General Baratieri, Italian Governor of Eritrea, escaped from the battlefield of Adowa. Haile Sellassie's daughter married to Haile Sellassie Gugsu, died prematurely but not from the attentions of "witch doctors" (p.165) - that term is not applicable in Tigre - even to debteras. Barker is entitled to his opinion that "Ethiopians were not of the same calibre as the fierce hillmen of India" but probably he is unwise, in view of so many instances of almost incredible courage recorded by the Italians, to be so dogmatic (170). The statue of the Lion taken by the

Italians which Barker reports they "are inclined to hint that they could find... but have no intention of seeing it returned to Ethiopia" (174) was actually returned long ago - perhaps he is thinking of the Aksumite Stele, still corroding in the air of industrial Rome, near the arch of Constantine. There is little evidence to suggest that Ras Hailu was "one of the best fighting chiefs of Ethiopia". He was over sixty and more renowned for intrigue than warfare. Haile Sellassie's conversation with Colonel Konovaloff, referred to at the beginning of chapter 14, took place in 1936, not 1935. The Abuna was not Patriarch of the Ethiopian Church in 1936. The quotations from Konovaloff (275) are considerably paraphrased and condensed from the original although presented as direct quotations. Ras Seyoum did not leave Ethiopia with Haile Sellassie and Ras Kassa, but remained and was salaried by the Italians, as was Ras Hailu. Several of the Patriot leaders who were "horrified at the collapse of France" and who had "believed France was the first military power in Europe" were educated at Saint Cyr not just at Djibouti (324).

If the campaigns are not well described, Barker's chapters on the failure of the ineffective sanction measures adopted by the League are interesting. This incidentally is an area in which the greatest portion of recent scholarly work has been concentrated. Barker includes many interesting photographs, but misses this opportunity to adequately present the unique and difficult terrain of Ethiopia. There are useful appendices and a useful select bibliography, but the notes are scrappy.

If the average standard of indexing in recent Ethiopica is admittedly low, Barker plumbs new depths.<sup>3</sup>

3. In general the indexing of works on Ethiopia leaves much to be desired and some, like the U.S. Army area Handbook for Ethiopia have none at all. It is a sad reflection on the funds that academic workers are able to attract, that the 'civilian' version of this quite comprehensive survey, G. Lipsky (editor) Ethiopia, Its Peoples, Its Society, Its Culture, (New Haven 1962)

(Cont.)

An index is a vital tool for the serious historian: in the hope that frank discussion of such shoddyness will prevent repetition, let us risk some tediousness in close examination.

Alagi, Aradam and Augher are listed under Amba, the Amharic for a mountain with a flatish summit, which is like listing Kilimanjaro, Everest and Goodwin Austin under Mount. Aradam is also separately listed, but the entries do not tally. Mai Ceu, the most important battle of the war, although correct in the text, is misspelt 3 times in the Index. Consulting "Emperor of Ethiopia", one is told "see Haile Sellassie" - but there were other Emperors, although for some reason Yohannes, anglicised as John, is wrongly listed as "King" Tewodros, anglicised as Theodore, is listed as "Emperor" but Eyasu - for consistency why not anglicised as Jesus? - is listed under his title 'Lij'. Similarly Walwal is anglicised but Uccialli is inconsistently left in the Italian usage. Entries under Haile Selassie, who incidentally spells his name Sellassie, do not include the pages before his coronation when he was known as Tafari Makonnen. Some of these are to be found, logically, under "Tafari, Ras" but others are under "N", "Negus Tafari", that is to say under the Ethiopic for "King".

The reader is unlikely to look up "Non-Amharic peoples" under "N" but might well be interested in Islam in Ethiopia, in which case he would have to consult Islam, Moors, Muslims and Muhammadans - and all entries are different. The Patriots, although mentioned in the text, are not listed, but "Fugitives Ethiopian" is an example of pointless listing. 

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(Contd. from Footnote 3)

can be only an abbreviated version of a handbook produced to meet the needs of the United States Department of Defense. However Lipsky's edition does have an index - in which he succeeds in listing several Ethiopians under A for Ato which means Mr!

Dawa is not mentioned on page 53 but the references to Churchill, Sir Winston might have included 313. Nor, as in places in the text, are Ethiopian names properly understood. The first name which Barker normally lists and uses is the important one. The second is normally the father's name and is not a surname, hence "Burru, Ayelu" should be under "A" as should Damteu, Dejiak Abbebe". "Fitorari Taferi" should be "Taferi, Fitorari" (a title) and worse the first reference (51-52) under "Gugsa, Ras" refers to Ras Gugsa Wolie who was unrelated to the other listings which refer to a quite different person, Dejazmatch Haile Sellassie Gugsa - who is also separately and correctly listed. "Harawiate, Teele" should be "Tekle Harawaite" under "T" and in the "W's" Wodaju's father was Ali not Alis and the next entry should read Wolde Mariam not Miriam. Shoa, the most important Province of Ethiopia, is meaninglessly listed as "Shoa, tribe of". "Danakil, country of" and "Dankalia" are separately and differently listed. Newspapers quoted are indexed but only the New York Times entry apparently merits the description "cited".

So much for what is contained in the book: but discussion of its relevance for the modern historian demands a note also on what may not be found therein. Barker subtitles his The Civilizing Mission as "A History of the Italo-Ethiopian War 1935-1936". Perhaps "Campaign" would have been a better word. The Italo-Ethiopian War must be dated 1935-41 for, as the author recognises in his last two chapters entitled "The Occupation" and "Aftermath", Ethiopia was overrun rather than conquered in 1936. Haile Sellassie left for Djibouti, Jerusalem and Europe where he made his historic personal appearance before the League of Nations, but that did not signify the end of the war to the Ethiopians and fighting continued.



Subsequently events within the Empire have been obscured by the justified emphasis that writers have given to Haile Sellassie's prophetic words at Geneva.

"I was defending the cause of all small peoples who are threatened by aggression. What have become of the promises that were made to me? ... God and History will remember your judgement"

World history has remembered - the world conscience is still stunned by repetition of those sad words. Their relevance is indisputable. Millions died because they went unheeded. The hearts of the people of the world, though not immediately of their governments, warmed towards the dignified and lonely exiled Emperor. But the attention of the African Historian must not be distracted from afro-centric examination. Back in the mountains of Ethiopia, where few knew and fewer cared about Geneva, enthusiasm for their King of the Kings was not so marked.

It is perhaps relevant to repeat an earlier summary of collected oral evidence on this issue.

"One by one, the leaders and the people of the city of Addis Ababa and beyond heard the news. It fell to Blatta Kidane Mariam to take the news to Dejazmatch Fikre Mariam and Blatta Takele. Incredulous, they drove down the bumpy 'murrum' road to the Akaki railway station and learnt that it was true. Takele, hot and dusty in his white dress, fell in a fit. 'My country there is no one to defend your cause', he cried as they took him to the car.

The shums (leaders) and priests of the villages despaired; never in their proud history had such a thing happened: that the 'Elect of God' should leave the chosen Ethiopian people for asylum in some foreign place".<sup>4</sup>

Before his departure the Emperor appointed Ras Imru as Viceroy and when the latter's forces were surrounded and he was obliged to give up the struggle, other leaders - Takale Wolde Hawariat, Balcha, Abebe Aragai, Geressa Duke, Desta and Ababe Damtew, Belai Zelleka, to list but a few, fought on as Patriot Commanders.

Just before a Commonwealth Army ended the occupation, General Bonacorsi, Inspector General of the Blackshirt forces in "Italian East Africa" wrote:

"The assassination of our officers from April 1939 until today has become a normal phenomenon. In the whole empire rebellion is latent and will have a tragic end when, in case of war, hostilities begin. If from any of our frontiers a single British or French unit marches resolutely into our territory with its flag flying, it will not need armed men because the greater part of the Abyssinian people will join it and fight against us".

Barker does imply this when he writes that "Mussolini's jubilant proclamation announcing the founding of an Italian East African Empire ushered in little more than five years of incomplete military occupation" (301) but he does not expand it. Once again a measure of confusion exists, for after describing the link-up between Graziani's troops and those of Badoglio, in Dira Dawa,

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4. R. Greenfield, Ethiopia - a New Political History, (London and New York 1965) page 223.

Barker can also write "so the war ended" (287). It did not. More work is needed on this period - in the field. But in this context it is very encouraging this year to find new work on the Patriots being published by Woizerit Salome Gabre Egziabher and Richard Pankhurst.<sup>5</sup>

Barker's "Civilizing Mission" is popular history and that perhaps not at its best. Your reviewer's excuse for examining a popular work at such unusual length is to demonstrate and reiterate that the serious student of twentieth century African and Black history must demand - or better produce - real works of scholarship. Amateurs and journalists have helped, but they are nowhere near enough. The aim should be, not merely to clear the cobwebs from the minds of historians like Trevor Roper of Oxford, who persist in publishing snide comments of the story of man in Africa, but to fill a significant gap in the knowledge of human experience. Work on contemporary African history, such as Professor Ajayi of Ibadan called for at the last International Africanists' Congress (Dakar, 1967) could well begin, as far as Ethiopia is concerned, with more theses and papers on the still shadowy men and women who have played leading roles. An obvious example is Dejazmatch Takale Wolde Hawariat - perhaps the greatest Patriot of them all - who died by his own hand at the age of 78, late in 1969, when one of the several conspiracies with which he has been associated misfired. But he is not alone. Enough is not known of Dejazmatch Balcha, Habte Giorgis, Ras Alula, Lij Eyasu, Empress Zauditu, Ras Makonnen Endalkatchew, Belai Zelleke, Geressu Duke, Ras Abebe Aragai, and so many others. Meantime, we await a definitive history of the Ethio-Italian War.

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5. "The Ethiopian Patriots 1936-41" and "The Ethiopian Patriots and the Collapse of Italian Rule in East Africa", Ethiopia Observer, Vol. XII, No.2, 1969.