(EXTRACTS FROM)

SHORT HISTORY

OF

ERITREA

BY

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I

THE TERRITORY

1. *Place in the World*

THE purpose of this book is to give an account, mainly historical, of the territory which since the last days of the nineteenth century has been called Eritrea.

Its history in antiquity and during the Dark and Middle Age will be dismissed in a few summary pages, to make possible a slightly fuller treatment of the later centuries in which the territory assumed its present character. Nor will the attempt be made to deal with other aspects of Eritrean life which, however interesting, are without direct bearing on its history or present politics: that is, details of daily household life, ceremonies of marriage and birth, folk-lore and legend, spoken dialect and religious doctrine, custom and law. For none of these can place be found. It is intended rather to provide, on an historical basis, material for answers to the questions sure to arise (and indeed already arising) as to the disposal or future treatment of the territory on lines consistent with its history and its geography and its political and economic realities.

Eritrea—so small a corner of the map of Africa—has an area of some 45,000 square miles. Its form is that of a triangle whose base and height are each three hundred miles in length, while from the eastern end of its base-line drops a long narrow corridor of Red Sea coast. Its position among the nations is, in many senses, intermediate. It belongs neither to north nor to central Africa, nor typically to east. It is not of the Nile Valley, nor mainly of the Red Sea. Its country-side is partly of Ethiopian type, partly Sudan—and the same is true of its inhabitants. It has had its place in the policies of Turkey and of Egypt, of Ethiopia and of Italy. Its neighbours to-day are Ethiopia on the south, the Red Sea on the east, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan to the north and west.

LIST OF PLATES

LIST OF MAPS

The international or strategic interest of the territory must depend upon its position from the viewpoint of land, sea, and air. It is by land joined to the Sudan by a broad open border of steppe and hill tract, unbroken either in its geography or its human species by any line but a recent and political. At the same time the territory affords, by modern roads and railways, an easy corridor for traffic from Nile to Red Sea. The Ethiopian land frontier is established by river-beds, but these—dry save for a few days in the year—form no obstacle in the continuity of the terrain, and as a boundary follow no reasoned plan. In geography and the conditioning of human life, southern Eritrea is part of the great Ethiopian massif. It opens many and easy entrances to the Tigrai and beyond, and holds the only coast-line by which northern Ethiopia can be approached. Eritrea in fact—or a part of it—must always be a factor of prime importance in any 'Ethiopian Question'.

On the great highway of the Red Sea, Assab has an easily improvable harbour immediately inside the Straits, and a modern road joins it to the hinterland. Massawa, its natural islands now linked by man to form the finest of Red Sea harbours, offers to the fleets of war or commerce advantages which they can best assess. It has easy access to healthy highlands inland. Here, and anywhere in the coastal belt, landing-grounds can easily be improved, or already exist: but the air-ports of the Eritrean highlands—at Gura and at Asmara—should by their climate and amenities be of greater interest for future air-routes. The highland conditions, indeed, of beauty and splendid climate and the setting of modern life which the last half-century has produced, are among the territory's most practical claims to the interest of the modern world.

2. *Claims to interest*

Such claims, however, are not confined to natural beauty or modern development, nor to the plans of strategists.

To the student of African races Eritrea offers a mosaic of peoples, whose past history can with fair confidence be traced,

and whose present diversity of cultures, languages, and economic habit is instructive. Not differing essentially from neighbouring peoples in Ethiopia and the Sudan, conditions have permitted them to be more closely studied. A surprising feature is the inclusion of types so various in a single, and a small, political unit.

Indeed Eritrea possesses none of the qualities of geographical or cultural singleness which should entitle it to be a unit of territory or of government; nor, since antiquity until its consolidation as an Italian colony, had its various peoples ever obeyed a single rule. That it now, all undeservingly, so exists is the unplanned result of a seizure in the late nineteenth century of the African territory readiest to hand, by an Italy newly united and competitive: a territory whose boundaries were fixed, at points to be condemned by all racial and economic criteria, by the fortunes of war and diplomacy in the years following. Had Italians never landed at Massawa, Eritrea would to-day be partly, as always before, the ill-governed or non-governed northernmost province of Ethiopia, partly a pleasant eastern extension of Kassala province of the Sudan, with the port of Massawa perhaps in Egyptian or Anglo-Egyptian possession. And if the battle of Adua had not been lost, or had been quickly avenged, Eritrea would to-day include far larger and homogeneous areas of northern Ethiopia.

Apart from the evolution of its own peoples, the territory has played a part in history. It was a central province of the Kings of Axum, and was ruled later by shepherd-kings from the north. It witnessed from its harbours the struggle for Red Sea power between the navies of sixteenth-century Europe, and protected itself against the Turks. It shared the fortunes of the Ethiopian State at crises of its history. When that State disintegrated, areas of it formed integrally part of the great sub-kingdom of the Tigrai. It witnessed—and indeed provided a landing-place and communications for—the strange episode of Napier's expedition, when, after age-long obscurity, Eritrean names and circumstances were the talk of Europe. It was an object of aggressive

ambition of the Egyptian rulers, and was later raided by the Dervish hordes. It was the scene of the first Italian occupation of African soil and saw, before and after Adua, their difficult establishment and fifty years of pre-Fascist and then Fascist government. The campaign of Keren delivered it to British arms, and to a British war-time administration.

The territory, for reasons suggested, must always attract from the world an interest disproportionate to its size and population. In particular its fortunes can never be indifferent to those nations of Europe which have most striven there—Portuguese, Italians, British; nor to those whose interest was of lesser or briefer moment—the French and the Egyptians, and (through her victorious troops) India. And the brief phase of American war industry in Eritrea, following the British occupation, brought, for the first time, the New World to this remote corner of the Old.

3. *Land Surface*

The land surface of the territory is composed of four main types of country, with marked—and indeed surprising—differences between them. We shall describe in turn the south-central core of the plateau highland; the Red Sea coastal plain; the broken hill country forming the north and mid-west of the main triangle; and lastly the broad plains of its western face.

The plateau of the central south (to be known simply as the highlands) is the smallest and most favoured of these regions. It is sharply differentiated from the other zones by the abrupt and impressive escarpment by which it breaks down eastward to the Red Sea, and by its less sudden descents to the north and west. To the south it is continued unbroken in the Tigrai highlands of Ethiopia. It forms, in fact, a second rough triangle within the first, its base a sector (east of the centre) of the base of the main triangle, its apex a point some forty miles north of Asmara, and its east side following the line of the great escarpment. Varying in height by stages and broken by irregular mountain masses, with deep ravines and rocky slopes, the highlands are watered by the Little Rains of February and March

(giving some two to five inches a year) and the main rains of midsummer, which deposit perhaps sixteen inches in a bad year and twenty-four in a good. They are drained by innumerable rocky channels, dry for nine-tenths of the year, which unite to form the Setit (known higher up as the Takazzé), the Mareb (Gash), Anseba, Barka, and a score of lesser 'rivers'. Lake Delia and the group of other small lakes, near and north of Asmara, are all artificial: there are no permanent streams or sources of water-power. The highland climate is—with the atmospheric rarity proper to an elevation of seven thousand to eight thousand feet—excellent throughout the year. There is little dust, constant sunshine, a healthy disease-free atmosphere, moderate winds, no frost save on mountain tops, while the rains appear in brief showers punctually to the day and hour. The seasonal change of temperature is slight.

In spite of clear air and wide mountain views and the broad expanses of grain crops in the autumn, the highlands fail of the highest scenic beauty by reason of their aridity (during three-quarters of the year) and comparative treelessness. Almost all land capable of cultivation is under the plough for the one annual rain crop, while rocky or precipitous areas are used for grazing. The whole plateau is now peopled with a density rare in Africa (though scanty enough by European standards) by long-settled and intensely land-devoted Coptic villagers.

The eastern escarpment of the plateau forms a distinct zone. In addition to the summer rains it benefits from the distinct rain system of the winter, and by the humidity of almost continuous winter fogs. The result is a total rainfall of some thirty-two inches, rising even to forty, with a semi-forest vegetation in contrast to the flatter and barer fields of the highlands. This is a narrow region of great natural beauty.

Every contrast is offered by the coastal plain and the low barren foothills into which, below the main escarpment, it merges inland. Here the rain, falling only in winter, does not exceed ten inches in the year and can well be half that amount—or none at all. The deficiency is ill compensated by the rain-fed


20 0 20 40 60 80 100
Miles
SKETCH MAP
ERITREA &
NORTHERN
ETHIOPIA
Roads
Railways
ANGLO-
EGYPTIAN
SUDAN
N
RED SEA
Dahlak
Islands
Nagfa
R. Anseba
R. Barka
Keren
Massawa
Kassala
Agordat
Ghinda
ASMARA
Zula
Tessenei
Barentu
Adi Ugri
R. Gash
Adi Caieh
Senafe
Thio
R. Setit
R. Takazze
Axum
Adua
Adigrat
Makale
Gondar
Lake
Tana

torrents which descend, on a few days of every year, from the highlands, and which here and there the plainsmen try to harness for rough-and-ready irrigation. The coastal plain runs with varying width—from ten to fifty miles—for the whole continuous length of the territory, broken only in one sector some miles south of Massawa, where the highlands jut eastward almost to the sea. Astride and north of this break the plain affords a scanty spring pasture, with a heavy grass crop in favoured places; but south of it, in the Dankali country, human and even animal life is barely supportable at all. The inability of the coastal plain in general to support any but the scantiest native population, under primitive pastoral conditions, is obvious enough. Europeans can live solely in the towns, and then only with easy access to the high hinterland.

The winter and spring climate of Massawa and Assab is pleasant, but the summer brings all the worst of Red Sea heat and humidity. The coast is barren and treeless, and without harbour save for those named. The same hard conditions and repellent landscape are found among the many flat islands off the coast, of which some twenty, out of a total of more than a hundred, are inhabited.

The next main zone or surface type to be considered is that of the northern, north-central, and mid-western massif of hill country. Its southern base lies in the hills (or rather, mountains) surrounding Keren, which stands at 4,500 feet of altitude or 2,500 feet below Asmara; its northern tip extends to the apex of the Eritrean triangle. Its three vertical zones, from east to west, are those of the *rora* or mountain plateau country, north and south of Nagfa and descending to the coast; the valley of the middle and lower Anseba; and the eastern bank of the middle Barka. This area, one-third of Eritrea, lacks both exact definition and internal uniformity. Its hills are higher and wilder to the south, where it attracts a greater rainfall: this, following the highland seasons, amounts to about sixteen inches in the year round Keren, and not more than twelve in Karora-Nagfa. To the north and east, where vegetation is lighter and

winter and spring drought can be serious, the level falls towards the coast and the Sudan, as it does westward also across the Barka. Except in torrent beds and rare fertile stretches, the northern and western two-thirds of the whole region is a desolate land of bare and thorny scrub-grown hills, incapable of agriculture and indeed, for half the year, of supporting life. Keren district is more beautiful, richer (though not rich) in winter crops and village-dwelling inhabitants. The climate is everywhere pleasant, and round Keren delightful.

The remaining principal area of Eritrea lies west and southwest of the River Barka, and both north and south of the Gash. Its boundaries are the Sudan and Ethiopian frontiers. The region covers about one-third of Eritrea. It has the same rainfall season as the highlands, but not more than twelve to fourteen inches are deposited, nor do the Little Rains contribute much. Although broken and undulating the general character of the country is far flatter than central Eritrea; especially so towards the Sudan frontier, but less between the Gash and Setit rivers. The vegetation is scanty thorn, except along river courses. These, except for a trickle in the Setit, cease to flow soon after the rains. Agriculture is widely practised, but supports only a part (perhaps a half) of the population, which is wholly pastoral towards the north; there, indeed, the surface is largely of light steppe bordering on desert. In the Gash-Setit quadrilateral, a settled country with comparatively heavy vegetation, there are stretches of forest with belts of deep grass. The climate is excessively hot in summer, with bad dust storms.

The varieties of physical land surface are reflected, to some extent, in traditional district names and in the Italian administrative divisions. The highlands form, fairly exactly, three of these; and they in turn perpetuate the rough boundaries of three ancient districts, those of Hamasien, Akkele Guzai, and Sarae, time-honoured marches of the Tigrai. The Dankali country, now divided between Eritrea and Ethiopia by the most absurd of frontiers, has always formed its own unit. The coast around and for fifty miles north of Massawa, and inland to the foothills, is

the traditional district of Samhar; farther north, to the Sudan frontier and deep into the hills westward, is the Sahil which depends on Keren. Keren area itself has been known in the past as that of Senheit or of Bogos; neither word is now in use. The western marches of Eritrea for centuries belonged to the Taka province of the old rulers of the Nile.

South of the present frontier were and are the Ethiopian districts of Kafta and Wolkait, across the Setit from the Kunama country; of Adi Abo and Shiré, across the Mareb west of Axum; and of Agamé, farther east up to the escarpment that overlooks the Dankali plain. All these form part of the great Tigrai province or kingdom. The Tigrai is homogeneous in language and culture with the highlands of Eritrea which, in history as in geography, formed for centuries an integral part of it. The western boundary of the Tigrai is formed by the course of the rivers Takazzé and Tsellari, the eastern by the great escarpment, the southern by a line running east and west below Lake Ashangi.

Such unity or separateness as Eritrea (or the highland nucleus thereof) possessed or still possesses was marked, from the earliest modern times, by the expression *Mareb Mellash*, 'Across the Mareb', which served the Court and officers of Ethiopia to differentiate it from the rest of the Tigrinya-speaking northern areas of the kingdom. The expression is not yet dead. The quantity and quality of its content, in terms of unity or separateness—however assessed—were never of more significance to Eritrean politicians and those of its greater neighbour. The territory was also known in early days simply as the *Bahrmeder*, 'sea land'.

Ge'ez or Ag'azian, left theirs to the south-Arabian language which they spoke. By the end of the fourth century B.C. there was already, in Eritrea and the Tigrai, a race, a nation, and a government. It was the kingdom of Axum, famous, powerful, and civilized in its day.

2. *Axum*

The progress of this power, made possible by the intrusion of Semitic culture and progress into sufficient elements of the long-settled Hamites, can ill be traced until another outside movement has given it both a further powerful stimulus and a link with the outside world. The expansion of the Ptolemies led, onwards from the third century B.C., to the foundation of a number of Red Sea trading-posts, and to trading or diplomatic journeys to the hinterland. Such was Adulis, the greatest of these posts or cities and a centre advanced in wealth and culture, founded near the later Zula, which bears its name: and such was Cohaitu on the plateau near Adi Caieh. From these penetrated to higher circles in Axum (and certainly to the ruling class) something of Greek language and the arts, though probably but little blood; while contact with the greater world both led to ambition of conquest and partly supplied the means for it. In the first century after Christ a king of Axum raided the burders of Egypt, and this was many times repeated.

From this same northern direction Hamitic invasions, whose beginnings were now long forgotten, were still in progress, though no longer upon a grand scale. Between Egypt and the northern limits of Axum's effective rule—that is, the Hamasien or possibly the Bogos hills—lay the deserts where, from the remotest age, have grazed those Beja tribesmen who, typical Hamites, are still there to-day. The northern branch of the same Beja were known by the Egyptians of the time—under the name of Blemmi or Blemmyes—as harriers of their southern borders; and later, as enemies of the Roman power, they earned the contemptuous notice of Edward Gibbon.

Between the southern Beja and the outlying pastoral subjects

of Axum relations were those of raid and counter-raid. The result was a persistent penetration of the highlands and of the coast by infusions of Beja blood. At the same time slave-raids carried out by Axum generals on the Nilotic or west-Ethiopian negro tribes would bring fresh blood-elements into the race: and the formation or survival of groups of half-separate type, or the imperfect assimilation, in remote back areas, of Hamite, aboriginal, and Semite, created the prototypes of those pockets of racial survival which are a feature of modern Eritrea and Ethiopia.

The Axum kingdom corresponded very little with the modern state of Ethiopia. It did not, in its golden age, extend southwards beyond the limits of the present Tigrai, where, and in modern Eritrea, may be found the descendants of its warriors. Its continuity with the later 'Solomonid' dynasty of Ethiopia is a vainglorious and political claim. The conversion of Axum to Christianity dates from the fourth century A.D., when missionaries of Syrian race, followed by saints and preachers in abundance, planted the quickly growing seed of that monophysite doctrine to which Ethiopia has ever since been faithful; but paganism long lingered in the farther areas, and in some Jewry held its own.

The empire fell, or fell into obscurity, for reasons but partly known. Long-drawn and costly ventures of conquest and government in the Yemen ended in weakening failure: the Beja tribes hit back or flooded forward with fatal effect. The Muslim conquest of Egypt and the Red Sea obliterated the old markets and plunged the sea routes into confusion; disunion and enfeebled rule at home did the rest. After the seventh century the name of Axum is heard no more.

3. *The Dark Ages*

The fame of Axum—invader of Egypt, conqueror and empire-builder in the Yemen, sharer in the Greek world culture of the day—is followed, for four centuries, by an impenetrable darkness over Eritrea and the Ethiopian highlands. Covered by this,

there was further Beja inroad from the north, further trickles of Sabaean entry across the sea, with perhaps some going and coming of the Nilotic folk to the west; and, in the slow fusion of race on the plateau—a process never complete—the lately triumphant Semite elements perhaps yielded ground cultural or political to the Hamitic masses, or rather ceased—their cultural contribution once made—to be separately recognizable.

The resulting blend was not uniform throughout. Especially in the Amhara mountains, north of T'sana, there survived elements faithful to the Jewish faith first introduced by the Sabaeans (ancestors of the tenacious modern Falasha or 'black Jews' of that area), and other groups resistant to Semite influence and blood. These can be identified with the name Agau, which indeed has served some writers for the pre-Semitic Ethiopian at large. The Agau were centred in Amhara; they retained earlier forms of speech, and, as will be seen, a measure of self-consciousness ready to take political form. The Danakil—or the original layer or stratum of them—were already established in their present unenviable home, mixed with some little Arabian blood. The same is true of the Somalis, far to the south. Ancestors of the Nilotic Kunama and Baria (to-day compact in the south-western corner of Eritrea) escaped both Hamitic dominance and conversion to Christianity: in a larger area than their present, they remained an unassimilated half-aboriginal element, as which they survive to-day.

On the Eritrean plateau, southward-thrusting Beja were able for a time—perhaps, indeed, for centuries—to establish half-nomadic 'kingdoms' of that race. Yaqubi, the geographer of the ninth century, saw and recorded six such Beja states. One of these, still pagan, straddled the Barka valley and delta. Another occupied the Eritrean highlands, had adopted Christianity, and paid tribute to the king of Ethiopia.

In the heart of Ethiopia itself it is clear that with the decline of the Axum State the centre of governmental power moved southwards. The move could follow lines of penetration made familiar by many past journeys to the gold-mines of Wollega,

and now unchecked by any organized resistance. Thanks to their higher development, better arms, and greater cunning the Semitized folk or rulers of the Tigrai, though worsted by adverse world conditions as a first-ranking State, found no difficulty in survival among the disunited savages of central Ethiopia. Their own civilization suffered; they ceased to build, to practise the arts, to coin money; they adopted the lower standards of their new primitive subjects. But in some fashion they maintained a State, and strengthened it (like Menelik of Shoa a thousand years later) by raids and conquests to the south. The process of reorientation and re-establishment was slow; three centuries of weakness and obscurity went by, until increasing enterprise, the pushing of military colonies to far-off areas and to the coast itself, renewed relations with the Yemen, and the unifying effect of their religion, produced a gradual revival. By A.D. 950 the new kingdom of Ethiopia, with its centre in Shoa or Amhara, was founded, growing, and formidable.

That it still confronted enemies and dangers, besides those of weakness or disruption from within, was shown by two events of the tenth and twelfth centuries. The first was an invasion, from an unknown quarter, by a people led by a legendary Queen Guedit, monstrous in her ferocity. She must represent some remembered incursion from the south or from the western fringes.

The second event was a change of dynasty, lasting for a century, in Ethiopia itself. Presumably by armed uprising, power was seized in about 1150 from the reviving monarchy by a dynasty of the Zagué people of Lasta district, a stronghold of the Agau. These, representing perhaps in some sense a revolt by unchanged Hamitic against Semite elements, not only retained the royal power for a century but adorned it by recognition in the Christian world abroad, by pious works and interventions in Jerusalem, and by church-building at home.

The Zagué dynasty was in its turn overthrown by an Amharic rebel. He claimed power and support by an appeal to the legitimacy (which he claimed himself) of the 'descendants of Solo-

mon'; a title which had for some time both during and since the Axum period been used by the Ethiopian King of Kings. It derives from the oft-told myth that the first King, Menelik I, was the son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, and had come to assume the government of Ethiopia escorted by representatives of the twelve tribes. This story is the national saga of Ethiopia. It has been repeated with full seriousness by centuries of loyal Ethiopians, and has proved an effective instrument of kingly statecraft.

4. *The Ge'ez Languages*

Among the many contributions made to Africa by the invading Semite was the language of south Arabian or Sabaean type (nearly related to Arabic and Hebrew) which they brought. It was known, from one of their own tribe names, as Ge'ez; and from it arose the presence, familiar to-day, of Semitic languages in Hamitic Ethiopia and Eritrea. The variety of these suggests firstly, that the recipient peoples may themselves have spoken a variety of Hamitic tongues; second, that Ge'ez was perhaps not in uniform dialect the language of the newcomers; thirdly, that it was imposed on the language of the Africans in varying degrees of thoroughness, according to the times and spaces of its spread, and to local resistances. Ge'ez at all events remained the only written language, and held (still holds) a unique position as the tongue of the Coptic Liturgy. It was also the common ancestor of the three languages spoken in modern times in northern Ethiopia and Eritrea—Amharic, Tigré, and Tigrinya.

Of these Tigrinya—unwritten until recent years—seems to represent the mixture of Ge'ez with the language of the Agau or Hamites of the northern plateau. Tigré is the simpler blend, nearer to Ge'ez but to-day still unwritten and not intelligible to Tigrinya-speakers. It was produced by contact with the Beja peoples of the coast and of the northern hills. Amharic, a written language, but perhaps the farthest from the parent tongue, resulted, farther south in Ethiopia, from a mixture of a Ge'ez already heavily modified in Axum times, with Shoan or

Sidama dialects. The language of the Axum empire, Greek in court circles, was probably a near approximation to Tigrinya among the people. Amharic became the State language of medieval and modern Ethiopia by reason of the southward re-orientation of the State. It is not spoken in modern Eritrea, where instead the Christian plateau folk speak Tigrinya (uniformly with the Tigrai districts), and the Muslim hill and plain folk speak Tigré.

Confusion has many times arisen, both in speech and writing, from common misuse of the words Tigré, Tigrai, and Tigrinya. The first of these has two meanings; it is the language described above (which is also often known as Hasa or Hassa) and, secondly, it is used for the lower or serf-caste element of the Eritrean Muslim population themselves who speak it. Tigrai (for which the alternative form Tigre is for clearness best avoided) is the region or province of northern Ethiopia. Tigrinya is the language of the Tigrai, spoken also by the Christian highlanders of Eritrea. It has alternatively been called Tigrái; but again this form, though claimed as more correct, must if used create confusion with the province-name.

XIII

THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

1. *The East and the North*

IT will be valuable, before proceeding to summarize the economic and political position at which Eritrea stands to-day, to review, in such detail as may hope to be instructive yet not too wearisome, the peoples of the territory at the present time.

How far the coming and going of governments, the decrees and the laws, the roads and hospitals and policemen, have in fact affected the cultural or even the economic life of the common villager or tribesman, may well be argued; far less, it may be, than bureaucrats believe! But the general public's relation to the central administration, and inclusion under its hierarchy, gives at least an intelligible plan for their enumeration.

Within the Division of the eastern plain, with Massawa as its head-quarters, there are grouped, firstly, the Dahlak Islands. Of these, the inhabited islands include Dahlak itself (with a remarkable natural harbour, and the abortive oil-drilling which the British occupation interrupted), Nokra (seat of the Italian Residenza and ill-famed penal station), Nora, Dohol, Harat, Kubari, Daraka, Dinifarikh. The island population, supported by fishing and a few goats and camels, are of mixed Dankali, Somali, Arab, and Samhar blood, number some 3,000, and speak Tigré and some Dankali. Secondly, the Danakil, whose origins and present manner of life have been described on earlier pages. Some 20,000 live within Eritrea, an equal or greater number in Ethiopia and French Somaliland. They are grouped in the district of Massawa itself, including the Buri peninsula; in the district of Thio; and in that of Assab, where the bulk of its inhabitants and of Little Assab its suburb are themselves Danakil. The sultanate of Rahaita, beyond Assab on the French frontier, is Dankali, and the tiny fishing villages of Mersa Fatma, Thio, Edd, Beilul are of the same folk. They supply workers in the

salt-pans of Badoli, and work the potash (when it is worked) at Dallol in Ethiopia. (The depression of the salt plain, inland from here, boasts to be the hottest spot on the earth's surface.) For the rest, the Dankali are nomadic herdsmen, some owning cattle, others camels and goats. The tribes which can be distinguished among the Eritrean Danakil to-day are the Damohaita, some 4,000 strong; the Dahimela (all 'white-men', but independent); the Hadarim, who claim Hadhramaut origin, as the Bellasuwa and the Dunna claim Yemeni. Smaller tribes, including some predominantly Somali, are numerous—the Assabarka, Nassal, Afara, Ankala, Hawakil, Gadimto. There is no unity among them, and no outstanding leader.

The Massawa division includes, thirdly, the Samhar tribes, grouped directly under that head-quarters. They surround, as islands in a sea, the few permanent centres of population—the Massawa suburbs of Harkiko, Monkullo, Otumlo, Zaga, and the coastal villages of Mersa Kuba, Emberemi, Wakiro. They cultivate precarious crops during the winter, crudely damming the mountain torrents which traverse their territory. In summer they seek the highland pastures with their herds. There is no caste system among these tribes, nor has any strong personality emerged. The tribes, among whom the Naibs of Harkiko still have influence, are petty and disuntied. The chief are the Aflenda, some 2,500 strong in three sub-tribes; and the Meshalet of some 2,000, also subdivided. Elements of the Sahil tribes descend during the winter into Samhar pastures.

Fourthly, Massawa division contains, in its Ghinda district, a further group of half-sedentary tribesmen of mixed origin. The district forms a narrow strip from north to south, but it includes both high and low altitudes. Fixed areas of it are visited annually by highland Tigrinya-speaking cultivators for their winter season. It contains also Muslim Tigré-speaking sections, which move with their herds seasonally to the plains below or up to the Sahil or westward into the highlands. These are the Ad Aha (perhaps of Saho origin), Ad Shuma, Ad Askar, and Geden Sikta (drawn by origin from the Naib's soldiers and

irregulars), Nabara, Waria, Teroa Bait Mushé, Iddifer. The two last mentioned are bilingual in Tigré and Saho. The district contains the permanent villages of Ailet, with mineral springs; Gumhod, Asus, and Damas, and the administrative centre, Ghinda, in a pleasant plain; and in general it links the Samhar with the highlands, combining the races and economies of both.

North of the Samhar and of the Hamasien division lies the Keren Division, with its two districts of Keren and of Nagfa and its great area of broken mountains, barren hills, and coastal wilderness. Of its peoples much has been said on previous pages. The Nagfa district, poor and grainless except in rare plots, contains the great tribe of the Habab, largest of the Bait Asghedé and 25,000 strong, under its aged Cantibai 'Uthman bin Hidad who has held the post against all rivals for nearly fifty years; the Ad Temariam, 7,000 strong, also Bait Asghedé; the Ad Shaikh, of some 9,000 souls, grouped round the descendants of their holy founder; the Ad Tsaura, 2,000 strong and lacking the serf system usual among its neighbours; the Ad Mu'allim, 1,000 strong, with the same peculiarity and claiming (as usual) Arab origins. The Bait Mala in the far north is a Beja tribe of some 3,000 souls, once subject to the Bani Amir, now independent. It is bilingual in Beja and Tigré. The others mentioned speak Tigré only. The Rashaida, newly settled Yemenis along the coast, have been described elsewhere. Except for them, all the Nagfa tribes migrate annually to the coastal lowlands. The Habab not infrequently move, in search of grazing, to the Tokar district of the Sudan.

In Keren District better rainfall produces an agricultural life and static 'tribes'. These comprise the two groups of the Bilein —Bait Taukwé and Bait Tarké, each 10,000 strong, with a smaller third, the Jangeren of 1,000 souls—both now subdivided into sections; the Marea, Red and Black, together some 25,000 in number, and each in turn subdivided into lesser groups; the Mensa, with 5,000 members between Bait Abrehé and the Bait Shaken; the Beijuk of 4,000 souls; and the Ad Takles, 10,000 strong, who are of the Bait Asghedé. Mention has been made

before of the probable origins and the strange serf-and-master social system of these peoples. The latter, interesting to the sociologist, presents problems to the administrator; indeed, a difficulty—ancient and accepted usage versus modern tendency, privilege versus freedom—not yet resolved. The British administration has refused to enforce the full claims of the masters (which include customary gifts as well as crop shares) but must leave final settlement to a less temporary successor.

Breaking the symmetry of Divisional and racial boundaries are, close to the Hamasien border of Keren division, four small districts of Tigrinya-speaking Copts with enda and village organization strictly on Hamasien lines. The four, each deriving its name from its largest village, were united by the Italian administration into a single district under a Meslenie.

There is throughout the Keren Division no town save Keren itself. Nagfa District depends entirely on import for its grain, which it obtains, in exchange for cattle, from Agordat and Massawa; Keren is self-supporting in a favourable year.

2. *The West*

We pass to the Division of the western plains, with its headquarters at Agordat. The only towns of the Division are the three administrative centres of Tessenei, Barentu, and Agordat itself. There is village life in the Kunama–Baria country and in the few settlements of Sabderat, Aikota, Gullui, Umm Hajar.

The Districts of Agordat and Tessenei contain the Bani Amir tribes, that of Barentu the Baria and Kunama. The latter tribe overflows into the Umm Hajar sub-area of Tessenei.

The Bani Amir, so often mentioned, are the greatest tribe group of Eritrea and, with vicissitudes of fortune, can show a long continuity of rule and organization. Some 60,000 of the confederacy are in Eritrea, half that number more in the Sudan. They are, by majority, pastoral nomads and camel-breeders, well armed, given to banditry, and ancient enemies and mutual raiders with the Hadendowa, the neighbouring Beja group in

the Sudan. The caste system of Nabtab and serf class still persists. All alike are Muslim, all revere the Mirghani family, whose chief (but weak-minded) Eritrean representative died in 1943 at Agordat. All conform to the loose system of separate tribes united only by their common way of life, religion, ruling aristocracy, and hereditary prince, the Diglal. The present holder of this post, Gailani Husain, was removed to Khartum at the time of the British occupation but restored with good results to his government in 1943. His traditional second-in-command, the Shaikh ul Mushayikh of the confederacy (always from a separate branch of the reigning family), is now supported by two equal colleagues, each with authority over a third of the whole. The constituent tribes show their diverse origins in that some speak only Tigré, some only To Bedawi (Beja), some both. Arabic is understood by a few headmen. The tribes vary greatly in size and strength. Those recognized to-day as separate units responsible to their Shaikh ul Mushayikh and the Diglal are tabulated in Appendix B.

Three petty communities are found, surrounded by Bani Amir but distinct from them, in the District of Tessenei. They are the Sabderat, living in the village of that name, settled folk speaking Tigré and Arabic; the Ilit, around Aikota on the main Barentu–Tessenei road, with a language entirely their own; and the Bitama, east of Sabderat. These groups number about 3,000, 600, and 150 respectively. The latter two are of negroid type, all are Muslim. The Shukriya, Arabs of the Sudan, live inside Eritrea on the frontier.

Filling the District of Barentu are the two negroid peoples of the Baria to the north, and the Kunama to the south. Reference to these and their way of life—their clans and dialects, their matriarchy and magic—was made when they first appeared in Eritrean history; and, except for their frequent sufferings at the hands of all their neighbours, they have to-day changed but little. They have, since the Italian occupation, themselves offended often against authority, and in turn been raided by Bani Amir groups or parties from Shiré over the Setit; but never on the

former scale. There are to-day perhaps 15,000 Baria, 10,000 Kunama. They live in distinct groups, each containing settled and permanent villages from which they practise agriculture. The Kunama sub-tribes are named from the rivers or tracts of country which they inhabit: the Marda, Barka (that is, Gash), Mogreb, Tika, Sogodas, Lakatakura. All these belong to Barentu, except the last two which fall within Umm Hajar district. There is no paramount head of the Kunama. They are still pagan, with a few hundred Catholic converts. The Baria fall in but two main groups, the Mogreb and the Hijjar, and a single Nazir of the Baria has authority above both of these, which are, in turn, subdivided into village areas. The Baria are Muslim, with a pagan residue. Both the Swedish and Catholic missions have long worked amongst them and the Kunama.

At the villages of Dukumbia and Woggero in Kunama country are found a group of Tigrinya-speaking Copts, collected from Shiré and from the highlands of Eritrea. Along the Sudan frontier of Tessenei and Umm Hajar are half-settled groups of Sudanis and West Africans.

Since the British occupation a spur of the Sudan railways, from Malawiya south-west of Kassala, runs through Eritrea to Tessenei. A gap from there to Agordat is thus left in rail communication between Massawa and Khartum.

If the abiding administrative problem of Keren is that of serf and master, the problem of the western plain is that of security. The Kunama country is close and difficult, its boundary with wild ungoverned Ethiopia is open; the Bani Amir country includes 10,000 square miles or more of open steppe and ravine-cleft hills. The peoples are primitive and predatory. They are stirred by feuds and hunger, and can hope for impunity. Even in Italian times, with hundreds or thousands of regular and irregular native troops stationed in the area, security here was imperfect; the British administration, with a tithe of these resources, has so far failed satisfactorily to achieve it.

3. *The Highlands*

The three Divisions of the Eritrean highlands follow closely the boundaries of the three traditional regions (Hamasien, Akkele Guzai, Sarae) from which they are named.

Of the differences between them in social organization, clear as this was at the time of the Italian occupation, there is now little trace. Society is uniform in them all, though in some measure their original loyalties are still felt. There are minor differences of vocabulary in their Tigrinya, but those of usage, according to the different systems of customary law, are not so much between Divisions as between groups of villages within them.

The plateau Districts recognized to-day as the units of administration within the Residenze, and each under a salaried Meslenie, are the creation of the Italians. They represent a formalization of the territorial units within which, in former days, kinship (real or traditional) was the bond; and no other or better unit could have been adopted. In the process of formalization, however, departures have been made which are the weakness of the system. Firstly, many present districts are artificial; they represent, that is, no natural group. Secondly, the chiefs are often unsuitable and were installed for reasons which ignored the needs of the position. Many, even of those traditionally entitled to the chief's authority, are now town-dwellers and losing touch or sympathy with their own people. A sounder organization for the future, perhaps, would refashion the districts so as to correspond better with areas of a natural unity; and would introduce, cautiously at first, the element of election into the choice of chiefs. This would in principle be no novelty to the Eritrean villager, whose own institutions, within his village, have always been freely democratic.

No merely administrative improvement, however, would solve the most pressing and truly serious of highland problems: the land shortage. Something clearly could be done by more intensive cultivation—manuring, terracing, clearing; but this would

not suffice. The present evils are three. There is, firstly, the actual shortage of food produce, involving import from the Tigrai and too frequent malnutrition. There is, next, the endless village and enda litigation over land, due to its value. And there is finally the social evil of the inferior 'landless stranger' class in the villages. All could be cured by the provision of more land, and this must come from areas where it can best (though in small extent) be found, the eastern edge and slopes of the plateau. Existing land must be cultivated upon a less rigid system than the present exclusive freehold of the enda; that is, upon one of collective village tenure. And more land—though still not much—can be made available if Italian-held concessions are gradually abandoned, and grazing-lands and hay-growing meadow-lands come under the plough.

But the rural economics of the highlands are no easy question. They lie behind any and all administration of these villagers; and they will not improve when, with probable lessening of European enterprise and employment, much of the urban proletariat of Asmara (whose own livelihood to-day is scarcely less a problem) must return to the land or starve.

The districts of the Asmara Residenza of Hamasien Division number seventeen. That of Decamere contains only one. In Akkele Guzai, the Residenza of Saganeiti has ten, that of Adi Caieh nine, that of Senafé sixteen. In the Division of Sarae, the Residenza of Adi Ugri contains twenty-five districts, that of Adi Quala seven. In size, population, and importance they vary enormously. The chiefs vary no less in age and standing, in efficiency, and in the principles upon which they were selected. They contain outstanding personalities—eighty-year-old Ras Kidanemariam of Arresa in Sarae, the Baraki family of Hamasien (sons of the Ras who greeted the Italians in 1885), Ras Tesemma and his son Dejjach Abraha in Akkele Guzai, and many more—and a wealth of folk-lore, tradition, and scenic beauty. Missionary enterprise, Catholic and Swedish, has long been active, and both can claim communities of converts. The Ethiopian Catholics number perhaps 10,000 on the whole plateau

(as against 240,000 Copts), the Presbyterians about half that number.

East of the main north–south road through Akkele Guzai, and down the eastern escarpment, are the Saho. From bold robbers they have turned, in half a century, into peaceful nomads who vary their pastures with the season, and keep the peace with their Christian hosts and neighbours. Their migrations take them far to the west across Akkele Guzai and across the Mareb in the Hazamo plain to the Sarae; and, surprisingly, little friction with the Christian cultivators is caused. They touch the sea-coast only in the Arafali Corridor, and supply Zula with the majority of its inhabitants. They no longer spread into the Samhar, though the Teroa there speak Saho; nor do they now (as in Napier's time) predominate in Senafé. Their chief spokesman, the aged Nasir Pasha, is a leading figure in tribal Eritrea. His tribe, the Assaorta, are some 17,000 strong and include six pure and five added or affiliated sub-tribes. The Miniferi number 10,000, and divide into four sub-sections, which acknowledge a single head for the whole. Both Assaorta and Miniferi are taking gradually to agriculture. The same is true of the smaller Saho tribe of Debrimela, in two branches; but untrue of the Hazu, 4,000 strong. These never cultivate, but live at feud with the Danakil and with their neighbours in Irob.

Before turning finally from the society of the highlands, we should mention certain Muslim elements (besides the Saho) found widely among the Copts. There are in Asmara city large numbers of Sudanis, mostly Anglo-Egyptian subjects but a few French. A few more live in the port areas of Massawa and Assab. All are simple labourers; their total number in Eritrea may be 8,000. With them, but far above them in society, are the smaller communities of Yemen and Hadhramaut (and rarely of Hijaz) origin, who provide the specialized stevedore labour at Massawa docks, and to whom belong some of the most considerable Asmara and Massawa merchants. Feeling is chronically hostile between the Yemen community in Asmara and the Coptic majority, and has led to violent clashes. A small Indian (Muslim

and Hindu) community of shopmen and traders deserves mention; they share the piece-goods trade with the few houses of Aden Jews settled in Asmara, and with the Greeks. The latter themselves are a compact self-respecting colony some 300 strong with their Church, school, and patriotic tradition. But a more important Eritrean element than any of these are the Jiberti, Eritrean Muslims whose suggested origins were mentioned on an earlier page. Their numbers were no doubt increased by the wars of Ahmad the Left-Handed, and by the same steady Islamic pressure which has converted the Marea and the Bilein. They may now number some 30,000, divided between the Maliki, Hanafi, and Shafa'i rites of the Sunna. All speak Tigrinya, some also Arabic. They live peacefully with their neighbours in the capital and the smaller highland towns, yet adhere strongly—even provocatively—to their faith. They are in general richer, more progressive and more public-spirited than their Christian fellow citizens.

Tables of population, religions, and languages for the whole native population are given in Appendix C.

4. *Economic Survey*

This rapid survey of the Eritrean peoples at the present day, sufficient for the general onlooker though not for the administrator, may furnish, additionally to the outline already given of Eritrea's past fortunes, material for generalization and for prophecy.

The country consists, as has been seen, of a small highland fragment of northern Ethiopia surrounded by greater areas clearly distinct therefrom and from each other. It is orientated equally towards the south, towards the sea, and towards the west. It combines elements of the oldest Africa with others of modern Europe. Essentially diverse within itself, the territory has by fortune become a detached political unit, whose future must shortly be decided.

To what, economically, does the territory amount, or can it be made to amount?

That any European community which remains in Eritrea must depend on import for most of its requirements is obvious; equally, that it must pay for these by some form of effort. The wealth of the Eritrean population, and its hope of self-sufficiency, can lie only in its agriculture, its herds, and its minerals.

The agricultural possibilities of the country, as previous pages have suggested, are limited. They are, and will always be, diminished by two general dangers: failure of rainfall, which is not uncommon throughout the territory and almost annual in one area or another; and visitations of locusts which, if by great efforts all home-hatched swarms are destroyed, can arrive already adult, and with disastrous consequences, from the uncontrolled regions of Ethiopia or the Yemen. In spite of these major risks, agriculture is in fact practised in all parts of the territory except the sea-coast, the north, and the north-west. It is practised in primitive form, of which conservatism and poverty and jealous land claims will long obstruct the improvement; and largely in broken or mountainous country where cultivable patches are small, and controlled irrigation (even were stored water available) impossible. Only in the broad stretches of the central and southern Bassopiano Occidentale can large estates and modern methods be imagined, and there in fact one modern-type estate exists; but the rain is precarious, and further irrigation must be competitive with the needs of the Gash delta in the Sudan. The climate must always preclude the use of European labour in the lowlands.

In general, then, no major land development is probable, nor could it easily attract the capital required for it. Proposals sometimes advanced for Jewish or for Assyrian settlement in Eritrea are fantastic, unless the present population is first to be removed, and the lowest standard of life anticipated. Eritrea will no doubt continue to import the grain surplus of the Tigrai to make good its own normal deficiency, to feed therefrom the grainless Danakil, Bani Amir, and Habab nomads. Local surpluses—in Sarac, or around Agordat—are, if they occur, immediately absorbed by

needy areas adjacent. Import from the Yemen is common, by dhow to Massawa, but is small and variable.

Of the produce of the soil only the dum-nut is a major exportable asset of Eritrea; it gives the hard 'vegetable ivory' used for buttons. This is exported in natural or manufactured form; and with it small quantities of sisal, of which, however, there is but one estate. The crops grown for local use are dhurra (sorghum), maize, millet, a little barley and wheat, dagussá (*eleusine coracana*) for local beer-making, taff (*erogrotis abyssinica*), the most favoured of local highland grains, various peas and beans, oil seeds on a small scale, flax and sisal, onions and pimento. The culture of tea and the olive has been tried in vain; coffee grows well on the eastern slopes, but on a negligible scale. Tobacco grows well and could, with improved treatment, be made to supply local native needs.

The forest belts of the territory, which the last century has seen gravely diminished, are now small and remote from main centres. They can take no major place in its economy, unless after some exceptional and costly effort of replanting, against native apathy and goats' destruction. At least forty types of trees are found. They include six varieties of acacia, the beobab, the juniper (but no other conifer), the euphorbia (candelabra tree), eucalyptus (imported), false ebony, balonites, tamarind, casuarina, sycamore, wild olive, and a large number of deciduous trees useful for house construction or furniture, and in some cases yielding gum and inferior tanning bark. These resources meet local needs, have assisted war-time industry, and have even permitted some abnormal export; but they can never be an outstanding asset.

The pastoral life of half the population suffices to keep them at a level of bare subsistence, with cattle as their unit of wealth as well as provider of livelihood. The pastures of the territory —upon which agriculture, through increasing population, has made some inroads in the highlands during the last fifty years— are, thanks to scanty rainfall, poor to the point of absurdity by European standards; and they have produced a type of cattle

inferior in nearly all respects. Herds could be increased, but the exportable surplus of meat and hides, which would then be considerable, would still be of low value. Milk yields are notably low and milk collection, to-day government-organized, is made especially difficult by the remoteness of grazing grounds. Hides are of indifferent quality; high-grade tanning materials are not found locally. It would not be difficult to produce improved milking herds by developing the best local strains (the Barka cattle) or by importing others from the Yemen; but this at best could visualize no more than the needs of a local European community, at present barely supplied. Locally tanned leather is used to-day by a modern Asmara shoe factory, but this itself could scarcely survive open world competition.

Pig breeding and the preparation of products therefrom have made great advances since the British occupation, and find (but perhaps only in war conditions) a ready market. The produce is of excellent quality.

Red Sea fish are plentiful, and the ports of Massawa and Assab could be equipped much better than they are to exploit this industry. The inland market will always be limited, but export of salted or (with greater promise) dehydrated fish can be imagined; salt is plentiful and ice available at a price. Such enterprise, on the other hand, would need costly initial equipment in boats and storage, and the Eritrean ports are too far from main markets—where they would compete with fisheries nearer at hand and at least equally favoured—to inspire much confidence in this industry. The same is true of Red Sea sponges, of medium to poor quality; and Red Sea pearls, not of the best. Mother-of-pearl is exported to America. Fish products—shark-oil, fish-meal—are at an early stage of development and have a limited promise. Certain of the Red Sea islands have guano deposits of some value.

Mineral possibilities of the territory were very thoroughly investigated under the Italian administration. Traces of low grade or inaccessible deposits of iron, lead, manganese, and copper have been examined; none of these are workable. The lignite

of Adi Ugri could not, even in war time, be exploited with economic soundness. First prospecting and then test drilling for mineral oil was carried out prior to 1941 on the Dahlak Islands, but no oil was revealed, and little promise. Mica of low quality was exported to Italy. Sulphur exists abundantly on the northern edge of the Dankali desert, but offers every transport difficulty; it has, at times, been exploited for export. The potash of Dallol, worked for a time before the war by an Italian company, belongs in fact to Ethiopia. Gold from quartz has been mined on an ambitious scale at two mines in the Kunama country—Ugaro and Susena—at Shumagalle near Asmara, and at many small outcrops; but the conditions and yield are nowhere favourable, and it seems that only the most economical working and an exceptional market could justify the industry. The Italian parastatal mining organization was ponderous and costly.

In general, then, the mineral wealth of Eritrea, while not quite negligible, has offered but a small contribution to its economics, and is unlikely to offer more.

5. *Future of the European Community*

The economics of the territory, thus far reviewed, are seen to be modest and little promising. They could be otherwise, in the field of agriculture, fisheries, forests, and minerals, only by the infusion—unlikely enough, and socially of doubtful consequences—of foreign capital and effort on an important scale. Such effort could valuably and harmlessly be directed to developing the country (and especially Keren and Asmara) as a tourist centre for which indeed its climate, interest, and modern amenities well qualify it. It could continue, also, the development of such industries as, already well established under wartime stimulus, can hope for a permanent place in East African economics; brewing and distilling, preparation of hides, glasswork, bacon, and matches may be among them. And Europeans can (indeed, must) continue to staff the public services, and many or most of the tasks of government.

All these functions are performed at present by the Italian

community of Eritrea, numbering, early in 1945, some 40,000. The future of the community depends upon political, administrative, and economic factors. Politically, few Italians would choose (or perhaps would be permitted) to remain under African rule, should the future of the territory involve this; more, but not most, under that of non-Italian Europeans; more still, and possibly a majority, under a restored Italian régime. Administratively, the presence of Europeans—that is, Italians—to staff the water and electricity installations, maintain roads and telegraphs (and railway, if it survives), and much else besides in the operations of central and local government, must be of great advantage—indeed almost indispensable, unless such services are to be abandoned altogether. Other Europeans would perform such functions no better, and more expensively; Indians would create one problem more; local Africans are at present quite unqualified. These services could employ perhaps from 1,000 to 2,500 Europeans. And (to pass from the administrative to the economic field) to these must be added all those concerned with surviving local industry, if this is to be allowed full and fair opportunities; with the hotel and tourist industry, and the banks, travel agencies, restaurants, shops, amusements connected with it; and with transport.

It is clear that there can be no question of Eritrea supporting a European population upon its present scale; nothing in the soil or resources or possibilities of the territory permits it; and the longer it remains, the more will it become an administrative and political as well as an economic embarrassment. It is a painfully lingering by-product of the Ethiopian war, and must in great majority be removed. That, however, there is and will be place for a number of Italians somewhere intermediate between 3,000 and 6,000 is no less clear, provided always that the territory is left under a régime rendering their presence possible and desirable.

6. *The Future of Eritrea*

The disposal of the Italian community of Eritrea depends, as the lesser upon the greater, upon that of the territory as a whole.

This main issue may now be considered in the light of its history, its races, its economics.

Historically, it has been seen that a small part of Eritrea—but the most populous and homogeneous part—was for many centuries an integral part of the Ethiopian State, or, for a century, of the effectively independent kingdom of the Tigrai. Of the rest of Eritrea, part was normally claimed and taxed by the Ethiopian representative on the plateau: that is, the Keren tribes (the old Bogos area and its near neighbours) and the Samhar. Part was the subject of a general and intermittent claim to sovereignty, and of occasional raids for cattle and slaves in token thereof: that is, the nomadic tribes of northern and western Eritrea, the Kunama-Baria quadrilateral, and the Danakil. Effective control (by the standards of an Ethiopian government) was thus maintained, it may be said, in the highlands; some measure of authority admitted in the mountain and lowland areas nearest thereto; and no control beyond that. Turkish and later Egyptian government of Massawa continued, and was not seriously questioned, from the sixteenth century until the Italian occupation. Egyptian control of the Bani Amir (in succession to that of the Fung empire) lasted for half a century, and was followed by Italian. The Egyptian occupation of the Keren area, however, was never acquiesced in by the Negus, and no historical claim can properly be based upon it; no area, on the other hand, was more brutally misgoverned or non-governed by the Ethiopian power.

Still on the historical issue, it is sometimes forgotten that if the present Ethiopian empire claims—as of course it does—complete continuity with that of Menelik II, it cannot well ignore the latter's treaties and frontier demarcations. The cession to Italy of territory north of the Mareb, and subsequent delimitation of this in detail, were not the work of hasty or dictated treaties; they were free and formal acts of the Ethiopian St after its victory at Adua. This aspect, however, should not be given more importance than it deserves.

Racially and culturally, the Eritrean highlanders are Ethio-

pian; the Keren tribes have some Ethiopian blood as well as a Ge'ez-derived language, but they are Muslim. The same is true of the Samhar and Sahil; in these, however, racial traces of Ethiopia are less, and of the Beja more. The Bani Amir contain faint Ethiopian traces only in certain sub-tribes, and are generally non-Ethiopian in blood as well as civilization. The Kunama and Baria have, of course, no cultural or racial element of Ethiopia at all.

Economically, Massawa and the Samhar are indissoluble from the highlands, as are the highlands from the Tigrai. Neither the Kunama nor the Bani Amir, on the other hand, nor the Sahil, nor the Keren tribes, have any necessary economic connexion with the highlands. The old pre-Italian east–west line of traffic across Eritrea passed from Massawa to Keren and eastward without touching the Asmara plateau.

As regards political sentiment, where their own future and that of Eritrea or its component parts are discussed, the different communities (or rather, the few spokesmen capable of conceiving or formulating political opinions) hold, as might be expected, widely varying views. Those of the Coptic highlanders are deeply divided. The elements among them who favour some sort of union of all or part of Eritrea with Ethiopia are the young race-conscious and usually Mission-educated intelligentsia of Asmara; the Coptic priesthood, who favour the emperor in the hope that he will favour them; a small proportion of the chiefs and village heads, and a very few of the merchant class. The idea of such union is opposed by most merchants who value principally security; by a majority of the chiefs; by all who value the progress made in Eritrea in the last half-century and contrast its present condition with that of northern Ethiopia; and by all ranks of the Muslims. It is untrue that the highlands, with a single voice or even with a clear majority, either demand or reject Ethiopian union. They are divided, inarticulate, unable justly to appreciate the issues concerned and the effects of either or any policy, and desirous principally of their own immediate advantage. 'Demonstrations' in support of or opposition to any-

thing at any time can, of course, be arranged with ease by anyone willing to pay for them.

Once off the Coptic highlands, it is certain that no considerable element whatsoever of the population desires a close connexion with the Ethiopian empire. It is not less certain that Ethiopian spokesmen claim and will claim all Eritrea as their 'right'.

Certain assumptions must here be made. The first is that the interest of the inhabitants of the territory is the first consideration, far more than that either of colonizers or of monarchs; the second, that such interest is above all in security, tranquillity, and the possibility of progress; the third, that there is no *a priori* reason why the present artificial unit of Eritrea should, after a mere half-century of existence, be perpetuated if it can be shown that the resolution of the territory into its racial and geographic elements can provide a sounder solution.

There is indeed nothing impossible in the retention of the old colony under a single European or African rule; but a solution on such lines is unlikely to find favour. Against a mere reassignment to Italy is the majority (though not quite the unanimous) feeling of the inhabitants, and the fear that at some future date the territory might again be misused as a base for aggression. Against assignment to another European power is the probable unwillingness of any to accept it; the charge would be unrewarded, probably, by either wealth or gratitude. Against the sometimes advocated assignment of the whole to Ethiopia (which would accept and indeed actively claims it) is the certainty that much of Eritrea was never Ethiopian; that such parts could not now be suitably or acceptably ruled by that government; and that no part has been politically Ethiopian since the deliberate cession of Beyond-the-Mareb by Menelik. For the formation of an all-native Eritrean State or Republic—a proposal not quite unknown to the intelligentsia of Asmara—there are no materials, because there exists no imaginable governing or administrative class; it could not but end in anarchy, or in renewed European control.

It seems, then, that the single Eritrea of to-day is doomed.

Dismemberment, in some form and to some extent, must be the alternative. If this is so—and the evident racial and cultural and historical diversities suggest it—it must be in favour of the two greater neighbours of the territory, the Sudan and Ethiopia.

In view of their position astride the present frontier, their kinship with the rest of the Beja group, their history of allegiance to a Nile-valley power (but never to an Ethiopian), their Islamic faith, it is difficult to resist the suggestion to attach the Bani Amir tribe-group to the Sudan, where it would without effort find a congenial place. The case for transference of the tribes of the northern hills and the Sahil is almost as strong. Their present frontier is as artificial and as frequently ignored by their own migrations; nor have they, at least for centuries, supported the pretence of Ethiopian rule. The Nilotic tribes of the Kunama and Baria should accompany the Bani Amir.

The assignment to the Sudan of these three groups is consonant with all our basic assumptions and reduces the remaining Eritrea to small proportions. It leaves, however, other problems for solution. They are those of, firstly, the Coptic highland itself —Hamasien, Sarae, and Akkele Guzai; secondly, Keren and its settled Muslim tribes (the Marea, Mensa, Bilein, Ad Tekles, Beijuk); thirdly, the Saho tribes; fourthly, Massawa and the Samhar; fifthly, the Danakil.

This list can at once be simplified. The Danakil with their long frontier with Ethiopia and their stretch of sea-coast (including Assab, useless to Eritrea, invaluable to Ethiopia) could conveniently join the rest of their race in the Ethiopian empire, where their suzerain the Sultan of Aussa already lives. A northern boundary for this people in the near neighbourhood of Arafali could easily be fixed in detail. The Saho tribes must necessarily be one with the rest of the Akkele Guzai, despite their difference in habit and religion; their geographical overlap and their economics of grazing and marketing preclude the possibility of separation. More important, Massawa and its coastal hinterland to the foothills of the Ghinda district cannot reasonably be

assigned to any power but that which controls the Asmara plateau. The difference in language and religion, and the long political separation, must be granted; but, apart from considerations of seasonal grazing as between the higher and lower level, the need for the traffic and commerce of the highlands to have its own outlet, the need of the port to its own healthier hinterland, the need to preserve under a single authority the modern communications running inland to the plateau, can be met only by refusing to separate the highlands from Massawa and the Samhar.

The outstanding problems, therefore, are now two: that of Asmara-Massawa and the highlands, and that of Keren and its tribes.

It cannot be justifiable to continue, if it can at all be avoided, the cleavage enforced by the present Eritrean southern boundary between the Ethiopian Tigrai and its northern part which is the Eritrean plateau. Every consideration of history and of race, language, culture, and economics urges the effective uniting of these two areas. The result would be a notably homogeneous and compact unit of population, from which both parts would benefit and to which both have their own contributions to make—the northern area, its port and communications; the southern, its cornfields and its man-power. The whole unit would have natural and already acknowledged frontiers.

Its political disposal need be no insoluble problem.

Firstly, it could be assigned without stipulation to the Emperor, at the risk (if present conditions in the Tigrai are any guide) of allowing a general reversion to Ethiopian standards of administration, and the decay or destruction of fifty years of outstanding material progress in the northern part of the territory, Eritrea. Our first assumption—the paramount importance of the well-being of the population—seems to be unsuited by this solution.

Secondly, the territory could be so assigned with the proviso or safeguard of the employment by the Emperor of European advisers or inspectors. There can be no confidence, however, that the presence of these would suffice to maintain

administration at a satisfactory level. There is, indeed, enough evidence to suggest every probability of the contrary. Nor would any régime of excluded or privileged areas, or local safeguards, produce anything but friction and trouble.

Thirdly, the united Tigrai unit or State could be placed under the sovereignty of the Emperor and be administered, in his name and on his behalf, by a European power, if such be found willing to assume the task and to face the certain (but not serious) financial loss from the administration. Ethiopia, increased by new homogeneous territory (including an admirable port) would benefit by an enlightened administration both of this and of the now disaffected and almost ungoverned Tigrai. This solution would be generally (but not unanimously) welcome in the Eritrean highlands, and almost certainly in the Tigrai also—where direct 'rule' by the Shoan dynasty has hitherto been a record of ceaseless rebellion and discontent. It would be viewed critically by the Ethiopian government; but this should not, perhaps, outweigh the certain advantage of the population at large.

In the case of Keren and its tribes the decision to be made is as between adhesion to the Sudan or to the Eritrean plateau, whatever be the fate of the latter. The argument from sovereignty over this area in past centuries would rather favour the Ethiopian claim, and the peoples' strain of Ethiopian blood runs counter to their present Islamic culture. In sentiment they are strongly anti-Ethiopian. The balance of advantage to the tribesmen and townsmen of the area lies, it can scarcely be doubted, in inclusion in the Sudan, if this may be conceded to them. The one Hamasien-type Coptic district, on the Keren borders, elsewhere described, would pass to the highlands.

To summarize these suggestions, it appears to the present writer that a partition of the territory should be made. Muslim tribal areas adjoining the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan should be included in that country. The central Christian highlands of Eritrea, with the port of Massawa and the Samhar and the Saho tribes, should form part of a United Tigrai state or province, which should be placed under the sovereignty of the Emperor

of Ethiopia but be administered, in his name, by a European power for either a stated or an unstated term of years. The Dankali country with Assab should be assigned unconditionally to the Emperor. Eritrea would cease to exist.

7. *Conclusion*

The present account of Eritrea has been historical. It has been forced to omit many aspects of the territory which are full of human and picturesque interest, and for which the reader may well have looked; it is forced by the same considerations (with which, however, inclination is this time in accord) to cut short its disquisition on present and future politics. This formed no part of the author's historical task; it has been included, thus briefly, rather to illustrate the sort of use which ought to be made of historical conclusions in framing a policy than to frame it. It may well be, moreover, that decisions will have been made even before this book is published.

It has been admitted, in certain recommendations suggested, that the facts of political history (even if clearly established) are not the only factors to be considered. Present preferences of the populations concerned may well outweigh them, if such preferences can be well ascertained; economics may modify or even counter-balance them; culture, religion, race, all have their word to say.

In studying the claims of interested parties, or their champions, there is need for care. In so far as such claims rest on history, they can be controlled to the extent to which historical truth is discoverable. If they rest on other aspects of the territory concerned—topography or economics—they must be considered by those best instructed in these aspects; and these may well be persons familiar with the territory at first hand. In so far as such claims seek a political or dynastic advantage, the criterion whereby to judge them is, no doubt, the true welfare of the peoples themselves, rather than the gratification of any claimant.

APPENDIX A

Table of Italian (and later British) Administrative Divisions and Districts in Eritrea

Administrative Divisions (Commissariati)	*Head-quarters*	*Administrative Districts (Residenze)*	*Head-quarters*
Hamasien	Asmara	Asmara	Asmara
		Decameré*	Decameré
Bassopiano Orientale	Massawa	Massawa	Massawa
		Dahlak Islands†	Nokra
		N. Dankalia†	Thio
		S. Dankalia‡	Assab
		Ghinda§	Ghinda
Akkele Guzai	Adi Caieh	Adi Caieh	Adi Caieh
		Saganeiti§	Saganeiti
		Senafé§	Senafé
		Arafali†§	Arafali
Sarae	Adi Ugri	Adi Ugri	Adi Ugri
		Adi Quala	Adi Quala
Keren	Keren	Keren	Keren
		Nagfa‖	Nagfa
Bassopiano Occidentale	Agordat	Agordat	Agordat
		Barentu	Barentu
		Tessenei	Tessenei
		Umm Hajar‖	Umm Hajar

NOTES

(1) * Only from 1934, and initially under Akkele Guzai.
† Not maintained as a separate district by the British Administration.
‡ Treated by the British as a separate division until 1944.
§ Vice Residenza.
‖ Usually not so maintained.

(2) In the period 1936–41, the Greater Eritrea included the Tigrai Commissariati of
Tigrai Occidentale (H.Q., Adua), with 6 Residenze and 1 Vice-Residenza.
Adigrat, with 3 Residenze and 2 Vice-Residenze.
Macallé, with 3 Residenze and 4 Vice-Residenze.
Tembien, with 3 Residenze.
Dankalia (H.Q., Assab), with 2 Residenze and 2 Vice-Residenze.
Paesi Galla (H.Q., Allomata), with 1 Residenza and 3 Vice-Residenze.

APPENDIX B

Table of Bani Amir Constituent Tribes

Tribe	*Population*	*Language*	*District*	
Daga . .	12,000	Beja, Tigré	Agordat	Nucleus was originally the entourage and camp-staff of the Diglal.
Ad 'Umr . .				
Ad Al Allam .	2,000	Tigré	Agordat	Five sub-tribes of Ad 'Umr, each now almost independent.
Al Hamid Awad	1,000	Tigré	Agordat	
Ad Humbirra .	1,500	Tigré	Agordat	
Hassal . .	1,000	Beja	Tessenei	
Shamaiyab	1,500	Beja	Agordat	
Ad 'Uqud .	10,000	Beja, Tigré	Agordat	
Ad Tuwas .	1,700	Beja	Agordat	
Ad Al Bakhit .	3,400	Tigré	Agordat	
Ad Taula .	400	Beja	Agordat	
Sinkat Kainab .	700	Beja	Agordat	
Ad Ibrahim .	2,000	Beja, Tigré	Agordat and Tessenei	
Faidab . .	1,500	Beja	Agordat	
Ad Shaikh Garabat . .	1,200	Tigré	Agordat	
Labat (1) . .	2,500	Beja	Agordat	Tribe is in two distinct parts.
Labat (2) . .		Beja	Tessenei	
Ad Sharaf .	1,000	Beja, Tigré	Agordat	
Bait Awad .	1,300	Tigré	Agordat	
Ad Ghadan .	500	Tigré	Agordat	Negroid
Ad Gultana .	4,000	Tigré	Agordat	
Ad Sala . .	500	Beja	Agordat	
Ad Nazi . .	300	Beja	Agordat	
Ad Hassari .	200	Tigré	Agordat	
Ad 'Ali . .	300	Beja	Agordat	
Alman . .	300	Beja, Tigré	Agordat	
Hashish . .	400	Beja	Agordat	

APPENDIX C

Table of Population, Language, and Religion Statistics (1943)

All figures are approximate

	Administrative Division					
	Asmara	*Massawa*	*Adi Caieh*	*Adi Ugri*	*Keren*	*Agordat*
Sedentary people	200,000	45,000	85,000	121,000	70,000	41,000
Nomadic	9,000	30,000	29,000	2,000	60,000	62,000
	209,000	75,000	114,000	123,000	130,000	103,000
Religions						
Copts	172,000	2,000	72,000	107,000	14,000	4,000
Muslims	32,000	73,000	36,000	14,000	110,000	80,000
Catholics*	2,000	..	6,400	500	500	..
Catholics†	..	..	..	..	5,000	750
Protestants	3,000	..	..	1,000	1,000	500
Pagan	..	..	..	500	..	15,000
Languages						
Tigrinya	190,000	5,000	82,000	117,000	10,000	4,000
Tigré	6,000	32,000	..	2,000	92,000	43,000
Beja	..	..	..	..	1,000	25,000
Bilein	1,000	..	..	..	21,000	..
Saho	1,000	6,000	31,000	3,000	..	..
Afar (Dankali)	..	20,000	500	..	..	..
Arabic	8,000	10,000	500	1,000	5,000	8,000
Nilotic and other	3,000	2,000	..	..	1,000	26,000

* Ethiopian Rite. † Mission.

APPENDIX D

SOURCES

The sources from which the present account of Eritrea is derived are:

(*a*) For topography, natural conditions, present economics, communications and administration—the writer's own observations and records.

(*b*) For the present races and tribes of the territory (and of adjacent countries), and considerations arising therefrom: the writer's own observations; studies made by officers of the British Military Administration of Eritrea since 1941, and those of recent Italian writers. Of the latter, particularly CAPOMAZZA, I., *La legge degli Atchemé Melga* (Macerata, 1912); id. *Cenni Etnografici sulla populazione dell' Acchele Guzai* (Napoli, 1909). Various papers by CONTI ROSSINI, C., LICATA, G. B., *Assab e i Danakil* (Milano, 1885); NESBITT, M., *La Dankalia esplorata* (Firenze, 1930); ODORIZZI DANTE, *Il Commissariato regionale di Massaua al 1 Gennaio 1910* (Asmara, 1911); id. *La Dankalia settentrionale* (Asmara, 1909); PERRINI RUFFILLO, *Di qua del Mareb* (*Mareb Mellasc*) (Firenze, 1905); id. *I Bani Amir* (Roma, 1895); POLLERA, A., *I Baria e i Cunama* (Roma, 1914); id. *Le Populazioni indigene dell' Eritrea* (Bologna, 1935); RODEN, K. G., *Le tribu dei Mensa* (Italian tr. from Swedish, Stockholm, 1913); RAVA MASSIMO, *L'Eritrea* (Roma, 1927).

(*c*) For the Italian Administration, 1900 to 1941: detailed personal observation; verbal information from many Italians and Eritreans; and Italian accounts such as those of SILLANI, T., *Africa Orientale Italiana* (Roma, 1936); STEFANINI, G., *I possedimenti italiani in Africa* (Firenze, 1923); CONSOCIAZIONE TURISTICA ITALIANA, *Guida dell' Africa Orientale Italiana* (Milano, 1938); articles in Enciclopedia Italiana; TREVISANI, R., *Politica Economica fascista in A.O.I.* (Roma, 1937); LESSONA, P., *La missione dell' Italia in Africa* (Roma, 1936).

(*d*) Generally for the history of Ethiopia, including Eritrea: the general histories of MORÉ, L. J., *Histoire de l'Éthiopie* (Paris, 1904); BRUCE, J., *Travels*, vol. ii (Edinburgh, 1790); ZOLI, C., *Cronache Etiopiche* (Roma, 1930); COULBEAUX, J. B., *Histoire politique et religieuse de l'Abyssinie* (Paris, 1929); CONTI ROSSINI, C., various publications; BUDGE, Sir E. A. Wallis, *History of Ethiopia* (London, 1928); dei SABELLI, L., *Storia d'Abissinia* (Roma, 1938).

All histories of Ethiopia from the thirteenth century are based on the various Ethiopian Chronicles; but only small portions of these have