

RACES AND TRIBES OF ERITREA

By

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This monograph was prepared during the summer months of 1943 in the Native Affairs section of the Secretariat of B.M.A., Eritrea. Compiled as it was after only two years of British occupation, the monograph is of necessity provisional in character. It is to be treated as a companion volume to two other publications - *Eritrea and her Neighbours*, and *Land Tenure on the Eritrean Plateau*.

The territory and administrative organization of the Eritrea of today, with which this book is largely dealing, are those of the Colony as it existed before 1935-36, that is, before the foundation of the Italian East African Empire. In its essential features this administrative organization was given its final (and present) shape in 1926-27. But the boundaries of the various administrative Divisions and Districts have been repeatedly altered and corrected, even after this date. Owing to inadequate recording, certain of these changes have remained doubtful. The internal boundaries as marked on the maps included in this volume are therefore in some instances uncertain.

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BRITISH MILITARY ADMINISTRATION - ERITREA

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NOTE: The spelling of vernacular words in these notes conforms to that commonly used in English ethnographical publications, with the exception of certain well-known place names, in the case of which the Italian spelling has been retained.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Physical and Political

The Italian Colony of Eritrea covers an area of 40,000 sq. miles; and has a population of about 800,000. On the map, Eritrea resembles an irregular triangle, with the base from east to west, and the apex in the north. This triangle which is Eritrea falls physically in three, or more precisely four, parts. Resting on its base and stretching north towards its tip, we have the spur of the Abyssinian table land. It forms, in the south of Eritrea, a mountainous plateau, 7000-8000 ft. high, which slopes gradually, over a plateau and hills of lesser height (4500-5000 ft.), to the north and the sea. To the west of the spur lies a wide, arid plain, intersected by the dry beds of large rivers - the Barka, Gash and Setit. In the east, the mountain spur drops into the narrow plain which is wedged between the escarpment and the sea. We shall in the following pages speak of these geographical zones as the Eastern and Western Plain, as the Central Plateau, and the Northern Hills.

Climatically, too, the four zones are sharply distinct. The plateau is cold, windswept and dry; the Northern Hills have a milder climate, with higher temperatures and greater humidity; the two plains share the typical climate of the arid and semi-desert zones of the Sudan or East Africa. The two plains are distinguished, however, by their rainfall. For in the Western Plain, as in the north and south of Eritrea, the main rainy season is in summer, in the months April to September. The total annual rainfall is comparatively small - 20 in. on the Plateau and in the Northern Hills, and 12 in. in the Western Plain. On the coast the rains fall in the winter months, from November to February. They are light in the plain (6-7 in.), but heavy in the foothills and on the escarpment (32 in.). We shall see how greatly these climatic conditions influence the economic habits of the people, above all, their seasonal migrations, which follow the grazing and the rains.

The political division of Eritrea corresponds fairly closely to the physical configuration. The large geographical zones reappear, only slightly modified, as administrative Divisions — *Commissariati*, in Italian nomenclature. The Western Plain forms the administrative Division of Agordat. The Northern Hills form approximately Keren Division, though this Division also includes, in its north-east corner, a strip of the coast. The Eastern Plain is divided between four Divisions: in the north, there is the strip of coast belonging to Keren; south of it, the coastal plain coincides with Massawa Division; at the Bay of Zula a narrow corridor to the sea, which forms part of the Plateau Division of Akkele Guzai, splits the territory of Massawa in half; further south still, the plain extends over the Division of Assab. The Central Plateau, finally, is the territory of three Divisions: Hamasien, Seraye, and Akkele Guzai.

Each *Commissariato* is sub-divided into a varying number of *Residenze* and *Vice-Residenze*. This sub-division is rarely based on geographical or ethnic features. More often it reflects merely principles of administrative convenience, and may thus for the moment be disregarded.

The physical configuration of the country has shaped, above all, its human contents. The physically uniform and relatively fertile Central Plateau is inhabited by the solid block of a sedentary agricul-

turist population, possessed of a common language (Tigrinya), a largely common religion (Coptic Christianity), and a common civilisation. The arid plains in the east and west are the habitat of numerous scattered tribes of greatly varying size and origin, yet united by the common livelihood of nomadic herdsmen and the common religion of Islam. Often the same tribes are spread over both plains as well as the Northern Hills, which, as it were, bridge the mountain spur. Indeed the Northern Hills may be called an ethnic bridge. They were crossed and crossed again by the tribes and races of Eritrea on their many migrations in historical times, which led from plain to plain, east to west and west to east. Today the Northern Hills are no longer a "bridge"; rather have they become an ethnic divide. For the hill tribes only descend seasonally to the plain in the east (hardly ever to the more distant Western Plain), to return again to their mountain home; and the plains tribes in the west move up to the escarpment, but not beyond it.

The physical separation of sedentary groups and nomadic tribes, too, has its counterpart in the political structure of the colony. This differentiation in livelihood is responsible for a certain administrative dualism. On the Central Plateau administration is based on territorial division, with "districts" as the units; in the east, west and north, we meet with a system of tribal administration, which adopts, not territories, but tribal or kinship groups as the units of organisation. (See Map No. 1).

These boundaries of livelihood and political organisation are not sharply defined. They are blurred periodically by the seasonal migrations of the nomadic tribes between the plains and the highlands. The escarpment of the Central Plateau, moreover, has become the semi-permanent habitat of some of the nomadic groups. Others have even become sedentary and agriculturist, and settled in the highlands, so that tribal areas and "districts" overlap at the edges of the central block. In a few cases the tribal groups have reconstituted themselves as territorial units; but often, too, these offshoots of once nomadic tribes live now as tenants of the land-owning highland groups, as newcomers and, as it were, guests in their territory.

2. Racial.

The fairly simple picture of ethnic grouping which emerged from the foregoing description is somewhat misleading. The areas which appear uniform on a map showing the distribution of religion or economic habits (see maps No. 2 and 3) in reality enclose a complex variety of ethnic elements. Eritrea was for centuries the scene of migrations, into its territory and across it. The result is, in this comparatively small population, a mosaic of tribes, races, linguistic groups. Before examining this "mosaic" in detail, it may be useful to outline the main ethnic units with which we shall be dealing. The first viewpoint which suggests itself is that of race.

The concept of race, vague and all-too-often abused, is an unreliable guide to ethnic grouping. This much, however, can be said without going too deeply into the involved (and in this case largely unobtainable) details of physical anthropology. In the west and east we find representatives of the race usually described as hamitic — it would be more correct to speak of a race habitually using languages of the

hamitic type. This race embraces, in the west, the Beja-speaking Beni Amer, and in the east, the tribe of the Danakil and possibly the tribes speaking a language known as Saho. A second racial unit is that of groups speaking semitic languages: it embraces the Tigrinya block, the tribes speaking Tigré, and many scattered immigrant groups, ancient or recent, from Arabia. A third racial group is represented in a number of tribes of negro origin, the Baria, Kunama, and one or two fragments of tribes in the Western Plain. Neither the hamitic nor the semitic groups are racially pure; indeed they have absorbed so much alien blood, from each other, from negroid groups, and from sources difficult to identify, that the term race has little meaning left.

3. Linguistic.

In this outline of racial grouping we had already to invoke the criterion of linguistic affinity. We will adopt it once more, in more detail, as a guide to ethnic distribution. These are the most important linguistic groups in Eritrea: Beja, Tigré (or Khasa), Tigrinya, Saho, and Danakil. Languages spoken by smaller groups are: Belein, Baria, Kunama, Ilit, and Arabic. Beja and Tigré are widespread also in the north-eastern Sudan. Tigrinya, Saho, and Danakil spread into Ethiopia. The remaining languages, with the exception of Arabic, are limited to Eritrea.

Map No. 4 shows the distribution of these languages in Eritrea and the adjacent parts of Ethiopia and the Sudan. As regards the structure and origin of these languages, available information is meagre and occasionally conflicting. Yet these general statements can be made.

Beja, also known as *To Bedawi*, is a language of northern-hamitic type. It bears no relation to any of the other languages spoken in Eritrea. It is represented in the large tribe of the Western Plain, the Beni Amer. But as we shall see later, the tribe also embraces sections which speak, not Beja, but Tigré, or which are bilingual, speaking both languages.

Tigré and *Tigrinya* are both semitic languages. Tigré is spoken by the majority of the tribes in the Northern Hills and the Eastern Plain. Tigrinya, as was said before, is the language of the solid ethnic block inhabiting the Central Plateau. It spreads into northern Ethiopia, over the whole of the area known as the Tigrai, down to the rivers Angareb, Takatse and Ala. Tigré and Tigrinya have sprung from a common root, Geez, the ancient language of Ethiopia, which has survived only in the Coptic liturgy. Tigrinya, possibly closer to the root, and since centuries a written language, uses Geez characters. Tigré reached the stage of a written language comparatively recently; it is written both in Geez and Arabic script. In spite of the similar name of these two languages their kinship is remote. It is based on common origin and structure rather than on recognisable similarity. As spoken to-day, Tigré and Tigrinya are mutually unintelligible. When Tigré herdsmen and local peasants once met in the Akkele-Guzai, the writer had to act as a double interpreter, speaking Arabic with the Tigré and Italian with the Tigrinya. A third branch from the same common root is *Amharic*, which is spoken in central Ethiopia and which is the official language of the Ethiopian Empire. It is said to be the language farthest removed from the mother language, Geez, and is as distantly akin to Tigrinya or Tigré as these languages are to each other.

Saho is spoken by the tribes in eastern and south-eastern Eritrea, and by the groups inhabiting the highlands and the escarpment in the eastern Tigray, in the districts of Irob, Agame, Kilte Awlalo, and Enderta. Little is known about this language, except that it is closely akin to Dankali, the language of the Danakil tribe in the south of the Eastern Plain. Both languages belong to the language family known as southern hamitic.

Belein is the language of three tribes in the south of Keren Division. It is classed by some authorities with the central-hamitic languages, which are described as the most ancient in the Ethiopian highlands. This would make the Belein-speaking peoples akin to the Ago or Agau, once a powerful ethnic unit, which is represented to-day in small, scattered and broken-up groups, many on the verge of extinction, which live in central Ethiopia, in the provinces of Lasta, Avergalla, Dembien and Woggera. The writer prefers to describe Belein as an unidentified language.

The languages, *Baria*, *Kunama*, and *Ilit*, spoken by the tribes of these names, must equally be called unidentified. In Eritrea, they represent linguistic islands, which bear no relation to the surrounding language groups. As spoken, the languages are distinct from one another, and mutually unintelligible. Structurally, they seem akin, and related to the family of Sudanic languages — whether to its Nilotic branch or to that of the central Sudan must be left undecided.

Arabic is spoken by immigrant groups, like the Rashaida in the east or the Shukria in the west, whose arrival in Eritrea is of comparatively recent date. But Arabic has also been adopted, as a second language, by sections and individuals of the Mohammedan tribes to which Arab culture has spread, either from Arabia or the Sudan. Arabic is, finally, almost a lingua franca in the Mohammedan quarters of the Eritrean towns and, above all, on the Red Sea coast.

4. Traditions and History.

The ethnic zones which we have outlined on the basis of livelihood, religion, race and language, do not coincide. Nor are these zones static and permanent. We have spoken of racial mixture, and of groups changing nomadic for sedentary life. We shall equally meet with groups which have changed their religion or language in the past—recent or remote. How these various strands which make up the texture of individual societies, race, religion, language and livelihood, are woven into one another, and what weight they have in the social fabric, will be shown in the description which is to follow. How they came to be so interwoven, is a question almost too dangerous to approach.

It is true that the past existence of the ethnic groups, their racial origin, and the language or religion which they once possessed, have survived in their memory, in the form of numerous traditions. The Eritrean, of all groups, is strongly historically minded. But the content of historical truth in these traditions is difficult to assess. The traditions are mostly vague and not infrequently conflicting. Few help us to elucidate the past, and fewer still to understand the living society. Those that do are concerned, above all, with the support of present claims to political status and social prestige. A typical

example are the claims of Arab descent, which are the fashion among Mohammedan tribes (though their Islamic faith may be only a few generations old). Another example are the traditions which refer to the widespread social division into ruling caste and serf class. And here the historical exactness hardly matters. Even as myths they can back, with persuasive arguments, the obtaining political and social system.

II. THE WESTERN PLAIN.

1. The Country.

The Division of Agordat, which embraces this geographical zone, is divided into three administrative sub-divisions or *Residenze*: Agordat, in the east and north, Barentu, to the south-west of Agordat, and Tessenet, in the extreme west of the Division. In the south-west corner of Agordat Division, on the Ethiopian frontier, the village of Om Hager is the centre of a small *Vice-Residenza*. This territorial sub-division has in the main only administrative significance, though it coincides to some extent with ethnic grouping in the country. Thus the *Residenza* of Barentu comprises the larger part of the territory of two tribes, the Baria and Kunama; and the *Residenza* of Agordat is clearly intended to unite the majority of the Beni Amer tribe. But these tribes also spread across the administrative boundaries, which we may therefore disregard in the following description.

The headquarters of the administrative sub-Divisions are also the only towns in the Western Plains. They are comparatively new creations, founded under the Italian regime as military posts and centres of administration and trade. Agordat has a population of 4000, Barentu a population of 1000, Om Hager one of 2000, and Tessenet, the most populous of the four, one of 5000. In all four towns the population is cosmopolitan, including many foreigners from the Sudan, the Yemen, West Africa, and other parts of Eritrea. But the population is largely uniform in its religion, Islam, and its standards of living, which closely resemble those of the towns and villages in the Sudan. Of the members of the local tribes only the more important chiefs, well-to-do merchants, and certain religious notables have taken to living, part of the year at least, in the towns.

Agordat Division is agriculturally one of the richest in Eritrea. Its agricultural resources are not fully utilised, however, partly because of the lack of perennial water, and partly because of the nomadic habits of a large proportion of the population, which takes only unwillingly to work on the land. The most important agricultural enterprises in the area are, in fact, in the hands of immigrants from the Sudan or West Africa.

Its wealth in crops makes Agordat Division an export country which sends its surplus to the poorer east, to Keren and the Plateau. Transport by modern means, on lorries and roads, and caravans along the old camel routes alike, serve this regular export trade. The Division is, besides, a country of transit for grain from the Sudan, especially in bad years, when the always precarious supplies of the Eritrean highlands fall far short of needs. Agordat Division is thus fairly self-supporting.

Its dependence on outside territories (disregarding commercial and industrial products) is limited to the grazing lands of which the roving Beni Amer tribe is always in search.

2. The Beni Amer.

With a population of about 60,000, this is the largest tribe in the west and south-west and indeed in the whole of Eritrea. The Beni Amer occupy the north, west and south-west of Agordat Division, spreading, in the west, deep into the Sudan (where they number about 30,000) and overflowing in the east into the Divisions of *Jerem* and *Serae*. As has been said, the tribe belongs to the large racial group usually known as Hamitic. Yet the term "tribe" is in a sense a misnomer, for the Beni Amer are a conglomerate of tribes, often of diverse origin, rather than a solid, single ethnic unit. Their union is largely political, and in the nature of a loose federation which pays allegiance to a common paramount chief, the *Diglat*, and acknowledges a common ruling caste known as *Nabtab*.

The heterogeneous origin of the Beni Amer is clearly visible in the linguistic situation. For sections of the tribe speak Beja, others Tigré, and others again are bi-lingual. In the case of several sections, moreover, their different origin has not been obscured by the growth of the Beni Amer "nation". As we shall see, there are among the Beni Amer sections which descend from the Hadendowa in the Sudan, from the Ad Sheikh tribe in the Northern Hills, from groups of negro origin, or from immigrants from Arabia.

The Nabtab ruling caste of the Beni Amer cuts across the existing tribal divisions, as well as probably the divisions of ethnic descent. But the Nabtab, of all the tribal sections, would allege that this diversity of descent applies only to the serf class of the tribe; for themselves, they claim a single common descent and that racial purity which figures so prominently in the ideologies of ruling groups. They trace their origin, in a vague tradition, to a man of the Jaalin tribe of the Middle Nile who married a woman of the Bellu, the aboriginal inhabitants of the Beni Amer country; his descendants are said to have migrated to that country, conquering and subjugating the various groups with which they came into contact. There are also certain other, equally vague, traditions, the most mythical of which states that the Nabtab have "sprung from the earth", as the predestined rulers over many tribes. Reduced to more concrete facts, the history of the Beni Amer shows them as the eastern spearhead of an expanding, nomadic, hamitic race, which came to dominate and partly to absorb many weaker and scattered groups, thus creating the Beni Amer nation. In the course of time other alien groups probably joined this confederacy, which offered them protection from the raids by the powerful neighbouring tribes in the Sudan and Ethiopia. The caste system must have grown out of the original distinction between invaders and invaded, protectors and protected.

There is no equivalent clear-cut term for the serfs as there is for the ruling caste. The serfs are generally called "the Arabs" of the rulers; or they are referred to as the *ndessna* (those "who belong") of this or that Beni Amer section; or finally, they are called the *Nabtabu haieffin* — those "under the Nabtab". The serfs bear the name of the tribal sections to which they "belong", and are an integral part

of the section. They live side by side with their rulers and, to-day, share in the same activities. The old division of labour which made the rulers the warriors and protectors, and their subjects the serfs and clients, has come to an end. To-day there exist wealthy and influential serfs who own livestock and work their own land. In some cases groups of serfs have become so large and powerful that they have even gained independent political status and are recognised as separate tribes (like the Labat, Elman, Ad Sala, and Beit Awat); their old serf origin is little more than a memory. The social integrity of the Nabtab is preserved only in the (at least theoretical) rejection of all intermarriage between masters and serfs. Another element of discrimination is to-day merely of historical interest. It is embodied in the tribal code governing homicide, which lays down that if a Nabtab kills a Nabtab, (of another section; within the tribal section, no secular punishment of this crime amounting to fratricide is admissible), blood feuds must ensue. But if a Nabtab kills a serf, the deed is expiated by the payment of blood money. The case of a serf killing a Nabtab is considered so unheard of a phenomenon that informants would decline to discuss its legal implications.

The Beni Amer are divided into 21 tribes, which are known as *badana* or, in Arabic, *qabail*. This, at least, is the tribal structure to-day. For this loose federation has undergone many changes, in the distant as well as recent past, new groups joining the federation, and old groups seceding from it. The latter process was mostly due to internal feuds or personal rivalry between the tribal leaders. The former, as has been said, may reflect the need of protection which, in the past, caused weaker tribes to join the powerful union; or a forceful Beni Amer chief would compel some small and weak group to exchange its autonomy for a tributary status; in recent times, too, this inclusion of new sections was sponsored, for administrative reasons, by the Italian Government.

Like the tribal federation, the component tribe is largely a fluid unit, whose sections sometime leave the mother-tribe and establish themselves as independent groups. The tribes, or *badana*, are of greatly varying size and are accordingly divided into varying numbers of sub-sections; these are known as *hissa* (in Beja and Arabic) or *hissat* (in Tigré). The tribes are thought of as genealogical branches of that vast kindred with which the Beni Amer ruling caste indentifies itself; the *hissa*, as kinship groups within the genealogical branch. Certain sub-sections (of the tribe Ad Omar) are so large that they have come to be regarded almost as separate tribes. Groups of tribes, on the other hand, are credited with close kinship, such as the four tribes Dagga, Ad Al Bakhit, Ad Taule, and Sinkat Keinab, and may well have grown out of what were originally branches of the same tribe.

These are the Beni Amer *badana* (the population figures are very approximate).

Dagga. This is the most important and wealthiest tribe, from which the paramount chiefs of the Beni Amer descend. Its people number 12,000 and speak both Beja and Tigré. The word *dagga* means literally "camp"; it refers, more specifically, to the large semi-permanent camp situated near what is to-day Agordat town, where the Paramount chief used to reside and from which he governed his

scattered tribes. Thus emerged the separate branch of the "people of the camp," which was composed of the chief's kindred, his many henchmen, serfs and slaves, and became the "royal" tribe of the Beni Amer.

Ad Omar. This tribe is divided into five large sections which claim to-day the status of separate tribes. They are: Ad Al Allam (with a population of 2000, Tigré-speaking), Al Hamid Awad (1,000, Tigré-speaking), Ad Humbirra (1,500, Tigré-speaking), Hassal (1600 Beja-speaking), and Sheneiab (1500, Beja-speaking). During the Mahdist wars internal feuds caused the Ad Omar to leave the Beni Amer federation; this secession, however, lasted only 10-15 years; it ended with the Italian occupation of the country, though the estrangement between the Ad Omar and their brother-tribes survived to the present day.

Ad Okud — Ad Towas. These two tribes claim close kinship. The former numbers 10,000, and its people speak partly Beja, partly Tigré; the latter numbers 1700, and is Beja-speaking. Like the Ad Omar, the Ad Okud tribe made itself independent about 40 years ago, denouncing its allegiance to the paramount chief of the Beni Amer. It was brought back into the federation only recently, in 1940.

Ad Al Bakhit — Ad Taule or Tauliab — Sinkat Keinab. They claim close kinship with each other and the tribe Dagga. The Ad Al Bakhit number 3400 and speak Tigré; the Ad Taule and Sinkat Keinab, much smaller tribes, have a population of 400 and 700, respectively, and are Beja-speaking. In the last generation the Ad Al Bakhit and Ad Taule tended to become sedentary; they live in the extreme south-east of Beni Amer country, south of Agordat, and are settled farmers rather than nomadic herdsmen.

Ad Ibrahim. The people number 2000; the majority speak Tigré, a few speak Beja. In Italian times a chief of this tribe was placed over the Ad Omar and Labat tribes as well, with the object of bringing these dissident sections back into the Beni Amer fold. With his death this tentative, small-scale paramount chieftainship lapsed.

Faidab. The tribe numbers 1500 souls, and is Tigré-speaking. It descends from the Ad Sheikh in Keren Division, but claims kinship with the Beni Amer Nabtab in the maternal line. It has since long identified itself with the Beni Amer.

Ad Sheikh Garabit. Another group descended from the Ad Sheikh, and still conscious of this kinship. It joined the Beni Amer about 30 years ago. The group numbers 1200, and speaks Tigré.

Labat. They number 2000-3000, and speak Beja. The tribe occupies two disconnected territories, one north of the Gash, and the other in the south, between Tessenei and Om Hager. The Labat were originally serfs of the Dagga and Ad Okud; they seemed to have gained independence later, acquiring their own serf class; under the Italian regime they exchanged their political independence for the qualified autonomy of a separate section within the Beni Amer federation.

Ad Sheraf. They number about 1000; their languages are Beja and Tigré. They claim Arab origin and trace their pedigree to a descendant of the Prophet (Sherif). This "holy" tribe joined the Beni Amer federation many generations ago.

Beit Awat. They number 1300; the majority speak Tigré, a few speak Beja. Like the Labat, the Beit Awat were once the serfs of the Dagga tribe, but are now an autonomous section.

Ad Gultana. They are 4000 strong, and Tigré-speaking.

Algeden. They number about 500, and speak Tigré. They were incorporated in the Beni Amer federation in Italian times. By descent they are akin to the small tribes of Negro origin which live amidst the Beni Amer, the Ilit and Bitama, of which we shall speak presently.

Ad Sala or Absadab. They number 500 and speak Beja. They are commonly regarded as descendants of serf groups, but claim Nabtab descent themselves. Like the Ad Al Bakhit and Tauliab, with whom they share the territory south-east of Agordat, the Ad Sala have adopted the life of sedentary peasants.

Ad Nazi — Ad Hassari. Two small groups, claiming common descent. The former number 300 and speak Beja; the latter, slightly less numerous, are Tigré speaking.

Ad Ali. They number 300, and speak Beja.

Elman. 300 strong, and originally of serf status. To-day they are autonomous and have their own serfs. Their languages are Beja and Tigré.

Hashish. A large proportion of this group is descended from the Hadendowa - the large hamitic tribe in the eastern Sudan. The Hashish number 400, and speak Beja. They were brought into the Beni Amer federation under the Italians.

Each *badana* is a political unit, ruled over by an *Omdah* or, in the vernacular, *ta badana ta hadda*. Each branch of a *badana*, or *hissa*, is under a Sheikh or *t'hissa ta hadda*. Chiefs and sub-chiefs are invariably members of the ruling caste. The Beni Amer confederacy as a whole is under a paramount chief, who styles himself *Diglal* and comes, as we have heard, from the tribe Dagga. The reigning *Diglal* is Gellani Hussein. At the beginning of the British occupation he was deposed and exiled to the Sudan for his alleged pro-Italian sympathies. The accusation, however, proved unfounded, and the *Diglal* was allowed to return to Eritrea and resume the rule of his tribe. At his side is his deputy, the Sheikh al Mushaikh, again descended from the "royal tribe", Dagga. The office of the *Diglal* is hereditary in a dynasty which several generations ago split into two branches. It has long been the traditional rule that both branches should be represented in the paramount offices of the tribe, so that if the *Diglal* comes from one branch, the Sheikh al Mushaikh must come from another.

Recently, the Administration has created the posts of two more Shiyukh al Mushaikh, dividing among the three chiefs the various tribes and tribal sections, giving five each to two of the chiefs, and fifteen to the third. There is no historical precedent for this administrative grouping, nor are the sections which have been so united akin to or linked with one another. Their unification has provoked a mild protest from an unexpected quarter: the paramount chief of the Ad Sheikh in Keren Division complained that the off-shoot of his tribe in the Beni Amer federation, the Ad Sheikh Garabit, had been placed under an "alien" Sheikh al Mushaikh, the chief of Ad Okut. Regarding himself still as the protector of these ex-members of his tribe, the chief of the Ad Sheikh demanded that they should be given back their old autonomous status in the Beni Amer confederacy.

The political unity of the Beni Amer is sustained by a common religion - Islam. The large majority acknowledges the spiritual

leadership of the Morghani family, which holds the same ecclesiastical position in the Eastern Sudan. From time to time, however, holy men appear in the Beni Amer country who command, for a period at least, the religious allegiance of the people. The most recent as well as the most conspicuous figure is Sayidnā Mustafa, of the Faïdab tribe, whose fame seriously rivalled that of the Morghani. He died in 1941, and his grave near Agordat has become a place of pilgrimage for the people of many tribes.

The Beni Amer also have in common their livelihood, which is largely that of nomadic herdsmen whose wealth lies in camels, cattle, sheep and goats, and only to a small extent in agriculture. During the dry season the Beni Amer wander far afield, less towards the west and into the Sudan than to the east and south. The camel-owning groups tend to move eastwards, towards the western flank of the Northern Hills; the cattle-owners migrate to the Gash river and beyond it, some sections visiting annually the pastures in the valleys of Keren, in the Akkele - Guzai and Serae. During the rains a large proportion of the people move to the river Barka, where hamlets and villages form the semi-permanent centres of the tribe. At this time of the year, too, the various sections restrict their migrations and inhabit fairly well defined areas (see Map No. 2). We have already spoken of the area in the south-east, where a few sections have almost abandoned nomadic life, exchanging it for the livelihood of settled farmers.

3. Kunama and Baria.

These two large tribes differ in race and culture fundamentally from the surrounding groups. They live in the Barentu area, the Baria roughly to the north of the motor road, the Kunama (or Baza) south of this line, down to the Setit and the Ethiopian frontier, and as far west as Om Hager. Small groups of Kunama also live in the north-west corner of the Serae. The tribe spreads into Ethiopia, across the Setit, which marks the political boundary. Ethnic affinity does not prevent this off-shoot of the tribe from joining its Ethiopian neighbours in raids upon the Kunama in Eritrea, and the latter have been forced to move north and inland from the Setit to evade this constant danger. The Baria number about 15,000 and the Kunama 10,000. The two tribes are of negro stock, and probably represent the remnants of the once much larger negro population which must have occupied the central Sudan and the middle Nile, and was gradually reduced and pushed south by the expansion of Arabs and Beja. Nor has this process come to a halt in recent times. We have historical evidence that in the years between 1850 and 1860 the population of the Baria and Kunama was literally decimated by the incessant raids of the Beni Amer and Abyssinians.

Kunama and Baria speak different languages, both apparently of the Sudanese type, and rarely intermarry. Sedentary and agriculturist, the tribes live in large, permanent villages. The Baria are to-day largely Mohammedans; the Kunama are only now exchanging their religion for the new faith of Islam. Catholic and Protestant missions, too, have made converts in this tribe, which now includes about 250 Catholics

and the same number of Protestant. The pagan rites and the priestly experts which the tribes possess (or possessed) are again reminiscent of the negro groups in the central Sudan, and especially of that untouched enclave, the Nuba mountains.

The social structure of the Kunama is based on a division into six clans (*molata*) - Kara, Dula, Sogona, Nataka, Serme and Argatakra. The clans are strictly exogamous, and descent is counted in the maternal line. The matrilineal element also determines to some extent the residence of the individual. A man moves on marriage to his wife's home and the children must be born in the mother's village. Afterwards the family may, if it chooses, move to the husband's place, but it is possible that here the impact of Islam has weakened the traditional rule. In the case of divorce, the children must invariably return to their mother's family. Their guardian is, not the father, but the mother's brother. The clans appear to have a totemic background, for they are linked with certain animals or natural phenomena (elephant, moon), which are regarded as the symbols of the groups. The clans are vested with special magic and spiritual powers, which they wield for the benefit of the tribe at large. Certain of these powers have considerable political significance. Thus the clan Kara possesses grain-magic, which it exercises through its old men or priests; the clan Dula gives to the tribe its hereditary rain-maker; another clan supplies a priest who controls locusts; finally the clans Dula and Sogona are called upon whenever there is a tribal dispute over land or a blood feud, to act, through their elders, as the tribal peacemakers. The political importance of these clans is expressed in the name by which they, or their elders, are known in the tribe: *lagamanna*, "chief of the earth".

Yet the clan system plays no part in the political life of the tribe. For the social structure is combined with another, politically more effective, sub-division, based on territory and local units. As the clans are irregularly scattered over the territory of the tribe, territorial and clan divisions are unrelated. The local groups are said to be distinguished by minor differences of dialect and custom. How these differences originated, whether they are the result of immigrations from without or of spontaneous separation from within, it is impossible to say. To-day the territorial division alone forms the basis of the political system.

There are six local groups, or sub-tribes, which take their names largely from geographical features — the names of rivers or localities: Marda, Barka, Mogreb, Sogoda, Lakatakura and Tika. The first three live in the north-east of Kunama country, between the rivers Mogreb and Gash (called Barka by the Kunama); the Sogoda live in the north-west, the Lakatakura and Tika in the south, on the Setit (Tika in Kunama). The Lakatakura and Sogoda belong to the *Residenza* of Tessenei, the remaining sections to the *Residenza* of Barentu. Each sub-tribe is divided into 3-4 sections, which represent again local units, living in well-defined, different areas.

Each sub-tribe is under a chief called *man* or (in Arabic) *Omdah*, and each local section under a chief's deputy — *awdada* or *Wakil*. In Mahdist times the tribe possessed a paramount chief, whose name was Sayyid Kakashi. He seems to have come from one of the two "peace-maker" clans, but it is not clear whether he was the last man of a hereditary line, or only a tribal leader chosen by the people in

their fight against the foreign invasion. Sayyid Kakashi was killed in battle in 1884, and his office died with him.

The political organisation of the Baria tribe closely resembles that of the Kunama. Again we find a division into local groups or sub-tribes, each with its smaller sections. There are two sub-tribes, the Mogreb in the west (north of the river of that name), and the Higgir in the east, both in Barentu district. Each sub-tribe has its chief (*mashinge* or *Omdah*), and each section its deputy (*nada* or *Wakil*). Unlike the Kunama, however, the Baria have since long been under a paramount chief, who is called, in Arabic fashion, the *Nazir* of the tribe. The social organisation of the Baria, too, seems closely akin to that of the Kunama - it is again based on a division into clans (*nara*) which are invested with magic powers; descent is counted in the paternal line. But among the Baria Islamic conceptions have overlaid the original features of the culture, and obscured the social structure of the tribe.

4. Small Tribes and Immigrants.

In the middle of Beni Amer country we find certain small enclaves of sedentary tribes of diverse origin, which have maintained their ethnic integrity, mainly owing to their reluctance to intermarry with their neighbours. The Sabdarat, on the Sudan frontier, number about 3000. They are bilingual, speaking both Arabic and Tigré, Mohammedan, and claim descent from a Sherif in Mecca. The Ilit, in the hills of Alkota, number about 600. They speak a language of their own, but are Mohammedans like the Sabdarat. The Bitama, only about 150 strong, and again Mohammedan, speak Tigré. The Ilit and Bitama are of negro stock and possibly akin to the Kunama. They were at one time under the Sabdarat, but have been autonomous for several generations. A group of Shukria Arabs, 400 strong, lives near the Kassala frontier. These Shukria are the off-shoot of the Sudanese tribe of that name, and migrated to their present home before the Mahdist regime.

On the river Gash, in the villages of Dukumbia and Wogero, in the midst of Kunama country, we meet with a group of Tigrinya-speaking Copts. They number about 1000, and have settled in their present home some 30 years ago. The majority are descended from the Serae, but among them are also people from Ethiopia - from Gondar and the Tigrai. In the villages in the south and southwest of Agordat Division groups of West Africans, Sudanese, Somali and Rashaida Arabs live side by side, without having evolved political units of their own. Mostly they are recent arrivals, who were attracted by the prospects of trade and by the large agricultural schemes which the Italians started in the Tessenei area. A final wave of immigration is happening under our eyes. It is specially interesting, as it repeats, in modern context, what must have been an essential feature of the growth of the Beni Amer nation and its serf class. The immigrants belong to the Maria tribe whose tribal lands are in Keren Division. Groups of this tribe (4000-5000 strong) move annually during the dry season to the rivers Barka and Gash for grazing. But Maria men and women have also settled in Agordat Division, and partly at Kassala in the Sudan, in ever increasing numbers during the last decade. The reason for their emigration is the poverty of the soil and the scarcity of grazing lands in their old country. The men found

work as labourers in the towns or as herdsmen of the Beni Amer; the women make mats of palm leaves or work as servants in the Beni Amer houses. It is said that few Agordat households are without a Maria servant. Most of the immigrants belong to the serf class of their tribe; a few are impoverished "nobles" now reduced to the state of serfs. In Agordat they still preserve one symbol of their tribal autonomy - they pay tribute through their tribal chiefs; in Kassala, they have lost even this. In a generation or so their name will probably be added to the list of the Beni Amer serfs.

III. THE NORTHERN HILLS.

1. The Country.

Keren Division, which embraces the territory of the Northern Hills, is divided into two *Residenze* - Keren in the South, and Nacfa in the North. This administrative arrangement, unlike that in other Divisions, corresponds closely both to the geography of the country and to the ethnic distribution. Keren District lies on the low plateau from which the chains of hills slope down towards the north; Nacfa district comprises the hills themselves and the stretch of coast at their eastern base. Moreover, as we shall see, Keren District is inhabited by a largely sedentary population, while Nacfa is the habitat of nomadic tribes.

Economically, too, this two-fold division is clearly marked. Keren District is comparatively rich in agricultural wealth, and in large measure self-supporting. The tribes of Nacfa have little arable land, and are disinclined to agriculture. They are, in consequence, almost completely dependent on supplies from outside. These come from two different sources. Imports on a large scale, effected by merchants, reach the markets of Keren and Nacfa from Agordat; for the small-scale purchases of individuals and families, Massawa and the coast, the transit markets for grain from the Yemen, are the sources of supply. The trading of livestock for grain forms part of the seasonal routine of these herdsmen tribes, which regularly visit the coast on their winter migrations.

Another economic dependence on outside territories, the need of grazing lands, affects only few of the tribes of Keren and Nacfa. The Maria Talaam move in the winter months to the Barka valley in Agordat Division. The Mensa tribe takes its herds to the plain of Sheb, on the border of Massawa Division. And in bad years the Habab would look for pastures in the Tokar region of the Sudan. The remaining tribes migrate within the territory of the Division, between the hills, their summer habitat, and the coast or the low lying valleys of the Shotel and Anseba, where they move in the dry season.

The Division has only one town, Keren. It has a native population of 9000, which is composed, in roughly equal proportion, of members of the local tribes, mostly Mohammedans, and strangers from the Yemen, the Sudan, Somaliland and, above all, from the Eritrean plateau and Ethiopia. About one third of the native population of Keren town belongs to the Belein tribe. Keren is an old settlement: it

existed in the time of Munziger Pasha, the Swiss adventurer in Egyptian service, who made it the seat of his short-lived government (1871-1876). In Italian times Keren developed into an important administrative, military and commercial centre, and became the third largest town of Eritrea.

Nacfa, the headquarters of Nacfa District, is an insignificant village in the winter months, with a population of only 150-200. But in the summer months, when the nomadic tribes return to the hills, it becomes a populous centre and a busy market.

2. The People

The complex variety of tribes and races in the Northern Hills does not lend itself to a simple classification. Linguistically, the population falls in two large groups, the Belein-speaking and the Tigré-speaking tribes. The former group comprises three tribes; the latter, a large number of independent ethnic units — the Habab, Mensa, Maria, and others. There are, in addition, certain smaller linguistic groups — one speaking Tigrinya, a second Arabic, and third speaking Beja as well as Tigré.

More significant is a division based on economic habits and forms of livelihood. Here a fairly sharp line can be drawn between the south and north, between the predominantly sedentary southern groups, and the nomadic herdsmen tribes in the northern part of the country. As has been said, this geographical and ethnic division coincides with the administrative organisation of the territory. The southern groups belong to the political District of Keren, the northern tribes to Nacfa District. There are, however, exceptions. For certain of the northern tribes have exchanged, or are even now exchanging, their "northern" livelihood for "southern" habits.

To the tribes just enumerated we must add sections of the Beni Amer, which graze their herds in the Shotel valley, in the south-west; and a block of Tigrinya-speaking people in the "Abyssinian Districts" south of Keren, which represents not a tribe, but an offshoot of the race inhabiting the Central Plateau.

3. Social System

Cutting across ethnic divisions, and differences of livelihood and habitat, we find yet another most important division: the social distinction between ruling caste and serf caste. The names by which the two castes are known differ somewhat in different tribes, though the Tigré words *shumagalle* for the ruling caste and *tigré* for the serfs have come to be used throughout the territory. It will be understood, then, that the Belein tribes comprise a *tigré* class which does not speak Tigré — the language of the serfs; while among the Tigré-speaking tribes, the class of nobles share the languages of their serfs. A plausible explanation of this anomaly seems to be that an alien ruling class has, in the course of time, adopted the language of the aboriginal population, which it reduced to the state of serfs. However, the available historical data are insufficient to prove this theory with any degree of certainty.

Indeed the facts of immigration and ethnic origin only complicate the picture. The ruling caste in these various tribes is said to be descended either from the Beja in the Sudan or the Ethiopian (Tigrinya-speaking) race of the Central Plateau. The serf-race, of heterogeneous stock, represents both remnants of an aboriginal population and the descendants of slaves or of weak and small groups which came under the domination of the new lords of the land. In some tribes (Habab and Ad Temariam) the latter distinction is expressed in the nomenclature, the descendants of slaves being known as *maket*, and the other serf-groups as *tigré*. In other tribes again, both ruling class and serfs claim Arab origin. Thus the only tangible reality that remains is that of groups united by submission to a system of political domination, by the acceptance of a common code, and by the consciousness of "belonging together".

In this sense the serfs "belong" to the tribe or sub-tribe, even to the kinship group, of their masters. The serfs identify themselves with the tribes or tribal sections of their overlords, though one or the other serf group may also preserve its old tribal or family name. The serfs live in the same settlements as their masters, and attend with them (though always in the back row) tribal feasts and ceremonies. Serfs and masters even intermarry, though the intermarriage remains unilateral, men of the ruling caste taking serf women for their wives. The caste distinction is expressed, above all, in chieftainship, and in certain social and economic disabilities which attach to serf status.

Only the ruling group can give the tribes or tribal sections their chiefs and hereditary heads. It claims property rights over all the tribal lands. Serfs may work land in their own right, but only as tenants of their masters, paying a share of the crops as rent. Again, serfs may own livestock, but must pay dues on it to their masters. The serfs are permanently bound to their masters and cannot change their allegiance without their masters' permission. The serfs must undertake all the menial duties which are considered unfitting for men of noble birth, like the herding of animals, the milking of cows, or, in groups which practise agriculture, the work on the land. Finally, the serf is bound to make certain gifts, often of a ceremonial and symbolic nature, to his masters, either on the occasion of tribal feasts, or at harvest time, or whenever he slaughters a beast from his herd.

The economic and social relations between masters and serfs have undergone considerable changes in the past, and are even now moving towards a re-definition. Among the Belein, for example, the serfs have bought land from their masters, a transaction which is forbidden by custom, and have thus become landlords in their own right; dues paid on the land are the last remnants of the old landlord-tenant relationship. Sometimes serfs have refused to continue the customary gifts, and have obtained exemption from these obligations - *de facto*, not *de jure*, in the eyes of the rulers. Serfs have even declined to perform their duty *par excellence*, the milking of cows, much to the annoyance of their helpless masters. These changes have reached different stages in different tribes. The serf obligations have almost disappeared among the Belein; they are fast disappearing among the Mensa; the first-signs of the coming change are visible among the Ad Tekles and Beit Juk; only among the Maria and Habab are the old customs still in force.

To understand these changes we must realise the reciprocal nature of the relations between masters and serfs. They consist, or consisted, in a definite give-and-take. For their services the serfs received the protection of their more powerful rulers and the use of land and grazing grounds held by the masters by the right of conquest. The need of the former has lapsed; and two generations of peaceful existence have obscured the old claims of conquest. Finally, economic changes have undermined the privileges of the rulers: now there are poor "masters" and wealthy "serfs" - a state of affairs which ill accords with the old relationship.

Probably other, less tangible, factors equally count in the master-serf relationship. If the serfs are expected to obey and honour their masters, the latter must treat their subjects with patriarchal benevolence. Indeed it seems that in the tribes which have preserved the old relationship intact, the ruling caste never failed in these duties. In other groups it did fail, and forfeited the submission of the serfs. To-day, having lost both their material power and their psychological sway, the weakened rulers are appealing to the Government, to help them to preserve, or revive, their waning authority.

4. The Southern Tribes.

Belein. This large group, also known as Bogos, lives in the south of Keren Division. It comprises two tribes (of a third, affiliated group we shall speak presently): the Beit Tarke, with a population of 10,000 and the Beit Tawke, with a population of 11,000. Though speaking the same language and sharing a common culture, the Tarke and Tawke regard themselves as separate units and claim independent origin, one from the highlands of Ethiopia, the other from the Eritrean Hamasien. They live in distinct, well-defined areas, the Beit Tarke in the south, the Beit Tawke in the north-west. Each tribe is divided into sub-tribes or *hissat* — the Tarke into five, the Tawke into six, — and each sub-tribe is further subdivided into numerous kinship groups (again known as *hissat*).

To the two Belein tribes we must add a third, small and unimportant group (only about 1100 strong), the Bab Jangeren. It is of alien origin, and originally spoke a different language. Offshoots of the tribe live today among the Habab and other Tigré-speaking groups. The Jangeren now living with the Belein have adopted the language of that tribe, and became affiliated to it. Even this small and dependent group has its class of masters and serfs. Politically, the Jangeren remained autonomous till 1932, when, for administrative reasons, they were joined to the Tarke and placed under the chief of that tribe, retaining, however, their own group head, known as *Sim*.

Until 70 or 80 years ago the Belein were Coptic Christians. During the Egyptian invasion of the Keren highlands (1860-1876) the tribes began to adopt the faith of their new overlords. Today they are largely Islamized, though among the Tarke we find 5000 Mission-converted Catholics, a few Mission-Protestants, as well as a small Coptic minority.

The Belein are mainly agriculturist, and live in permanent settle-

ments - small hamlets of 4-5 families. Masters (called *simager*) and serfs (*mikeru*) live side by side and share in the common livelihood - agriculture.

The political organisation of the Belein tribes reflects their sedentary habits - it is essentially territorial, and based on the districts in which the people live. Until recently each sub-tribe of the Tarke and Tawke was politically autonomous, under its own hereditary head (*Sim*). In 1932 the Italian Government decided to place the group heads in each tribe under a District Chief or *Meslenie* - a measure which, logical though it appears, has never become popular. In the political organisation of these groups tribal administration thus shades over into district administration. The former is visible in the internal division of the tribes, into sub-tribes and kinship groups; the latter in the territorial jurisdiction of the chiefs. This territorial jurisdiction allows of one exception: the internal disputes of alien herdsmen tribes which visit Belein country on their migrations remain under the jurisdiction of the tribal chiefs of these seasonal guests. In disputes between the "guests" and their "hosts" the chiefs of the latter alone are, according to custom, the judges.

Maria. This tribe, about 25,000 strong, lives to the north-west of the Belein. It derives its descent from a common ancestor with certain other tribes, the Tigré-speaking Mensa, the Saho-speaking Hazu and Asaorta, who is said to have come from Arabia. Eight generations ago, when the tribe already occupied its present habitat, it split into two branches, the Black and the Red Maria (Maria Tsalam and Maria Ayyah), which are said to have taken their names from the two wives of their paternal ancestor - one "black", and the other "red" of skin. The Black Maria, more numerous and wealthy than their brothers, are regarded as the first-born, and used to claim the prerogative of investing their hereditary chief with the ancient paramount title of *Shum*. This prerogative has lapsed however, and to-day each section of the tribe has its chief called *Shum*. The two sections intermarry freely, but live in well-defined areas, the Black Maria in the west, the Red Maria in the east. Each section is sub-divided into four kinship groups (*hissat*), each under its hereditary head (again known as *Shum*). The kinship groups do not occupy separate territories, but live interspersed among each other. The true descendants of the tribal ancestor constitute the aristocracy - *shumagalle* -, and give the tribe its chiefs and headmen. The serfs - *tigré* - are, as in all these tribes, descendants of slaves and of aboriginal inhabitants, or of weak tribal fractions which came under the tutelage of the Maria.

Like the Belein, the Maria were originally Coptic Christians. According to local tradition they were Mohammedans first, but later lost their religion and adopted the Coptic creed of the country. Early in the 19th century, the tribe was converted (or reconverted) to Islam.

The Maria are cultivators on a small scale. Their main wealth is represented in the large herds of cattle, sheep and goats, and (especially among the Black Maria) camels. The seasonal migrations of the tribe in search of grazing are largely limited to the tribal territory, though the Black Maria, who live close to the border of Agordat, also move seasonally to the Barka valley in that Division. Some groups, of the Red Maria more particularly, live in small permanent hamlets. Their

nomadic leanings are still discernible in the many temporary encampments, rarely of more than three or four tents, which are moved from place to place, as the tribe takes new stretches of land under cultivation. The serfs live with their masters; they observe, fairly rigidly, the old division of labour which makes the former the tillers of the soil, and the latter the idle landlords.

As among the Belein, tribal and territorial units coincide, and the political organisation is on a territorial basis. Again, alien visitors on their seasonal migrations remain, in disputes between themselves, under the jurisdiction of their own chiefs.

Mensa. This tribe lives to the east of the Belein, touching the administrative boundaries between Keren and the Divisions of Massawa and the Hamasien. The tribe is small, only about 5000 strong, and is divided into two sections (each with five kinship groups), the Beit Abrehe and the Beit Shakan. Of the traditional origin of the tribe we have already spoken. The two sections of the Mensa represent two genealogical branches, descended from the common ancestor of the tribe, Mensaai. Again, the offspring of the tribal ancestor forms the nobility which rules over the *tigré* serf population. The two branches of the tribe occupy different parts of the country, the Beit Abrehe the northern, and the Beit Shakan the southern part. The Beit Abrehe are the senior branch, richer in land, and one of its ancestors is said to have received, in 1600, the rank of *Kantibai* from the Emperor of Ethiopia. The rank became the title of the hereditary chiefs of the Beit Abrehe. The chief of the Beit Shakan bore till recently the less ambitious title of *Meslenie*; to-day the chief of the junior branch is equally known as *Kantibai*.

The Mensa, too, have exchanged their original faith - Coptic Christianity - for Islam. On the border of the Hamasien there are still a few Copts among the tribe - as there are also a few who speak, not Tigré, but the language of the Coptic Eritrean, Tigrinya. About a thousand Mensa were converted to Protestantism by the Swedish Mission.

The Mensa are cultivators; and live in small, permanent settlements. Their system of chieftainship is, accordingly, based on territorial jurisdiction.

Beit Juk. They are a small tribe of under 4000 souls, said to be descended from the Tigrinya-speaking peoples on the Plateau. Even this small group has its caste division of nobles (*shumagalle*) and serfs (*sebmider*). The tribe is Mohammedan and agriculturist, and lives in permanent settlements, mostly small hamlets, though there is one large village, called Wasentet. As in the other sedentary tribes, the political organisation is territorial; at its head is the chief of the tribe, who bears the rank of *Kantibai*.

5. The Northern Tribes.

Beit Asgede. The largest of the northern tribes is the Habab tribe, numbering 25,000. It claims common descent with the Ad Tekles (10,000) and Ad Temariam (7,000) from an identical ancestor, Asgede. Though the three groups thus appear as sub-tribes or genealogical branches, it seems more appropriate to regard them as separate tribes, for today

they lead an independent life in well-defined territories, and are politically autonomous, each under its own tribal chief.

Asgede, the semi-mythical founder of the three tribes, is said to have lived in the 17th century, and to be descended from the Tsenadegle, a kinship group (now a territorial unit) in the Akkele-Guzai on the Plateau. It is interesting to note that the people living in Tsenadegle today are as well aware of this tradition as is the offspring of Asgede in the Keren and Nacfa hills. These latter groups have lost their original language, Tigrinya, and now speak the language of their serfs, Tigré. Again we are dealing with immigrant groups which became a tribal aristocracy, ruling over a population of serfs and ex-slaves. The three tribes are known collectively as Beit Asgede (the House of Asgede). The ruling cast is referred to as *tono* or *shumagalle*. The former name is applied to those members of the aristocracy who combine social standing with wealth, and thus real power. The word *shumagalle*, on the other hand, has come to mean the impoverished aristocracy of the country - men of noble descent without wealth or authority.

The Habab claim descent from the first-born son of a certain Mafles; the Ad Tekles from the second-born; the Ad Temariam from a younger brother of the same Mafles. Each tribe is subdivided into numerous kinship groups (*hissat*). The hereditary chiefs of the tribes, as well as the heads of the kinship groups, are known as *Shum*, except in the case of the chief of the Habab tribe, who bears the ancient Ethiopian title of *Kantibai*.

The Asgede tribes were originally Coptic Christians, their *tigré* subjects Mohammedans. But in the course of time the rulers adopted, with the language of their subjects, also their faith.

The Habab and Ad Temariam are nomadic herdsmen, rich in herds. They live in temporary encampments of tents and grass huts. Their winter migrations take them down to the coast and, occasionally, north, into the Sudan. Both in the plain and in the hills, at Algena, Maba and Nacfa, they have traditional camping sites, which are the semi-permanent centres of the moving tribe, especially of its less mobile members, the old men and the nobles. The two tribes also practise a little agriculture near these tribal centres. The political organisation of the Habab and Ad Temariam is tribal, the jurisdiction of their chiefs extending over the members of the tribe wherever their migrations may take them.

The Ad Tekles, the southernmost of the Beit Asgede, have adopted agriculture on a much larger scale, and are today almost sedentary. We were referring, above all, to this tribe, when we spoke above of groups which have exchanged the "northern" for the "southern" way of living. Administratively, too, the Ad Tekles are separated from their brother tribes. For while the latter belong to Nacfa District, the Ad Tekles have been placed under the less distant Keren. In the political system of the Ad Tekles the transition from nomadic to sedentary existence is reflected in the gradual reorientation of chieftainship from tribal to territorial jurisdiction.

Ad Sheikh. Their country is wedged between the Habab in the north and the Ad Tekles in the south. The Ad Sheikh number some 9000 souls. They claim Arab origin, and trace their descent to a *sherif* (relation of the Prophet) in Mecca. The arrival of the tribe in its present habitat is placed five generations back (about 1800). The fame of its sanctity

and the strength of the tribe attracted many weak groups, which voluntarily became the clients of the immigrants, among them even groups which had already been the serfs of the House of Asgede. Among the serf groups of the Ad Sheikh (called *tigré*) are a few of Beni Amer origin, which are today bilingual, speaking both Beja and Tigré. The aristocracy is known, as among the Habab, as *shumagalle* and *tono*, the two names having the same meaning as in that tribe. The close contacts with the local tribes have caused the Ad Sheikh to lose their old language and, through intermarriage, their racial characteristics (though the Ad Sheikh themselves would hotly deny this intermarriage). In the course of time the tribe split into several sections. The branch descending from the eldest son of the tribal ancestor alone lives in the hills of Nacfa; the other branches have emigrated east, to the coastal plain, north, to Tokar in the Sudan, or west, to the Barka valley. Two sections - the Fa'dab and Ad Sheikh Garabit - now live in the Western Plain under the patronage of the Beni Amer. This separation, though apparently fully acceptable to the split-off groups themselves, is viewed with resentment by the chief of the senior Ad Sheikh; he has several times appealed to the Government to bring these offshoots of his tribe back under his jurisdiction.

The Ad Sheikh are strongly conscious of their role of a "holy" tribe; they are, naturally, fervent Mohammedans. One Ad Sheikh man, Sheikh Mohammed ben Ali, who died in 1877, is widely worshipped as a saint, and his grave near Massawa has become a sacred shrine and famous place of pilgrimage. The position of religious leaders, however, which the Ad Sheikh could once claim, has passed from them to the Morghani family, whose spiritual overlordship is now acknowledged by most of the Mohammedans of Eritrea.

The Ad Sheikh are nomadic herdsmen, though they have one or two fixed camps at Kamchewa and Afabet, to which they are accustomed to return after their winter migrations. The tombs of the tribe, situated close to these camp sites, are visible evidence of this sedentary strain in the otherwise nomadic character of the tribe.

The political system of the Ad Sheikh is tribal. Its rule is vested in a hereditary chief who is called in Arabic, *Nazir* or *Shetkh*.

Ad Tsaura, *Ad Muallim* and *Beit Mala*. These are three small tribes, totalling 4000-5000 souls, also claiming, with more or less justification, Arab origin. The first two live in the east, down to the Red Sea coast (partly in Massawa territory); the third lives in the foothills northwest of the Habab. Offshoots of the Ad Tsaura have become the dependents of the Habab and Ad Temariam; the rest of the tribe is autonomous, under its own chief, as are also the other two tribes, Ad Muallim and Beit Mala. During the Mahd'st invasion, the Beit Mala became, for a time, the serfs of the Beni Amer; small groups of Beit Mala still belong to the Beni Amer federation of tribes. At one time, too, the Beit Mala spoke only Beja, the language of the Beni Amer; today they are bilingual, speaking both Beja and Tigré. Alone among the Tigré-speaking tribes, the Ad Tsaura, Ad Muallim and Beit Mala, have no caste division. To the caste-proud ruling groups of other tribes, these three groups are very nearly serfs, their political autonomy notwithstanding.

The three tribes are Mohammedan, and largely nomadic. The Ad Muallim - "Tribe of the Teachers" - claim descent from Mohammedan scholars, and used to supply the teachers of the Qoran to their neigh-

bours, the Ad Tamariam. To-day they practise a little agriculture, and engage in trade in salt, which they transport on their camels from the Red Sea to the hills.

Rashaida. They represent the most recent wave of immigration from Arabia, dating back only to 1870, and possibly the only one that can be established with any certainty. They are also the only group which preserved its language and culture, disdaining both intermarriage with other tribes and cultural assimilation. The tribe is small, probably only a thousand strong, and exclusively nomadic. The *Rashaida* own camels and goats - no cattle - and live in the typical cloth tents of Arabia. Their principal livelihood of bygone times - slave trade - is today, one hopes, only a memory.

6. The "Abyssinian Districts".

These four districts - Debresina, Lamachelli, Adirba and Dakandu - are situated close to the Hamasien border. They share with the Hamasien, and the people of the Central Plateau, language, religion, and civilisation at large. They speak Tigrinya, they are Copts (excepting a few recently converted Catholics), and are organised in the large kinship groups or *enda* which are typical of the social organisation of the Plateau population. It is this close affinity with the "Abyssinian" culture in the highlands which has given these districts their names. The population of the Abyssinian Districts numbers 6000, and lives in large, permanent villages, governed by village chiefs or *Chikka*, as are the villages on the Central Plateau. In the districts Debresina, Adirba and Dakandu, the name of the district is also the name of the main village. The fourth district, Lamachelli, has no village of that name; the main settlement is Haddish Adi.

In pre-Italian times each district was autonomous, under a chief who styled himself *Shumonya*. In Debresina the famous monastery of that name, which still exists, owned all the land and claimed the temporal as well as spiritual overlordship. Under Italian rule, the monastery lost its land and temporal powers, but the four districts retained their autonomy till 1932. In that year the Italians united them under a paramount chief, entitled *Meslenië*, who now rules over the four communities and their *Shumonya*. It is interesting to note that *Shumonya* is the old title of the District Chief on the Plateau, which was superseded in Italian times by the modern rank of *Meslenie*. Thus the Abyssinian Districts, offshoots of the Plateau groups, have preserved a feature of their mother-culture which has disappeared in the country which was its home.

IV. THE EASTERN PLAIN

1. Country and People.

The spur of the Central Plateau which, at Massawa and the Bay of Zula, almost reaches the sea, divides the coastal plain in half. To the north the plain is known as Samhar, and further north still, as Sahel (meaning "plain"). It stretches from Massawa, through the north-eastern part of Keren Division, to the Sudan border. In the

south, the plain of Dankalla sweeps south and south-west into Abyssinia and to the border of French Somaliland.

This geographical division also determines the ethnic configuration. The north is sparsely populated, though rich in racial variety. Mostly we find small, broken-up sections, often offshoots of larger tribes and races, which are scattered in an irregular pattern over plain and foothills. The population is to a large extent only seasonal, and in the summer months, when the nomadic groups move to the hills, large tracts of the country are empty of people. The southern part of the plain is inhabited by the large tribe of the Danakil, whose far-flung dominion stretches as far as the plain which bears its name.

A third geographical and ethnic region is the mountain spur itself, with the foothills at its base. It is the home of many groups, some sedentary, others nomadic, which move into the hills during the winter months, for grazing or cultivation. On the northern flank of the mountains, at Ghinda, we find cultivators from the Plateau districts of Tsenadegle and Engana. On the southern and eastern flank we meet with three large tribes from the Akkele-Guzai, the Asaorta, Miniferi and Hazu.

The hills of Ghinda belong, politically, to Massawa Division. The eastern flank of the mountain spur and the stretch of coast beyond, to the Akkele-Guzai. This stretch of coast thus forms a "corridor" through Massawa Division, from the mountains to the Bay of Zula, an odd frontier arrangement, which was created to allow the tribes from the Akkele-Guzai to reach the coast without crossing the administrative boundary.

The regular movement between the plain and the mountains, which characterises the livelihood of all these tribes, makes it difficult to decide whether to regard them as hill groups or plains tribes, and whether to treat them in the present chapter or in that on the Central Plateau or on the Northern Hills. The period of the year which these groups spend in the plain often equals that spent in the hills. Some groups, too, cultivate both in the plain and in the mountains. Nor does the distinction of descent and origin offer any guidance; for many of the groups with which we meet in the plain have their mother tribe and kindred on the plateau and in the hills. Politically, however, the distinction is easy: the tribes "belong" where they pay tribute. This distinction is neither arbitrary nor artificial. For the payment of tribute reflects, in all tribes of Eritrea, the consciousness of tribal membership. It thus expresses the attitude of the people themselves — whether they regard themselves as mountain dwellers or plainsmen, and the hills or the plain as their real home. It is this criterion which we have adopted in the present description. And it decrees, in the case of the "corridor" tribes, that they "belong" with the other groups of the Akkele-Guzai and the Central Plateau.

The nomadic tribes in the Eastern Plain are rich in livestock, but the sandy, barren country is far from self-supporting in agricultural wealth. It does not produce enough either for its permanent population, small though it is, or for the migrant groups which move between the coast and the hills. Only the area of Ghinda and the cultivations at Sheb, on the Nacfa-Massawa border, are centres of production of some importance, the former for the seasonal cultivators from the

the latter for the Mensa and Ad Temariam tribes of Keren. But the coastal plain with its ports, large and small, is an important transit market for grain and other commodities from the Yemen. The stream of supplies from overseas reaches central and southern Eritrea by various routes - by the main road to Asmara, and by the many caravan routes to the Northern Hills and the plateau region of the Akkele-Guzal.

2. Dankalia

The Danakil of Eritrea are about 20,000 strong, and are typical nomads. They are essentially of hamitic stock, but the loose organisation of the tribe, which represents a political rather than an ethnic unit, admitted of considerable admixture of other racial elements. Common language (Dankali), common religion (Islam), and above all, the century old threat of Abyssinian aggression, have created and sustained the consciousness of unity in this heterogenic group. The tribe is divided into numerous sub-tribes and kinship groups. It is besides, split into two castes: the ruling caste of Assaimara ("red men"), and the serf caste of Adoimara ("white men.") According to tradition, the former are the conquerors of the latter — once more aliens ruling over an indigenous population. Ethnic, social and tribal divisions cut across one another. Thus one sub-tribe, the Damoheita, embraces both ruling caste and groups of serfs; another sub-tribe, Dabimela, consists of members of the serf caste who, unattached to any ruling group, are in reality their own masters; the serf caste, finally, embraces many groups of alien origin which, through political affiliation and submission, merged with the Danakil tribe.

The powers of the ruling caste are political and economic. The chiefs of the tribe and the headmen of kinship groups must belong to the Assaimara; and in the ruling caste is also vested that paramount economic privilege, the title to the land. Only the ruling class, or the serf groups which have attained autonomy, can claim rights to well-defined grazing grounds. The serf may own herds, but not the pastures on which to graze them. Landless and unfree, the serfs move with their masters, and derive their claims to grazing lands from the submission to the ruling groups. Thus, if serf groups intend to move to other, new, areas, they must seek the permission of the lords of that country and submit, for the time of residence, to their political authority.

Let us note that while the ruling caste numbers about 5000 individuals, the various serf groups total more than three times that number. This discrepancy in numbers is not rare in societies split into ruling and serf groups; and one of its results has been, in this, as in other, similarly organised societies, to weaken the hold of the ruling caste over the serfs, and to enable the latter to gain political autonomy, if not recognition as members of the master race.

This is the list of the sub-tribes of the Eritrean Danakil. The Danakil groups living in Ethiopia had to be omitted from the present description.

Damoheita. About 4000 strong, this group is scattered along the coast between Assab and the Buri peninsula. As said before, it is

composed of ruling caste and serf groups. The tribal name refers more specifically to the ruling caste, which claims (probably with little justification) pure Danakil descent. The serfs are groups of varied, and partly forgotten, origin, which live with the Damoheita and have become identified with the master-tribe.

Assabarka - *Nassal* - *Afara*. Three small groups, just over 1000 strong, and members of the ruling caste. They live with their serf groups at Beilul, north of Assab.

Dahimela. A powerful group of serf origin, numbering over 5000 souls, which became politically autonomous. It even extended its protection over other, weaker, groups so that today this tribe of serf descent has itself its dependents of serf status. The Dahimela live in the western part of the Dankalia plain, near the salt lakes of Assab, and in the Bedda area.

Hedarem. A group of Hadramaut origin, 3000 strong, and widely scattered over the plain. In spite of its size it did not achieve political unity, but is distributed as serf caste among the various local sections of the Damoheita and partly Dahimela.

Bellesuwa. Just under 1000 strong and of Arab origin, claiming descent from the Yemen. The Bellesuwa live between the Endeli river and the Buri peninsula. Thought not of Dankali origin, and therefore regarded as having serf-status only, this group is (or became) politically autonomous.

Dunna. Another group of Arab descent, tracing its origin to Hodeida. This small group, with a population of only 400, was originally subject to the Bellesuwa, as a serf group serving serfs. The Dunna shared with their masters the tribal lands round the Dimo hills, at the base of the Buri peninsula. Having grown comparatively numerous, the Dunna gained social independence and, in 1907, political autonomy.

Ankala. A group 760 strong, of mixed descent and serf status, though since long politically autonomous. Small sections of the tribe live near Assab; the larger part lives in the west of the peninsula of Buri.

Hawakil. This is the name of an island and bay south-east of Buri. Island and bay are inhabited by small groups of fishermen, totalling only 100-200 souls, which have taken the name of the locality, having lost their own tribal name. They were once the serfs of the Damoheita of Buri, but were declared autonomous under the Italian régime.

Gedimto. They are said to have originated in Baada, in Ethiopian territory, in the extreme south-west of the Dankalia plain. A tiny section (numbering 50 individuals in all) lives near Lake Giulietta as serfs of the Damoheita.

Sheka. A widely scattered group, with a population of 500. It calls itself the "tribe of sheikhs", for it claims descent from the family of the Prophet, and is therefore regarded as of noble origin. The Sheka are not, however, politically united, but live dispersed among the other Danakil sub-tribes. One small section of the Sheka affiliated itself, as a serf group, to the Damoheita of Buri.

Somali. Scattered groups of Somali descent live on the island of Baka and in Hawakil bay. After their arrival in their present home, three generations ago, the Somalis remained for a period dependent on the chiefs in the old country. The connection with the mother tribe soon lapsed, and the group merged with the Danakil nation, in which it now

occupies the place of a sub-tribe, politically autonomous, though of serf status.

Adoimara. To the sub-tribes enumerated above must be added small, broken-up sections of the Adoimara (serf class), totalling about 1500 souls, which, through lack of cohesion and long submission to the Danakil ruling groups, lost their tribal identity. They have survived as nameless families and kinship groups of sefs.

The Danakil are nomadic herdsmen, owning cattle, camels and goats. Their livestock forces them to some extent to restrict their migrations to the areas which offer pasture. Thus the cattle-owning groups among the Damoheita never move far afield from the rich grazing lands of the Buri peninsula, while the camel- and goat-owners, more independent of the seasonal pasture, migrate over long distances, often deep into Ethiopia. This restricted mobility of the cattle owning Damoheita finds expression in the name by which the tribal sections are known; for these names link, with the tribal name, that of the locality which became the habitat of the group: Damoheita-Buri, or Damoheita-Edd. One small section of the Danakil (probably an immigrant group) adopted agriculture and became sedentary at Badda. A few groups on the shores of the Red Sea are fishermen; and the Dahimela also mine salt in the salt pans of Badoli.

Small hamlets of poorly built huts, rarely larger than 10-20 families, are scattered over the plain. Situated near wells, they are the seat of headment, the home of the old, and the semi-permanent centres in the tribal migrations. A few larger villages, Thio, Badda, Meder and Edd, owe their growth to the importance which they attained more recently, as markets, ports, police posts, or administrative centres.

Today, a large number of headmen controls the various sections of the tribe and collects the Government tribute. We know little about the traditional political system of the Danakil. It seems to have been based on a division in kinship groups rather than tribal sections, and the chiefs of the tribe were probably kinship heads rather than political leaders. There is no trace (or no longer any trace) of a stronger and more embracing political leadership, save the vague allegiance which the tribe at large owes to the Sultan of Aussa in Ethiopia.

3. Northern groups — the Plain.

The Samhar plain has, in the past, attracted numerous tribes and tribal sections from the north and west of Eritrea, as it still attracts the seasonal migrations from that area. The somewhat turbulent history of Massawa caused further migrations from place to place in the plain. Immigration from Arabia and liberal intermarriage have done the rest, so that today the population appears as a mosaic of many groups, of greatly varied ethnic strain.

The ethnic diversity, however, is combined with a striking uniformity of custom, social organisation and ways of livelihood. All groups share the same religion - Islam. Over half of the population speaks the same language - Tigré; next come groups speaking Arabic and Saho, and a few small sections speaking Dankali or Somali. A caste division, as it exists among the Danakil or in the Northern Hills, is unknown among the Samhar tribes, even among the sections which hail from these parts:

these immigrants were clearly serfs who only too readily adapted themselves to the "democratic" régime of the country. Only few of the tribes in the Samhar are sedentary. They are concentrated in the towns of Massawa and Archico, and in the few villages which are scattered over the plain. The remaining groups are nomadic and pastoral, though most of them also engage, on a varying scale, in agriculture during the winter months. The people live in small encampments of grass huts or tents, covered with hides or matting. They cultivate mainly along the few rivers which run to the Red Sea. Applying a primitive system of dams and channels, the cultivators utilise the seasonal floods for the irrigation of their fields. In the summer months, when the rivers are dry, the people turn to the pastoral life.

The political organisation of the tribes again follows a common pattern. Each tribe has its chief or Sheikh, who is elected from the old and influential men of the group. Only two of the tribes have a hereditary chieftainship (as will be pointed out later). Hereditary or elected, the chief is mostly a man of little consequence, and his leadership, like the group over which it extends, is on a most modest scale. The petty salaries which these men receive are a clear expression of their political insignificance.

Bellu. Of the groups in the Samhar this tribe alone grew to political importance. The Bellu are the descendants of the original inhabitants and rulers of Beni Amer country who, dispossessed in their own country, emigrated to the coastal plain. Here they are sedentary and speak Tigré. They live in Archico and Massawa, and in the villages of Otumlo, Monkullo, Zaga and Emberemi. The tribe gained political importance at the time of the Turkish occupation of Massawa, when the member of a wealthy and powerful Bellu family became the *Naib* - the Deputy Governor of the Turkish commanders. Another family, equally powerful and equally enjoying the protection of the alien Government, came to rival the leadership of the Naib family. In the course of time the position of Naib became hereditary in the two families, which succeeded to the office in turn. The tribe itself split into two sections, led by these two families and bearing their names - Beit Hassan and Beit Osman. Through the centuries, the Bellu maintained and increased their power placing their men as chiefs, tax-collectors, religious emissaries or simple merchants among the Mohammedan groups in the plain, and extending their political and economic influence even to the Coptic Plateau. In the Egyptian era a member of the tribe became the commander (*Sirdar*) of the Egyptian troops in Massawa, and his family is still known as the "House of the *Sirdar*", Beit Sardal. The rest of the tribe, its slaves, clients and poor relations, was efficiently organised; the able-bodied men were recruited into bands of irregulars; and their command became hereditary in another branch of this enterprising tribe. This branch is known as the Beit Kekkia, after the (Turkish?) title of the commander of these slave troops. The influence of the Naib family and its brother clans is still great, and their members are prominent in the political and economic life of Massawa Division.

Aflenda. This group is of Beja and Hadendowa origin, and once formed part of the Beni Amer, apparently as a serf group of the tribe. Escaping from the overlordship of the Beni Amer, the Aflenda established themselves in the coastal plain, where they now number 2500. The

Aflenda speak Tigré. They combine seasonal agriculture in the north of the plain with pastoral life. Their migrations lead them only to the foothills in the west. Though small, this tribe is divided into sub-tribes, of which there are three: Nasreddin, Ad Igel, and Ad Hababai. The last lives, not in the coastal plain, but in the foothills of Ghinda.

Mes'halit. A tribe 1600 strong, and composed of sections of diverse origin (Asaorta, Ad Tsaura, Arab and Dankali). Today the whole tribe speaks Tigré. Its nomadic migrations are on a small scale, and its cultivations in the plain, on the Wakiro river, larger than those of the other tribes.

Tribes from the Northern Hills. Throughout the coastal plain, and specially in the north, where the plain changes its name from Samhar to Sahel, we also meet with tribes we know. They are migrant groups, or offshoots of tribes from the Northern Hills: Ad Sheikh, Ad Tsaura, Ad Muallim, Habab and Rashaida. Groups of Ad Sheikh and Habab, about a thousand strong, cultivate in the winter months on the Wakiro river in the Samhar. The Ad Sheikh and Ad Muallim, more rarely the Rashaida, also appear in the foothills of Ghinda.

The Islands. A word remains to be said about the population of the islands off the Massawa coast. Of these islands, which number over a hundred, only few have permanent settlements. The main islands are Dahlak, Nocra, Norah, Dohol, Harat, Kubari, Daraka and Dinifarikh. The total population is about 3000, and is composed of people of mixed stock, mainly Arab, Dankali and Somali by descent. The people are mostly fishermen; a few own goats and camels; none cultivate. Nocra was for a time the seat of a *Vice-Residente* and thus gained importance as an administrative headquarters. Its main claim to fame under the Italian regime was that of being the penal settlement for political malcontents and rebellious chiefs.

3. Northern Groups — the Foothills.

This geographical zone is separated from the coastal plain also administratively, by the political boundary which assigns the foothills and the spur of the plateau to the sub-District (*Vice-Residenza*) of Ghinda, and the Samhar plain to the District of Massawa. In the west, towards the Plateau, the administrative boundary of Ghinda District is artificial; towards the plain, it coincides with a well marked ethnic division. As we have seen, a few of the tribes in the plain also spread into the zone of the foothills; and by descent, language and religion the groups in the plain and in the hills are closely akin. But most of the tribes have chosen either one or the other area as their habitat. For the different geographical configuration has provoked different economic habits in the plains and in the foothills, and thus fostered the physical separation of the tribes. Indeed a strip of poor and rocky soil, uncultivable and uninhabited, forms a natural barrier between the two zones. The foothills, too, enclose a wide, open plain; it lies higher than the coastal plain and enjoys, owing to the closeness of the escarpment, greater rainfall. Thus agriculture in the foothills is based on rain cultivation and not, as in the coastal plain, on irrigation. The richer pastures allow of a greater concentration of livestock; and the closeness of the plateau slopes has opened to the people new paths for

their seasonal migrations.

Apart from these differences in economic habits, what we have said about the languages, religion, political organisation and ethnic affinities of the Samhar tribes applies equally to the groups in the foothills. But here the admixture of migrant groups from other parts is greater: it also includes the Tigrinya-speaking sections from the plateau districts which annually visit the pastures and cultivations at Ghinda. Here again, the political boundaries reflect the ethnic grouping. The boundary between Ghinda and Massawa is also the line which bounds the eastward migrations of these seasonal cultivators. Their cultivations are even more restricted, lying in the region of Damas and Agambussa, in the southern half of the Ghinda area. In 1938 this region was constituted as a territorial district, modelled on the native districts on the plateau, and administered by a district chief. The chief belongs, himself, to the groups of seasonal immigrants, and combines with his political office that of a *Moferi* or "Cultivation Chief". His jurisdiction is limited to the Christian cultivators from the plateau, and does not extend to the Mohammedan tribesmen who live in the area or visit it on their migrations. The attributes of this district-chieftainship are no more peculiar than is the nature of the district itself, which remains, for half the year, without a chief and almost without population.

These are the Mohammedan tribes in the Ghinda area.

Ad Aha. This small group claims descent from the Saho-speaking tribes, but its language to-day is Tigré. The tribe has absorbed small fragments of other ethnic units - the Ad Sheikh, Mensa and Beit Asgede from the Northern Hills. The whole group only numbers about 400 souls. It is nomadic, moving between the plain of Ailet and the southern hills of Keren Division.

Ad Shuma. Of obscure descent, about 2500 strong, the Ad Shuma speak Tigré, and combine agriculture with pastoral life. Their summer migrations lead the tribe far afield, from its home in the Ailet plain, to the plateau region of the Hamasien and Serae.

Ad Ashker. A small and poor tribe, 750 strong, claiming Saho descent but Tigré-speaking. As their name reveals, these people descend from groups of soldiers (*askari*) - from those bands of irregulars which served the Naib family. The tribe cultivates in the plain of Ailet and, to a lesser extent, in the Samhar. On its migrations in search of grazing, it moves up to the plateau in the Serae. Hereditary soldiers by descent, the Ad Ashker also evolved a system of hereditary chieftainship.

Gedem Sikta. The origin of this group is the same as that of the Ad Ashker. The tribe is 600 strong, and embraces fragments of varied descent - serfs of the Bellu and the Naib family, Assaorta, Miniferi, and Danakil of the sub-tribe Ankala. Its language is Tigré. As among the Ad Ashker, chieftainship is hereditary, and vested in one family, of Bellu descent. The tribe is largely pastoral and moves between the foothills of Ghinda and the edge of the plateau, up to the highlands of Serae.

Nabara. Ethnically a conglomerate, the tribe is today united by its common language, Tigré. The Nabara number 800, and are partly nomadic and partly sedentary. Sections of the tribe have settled as agriculturists in the highlands of the Hamasien; the rest of the tribe migrates between Ghinda and the edge of the Plateau.

Waria. These people, probably of Hadendowa origin and Tigré

speaking, number 1700. They are prosperous, cultivate on a small scale, and move seasonally with their herds to the edge of the plateau in the Hamasien and to Mensa country, in the hills of Keren.

Terowa Beit Mushe. They claim kinship with the Mensa and Maria in the Northern Hills, and with the Saho-speaking Hazu of the Akkele-Guzai. The tribe is bilingual, speaking Tigré as well as Saho. The people, 1100 strong, are nomads, rich in cattle, and move far afield, from the Agambussa hills to the Hamasien, the Engana, the Serae, and even to the pastures of the Tigray.

Iddifer. Another bilingual tribe, speaking Saho and Tigré. The Iddifer are descended from the Idda sub-tribe of the Asaorta, as is borne out by their tribal name. Their number is 900. A few cultivate at Agamedda in the hills of Ghinda; the majority of the tribe is nomadic and pastoral, and moves with its herds to the Hamasien and Serae.

5. Villages and Towns.

No permanent settlements exist in the Sahel, and only few have sprung up in the Samhar and the foothills. They are: Otumlo, Monkullo, Emberemi, Zaga, Zula, Afta, Ailet, Gumhod, Asus, Damas and Ghinda. Fewer still form part of the tribal life of the country, and are the home of groups still conscious of their tribal membership. These village are: Ailet (with a population of 700), Gumhod (400) and Asus (700), all in Ghinda District. But even here we find the admixture of many alien ethnic fragments - Asaorta, Ad Sheikh, Ad Muallim, Yemeni Arabs, as well as groups which can no longer be ethnically identified, and which are known only by the name of the locality in which they live.

Afta and Zula, with a population of 3000, belong ethnically to the Asaorta "corridor". They are inhabited by settled Asaorta, detribalised and since long split off from the mother tribe, and a few Yemeni Arabs and tribesmen from the Samhar.

Otumlo, Monkullo, Zaga and Emberemi (with a total population of about 8000) are almost suburbs of Massawa, and as cosmopolitan as that metropolis.

Damas has a settled population of only 150; but as was said before, it is visited by large numbers of cultivators from the plateau, which seasonally treble the population of the village. Ghinda, which shares in this floating population, is a modern creation. Headquarters of a *Vice-Residenza*, a railway station, and a commercial centre, it acquired its large permanent population of 3000.

The villages in the plain are composed largely of primitive grass huts with thatched roofs, though petrol tins and corrugated iron are, when available, equally acceptable building material. Near Massawa well constructed houses, built of wooden planks, predominate. Here and there the urban style of housing has penetrated, and chiefs or wealthy merchants built themselves modern houses of stone and mortar.

The picture of racial variety which characterises the coastal plain reappears, greatly enlarged, in the two towns, Massawa and Archico. The population of Massawa is 10,000, that of Archico 7000. Tigré-speaking groups from the Samhar, tribesmen from the Northern Hills, Asaorta, Arabs, Danakil, Sudanese, West Africans, Indians, and groups of Turkish descent, all live side by side in the crowded quarters of the towns. The livelihood of the people is of the great variety typical of coastal settle-

ments and large and wealthy cities. There are, however, unifying factors: the predominant religion is Islam, and the predominant language Tigré and Arabic.

Till the 17th century Archico was the more important of the two towns. Even afterwards, when Massawa had already become the richer and more important port, Archico retained its significance; for it remained the seat of the Naib - the Governor appointed by Turkey and Egypt. The early history of Massawa is obscure. It is first mentioned in an account of the wars between the Ethiopian Empire and the Iman Grany, Sultan of Harrar, early in the 16th century. In 1520 a Portuguese embassy landed at Massawa, and from a report left by the commander of the fleet we learn that at the time Massawa belonged to the maritime province of the Ethiopian Empire. In 1557 Massawa and Archico were occupied by the Turks. In 1865 the towns and their hinterland passed into the possession of Egypt, and were held by her until the Italian occupation in 1885. The political changes had their repercussions in the life of the tribe, as these were drawn into the military adventures of their overlords and had to accept, now one, now the other, protector (or oppressor). But the political changes have altered but little the face of the country and the habits of the people.

Assab, finally, in the extreme south of the Dankalia plain, is a town without hinterland. All around it is almost uninhabited country. Assab town has a population of 2000, the people in the rest of the Division numbering only 6000. The small fishing village of Assab was bought in 1869 by an Italian shipping company on behalf of the Italian Government, and here Italy gained her first foothold on the Red Sea and in Eritrea. Assab grew into an administrative, commercial and military centre, but reached the height of its importance only after 1935, when it became one of the most modern ports of the new Italian African Empire. Today it has relapsed into comparative insignificance.

V. THE CENTRAL PLATEAU

1. Cultural Division.

It may have been noticed that in the foregoing description we referred to the Administrative Divisions in the plains and in the Northern Hills by the names of their main towns, while for the Divisions on the Central Plateau we used names denoting the territories as such. This is no accident, for the former represent largely artificial political creations, the latter, traditional units which are the result of a long historical evolution. To the people of Eritrea at large, the three Plateau Divisions, Hamasien, Akkele-Guzai, and Seraye, are different "countries" in the true sense of the word, with different history, different character, even different customs, and the people of the different Divisions are conscious of these differences almost as one is conscious of different nationality.

But these differences and affinities are balanced by a unity which is both wider and narrower than that embodied in the single "country". Thus the three Divisions form part of the large cultural and ethnic block which is characterised by Coptic religion, Tigrinya language, and

the livelihood of sedentary peasants living in large villages of towns. It embraces, with southern Eritrea, the northern part of the Ethiopian Empire, known as the Tigray or the *Alauha Mellash* (the country "beyond the river Ala", - a river south of Lake Ashangi). At the same time, the Plateau Divisions are sub-divided into Districts (*awraja* in Tigrinya), which are again known by traditional names, and which again represent (with certain exceptions) historical units, separated from each other by minor divergences in tradition and custom. Group migrations, finally, both in historical times and in the dim past, have woven ties of kinship and common descent between districts and "countries", even between Eritrea and the Tigray, so that a third, irregular, pattern of affinities has overlaid the other forms of unity.

The diversity of custom which separates Divisions and districts is epitomized in the different codes of customary law which exist in the country. Thus the majority of the people in the Akkele-Guzai follow the code known as Meem Mehaza. The customary law of the Serae is embodied in the code of Adkeme and Melega, so called after the brother-ancestors of the Serae people. Half of the districts in the Hamasien have adopted the law of Gebrekristos, also known, after a district in the Division, as the law of Dekki Teshim. The remaining districts in the Hamasien have codes of law of their own. Various districts in the Akkele-Guzai and Serae, too, have separate codes of law. The main codes of the three Divisions show considerable differences both in the legal conceptions and in the rules of procedure. The divergent laws of districts, on the other hand, differ only in minor features: matrimonial customs, customs of hospitality, or the rules of blood money. Often these divergences can be derived from differences in descent and ethnic affinity. Typical examples are the law of the people called Loggo Cwa in the Hamasien, which is also the law of the groups of Loggo Cwa descent in the Serae, and the law of Eggela in the Akkele-Guzai, which is shared by a number of groups claiming common origin. Yet this possession of a common or different code is not an unequivocal criterion of ethnic affinity; for in many cases, as we shall see, it can be proved to be the result of recent developments - of political re-grouping or self-chosen assimilation.

2. Ethnic Grouping.

The population of the Central Plateau embraces more than half of the total population of Eritrea. In this large racial group the questions of origin are no less obscure, and the traditions of descent no less mythical, than in the other parts of Eritrea. There is a vague tradition that the greater part of the population of the Hamasien and Akkele-Guzai (as well as the whole Amhara race) descends from a common ancestor, sometimes described as a "King from beyond the Seas", and his three sons, Maluk, Chaluk, and Faluk. Another tradition traces the origin of the people of the Serae to immigrants from Lasta in Ethiopia. These mythical first inhabitants or immigrants are said to have been joined, in the course of time, by other racial groups and fragments of tribes, many of which are admitted to be of unknown origin.

The memory of ethnic descent and affinity still survives in a few names of districts or Divisions. The Akkele-Guzai is said to be named

after two brothers, Akkele and Guzai, who were the ancestors of the first inhabitants of the country. There are districts called Loggo in the Akkele-Guzai, the Hamasien and Serae, whose peoples are believed to be descended from the same ethnic branch. There is a district called Dekki Digna, "sons of Digna", in the Akkele-Guzai, and one of the same name in the Serae, again names suggestive of common descent.

However this may be, in the population of today the old ethnic divisions are hardly more than a memory. Migrations and cross-migrations have rendered the Tigrinya-speaking peoples both in Eritrea and Ethiopia a confusing mixture of racial strains, and the ethnic or tribal distinctions which may once have existed have become submerged in the century-old territorial regime of the country.

3. Economics.

The economic position on the Plateau, the wealth in livestock and agricultural production, differs from Division to Division. But nowhere does the produce of the land amount to self-sufficiency. The insufficiency of grazing lands, though undeniable, is not, on the whole, serious: it can be met comparatively easily by migrations to richer pastures. We shall hear of the regular migrations to the coast of the herdsmen tribes in the Akkele-Guzai, and of other migrations, on a smaller scale, to the Western Plain of the people in the Hamasien and Serae. The shortage in staple crops, on the other hand, constitutes one of the paramount economic problems of the country.

Various reasons are responsible for it. In the Hamasien, the presence of the large city of Asmara, agriculturally unproductive, cannot but preclude a balance of production and consumption, even if the land were more ample and fertile than it is. The Serae, agriculturally the richest of the three Divisions, is very nearly self-sufficient; that it is not fully so is due to the density of the population. In the Akkele-Guzai, finally, the presence of a large nomadic population and the poverty of the soil render this Division far from self-supporting. To these physical factors we must add another, psychological, motive, which is no less effective, and possibly most powerful in the Akkele-Guzai. It is the warlike tradition of the people, to whom work on the land is only the second best occupation. This tradition was utilized to the full by the Italians. They withdrew thousands of able-bodied men for service in the army, unfitting them for the more strenuous and more humdrum work on the soil.

The shortage in agricultural production is made up, and has been made up since ancient times, by imports from outside. There are two main sources of supply: the rich granary of the Tigray in Ethiopia; and the coast, the transit market for the Yemen. The modern means of transport, lorries and railways, have never quite superseded the old trade routes travelled by mules and camels. These are least important in the Hamasien, whose capital is the commercial centre of modern Eritrea. Here imports from Agordat, from the coast, and from the markets in Ethiopia, near or distant, converge, partly to be redistributed over the country. Certain parts of the Hamasien, however, still depend on the old trade routes across the frontier. The Market of Decamere is the terminus of one such route, which comes from Enticcio in the

Tigrai, and crosses the frontier at Tzorona, in the Akkele-Guzai. The district of Decamere also relies on the crops grown at Damas and Ghinda, in Massawa Division, where many of the people of the district have their cultivations.

In the Serae one of the main trade routes from Ethiopia leads through the frontier district of Zaid Akollom to the village market of Tukul; another, following the motor road, reaches the market of Adi Quala. The merchants of Adi Ugri, besides, import grain from Ethiopian markets as far distant as Adowa and Enda Selasse.

In the Akkele-Guzai the sedentary Coptic population and the Mohammedan nomads rely on different sources of supply. The former depends on the trade routes from the Tigrai: these cross the frontier at Tzorona, on the border of Enticcio; at Monoxeito, on the border of Agame; and at Aromo, on the border of Irob. The districts in the Saganeiti area are an exception; like the adjacent district of Decamere, they rely on the crops from the cultivations at Ghinda and Damas. The largest of the nomadic tribes, the Asaorta, obtains its supplies from the coast, from Massawa or Zula, or buys its grain at Mahio, in the Haddas river valley, the meeting place of caravan routes from east and west. The Miniferi tribe, which lives between the coast and Senafe, depends on the coastal market of Arafali and on the inland market of Senafe. The Hazu, in the south-east of the Division, again depend on supplies both from the coast and Senafe, but also visit the markets of Agame in the Tigrai.

This considerable, as well as ancient, dependence on the granaries across the frontier fits well into the picture which we have outlined of the ethnic and cultural affinities linking Eritrea with the Ethiopian Tigrai.

4. Religion.

As already stated, the large majority of the Plateau groups are Coptic Christians. The smallest village has its Coptic church, and no Division is without a number of famous monasteries, often wealthy and of great age, which are the spiritual centres of the country. These monasteries once had considerable secular powers, owning large stretches of land, and holding territorial fiefs. The latter were secularised partly already in Ethiopian times, and the former were reduced, and are still being reduced, by the will of the people, whose respect for the church is more than offset by their land-hunger. Indeed the respect for the church must not be exaggerated: the Coptic priests and monks are greedy, ignorant and lazy, and lead far from holy lives, and the peasant is not blind to this. Disputes between chiefs and abbots, villages and priests, are common. It happens more and more often nowadays that the peasants refuse to work on the land of the monasteries, thus breaking away from the old feudal obligation.

The church still wields those formidable weapons, excommunication and the refusal to celebrate Mass for a recalcitrant community; but even these are losing their force. Finally, internal discord is weakening the resistance of the Coptic Church to these assaults from without.

The head of the Coptic church is the Bishop at Asmara, who styles himself "Abuna", and whose traditional diocese comprises both

Eritrea and the Ethiopian Tigrai. Up to 1935 the Bishop of Eritrea received his office at the hands of the the Coptic Metropolitan of Alexandria. After the interlude of the Italian rule over Ethiopia, during which, for political reasons, the Coptic bishoprics in the Italian dominions were made dependent on the newly created see of Addis Ababa, the situation reverted to what it had been before - in theory; for the position is still undefined and full of anomalies. The present Bishop of Eritrea is one of those church dignitaries who were appointed by the short-lived see of Addis Ababa. He lost, by official decree, his unorthodox rank, but still continues to exercise his office.

In the Akkele-Guzai and the Hamasien, Catholics of Ethiopian Rite form a fairly considerable minority. The Ethiopian Catholics in the Plateau Divisions number just under 10,000 (as against 350,000 Copts). This creed, which represents a compromise between Roman Catholicism and Coptic Christianity, was founded early in the 18th century by the Italian Franciscan De Iacobis, who is known among the people as Abuna Iakob. De Iacobis spread the new faith among the people of Agame, in the north-eastern Tigrai, and the Eritrean provinces, braving the bitter hostility of the Coptic rulers of Ethiopia of that day. He succeeded in reviving (with certain modifications) the Catholic faith which had very nearly succumbed to the religious persecutions of the 17th and 18th centuries. The palatial church, erected in modern times over his grave at Hebo near Saganeiti, is a belated symbol of his final triumph. The Ethiopian Catholics have their own bishop, whose seat is in Asmara. He and his clergy keep the proselytizing spirit alive, and have enthusiastically adopted the doctrine of a church militant.

Islam numbers 72,000 adherents on the Eritrean Plateau. It is represented by two ethnic bodies: first, the Mohammedan, Saho-speaking tribes which live as immigrants in the Plateau Divisions; secondly, the sect of the *Jiberti* (the "elect"), which is settled in small groups throughout the country. The *Jiberti* are ethnically identical with the Coptic inhabitants of the Plateau, and speak their language, Tigrinya. They trace their conversion to one Mohammed El Negash, a self-appointed disciple of the Prophet, of Abyssinian origin, said to have lived at the time of the Hejra. Mohammed El Negash is buried in the Tigrai near Adigrat, and his tomb has become a place of pilgrimage for all Mohammedans of *Jiberti* persuasion. A third, alien, group of Mohammedans are the Arabs from the Yemen and Hadramaut. Labourers or merchants by profession, they congregate in considerable numbers in all the towns and larger villages.

Copts and Catholics rarely intermarry; Christians and Mohammedans hardly ever; but apart from occasional jealousies between Copts and Catholics, the different communities live peacefully side by side, enjoying the benefits of the old Italian policy of religious tolerance. The Catholic church, supported by Rome, has been expanding slowly but steadily. The Coptic and Mohammedan communities seem static. It is said that, in the past, certain tribes were converted from Coptic Christianity to Islam (e. g. the Miniferi in the Akkele-Guzai), while others exchanged Islam for Coptic Christianity: today, large-scale conversions of either kind no longer happen.

5. Land Rights and Social Structure.

The pivot of social organisation on the Plateau is the *enda*, the large kinship group. It is composed of a greatly varying number of individual families, all claiming descent from a common ancestor, whose name the *enda* bears. An *enda* which grows very large splits into two or more sections, which in the course of time acquire a name and social identity of their own. The *enda* is, in a sense, a territorial unit, for the most important form of land tenure in the country, the hereditary, absolute land right of *resti*, is bound up with the *enda*-group. Land of the *resti* type can also be owned by the individual family within the *enda*; but these individual landrights are conceived of as being derived from the landrights vested in the *enda* itself, in virtue of an ancient first occupation of the land. This corporate conception of land-ownership is revived in every dispute over land, and indeed constitutes the strongest bond of cohesion in the *enda*.

As a result of this corporate land-tenure, the single *enda* tends to be concentrated in one district, or even one village community. Progressive sub-divisions of *enda*-groups, combined with migrations in search of new land, have partly broken down these territorial limits, and today we meet with *endas* which have spread over different villages and districts. Nor are there, today, villages or districts composed of one *enda* only, though certain local names seem to indicate that political districts and village communities did once coincide with *enda* groups (e.g. the district called Enda-Dashim in the Akkele-Guzai; the district Enda Azmac Ogbit in the Serae; or the district which existed in the Hamasien up to the time of the Italian occupation, called Enda Gebrekristos).

The land-rights of *resti*, round which the *enda* revolves, are also the foundation of a social division vaguely reminiscent of class or caste distinctions. This division groups, on one side, the people who are regarded as the old original inhabitants of the country, and on the other, the newcomers to the area. The former are known as the *restenyatat*, the "*resti*-owners", or as *ballabat*, "hereditary families"; the latter as *makhelai-alet*, the "people amidst", i.e. the people who live "amidst" the original population. As the name implies, only the *restenyatat* can claim the absolute hereditary rights of *resti*, while the "foreigners" hold land as tenants only (*sedbi*), or by the right of ancient or recent purchase (*worki*). The *restenyatat* claim the status almost of a landed aristocracy, which looks down upon the once landless "foreigners". This class distinction has lost some of its old rigidity. The ownership of purchased land has come to be regarded as a full equivalent of hereditary *resti*. Moreover, in a system of communal land landownership known as *shehena* or *diesa*, which exists in many parts of Eritrea, and which allots equal usufructuary rights to all members of the village community, the distinction between "hereditary families" and strangers is largely emptied of meaning. A political measure with which Ras Alula, the last Ethiopian governor of Eritrea, is credited, finally bridged the gulf between landed aristocracy and landless foreigners. This measure was embodied in a famous edict which Ras Alula issued before leaving for the wars against the Mahdi; it was prompted, above all, by the necessity of finding the large tribute which was to furnish the wherewithals for the forthcoming campaign. The edict laid down that

whoever, there and then, paid the tribute due on land in his possession; would become, ipso facto, one of the *restenyatat*, whatever his origin, or the nature of his and rights. Yet though weakened, the class barrier has not disappeared. It is visible in the important political prerogatives still vested in the *ballabat* families (like the right to be invested with chieftainship and other village offices), and in the social obligations (symbolic gifts to the *restenyatat*, duties of hospitality) which still attach to the status of foreigners in this land-proud country.

6. Political Organisation.

The modern political system of the Plateau groups is based on a territorial organisation which recognises two units: the narrow unit of the village community, under a *chikka* or village chief; and the wider unit of the district, under a *mesleniè* or district chief. The social organisation, with the *enda* as its centre, represents largely an independent, parallel organisation, which does not overlap with the political structure. It did, however, overlap in the past. The leaders of powerful *enda* groups could obtain recognition as feudal chiefs of villages and districts. And the village chief in pre-Italian times (then known as *halakha*) owed his office to his membership of an *enda*; for he was nominated by his kinsmen, and chieftainship changed hands annually, devolving upon each of the village *endas* in turn. In some parts village chieftainship has not wholly severed its old link with the *enda*, and here *chikkas* administer, not villages, but *endas* within the village.

Village chieftainship has changed its meaning as well as its name. Today it is by appointment, and permanent. But as of old, the village chief must still come of the "hereditary families"; apart from this, his office has no hereditary background. The village unit itself has remained intact throughout the political changes which Eritrea underwent. The political unit of the district, on the other hand, has been considerably affected by the political evolution of the country. A large number of the districts existing today are of the traditional type described before. Some, however, are of more recent origin. Up to the time of the Italian occupation of Eritrea, many villages were enjoying an autonomous status, never having been incorporated in political districts; the majority of these autonomous villages are now united in districts, though a few still survive in all the Plateau Divisions. With the secularization of the church lands, and the abolition of royal fiefs under the Italian regime, new districts came into being. The Italian Government also split up or united certain of the traditional districts, either for administrative reasons, or to create new offices for favoured chiefs, or to limit the powers of too influential traditional rulers.

Like the districts, the office of the District Chiefs underwent considerable changes. The District Chief in pre-Italian times, was known as *shumonya*; he was invariably descended from the *ballabat* - "the landed aristocracy" - of the country. Often, too, the office of the *shumonya* was hereditary, though it is difficult in this war-torn country to define with certainty the age of these hereditary ruling houses, few of which were probably older than 3-4 generations. The Italians changed

the old title of the chiefs to *mesleniè*, an Amharic word meaning "I am the emblem", that is "I represent". Many of the hereditary chiefs still held office under the Italian Government; but many are new men - mostly ex-soldiers who were rewarded with the chieftainship for services rendered. Some are natives of the districts which they now govern; a few have not even this claim to their office. Again some chiefs are descendants of ruling houses, but have been transferred to districts other than their own, often by way of promotion to more important posts. Or again, the jurisdiction of hereditary chiefs was extended over new, alien districts.

The territorial government of the country in pre-Italian times was equally varied and subject to change. The old Eritrea, we must remember, was part of the Ethiopian Empire; it was known by its traditional name as the *Mareb Mellash* - the country "beyond the Mareb" - and was administered by an Imperial Governor who bore the rank of *Ras*. The offices of village head and district chief were only two grades in a complex, and far from uniform, hierarchy of territorial offices. Only the lowest and highest grades - village chieftainship, and the governorship of the *Mareb Mellash* - were invariable: between these two extremes there were, in greatly changing combination, the offices of traditional district chiefs, feudal chiefs, Imperial tax-collectors, district heads appointed by the Central Government, and Imperial governors of provinces. It is more appropriate to speak of the principles of government behind this varying pattern of administration than to describe the latter in all its details.

We find three main principles: first, the traditional autonomy of villages and districts, which was embodied in the offices of village head and *shumonya*. Secondly, the leadership of powerful local families which succeeded in obtaining the support of the Central Government for their territorial claims; men of these families became feudal "barons" of the Emperors of Ethiopia, and were known as *shumgulti*, "chiefs of fiefs"

Thirdly, we have the principle of direct military or civil administration by representatives of the Central Government: these men were all aliens in the country they administered; they acted as tax-collectors or regent-delegates (both offices were known by a common term, *ferresenya*); the governors (*geza'i*) of provinces came frequently from their ranks, and invariably the *Ras* of the *Mareb Mellash*.

In the Akkele - Guzai the first principle was paramount. The districts were under district chiefs of *ballabat* families, who were confirmed by the Imperial governor. The office of the *ferresenya* was concerned with little more than tax-collecting and periodical inspections. The whole province was under a *geza'i* appointed by the Emperor. In the time of Empor John, the Governor of the Akkele - Guzai was *Ras Araia*, a man from Enderta (Tigrai); he was succeeded by *Dejach Bariagaber* of Adowa; *Dejach Asbaha*, also from the Tigrai; and finally *Dejach Debeb*, a son of *Araia*. *Debeb* had been ruling for only one year when the country fell to the Italians.

In the Hamasien the feudal principle held the balance of direct administration. Men of powerful families not only maintained their rule over districts over which they had, in times past, established their domination, but could also become Imperial governors of the whole province. Thus *Ras Hailu* of the *Hazega* family, ruled over the *Hama-*

sien in the time of the Emperor Theodor, and Ras Woldenkiel of the rival house of Zazzega, in the time of Emperor John. Ras Woldenkiel also extended his rule for a period (in the time of Napier's expedition to Magdala) over the Serae as well.

In the Serae, territorial autonomy and feudal claims reduced the "direct" administration to the level of a decentralized, local supervision. The chief of a village community would be directly under a *ferresenya* as the representative of the Central Government, but was also ruled by the local feudal "baron". The rival claims of feudal houses would frequently break up existing, and achieve new, bonds of political dependence.

The explanation for this irregular and varying system lies in the structure of the Ethiopia Empire, in the historical changes which it underwent, and in the position of Eritrea as a dependency of a remote and far from stable Central Government. The historical background and the political relations between Eritrea and the Ethiopian Empire will be discussed more fully in a different context (see the separate monograph on "Eritrea and her Neighbours").

Here we need only add that the territorial office of provincial overlords survived in one case into Italian times. One Dejach Bahta Hagos of Tsenadegle in the Akkele-Guzai, a powerful chief who, at the time of the Italian occupation of Eritrea threw in his lot with the invaders, was rewarded with the paramount chieftainship of the Akkele-Guzai. His appointment was not an unqualified success; for shortly afterwards Bahta rebelled against the Italians, and was sent to the penal settlement of Nokra. With his disappearance from the scene the office lapsed, not to be revived. We shall also meet with two other chiefs who aided the Italian occupation, with more lasting success, - Ras Baraki of the Hamasien and Dejach Tesfamariam of the Serae. They, too, received their reward at the hands of the new rulers. It was, though not the paramount chieftainship of provinces, yet a chieftainship which extended over a large part of the country, and over districts to which these men could lay no traditional claim.

VI. THE HAMASIEN.

1. Country and People.

Of the three plateau divisions, the Hamasien is the smallest in territory, the largest in population (over 200,000) and politically the most important. Already in Ethiopian times the capital of the Hamasien was also the capital of Eritrea and the seat of the Imperial Governors. Geographical and ethnic conditions alike have contributed to making Asmara and the Hamasien the strategic and political centre of Eritrea. The main roads (caravan routes in the past, motor roads and railway in the present) from the coast to the west, and from the Northern Hills to the south, cross the Hamasien at Asmara. The Hamasien is, besides, the northernmost outpost of the Tigrinya block. Ethnically more homogeneous and united than the Akkele-Guzai or the Serae, it lent itself more easily to becoming the point d'appui for the government of that distant Ethiopian province, the *Mareb Mellash*. This ancient political

prominence of the Hamasien is reflected in the equivocal use which was made of its name; for many of the old travellers and historians of Ethiopia took the name Hamasien to mean the whole of the *Mareb Mellash*, and spoke of the Imperial Governors of the Hamasien as of the Governors of Eritrea.

As has been said before, a large part of the people of the Hamasien derive their descent from three brothers, the mythical ancestors of the Eritrean people, Faluk, Maluk and Chaluk. The legend describes how their father emigrated from his old home (which some place in Ethiopia, others in a country "beyond the sea") and wandered through the Ethiopian Wolkeit, through the country of the Kunama and Baria, up the valley of the Anseba, until he reached the Hamasien, where he decided to make his home. His numerous offspring reaches the light of history in the man Tesfazien, who is said to have lived in the 17th century and to have been invested with the rule of the Hamasien by the Emperor of Ethiopia. Tesfazien's younger brother and sons bear names which are the names of present districts in the Hamasien, Gebrekristos, Agaba, Zerai, Takkele and Menab, and the people of the districts regard themselves as the direct descendants of these men. Whatever the true facts of this Hamasien Book of Genesis, it has sustained till to-day the pretensions of supremacy of the Hamasien people and, more especially, the political claims of the descendants of Tesfazien. It is admitted that many groups from other races and countries, from Amhara, the Tigrai and the Western Plain, also immigrated into the Hamasien, where they either merged with the first settlers or founded new communities and districts. Yet in the uniformity of culture, which has characterised the Hamasien for the last century, there is little trace of these ancient divisions.

The modern administrative Division, or *Commissariato*, of the Hamasien, is composed of three zones; the township of Asmara; the Hamasien proper, and the District (*Residenza*) of Decamere. The last is a comparatively recent creation, dating back only to 1935.

2. Asmara Town.

Of Asmara little need be said except that its population numbers over 140,000, of which over 100,000 are non-Europeans of diverse descent and race. The majority of the native inhabitants of Asmara are Eritreans and Copts (about 70,000), but there are also many Eritrean Mohammedans, of Saho and Jiberti origin (over 25,000), and a few Catholics of Ethiopian Rite (1900); there are, finally, considerable sections of non-Eritrean descent, above all, Ethiopians, Sudanese and Yemeni Arabs. Their professions are of the great diversity typical of large towns.

The non-European population of Asmara lives almost entirely in a special part of the town, separated from the European population. This non-European part is divided into two quarters, each composed of four wards. The quarters are administered by town chiefs (*Capi Rione*), and the wards by wardheads (*Capi Quartieri*). One of the quarters, whose population is predominantly Mohammedan, is under a Mohammedan town chief; the other, predominantly Coptic, has a town chief and ward-heads of that faith.

3. The Districts.

Dekki Teshim. Though its territory is small, this district has a large population (13,000). The name of the district is new: before the Italian occupation of Eritrea it was called Enda Gebrekristos, after the ancestor of the kinship group which first settled in the area. The rule of the district was in the hands of this family of original settlers till the advent of the Italians, when Kantiba Tesemma, the last of the line, rebelled against the new masters and fled to Ethiopia. The district headship went to Blatta Baraki, a nominee of the Italian Government. He came from an influential family in the Hamasien, but had no specific claim to the chieftainship. The Italians found him useful and energetic, and in due course invested him with the chieftainship of almost the whole of the Hamasien. Nor was his prestige neglected. From a simple Blatta (one of the lowest ranks in the Ethiopian hierarchy), he became a Ras, thus acquiring the title of the ancient Governors of Eritrea. In his old age, Ras Baraki divided his dominions among his five sons, whom he appointed as his deputies and successors. After Ras Baraki's death (in 1939), the Italian Government confirmed their appointment, so that today nine out of the fifteen districts of the Hamasien are governed by members of the Baraki family.

The district of Dekki Teshim includes two suburbs of Asmara, Godaif and Gajjiret. The two most important villages in the rural part of the district are Addi Sogdo, the capital of the district, and Tsada Kristian. Dekki Teshim is a rich agricultural district, though it had to cede much of its fertile land to the township of Asmara. Many of the people in the districts, too, seek their livelihood in the town. With the exception of a few Jiberti Mohammedans and a small group of Protestant converts of the Swedish Mission, the population is Coptic.

Dekki Teshim gave its name to one of the codes of customary law existing in the Hamasien. This code has been adopted also by five other districts which bear no kinship to the people of Dekki Teshim.

Tekkele Agaba. About the same size as Dekki Teshim, with a population of 9000. Its most important village is Zazzega. It is the home of the Zazzega family, a branch of the dynasty of Tesfazien, of local fame, which claims to have ruled over the whole of the Hamasien and even (a most dubious claim) over the whole of the *Mareb Mellash* under the Emperors of Ethiopia. Today, the family has completely lost its former power. Its last representative is an insignificant "Notable", and the chieftainship of the district has passed to an ex-soldier in the Italian Army. The district is rich in agricultural land. The religion distribution is the same as in Dekki Teshim.

Minabe Zerai. Lies to the north of Tekkele Agaba. Its area is small, and its population only 5000. It is the home of another branch of the once powerful dynasty of Tesfazien. But unlike the Zazzega family, this branch has preserved its political importance, at least in the narrow orbit of district administration. The present chief is a direct descendant of Tesfazien, and a son of Ras Woldenkiel, who ruled over the Hamasien in the time of Emperor John. The district is poor in agricultural land, and of little importance, save for its connection with the ancient ruling house. Indeed Minabe Zerai is one of the two

districts in the Hamasien which are governed by chiefs holding their office by the right of heredity. The majority of the people are Coptic Christians; there are also small groups of Mohammedans and Catholics.

Dembezan. One of the largest districts in the Hamasien, with a population of over 13,000. Dembezan is credited to be the country where the mythical ancestors of the Hamasien, Faluk and his brothers, first settled. Till 1933 the district comprised also what is now the independent district of Ad Teklezan, and the capital of the Dembezan was in the village of Ad Teklezan. When Ad Teklezan was made a separate district, the village Gashinashim became the political centre of Dembezan, and the seat of its chief. He is a son of Ras Baraki, of whom we have spoken above. The district comprises some very fertile land, but much of its area is rocky and barren. In Dembezan the Swedish Mission has found a promising field, and flourishing congregations of Protestants (totalling 540 souls) exist in many villages. The large majority of the people are Copts, though there is the usual admixture of Mohammedans and Catholics.

Ad Teklezan. Lies in the north-west corner of the Hamasien, on the edge of the escarpment. It is a small district comprising only two larger villages, and a population of 4200. As was said before, it is a newly-created district, split off from Dembezan in 1933. The old political link has survived in the chieftainship of the district; for the present chief, of ancient lineage, is the son of a former chief of Dembezan. The lands of the district are poor, and the people depend largely on cultivation in the Bahri. The populous village of Ad Teklezan was to have become a township on modern lines, but the project was cut short by the present war. A quarter of the population is Mohammedan, of Jiberti persuasion; the rest are Copts, though there are a few Catholics.

Autonomous Villages. There are four -- Hadamu, Adi Nefas, Adi Abeito, and Beit Meka. Their population is 6700. The people of Hadamu, Adi Nefas and Adi Abeito are akin to the main ethnic branch in the Hamasien; the people of Beit Meka trace their descent to the Bellu of Massawa Division. The villages are situated close to Asmara and one of them, Hadamu, used to occupy part of what is today the town area. When Asmara was built, the village was moved to a site outside. The people of Hadamu owned most of the land on which Asmara now stands, and in spite of extensive expropriation, they still keep large tracts of cultivable land. Today, the villages are "autonomous" only in name. They are united under a district chief, who is another member of the ubiquitous tribe of Baraki. The population is almost entirely Copt.

Karneshim. A twin district, consisting of Karneshim North and South. Its total population is 13,300. Karneshim North has its headquarters at Ad Zien; other important villages are Wokki and Zagir. The capital of Karneshim South is Amba Darho. The chiefs of both districts are new men, without hereditary claims to their office. The districts are rich in livestock and arable land, though most of the cultivations of Karneshim lie outside the districts, on Bahri land. In Karneshim we find another flourishing community of Swedish Mission Protestants; the rest of the people are Copts;

Karneshim North has a small Mohammedan minority.

Karneshim follows a code of customary law of its own. This code shows small and on the whole insignificant differences from the code of Dekki Teshim, to which all the districts enumerated above subscribe.

Anseba. Another twin district, divided in North and South. The two Anseba districts lie in the west of the Hamasien, where the plateau slopes down to the hills of Keren. The population is 14,400. The main villages of Anseba North are Adi Naamen and Deresenei; of Anseba South, Dekki Skiai. The chiefs of both districts are ex-soldiers, with no hereditary or traditional title to their chieftainship. With the exception of a small Moslem minority the people are Copts. The districts are poor in agricultural lands, and the majority of the people are semi-nomadic herdsmen rather than sedentary cultivators. Their migrations take them to the western plain and to the pastures of the Tigray in the south. To the west of the Anseba districts lies a large tract of mountainous, uninhabited land, which is administered as part of the Crownlands of the colony, on the lines of the Bahri domain (to be discussed presently). This area, too, serves as pasture for the Anseba people. In the Anseba districts we meet with a new code of customary law. Again it closely resembles the code of Dekki Teshim, perhaps as a result of the ties of kinship which the two groups claim.

Loggo Chwa. A large district in the extreme south-west of the Division, bordering on the Serae. The name Loggo is said to mean the military colonies which the Emperors of Ethiopia established in their distant dominions, and the present Loggo people are believed to be descended from the men of many races who made up these colonies. Thus the Loggo Chwa in the Hamasien, numbering 15,000 claim common origin with the group of the same name in the Serae and with the Loggo Sarda people in the Akele-Guzai. The two Loggo Chwa in the Hamasien and the Serae also share a common code of customary law. The two largest settlements in the Hamasien district of Loggo Chwa are Himberti and Skiketti. As an area inhabited by a well-defined group the Loggo Chwa is old; as a political district it is a new creation. For in pre-Italian times it was divided into a number of autonomous village communities. Under the Italian régime the villages were united, and placed under a district chief, who comes again from the Baraki family. The religious distribution shows the familiar combination of a Coptic majority and small Mohammedan and Catholic minorities. The eastern part of the district is fertile, the western part rocky and barren. This area is used largely as pasture land for the considerable herds of the people. Many, however, also drive their animals down to the western plain for grazing in the winter months.

To the east of Loggo Chwa, extending to the boundary of Asmara town, lies the sub-district of "Upper Chwa" — *Kebessa Chwa*. Its population is 5,000, and its villages are small. The largest of them, Adī Gwadad, is almost a suburb of Asmara. The people of the two Chwa districts are ethnically identical, and under the same chief.

Lamza. The population of Lamza numbers 4800 and is by religion almost exclusively Copt. The villages are small, and arable land is little and of poor quality. The chief of the district is the senior member of the

house of Baraki, who also governs the neighbouring districts of Saharti and Wokerti. The people of these three districts used to follow the customary law of Dekki Teshim. For reasons difficult to understand, they recently evolved a code of their own, which differs in some important points from the old law of the country.

Saharti. In size a small district, though rich in agricultural land and densely populated (population 6000 - all Copts). The main village is Emberto.

Wokerti. Smaller still, this district has a population of 3000 (all Copts). The wealth of the district lies more in livestock than in agricultural land, of which there is little in this barren region. Though claiming different origin, the people of Wokerti have always been closely associated with Lamza and Saharti, and also share with the two districts, as has been said, their customary law.

Bahri Domain. This area comprises the eastern escarpment, the slopes and the low-lying lands in the Hamasien. Bizen, one of the most ancient and famous Coptic monasteries of Eritrea, lies within its boundaries. The Bahri has only a small settled population of 5200; and a large proportion of this (1200) lives in the modern settlements of Nefasit and Embatkalla. But the district is visited seasonally by cultivators from many districts of the Hamasien. In pre-Italian times, the larger part of the Bahri was a territorial fief held by the monastery of Bizen. Under the Italian régime these church lands were secularised and declared Crownland; the monastery was allowed to keep only a small tract of land, of which, incidentally, the monks of Bizen make poor use. The Crownlands are allotted, in leasehold, to cultivators from the Hamasien who seek land outside their districts. The lease is, in theory, annually renewable; in practice, families and village communities hold the lease for indefinite periods, until it lapses through death or emigration. Each lease is registered in the *Commissariato* of the Hamasien. Until recently, the Bahri had the position of a State Domain placed directly under the Government; it was administered by the *Commissariato* of the Hamasien, through cultivation chiefs (*moaferi*) elected by the village communities which held land in the Bahri area. The great confusion and the constant disputes which resulted from this system led to a change in 1933. The Bahri was reconstituted as a district proper, under a district chief, who was assisted in his work by cultivation chiefs appointed for each of the Hamasien districts whose people cultivate in the Bahri. More recently still, the district was subdivided into two zones, each under its own district chief. The groups which cultivate in the Bahri, however, claim more than this usufructuary right, by the grace of the Government, to the lands which they are allowed to work: they claim rights of *resti*, vested since ancient times in the *enda* groups of the Hamasien - with what justification it is difficult to say in this land empty of permanent settlers.

Engana. This district does not form part of the country of the Hamasien in the traditional sense. The Engana was incorporated in the Hamasien only in 1935, as a Sub-District, or *Residenza*, with the headquarters in Decamere. Until then, the Engana had formed part of the Akkele-Guzai. The reasons for this change were administrative; for when, during the Italo-Ethiopian war, a small village in the Engana called Decamere (Dekamhare in the vernacular) grew into an important town, with workshops, factories, an aerodrome, and a large Italian population, it was felt that the district enclosing the new township would fit better into an

area administered from Asmara, than into the rural Division of Akkele-Guzai.

The people of Engana claim common origin with those of Gundet and Aila, in the southern Seræ. But they regard themselves as a part of the Akkele-Guzai, to which province they belonged since old, and with which they share their code of customary law. This sentiment of 'nationality' has remained unaffected by the recent administrative changes. The population of Engana is 10,500, the large majority of which (over 7000) lives in Decamere town. Outside the town, the villages of Afalba and Sessah are the only important settlements. The rural area of the district is sparsely populated, though rich in arable land. Many of the people, however, like their neighbours in the Akkele-Guzai, also cultivate during the winter months in the foothills of Ghinda. Unlike the other district of the Hamasien, Engana has a large minority of Catholics of Ethiopian Rite (1200) and in this, too, resembles the adjacent districts of the Akkele-Guzai Division.

As a political district, the Engana is only two generations old. Originally its territory was divided between three districts of the Akkele-Guzai, Dekki Gebri, Dekki Admokhom and Eggela Hames. At the time of Emperor John of Ethiopia, the district of Engana was created, mainly to provide a chieftainship for a certain Dejach Bokru, a powerful and wealthy Engana man, who had rendered valuable services to the Emperor. He was confirmed in his post by the Italian Government and received, in 1931, also the district of Dekki Gebri. After his death in 1937, Engana became again an independent district, under its present chief. He, too, is of Engana extraction and a new man, who owes his appointment, not to a traditional title, but to his undoubted ability.

VII. THE SERAE.

1. Country and People.

The Seræ is, as has been said, agriculturally the richest of the three Plateau Divisions. The wide open plateau and the rolling hills over which it extends lie at a lower altitude than the plateau in the Hamasien and Akkele-Guzai, and are richer in perennial water, in arable land, and pastures. In the south and east, the plateau drops steeply into the valley of the river Mareb, which forms the boundary with Ethiopia. In the west and north-west the plateau slopes down gradually into the Western Plain. It is here that we meet with the nomadic herdsmen of the Beni Amer tribe who seasonally visit the pastures in the Seræ. Here, too, a small group of Kunama, members of the tribe in the Barentu district, is living. The fertile plateau, known as the "black earth" country, is densely populated; at its edges, where the fat "black earth" gives way to rocks and barren sand, the population is scattered and sparse.

The total population of the Seræ is 123,000. Ethnically, it is very nearly homogeneous, and shows only an insignificant admixture of alien elements. The large majority of the people claims descent from two genealogical branches, which are regarded as closely akin. One

... with two brother-ancestors, Adkeme and Melega; the other with a third ancestor called Tesfa, and is known as Dekki Tesfa the "sons of Tesfa". Both branches are said to have originated in the country of Bora and Selowa, in the Ethiopia kingdom of Lasta. The different genealogical branches tended to spread over different parts of the Serae, so that today they inhabit, with few exceptions, well defined areas. The Dekki Tesfa live in the western districts, usually known by the collective name of Arreza. The descendants of Melega inhabit the large southern district of Kohain, and partly the adjacent Maraguz and Takala. In these two districts we also meet with the genealogical branch of Adkeme, which, besides, extends over nearly all the remaining districts of the Serae. A few districts on the northern and southern border are inhabited by alien groups of Hamasien or Tigrai descent. The ethnic uniformity is reflected in the largely uniform customary law of the country, which is called, after the brother-ancestors, the code of Adkeme-Melega. The few exceptions which exist, and which concern the groups of alien origin, will be mentioned in the description of the districts.

Administratively, the Serae is divided into one *Residenza* and one *Vice-Residenza*, Adi Ugri in the north, and Adi Quala in the south. This sub-division has no ethnic or traditional significance. Nor is the boundary of the Division itself founded everywhere on tradition or ethnic grouping. It has undergone not inconsiderable changes during Italian rule: thus districts which used to belong to the Hamasien and the Akkele-Guzai have been incorporated in the Serae, and an area in the north-west which once formed part of the Serae is now in Agordat Division. Administrative convenience, not always fully justified, was the motive for these boundary revisions.

2. Districts of Adi Ugri Residenza.

Takala. This is the district which includes the political capital of the Division, Adi Ugri. The population of the district, numbering 9400, descends, as has already been said, from Adkeme and Melega; a few villages are inhabited by immigrants from Saharti in the Hamasien. The majority of the people are Copts; but there are also Jiberti Mohammedans and a few Catholics of Ethiopian Rite. Takala has an old and famous Coptic monastery, Enda Abu Ioannes. The main settlements are Adi Ugri, Kena Haiela, Egri Makhet and Adi Bari. The land is very fertile and the district rich. Like most of the districts in the Serae, Takala has been an independent district since ancient times. Under Ethiopian rule, it was administered by the chiefs of villages, under an Imperial *ferresenya*. The administration of Takala as a group of "autonomous" villages continued into Italian times till 1931, when the district was given its first, and present, district chief. He comes from one of the noble families of the country which, in the past, had held fiefs (*gulti*) under the Ethiopian Emperors.

In pre-Italian times Adi Ugri was a small village, situated on the hill now occupied by an Italian fort. In 1894 the modern town was founded, as a military and administrative centre, and the old village was moved to its present site. Adi Ugri is to-day an important

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population. The main settlements are Adi Gedder (the chief's residence), Amader, Emmi Tsellim, Debaroa, Adi Bezehannes, Adi Baro, and Dekki Tsuna. In Ethiopian times the district was administered by village chiefs under an Imperial *ferresenya*. The autonomous village administration continued, under the Italian regime, till 1925. In that year the Italians introduced the *endaba* council of elders, and replaced it again in 1931 by the appointment of a district chief. He is an ex-soldier, and a stranger in the district, hailing from the Hamasien.

Seffaha. Like Tsellima, inhabited by people of Loggo Chwa descent, and formerly part of the Hamasien. The people number 4800, and are almost exclusively Copts. The district is rich in agricultural land and livestock. The main villages are Adi Felesti and Tallaa. The district was long under a hereditary dynasty of chiefs. In 1931 the last chief was, for obscure reasons, reduced to the status of a Wakil, dependant on the chiefs of Tsellima. Recently this hereditary chief with Wakil rank was deposed and replaced by a new man. The monastery of Enda Abuna Endrias, situated in the district, is worthy of mention. Though poor, it is important and of ancient fame, for the hot springs on its land are believed to cure leprosy, and are visited by the sick from many parts of the country.

Liban. This small district, too, belonged originally to the Hamasien. Its population of 2600 is of mixed descent; it embraces people from the Ethiopian Lasta and Tigray, groups of Belein descent, and sections of the Adkeme-Melega. The country is poor, adapted to animal husbandry rather than agriculture. The people of Liban cultivate across the frontier, in Agordat territory, where they claim ancient rights of *resti*. There are two large settlements, Grat Gebru (the seat of the chief) and Wogerikho Lalai. In pre-Italian times the district was governed by a number of chiefs who represented the large kinship groups (*enda*) in the district; the nomadic leanings of the people, who have few permanent settlements, led to this chieftainship, based, not on the village unit, but on the *enda*. This system remained in force till 1932, when the first (and present) chief was appointed. About that time many of the people emigrated to the district of Adi Abo, in the Ethiopian Wolkeit, in search of pasture. The chief still claims jurisdiction over these emigrants - a claim which, under present conditions, can have hardly more than platonic value.

Wedged between Liban and the Hamasien border, lies the large autonomous village of Habela (population 1300). The land is poor, but the people are rich in livestock. They descend from the Loggo and other groups in the Hamasien. Habela was separated from the district of Loggo Chwa in the Hamasien and incorporated in the Seraye only in 1939. The reason was a grazing dispute of long standing and, frequently, violent repercussions between the people of Habela and their neighbours in Liban. It was hoped to facilitate its settlement by including both groups in the same territory. The first chief of the newly constituted autonomous village was elected by the villagers themselves. He was, however, deposed shortly afterwards, and replaced by a stranger, a man from Godefelasse.

Temezza. The people, numbering 3000, are Copts, and are descended from Agame in Ethiopia. There is also a considerable minority of Mohammedan Asaorta. The district is rich in livestock, and its lands are situated in the fertile plain of the Mareb valley. The main villages are Kenafena and Adi Segwawi. Till Italian times the district, composed of autonomous villages, belonged to the Akkele-Guzai, on whose border it lies. The Italians handed the district to Dejach Tesfamariam of Adi Quala,

their much favoured chief. After his death in 1916, the district once more reverted to the status of autonomous villages. In 1932, finally, the present chief was appointed, a man from Adi Mongonti, and a descendant of one of the old *gultinyatat* families. The people of Temezza have a law of their own, called Awaa Tsumro, which differs only in matrimonial rules from the code of Adkeme-Melega.

Dobub. The population, 5000 strong, is of the same descent as that of the district Guhcha. The majority of the people are Copts; there are also three Mohammedan villages peopled by Jiberti and Asaorta. The district is rich in arable land. Its main settlements are Damba Mich (the chief's village) Adikkiamo, and Adi Hai. Like Guhcha, the district was originally divided between the *gultinyatat* of other districts. In 1931 Dobub was given a district chief, who is a native of the district.

Dekki Digna. The people come from the district of the same name in the Akkele-Guzai, but have intermarried with the Adkeme-Melega, and have become part of that genealogical group. They number 1200, and are Copts. The district, very fertile, has only one large village, Addekki Seienti. Its history is the same as that of Guhcha and Dobub, and the chief of the latter also governs Dekki Digna.

Dembelas. The district lies in the dry and barren northwest corner of the country on the Agordat border. It is rich in livestock, but poor in agricultural land. Like the people of L'ban, another district bordering on Agordat, the people of Dembelas cultivate across the frontier and claim *resti* rights in that area. The population numbers 6,600, and is largely Coptic; Jiberti and Asaorta form a small Mohammedan minority. The main villages are Adi Tsetser (the residence of the chief), Kennan Koba, and Mai Mefalis. Politically the district came intermittently under the overlordship of Arreza, and was at other times independent, under its autonomous village chiefs. The Italians appointed the local chief of the village of Mai Mefalis as district head. He rebelled against the Government, and was forced to flee the country. In 1897 the people elected a new chief, who was confirmed by the Government. He was succeeded by his son, the present chief.

A part of Dembelas, embracing the land of the village Missiam, was made an autonomous territory in 1900. The village was inhabited by Mohammedan settlers from the Tigray, and the autonomous community was created as a Mohammedan "colony". It subsequently attracted more immigrants from the Tigray, and its present population numbers 600. The people are mostly herdsmen, though a few cultivate in the adjacent parts of Agordat territory.

Autonomous Villages. There are six autonomous communities in the Residenza of Adi Ugri, mostly small and of little importance, except Godefelas and Adi Mongonti, which are important as the home of powerful feudal families in Ethiopian times. Godefelas, with a population of 1600, is the home of the feudal barons of the Enda Asgodom. It includes besides, the descendants of the serfs and slave troops of that family; they are of varied descent, some descending from Merettah Sebene in the Akkele-Guzai, others from the Tigray and Gondar, and embrace both Copts and Mohammedans. The land of Godefelas, though small, is very rich. When the *gulti* was abolished, the former feudal lord remained *chikka* of the village community. He was succeeded by his son, who was deposed after a short reign. Since then the village has been

ruled by various chiefs, local men, and mostly ex-soldiers.

Adi Mongonti, which has a population of 800 (all Copts), is the home of the feudal house of Dejach Zerabruk, kinsman of the Enda Asgodom. Its serfs and dependents came from the Wolkeit in Ethiopia, the Hamasien and other parts. The area, though small, is rich. The former feudal rulers now hold office as village chiefs.

Teramni (population 1800) was a *gulti* of Godefelasse, peopled by the dependents of the Enda Asgodom. Among them are a few Mohammedans, descendants of the people of Senafe. Takkita (population 900) and Gwila (300) were *gultis* of Adi Mongonti. Until 1932 each of the three villages was under a separate *chikka*. Today they have been united under one chief. The village of Adi Gonned, finally, was in pre-Italian times a *gulti* of the chiefs of Arreza. Its population of 500 is composed of alien immigrants of obscure origin.

3. Districts of Adi Quala Vice Residenza.

Mai Tsada. This names comprised originally three territories which are today independent districts: the new Mai Tsada, Enda Azmach Ogbit and Dekki Bokri. The people in all three districts are akin, descended from Adkeme and Melega. Under the Italian regime the present district of Mai Tsada was created, which embraces the territory around Adi Quala. The majority of the people are Copts; there is a Mohammedan minority as well as a group of Catholics of Ethiopian Rite. The population numbers 6700, of which 2000 live in the only large village of the district, Adi Quala. The district is very rich, and its land most fertile. In Ethiopian times two rival families, Enda Geremariam and Enda Kahsu, disputed each other the *gulti* rights over the district. At the time of the Italian occupation the Enda Geremariam had attained supremacy. The leader of the rival faction, one Lij Tesfamariam, made submission to the Italians, and was rewarded with the chieftainship and the rank of Dejach. His less fortunate rival who had sided with Ethiopia, was sent into exile to Assab. Dejach Tesfamariam, persona gratissima with the Italians, was allowed to extend his rule over many other districts as well. In 1919, he was succeeded by his eldest son, Dejach Haile, who remained chief of Mai Tsada only. Recently, under British rule, Haile was deposed and exiled to Nacfa for his troublesome conduct and irredentist activities.

Enda Azmach Ogbit. A very rich district, with a population of 3000. The main village is One Gabriet. There are a few Mohammedans among the people, the rest are Copts. This district was of old a *gulti* of the families which ruled over Mai Tsada, though their authority was frequently disputed by powerful local families. Under the Italian Government the district was given to Dejach Tesfamariam. After his death, Tesfamariam's younger son was appointed as chief, to be deposed again after a short misrule. A new chief was appointed, who is still in office. He is an ex-soldier, and a stranger from Harfi Grotto.

Medri Felassi. A small but very rich district, of only five villages. Its population (900) is Coptic. Like the other Medri Felassi in Arreza, this district belonged originally to the churchlands of the monastery of Debra Merkurios. Under the Italians it was added to the possessions of Dejach Tesfamariam, and is today under his brother.

Dekki Bokri. Another small and rich district. Its population of 1800 (almost exclusively Copt) lives in small villages which, in pre-Italian

times, were autonomous. A local man, related to the Hamasien Hazzega, established himself as the feudal baron of Dekki Bokri on the eve of the Italian occupation. Though he submitted to the Italians, he was ousted by their protégé, Dejach Tesfamariam. After Tesfamariam's death Dekki Bokri was allowed a chief of its own under the control of Tesfamariam's eldest son. Shortly before the British occupation this control was removed, and the district became autonomous.

Kohain. A large and mountainous district, inhabited by a large population (12,000). In the north, in the valley of the river Obel, we find many nomadic Mohammedan herdsmen, Asaorta from the Akkele-Guzai and Tigré-speaking groups from the coast. The southern and central part, peopled by the Coptic descendants of Melega, has many villages, the most important of which are Adi Shumbet Tombosa (the chief's settlement), Sebawu, Debre, and Adi Katina. The mountainous parts of the district are barren, but many fertile valleys offer excellent pasture and, to a lesser extent, arable land. The distance from the administrative centre and the lack of roads has kept this frontier district on a more primitive level of civilization than the rest of the country. The district has two important Coptic monasteries, Debra Mariam, once powerful but now impoverished, and Debra Dehuan, still rich and famous far across the border. The people Kohain are divided into four large *enda* groups. Three of these were, in pre-Italian times, split up into autonomous village communities; the fourth, the Enda Ganzai, had an elected chief, or *shumondi* (lit. "chief of the brothers" i.e. kinsmen). In 1896 the Italians handed the rule over the Kohain to Dejach Tesfamariam. This rule by a stranger was strongly resented by the people, and after Tesfamariam's death the status quo was re-established. In 1925 the experiment of *endaba* was tried and again abandoned. In 1929 a man from the Enda Ganzai, the nephew of the last *shumondi*, was appointed as chief of the district.

Aila. A small district, bordering on Kohain, with only six villages and a population of 1100. The majority are Copts, and there are a few Jiberti Mohammedans. The district lies in the plain of the Mareb, and its land is fertile, though not of the fertility of the "black earth" country farther inland. The people are rich in livestock. Originally part of the Kohain, the district was placed under Dejach Tesfamariam in Italian times. After his death, the district was joined to Gundet, under the chief of that district.

Gundet. The people, numbering 3200, hail from Sorokhso in Agame. They are Copts, and live in small villages. The only larger settlement is Enda Keren, the residence of the chief. The agricultural and animal wealth of Gundet is the same as in the neighbouring Aila. The district was of old the *gulti* of a powerful family in Maraguz. A man from Gundet, related by marriage to Emperor John, won independence for his district, and the chieftainship for himself. His authority was confirmed by the Italian Government, but reduced to a sub-chieftainship under the ambitious Dejach Tesfamariam. After the latter's death the sub-chief of Gundet (by then united with Aila) became a full chief. Shortly afterwards, however, he was accused of being in league with rebels and Ethiopian bandits, and was deposed. The two districts passed into the hands of Dejach Mengesha of Arreza until 1936, when they received a new chief. He comes from Adi Quala, but is of Tigrai extraction, being descen-

ded from one of the families of serfs and soldiers who served the *gultinyatat* of the country.

VIII. THE AKKELE-GUZAI.

1. Country and People.

The population of Akkele-Guzai, numbering about 115,000, shows a greater ethnic variety than that of the other two Plateau Divisions. It embraces two distinct racial and cultural groups: in the west, the sedentary, Coptic, Tigrinya-speaking race; in the east, the nomadic Mohammedan, Saho-speaking tribes. Claims of diverse descent and ethnic affinity divide the Tigrinya-speaking groups internally. As everywhere else in this country of many races, the traditions of origin are semi-mythical and not infrequently conflicting, yet vividly conscious and effective in social relationships. The diverse claims of origin hardly detract, however, from the very nearly uniform culture of the Tigrinya-speaking population. Only in the sphere of customary law do these differences of origin become visible.

The traditions of origin of the Coptic Akkele-Guzai are again linked with the brother ancestors Chaluk and Maluk (the third brother Faluk, plays no part in the Akkele-Guzai genesis). Tradition names two descendants of Chaluk, Akkele and Guzai, as the ancestors of the greater part of the population in the country now bearing their name. The offspring of Maluk formed a group apart, much smaller in size, and restricted to two districts, called Merettah. These original inhabitant and their kin were in the course of time joined by immigrants from unknown parts (some say from Asaorta country), the offspring of one Enai and Logai. Nor were these the only immigrants. Another large group known as Eggela, is said to have come from Agame in the Tigray and to have settled in the west and northwest of the Division. The names of certain districts of to-day still betray the ancient distribution of these groups and genealogical branches. Thus we find a district called Woldekkele, "sons of Akkele"; another called Loggo Sarda, "Logai the Mighty" (we notice the different interpretation of the name Loggo in the Akkele-Guzai and the Hamasien); two other districts, Eggela Hames and Eggela Hatsin, bear the old family name Eggela. This local separation of the original kindreds has since long ceased to be true: but as we shall see, the various groups still appear to some extent concentrated in different areas and districts.

Administratively, the Akkele-Guzai is divided into two *Residenze* and one *Vice Residenza*, which are known by the names of their main towns — Adi Caleh, Saganeiti, and Senafe. A fourth sub-division, the *Vice-Residenza* of Arafali, had only an intermittent existence; it did not function at the time of the British occupation, and has not been revived. The various *Residenze* are artificial, purely administrative creations; districts have been freely transferred from one to the another, and tribes or groups of common descent are divided between different *Residenze*.

More significant is the division of the country into an area organised on a territorial basis, and one administered in accordance with tribal

grouping. Here we meet with that administrative dualism, of which we have spoken in the Introduction, which reflects the co-existence of sedentary territorial groups and nomadic tribes.

2. Districts of Adi Caieh Residenza.

Zebaonti. The population of this district is 3600, which figure includes the native population of Adi Caieh town (1900). The people of Zebaonti derive their descent from the ancestor Guzai. The district is rich in arable land. It extends in the east over the plateau of Kohaito, where numerous Asaorta and small groups of Miniferi have their cultivations. With the exception of these Mohammedan "guests", the people are Copts. The main villages are Tokonda and Menah, both ancient settlements, and the former the traditional capital of the district. Zebaonti was governed by a hereditary line of chiefs, who combined with their chiefly office the dignity of an Imperial tax-collector (*ferresenya*). The present chief is a grandson of the last Imperial *ferresenya*. Like all the groups claiming descent from Akkele or Guzai, the people of Zebaonti follow the code of customary law known as Meem Mehaza.

Adi Caieh (in the vernacular Add' Ghayer), originally a small village, became the administrative centre and a modern township in 1892. With its foundation, Tokonda lost its former importance, though it still remains the official residence of the chief. Like all towns, Adi Caieh has a heterogeneous population, composed of Copts and Catholics, Mohammedans of Jiberti persuasion, Asaorta tribesmen, and Arabs from the Yemen and Hadramaut.

Aret. In population the largest district in the Division (5300), it extends over the plateau and mountains to the northeast of Adi Caieh. The land is largely poor and rocky, though the district includes some fertile pastures. The people of Aret belong to the genealogical branch of Guzai. On the mountains in the east we find groups of Asaorta, both as nomadic herdsmen and settled peasants. The large majority of the people are Copts; small groups of Catholics of Ethiopian Rite live in some of the villages. The most important settlements of the district are Halai, the residence of the Chief, Haddish Adi, Deraa and Auhane. Halai is of historical interest. It was visited in 1832 by Bruce, one of the first British travellers in Ethiopia; and in 1894 it was the scene of the battle between the Italians and the rebel army of Dejach Bahta Hagos, in which Bahta was defeated and killed. Aret is an ancient district, for long under the rule of a traditional dynasty. The last chief of the line was deposed by the Italians, reduced to the rank of a "Notable" without office, and replaced by the present chief; he is an ex-soldier, a native of Aret, but without traditional claim to the office.

Dekki Zeressenei. A small and poor district, of only seven villages and a population of 1100. The people are Copts, and akin to the people of Zebaonti. The poverty of the land forces them to migrate seasonally to the Hazomo plain in the south-west of the Division. Originally an independent district, Dekki Zeressenei accepted the overlordship of the chief of Zebaonti and united itself with that district shortly before the Italian occupation of Eritrea. Dekki Zeressenei may be called the cradle of the customary law of Akkele-Guzai, the Meem Mehaza. Its name is the name of a stream in the district, on whose banks, under shady trees,

the elders of the Akkele-Guzai are said to have held court and dispensed justice, thus evolving the law of the country.

Dekki Tihishta. A still smaller district, with three villages and a population of 450, also united with Zebaonti. The people, all Copts, belong to the ethnic group associated with the mythical Enai. The villages of Dekki Tihishta belonged originally to the district of Haddadim Chalo. In 1896 they were placed under Zebaonti. The land of the district is not large but fertile, and ample for the needs of the small population.

Derichen. The population, 2700 strong, comprises the two genealogical branches of Guzai and Enai. The main villages of the district are Tegeren, the seat of the chief, Dekki Lefai and Maaizgi. The people are exclusively Copts. The territory of the district lies on a barren and sandy part of the plateau, but reaches down into the fertile plain of Hazomo. Derichen is an ancient district, ruled by a hereditary line of chiefs, which is still in power.

Degien. The people number 1800. They are Copts and descend from the branch of Enai. The district has only two large villages, Beit Semathi and Abaa. The lands are barren, but the people find rich cultivations in the nearby Hazomo. Though an ancient district, Degien was without political autonomy in Ethiopian times, when it formed part of the church lands of the monasteries of Bizen and Enda Abulibanos. In the time of Emperor John these church fiefs were abolished, and a man of Degien became the chief of the district. After his death, already in Italian times, the chieftainship lapsed again, and the district was administered as a group of autonomous villages. In 1932, finally, Degien was joined to the adjacent Haddadim Chalo and placed under the chief of that district.

Haddadim Chalo. The people, numbering 2600, are Copts, and are akin to those of Degien. Extending over the northern part of the Hazomo, the district is rich in agricultural land. It has only one large village, Ona Andom. Though always thought of as an independent district, Haddadim Chalo was ruled by the chiefs of the neighbouring Mets'he in pre-Italian times. In 1896 Haddadim Chalo was made autonomous under its own chief. In 1920 a rebellion against the chief forced the Government to intervene; the chief was deposed, and for 12 years the district was administered by a notable appointed by the Administration. In 1932 the district was again considered worthy of having a proper ruler, and the present chief was appointed. He is an ex-Government servant and an able man, but a stranger and, in this Coptic district, the only Catholic.

Mets'he. The people, 4500 in number, belong to the offspring of Guzai. The territory of the district is barren and poor, but the people also own land in the more fertile Haddadim Chalo and the plain of Hazomo. The main villages are Coatit, Emba Kwakwat, Birkito and Adi Kwita (the chief's residence). Coatit has an interesting history. Here the Italian General Barattieri defeated in 1895 the army of Ras Mangasha of the Tigray, thus saving Eritrea for Italy. During the Italo-Ethiopian war Marshal De Bono had his headquarters at Coatit. In Italian times Coatit was a garrison town, an important market, and a mission station. To-day it is an insignificant village, with a population of 600. The people of Mets'he are largely Copts, though there is a small Catholic settlement at Birkito, and a very old colony of Jiberti Mohammedans at Coatit. The district of Mets'he was long governed by a hereditary chiefly dynasty. In 1892 the line became extinct, and the district remained

without a chief, being administered as a group of autonomous villages, under village chiefs. In 1932 the present chief was appointed; he is a kinsmen of the original dynasty, an ex-soldier, and an able man.

Eggela-Hatsin. It is inhabited by that ethnic group which calls itself Eggela and traces its descent to the Tigrai. Unlike the districts above, which all follow the law of Meem Mehāza, the Eggela Hatsin has a law of its own, called Gorzo Tsobolo; it differs but little from the main code of the country. The population of the districts, entirely Coptic, numbers 2800. The territory, which comprises the western part of the Hazomo, is large and rich, both in agricultural and grazing land. It attracts annually large numbers of nomadic herdsmen from the Asaorta mountains, the coastal plain, and Beni Amer country, as well as cultivators from the poorer districts of the Akkele-Guzai. The main villages are Mebret (the residence of the chief), Kalai Baltit and Seræ. In Ethiopian and still in Italian times the district was governed by hereditary chiefs. In 1915 the Government abolished the District Chieftainship and made the various village communities in the district autonomous. In 1918 this experiment was again abandoned, and the Eggela-Hatsin was united with the district Merettah-Sebene (now in the *Residenza* of Saganeiti). In 1939 Eggela-Hatsin became once more an independent district, under the present chief, who is an ex-soldier, with no traditional title to the office.

3. Districts of Saganeiti Resdenza.

Tsenadegle. The population, 4500 strong, is an offshoot of the group inhabiting the Woldekkele - the "sons of Akkele". The district is rich in livestock but has little arable land. Thus the people migrate annually to the crownlands of Damas, in Ghinda district, for cultivation. The main villages of Tsenadegle are Akrur, Hebo, Degra-Libe, and Saganeiti, the capital of the *Residenza*. Saganeiti is a small town, with a native population of 3600. It is an old settlement and market, which was made an administrative and military centre, strongly fortified, at the time of the Italian occupation. The large majority of the people belong to the Catholic Church of Ethiopian Rite. In Tsenadegle Abuna Yakob, the founder of the church found his most fertile field. As we have mentioned, he is buried in the church of Hebo, the village where Catholicism has struck the firmest roots. The rest of the people are Copts; in Saganeiti there are also a few Jiberti Mohammedans. Tsenadegle has no traditional chieftainship. In Ethiopian times, its villages were administered by *ferresenya* appointed by the Governor of the Tigrai. Shortly before the Italian occupation a local man, the famous Bahta Hagos, became the self-appointed ruler of the district. He joined forces with the Italians against the Emperor, but later rebelled against his allies and masters, and was defeated and killed in battle. He was succeeded by a Government nominee, a man who had served in the Italian Army, and whose family now hold office in the third generation.

Haddegti. The people are another branch of the "sons of Akkele". The district is small, and has a population of only 1400. It possesses some fertile land which is not, however, sufficient for the needs of the population. Again, the people are forced to cultivate in the plain of Damas to make up for the scarcity of land. The main settlements are Maraba (the chief's residence) and Adi Abur. The former is Coptic, the latter Catholic. The

district is governed by a chief who holds one of the highest ranks in the hierarchy of the country, that of Dejach bel Naggarit - "Dejach of the Drums". His name is Tesemma Asberom, and he comes from one of the oldest chiefly dynasties in Eritrea. In Ethiopian times, the chiefs of the house of Asberom held also the Imperial office of *ferresenya*. Under the Italian regime, the family maintained and even extended its powers, adding to its original possessions the rule of many other districts.

Eggela Hames. The majority of the people (who total 2200) descend from the Eggela of Agame; two villages are inhabited by immigrants from Sorokhso (also in the Agame.) The district has ample, fertile land. The main villages are Gura, Zeban, Serrau and Enadoko. The population is almost exclusively Coptic. In pre-Italian times, the country called Eggela comprised the present districts of Eggela Hames, Robra and Dekki Admokhom. Politically, it was divided into numerous autonomous villages which were, however, tributary to the Woldekkele of Haddegti. In this period, too, the Eggela followed the code of Woldekkele, the Meen Mehaza. In the course of a turbulent history, full of rebellions and blood feuds. Eggela gained political independence, and also abandoned the law of its overlords. It adopted a new code of law, which it called Mai Adgi, after a river of historical associations; here the chiefs of Woldekkele were formerly invested with the insignia of office at the hands of the Imperial regent-delegates. Shortly before the advent of the Italians, two powerful men usurped the position of chief, one of Eggela Hames and Robra, and the other of Dekki Admokhom. Under the Italian regime Eggela Hames was created an independent district. The local chiefs, to whom the district was first entrusted, proved unable to govern his unruly country, and in 1927 it was added to the dominions of Dejach Tesemma Asberom of Haddegti. His eldest son is the present chief of the district.

Robra. This district lies in the fertile plain of Gura and is rich in agricultural land, though it lost much of it through expropriation in 1935, when the aerodrome and the Caproni works of Gura were built. The population, numbering 2600, is almost exclusively Coptic, and hails from the Eggela and other parts of the Tigrai. The main villages are Tukul, Wutto, Mai Hoza (which were hardest hit by the expropriation of the land), Adi Nefas and Godeiti. The history of Robra is that of Eggela Hames, and the two districts also share their code of customary law. The first chief appointed by the Italians was a local man, but, inclined to abuse his powers and hated by the population. He owed his appointment to the services which he had rendered to the Italians during the rebellion of Bahta Hagos. In 1929, after severe riots in the district, he was deposed, and this district, too, passed to the family of Dejach Tesemma. Like Eggela Hames, it is at present administered by Tesemma's eldest son.

Dekki Admokhom. A rich district, again situated on the Gura plain, with a population of 2000 (all Copts). The people are of Eggela descent, and follow the Eggela law. The main villages are Amhur, Dengel, Arato and Awle Ieru. An ancient and famous monastery, though endowed with little land, Enda Selasse, is situated in the district. Again, the early history of the district is that of Eggela Hames. The man who had usurped the chieftainship shortly before the Italian occupation was confirmed in his office by the new Government, but was soon afterwards murdered by one of his own people. Till 1929 the district was without chief, and remained a group of autonomous villages. In 1929 Dekki Admokhom became the fourth district of the house of Asberom.

Dekki Gebri. A district very rich in land, with a population of 2600, all Copts. The main settlements are Korbaria, the seat of the chief, Torat and Adi Rassi. The name Korbaria means "hill of slaves"; for according to tradition the people of this village are the descendants of slaves from Gondar. Other sections claim kinship with the Eggela, whose law is also the law of this country. In pre-Italian times, the district was the dominion of a chiefly dynasty, whose last representative was murdered by a relation. After an interlude under an incapable chief, appointed by the Italian Government, the district was united with Engana (now in the Hamasien) in 1931, under the chief of that district, Dejach Bokru. In 1937, after Bokru's death, the two districts were separated, and Bokru's son became chief of Dekki Gebri.

Merettah Kaieh. The people of this district claim descent from the mythical ancestor Faluk. The population numbers 2300, is Coptic by religion, and possesses a large and fertile territory. The main villages are Gogwat, Gergera, Adi Nefas, and Fekieh. Originally composed of a group of autonomous villages, Merettah Kaieh was constituted as a district in Italian times, and given first to Dejach Bokru of Engana and later to the present chief, an ex-soldier of little ability and prestige. The district has a customary law of its own, called Tsada Hamet.

Merettah Sebene. Its large population of almost 6000 is akin to that of the other Merettah, though it follows the law of Akkele and Guzai. The territory is large and fertile. The main settlements are Halibo, the seat of the chief, Mai Aha Hadidah and Embeito. The people are Copts, with a small Catholic minority. Like the brother district, Merettah Sebene consisted originally of autonomous villages. Under the Italian regime an ex-soldier was appointed as the first district chief. He handed his office on to his son, the present chief.

Tedrer. The territory of this district includes the northern part of the Hazomo plain, and is one of the richest in the Akkele-Guzai. The population numbers 3000, and is Coptic by religion. It traces its descent to a group of alien origin, the Naib branch of the Bellu in Massawa, of which we have heard in a previous chapter. The people of Tedrer were once Mohammedans, but were, according to tradition, converted to Coptic Christianity by the founder of the famous (though now poverty-stricken) monastery of Enda Ioannes in the district. To-day the only cultural difference between Tedrer and the rest of the Akkele-Guzai lies in the separate law of the district, which is called, after the ancestors of the group. Seleste Dekki Derar, the "Three Sons of Derar". The district has many villages, the most important of which are Adi Nebri (the chief's residence) Geniseba, Adi Mokada, Hadish Adi, and Hatemat. The hereditary line of chiefs which had ruled over the district became extinct in Italian times. Its successor is the present chief, a brother of Dejach Tesemma of Had-degti, an alien in the district, but related by marriage to the old chief's family.

Dekki Digna. A small and poor district, with a population of 1800. The people, of Woldekkele origin, are Copts and Catholics. The district has only two villages, Digsä and Adi Hadit. The last of a hereditary line of chiefs which used to rule over this small district holds today the office of a village chief of Digsä. The district itself has been joined to the neighbouring Tsenadegle.

4. Districts of Senafe Vice-Residenza.

Zeban. The people of this district (numbering 2300) claim descent from the ancestor Guzai. They are almost exclusively Copts, one village having a few Catholics. Zeban is one of the frontier districts of the Akkele-Guzai, and forms part of the region known as Shimezana. This includes, apart from Zeban, the districts Adi Gulti, Enda Dashim, and the twin district of Agruf. The territory of Zeban is fertile, though somewhat restricted. The main villages are Zigfet, where the chief resides, Ahfessi, an important market, Adi Embara, and Aromo, an old frontier post. Zeban is an ancient district, ruled by a hereditary family whose powers of old extended over a much wider area. The law of the country is the Meem Mehaza.

Degien Wogera. The people are said to be of Amhara descent, though intermarriage has made them akin to the adjacent groups. The district has only three villages, of which Matara is the only important settlement. The territory of the district is large and fertile, and more than sufficient for the small population (800). The people are Copts, and Matara is the seat of the Like (Kahnat, the delegate of the Coptic Bishop of Eritrea. Degien Wogera was originally a fief of the Ethiopian monastery of Debra Damo (situated close to the border of the Eritrean district of Akran). Under Italian rule the church lands were secularised, and the district was given to the father of the present chief, a descendant of the chiefly dynasty of Zeban.

Senafe. This name is said to mean "those who came from Sennaa", and to refer to immigrants from the Yemen, who first settled in the area. At the time of their arrival the land belonged to the nomadic Gaasu-Miniferi, and to a group of obscure origin, called Zereftai, which is today widely scattered over the Akkele-Guzai. Through intermarriage with the Gaasu, the immigrants obtained a title to the land, on which they built two villages (which still exist), Awle and Hahaile. In the time of Emperor John the Senafe people had already a hereditary chief who, incidentally, guided Napier's army to Magdala. After the extinction of this line of chiefs, a new family came to power, which now holds office in the third generation. The district is small, and its people, all Mohammedans, number 850. Of these, two-thirds live in the native quarter of Senafe town. The town is a modern creation; it was founded in 1902, as a market and a garrison to guard the nearby frontier.

Adi Gulti. A very fertile district, whose people number 2200. They are of heterogeneous origin, descending from the branch of Guzai, from the Arab settlers at Senafe, and from immigrants from the Tigray. The majority are Copts; the Mohammedan minority, of the Jiberti sect, has given the district its hereditary chiefs. The main settlements are Barakit (the residence of the chief), Bihat, Addi Atal and Egri Manda.

Enda Dashim. The district lies in the fertile valley of the river of that name. The people (about 3000) are Copts, and claim descent from Guzai. They live in the villages of Barakna (the seat of the chief), Adderho, and Kodadu. The rule of the district is vested in a hereditary ruling house.

Colonia Cattolica. This "colony" was founded in 1896, to give shelter to groups of Catholics of Ethiopian Rite which were driven from their old home in the Ethiopian Agame by religious persecution. The population numbers only 700, and includes a few families of Copts and Mohammedans.

dans which live as "guests" in the Catholic colony. The territory on which the "colony" was founded used to belong to the districts of Zeban and Enda Dashim. Though their new lands are rich and fertile, the people have not renounced their claims to the *resti* lands which they once possessed in Agame. The district has only one large village, Monoxelto, which is the home of the church and the residence of the chief. He is a descendant of the chiefs who ruled over the people in the old country. The district includes two small "autonomous villages", Colet and Grana, which lie to the east of the Colonia Cattolica, on the Ethiopian border. They are inhabited by people of Gasu and Ethiopian descent, who were nomads originally, and became sedentary in Italian times.

Debbar Islam. Another "autonomous village". It lies on a hill north of Akran, and its barren lands stretch to the west, to the Ethiopian border. The population, 250 in number, is Mohammedan, of Jiberti persuasion. In the time of Emperor John, the people were forced to adopt Coptic Christianity, but after the Italian occupation they reverted to the old faith. At that time, too, Debbar Islam ("Hill of the Mohammedans") was made autonomous under its own chief. It had previously belonged to the church lands of the monastery of Enda Abulibanos.

Akran. This border district is inhabited by descendants of Akkele. They number 2700 and are Copts. The land is barren and restricted. The main villages are Mes'hal, Haddit Adi, Adi Shoho, and Adi Arbeita (a frontier post and the residence of the chief). The hereditary chiefs of Akran also governed, till Italian times, the districts of Zerimossi and Woldekkele. Later the districts were separated, and the dynasty of Akran lost its paramount office as well as the district chieftainship. A new man was appointed, whose son now holds office.

Zerimossi. The people are akin to those of Akran; they are Copts and number about 1000. The territory of the district stretches over rocky cliffs and deep gullies, and is barren in the extreme. Large numbers of the people are thus forced to cultivate in the Hazomo plain to the west of Akran. There are only two large villages, Assetha and Keshahat. The present chief is the son of the first chief of the district, who was appointed by the Italians when Zerimossi gained autonomy.

Woldekkele Mes'hal. A large and important district (population 4200), and the home of the "Sons of Akkele". The people are Copts, with the exception of the chief, who is a Catholic, and a few Mohammedans of Miniferi descent. The district is rich, though some of its most fertile land was expropriated in 1935, when the aerodrome at Senafe was built. The district has many large villages: Mes'hal, Dibdib, Adi Refai, Mai Tsada, and Emba Bedahan. Originally one of the three districts ruled by the chiefs of Akran, it became autonomous under the Italians. The first chief of Woldekkele joined the rebel forces of Bahta Hagos, and was deposed. Two other chiefs followed, whose rule was only moderately successful. The fourth and present chief has ability and prestige. He comes from the Tsenadegle branch of Woldekkele, and strangely enough, from the family of the rebel chief Bahta Hagos.

Ambeset Geleba. The population of 2500 is heterogeneous, composed of groups of Tigray descent and of a section which is akin to the people of Enda Dashim. The people are Copts, and have in their territory the famous and once powerful monastery of Enda Abulibanos. The land is poor, and the villages are few: Geleba, Ham, Ahez and Aregen. Until

1896 the district belonged to the church lands of the monastery of Enda Abulibanos. Though the church fief was abolished in that year, the district continued to be administered by the abbot of the monastery till 1929, when the present chief, an ex-soldier, was appointed.

Loggo Sarda. We have spoken of the origin of the people in this district. The population is small, numbering 1500, but the territory, which embraces the southern part of the Hazomo plain, is rich and large. Like the other districts in the Hazomo, Loggo Sarda receives annually many visitors, herdsmen and cultivators, from the poorer parts of the country. The main villages are Sarda, Mendaf Koma, Merara and Sukum. Until recently, the district was under a hereditary line of chiefs. The last representative of this old ruling house was deposed for incompetence, and replaced by the present chief, who is an able man, of Loggo descent, and an ex-soldier. Their alien descent notwithstanding, the people of Loggo Sarda follow the law of Meem Mehaza.

Agruf. There are three districts of this name: Lalai (or Upper) Agruf; Tahtai (or Lower) Agruf the First, and Tahtai Agruf the Second. The last comprises two disconnected areas, to the east and west of Lalai Agruf. All three districts are small, but moderately rich in agricultural land. The people are Copts. Lalai Agruf has long existed as an independent district. The present chief comes from a family which has held office for three generations. The people, of the branch of Guzai, number 1800. The main villages are Cefa and Mekaieh. The two Tahtai Agrufs originally formed a single district. They are inhabited by descendants of Guzai and by groups of Hazu origin. The old district of Tahtai Agruf was governed by hereditary chiefs till 1896, when the last chief, having fought on the side of the Ethiopians in the battle of Adowa, was ousted from office. The district was split into the two parts which exist today. Tahtai Agruf the Second, the larger of the two, was joined to Enda Dashim. Its villages are Cegworo, Adi Hisho and Kessat Emba. The much smaller Tahtai Agruf the First (with a population of 360, and only two villages) was handed, almost in poetic justice, to a soldier who had fought at Adowa on the Italian side.

5. The Tribes.

We have already mentioned the three nomadic tribes, Asaorta, Miniferi and Hazu, which move between the Red Sea coast and the mountains of the eastern Akkele-Guzai. These three tribes speak a common language, though in slightly different dialects, which is called Saho and is akin to Dankali. They are, with the exception of one section of the Miniferi, Mohammedans. They have a tribal law (different in each tribe) which differs fundamentally from the law of the Coptic districts. Both in their mountain home and in the plain, the tribes occupy adjacent areas. The Asaorta live between the rivers Haddas and Selima. South and east of this line lies the country of the Miniferi, bounded in the east by the foothills enclosing the Wangabo plain, and in the south by the southern flank of Mt. Soira and the upper Dandero river. East and south again, down the rivers Endeli and Renda Komo, to the edge of the Dankalia plain, the Hazu are living. Groups of Asaorta and Miniferi move seasonally across the Plateau into the low-lying pastures of the Akkele-Guzai and Serae, and some have even settled in the midst of the Christian population of the highlands.

Disregarding these split-off sections, we may say that the boundary between the Mohammedan tribes and the Christian Plateau population follows the crest of the mountains to the west of the Haddas river and continues due south, across the plateau known as Kohaito, towards Senafe and the western spur of Mt. Soira. It is along this line that the "overlapping" of tribal and territorial administration occurs. For the Christian groups claim ancient land rights as far as the Haddas valley and over the whole of the Kohaito plateau, down to the plain of Senafe, and the jurisdiction of their chiefs extends to this traditional frontier. Sections of the Asaorta and Miniferi live thus as "guests" in the territory of the Christian chiefs. The result is a dual system of jurisdiction: in all disputes which bear on their status as "guests" - disputes over land or grazing rights - the tribesmen must accept the jurisdiction of the territorial chiefs; while all internal disputes of the tribe come before their own tribal chiefs.

Asaorta. The Asaorta are about 17,000 strong. They are most probably of southern Arabian origin, and have been living in Eritrea since the early wave of immigration which must have taken place at the beginning of the Christian era. The descent of the Asaorta from southern Arabian tribes is elaborated in the tribal traditions, which are otherwise obscure and far from illuminating.

Like most tribes in this land of many races, the Asaorta are composed of an aboriginal nucleus and of alien groups which have attached themselves to the tribe, adopting its language and culture. No caste or class distinction arose from this difference in origin, but the latter is clearly marked in the structure of the tribe. Of its eleven sub-tribes, six are known as Asaorta "proper", and five as "affiliated" groups. These are the Asaorta sub-tribes:-

- Asaorta "proper" - Fogrot Are
- Beit Lelish
- Assakeri
- Assalisan
- Beit Fakhi
- Sarmare Engage
- Affiliated groups - Hassabat Are
- Idda
- Beradotta
- Rezamare
- Tarowa Beit-Sarra

The Asaorta were originally pagans, and they still remember, and point out to the traveller, the places of their ancient worship on the sacred mountain of the tribe, Mt. Farum; today they are confirmed Mohammedans. The people own cattle, goats, and sheep. The seasonal migrations of the tribe follow a regular pattern, determined both by the need of grazing for the herds, and the dislike of the people (who are mountain dwellers rather than plainsmen), of the heat in the plain. During the coastal rains, from November to April, the Asaorta live in the plain west of the Bay of Zula; from May to July they move up to the foothills and western edge of the plateau, which at that time of the year are covered with rich vegetation; afterwards, during the inland rainy season, the tribe moves up to the Plateau itself. During their stay in the foothills some of the people engage in a little agriculture, planting maize, millet,

and other quickly maturing crops. Other groups have taken up cultivation of a more permanent nature on the plateau: these are the "tenants and guests" of whom we have spoken above. About 10-15 years ago small groups of Asaorta started cultivating on the banks of the Haddas river, which they irrigate by means of channels and primitive sluices. In the agricultural colonies which sprang up in the last 25 years. The trend from nomadic herdsmen to sedentary cultivators, already marked in the recent past of the tribe, is clearly progressing, and will in the future create the difficult problem of a land-hungry tribe pressing upon the landed people of the highlands.

The settlements of the Asaorta are small, and composed of primitive shelters made of loose wood, shaped like tents, and as temporary as these. Only in the mountains, among the more sedentary sections of the tribes, is the house of more permanent type, built of stone and thatch. Where the Asaorta have penetrated into the area of the highland population, they have also adopted the solid flat-roofed house of Abyssinian type.

The social organisation of the tribe is based on kinship and descent. The sub-tribes (omitting the affiliated groups) are thought of as a genealogical branches descended from a common ancestor. They are known as *kisho* or *are* ("house"). Each sub-tribe is divided into numerous kinship groups, or *dik*, which usually bear the names of individuals - the founders of the lineage. The kinship groups are not local groups as well, though the term *dik* is also used to denote a local group (of mixed lineage). The sub-tribes, on the other hand, occupy well defined areas, where they graze their animals or put up their seasonal camps. No rigid land-rights exist - the division of the tribal lands among the different sub-tribes is by tacit agreement rather than inalienable right.

In Ethiopian times the Asaorta jealously guarded their tribal independence which, to them, included the liberty to raid the Plateau districts, and to levy dues, imposed by force of arms, on caravans from the interior. Even after the Italian occupation of Eritrea the tribe enjoyed for many years a status of quasi-autonomy, a light control, and a purely nominal tribute. In the political organisation of the tribe the sub-tribes were recognised as autonomous units, and tribal government was in the hands of the elected heads of these sections, known as *shum*. The *shum* is still the chief of the sub-tribe, and has under him the heads of kinship groups, called *nabara*. In 1933 the Italian Government united the whole tribe under a paramount chief, who was invested with the rank first of Bey, later of Pasha. Though this office is not traditional, the present chief, still the first paramount chief of the Asaorta, has some claim to the leadership of his tribe, for he comes from its senior section, and traces his descent in direct line to the tribal ancestor.

Miniferi. This tribe, about 10,000 strong, is of the same racial extraction as the Asaorta, but the Miniferi are said to have been Coptic Christians once, and to have adopted Islam only a few generations ago. A few sections which live as sedentary agriculturists on Mt. Soira, are (still?) Christians. As regards the livelihood of the tribe, and especially the gradual transformation from pastoral to peasant economy, what was said about the Asaorta applies equally to the Miniferi.

On the south end of the Bay of Zula, a fairly large village has sprung up — Arafali. Though Arafali is mainly an administrative centre, a police post and market, it is not entirely an artificial creation, for it is

situated close to rich wells which, during the winter months, attract the herds from many miles inland. A mixed population of merchants from Massawa, Zula, and the Yemen inhabits Arafali during that time of the year; in the remaining months the grass huts of Arafali are almost deserted.

The Miniferi are divided into four sub-tribes: Gaasu, Fekat-Harak, Dassamo and Danagul. The first three claim common descent from the ancestor of the tribe; the fourth is an "affiliated" group of alien origin. The Gaasu and Fekat-Harak are divided into kinship groups; the other two sub-tribes, of less numerous population, have no sub-sections. The political organisation of the tribes is closely akin to that of the Asaorta, but the Miniferi were much earlier united under a paramount chief (in 1902). Weaker, and less predatory than the Asaorta, the Miniferi were evidently considered a fitter subject for this administrative reform. Their first chief was the Qadhi of the tribe, a man of great learning and reputation. Their second, and present, chief is a man who, by descent, has no special claim to his office - he owes his promotion from sub-tribal head to paramount chief to his energy and ability.

Hazu. They are a small tribe numbering only about 4000 souls. In their mountains and river valleys, remote from towns, roads and the influence of the Christian highlands, they have remained on a more primitive level than their brother-tribes. Unlike the Asaorta and Miniferi, the Hazu never adopted agriculture. On their seasonal migrations they move within a narrow compass, between the coastal region and the inland hills. Their only outside contacts are with the Danakil and the Ethiopians from Irob, both their enemies, against whose raids they have to defend their frontiers today, as they have done for generations.

The tribe is divided into ten sections, some of which are regarded as genealogical branches of common descent, and some described as affiliated groups. Each section is under a *shum*, and the whole tribe under a paramount chief whose hereditary rank is *Ona*. Alone among the three Saho tribes, the Hazu have a traditional tribal chieftainship.

Debrimela. A fourth, very small tribe, with a population of under a thousand, lives in the south of the Akkele-Guzai, on two mountains which mark the border between the Christian and Mohammedan groups. This tribe, the Debrimela, is divided into two branches - the Alades on Amba Debra, and the Labalhe on Mt. Soira. Both are sedentary and largely agriculturist. They thus fit well into the framework of a territorial administration, and are in fact administered as districts, under district chiefs. The Alades are Mohammedans and speak Saho; the Labalhe are Copts and bilingual, speaking both Tigrinya and Saho. The origin of the tribe is obscure, as is also the reason for this difference of religion in a group claiming common descent: as to whether it is due to the Islamisation of an originally Christian people, or to the converse process, even the tribe itself has no theories.

S T A T I S T I C S

(The figures are approximate)

A. Sedentary and nomadic Groups

	<i>Akkele</i>						
	<i>Agordat</i>	<i>Keren</i>	<i>Massawa</i>	<i>Hamasien</i>	<i>Serae</i>	<i>Guzai</i>	<i>Assab</i>
Sedentary	44,000	70,000	45,000	200,000	121,000	85,000	3,000
Nomadic	62,000	60,000	30,000	9,000	2,000	29,000	5,000
Total	106,000	130,000	75,000	209,000	123,000	114,000	8,000

B. Languages

	<i>Akkele</i>						
	<i>Agordat</i>	<i>Keren</i>	<i>Massawa</i>	<i>Hamasien</i>	<i>Serae</i>	<i>Guzai</i>	<i>Assab</i>
Tigrinya	4,000	10,000	3,000	170,000	114,000	81,000	
Tigré	43,000	90,000	28,000	5,000	2,000		
Beja	25,000	1,000					
Belein		21,000		3,000	300		
Saho			6,000	5,000	6,000	31,000	
Dankali			20,000			500	7,300
Arabic	10,000	6,000	15,000	13,000	700	1,000	500
Others	30,000	2,000	8,000	13,000			200

C. Religions

	<i>Akkele</i>						
	<i>Agordat</i>	<i>Keren</i>	<i>Massawa</i>	<i>Hamasien</i>	<i>Serae</i>	<i>Guzai</i>	<i>Assab</i>
Copts	4,000	14,000	2,000	171,000	107,000	72,000	
Mohammedans	86,000	110,000	73,000	32,000	14,000	36,000	8,000
Ethiopian Cath.		400		2,000	500	6,400	
Mission Cath.	300	5,000					
Mission Prot.	300	1,100		3,000	1,000		
Pagans	16,000				500		