

LLOYD GEORGE REJECTED ITALY'S PROPOSAL

The subtle working of this compact on the part of France, and particularly of Britain, the largest European investor abroad, to leave all share in Ethiopian development to Italy could not fail to lead to frictions and frustrations. France, Germany, Belgium, Holland or Switzerland, who at that period were all investing capital abroad, might have done something with the unrestricted field given to Italy; whereas Italy had not the means to make effective use of it. The Italians either lacked, or were unwilling to venture, capital to develop the colonies they had already obtained. Nevertheless, the appetite of the Italian Government for territory was insatiable. They knew the Ethiopian interior contained greater resources than the colonies they possessed on the coast; they hoped to find there the good fortune which had hitherto evaded their colonial adventures. They were continually complaining that owing to Ethiopia's obstinate unwillingness to assist them, the Tripartite Agreement they had made with France and Britain in 1906 had proved of little value to them. They were jealous that the Franco-Ethiopian railway from Addis Ababa to Jibuti carried the major share of Ethiopian commerce. Moreover, they had failed to secure from Ethiopia the concession for building the railway through Ethiopia, to which they had obtained the Agreement of France and Britain, but not of Ethiopia, in 1906.

THE TREATY OF LONDON, 1915

In 1915, when Britain and France were hard-pressed by German successes in the course of the first World War, Italy exacted from them the Treaty of London, as the price of her entry into the war beside them. When the Central Empires had been defeated, and the victorious Allies met to dictate the terms and divide the spoils, Italy fought bitterly to secure as much as possible from the Treaty of 1915. It is not surprising, in view of the restless ambition of her ruling elements to possess and to exploit Ethiopia, that the claims which had been made in the 1906 Tripartite Treaty were now advanced in a more concrete and imperative form. The Italian negotiators offered to lend Italy's friendly support for the purpose of inducing the Ethiopian Government to grant to Britain a concession to build a barrage on Lake Tana, in Ethiopia, for the regulation and utilisation of the waters of the Blue Nile which flow thence through the Sudan. In return for Italy's support for the barrage concession, Britain was to join in pressing the Ethiopian Government to give Italy a concession to build the desired railway. Britain would also support all Italy's demands for economic concessions in the zone Italy claimed; that is to say in all Ethiopia, except the immediate neighbourhood of the Franco-Ethiopian railway, and some area defined as "the hinterland" of the small French Somaliland Protectorate.

Had the British agreed to this proposal, there is little doubt the Italian Government would have followed up the compact with

such ~~military~~ ^{any} persuasion as had many times previously been applied in Africa. David Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister of 1919, curtly rejected the Italian proposals to strangle the liberty of a small nation; he probably considered they conflicted too flagrantly with the Charter of the League of Nations of which he and the American President Wilson were the foremost sponsors. In fact the Charter of the League of Nations in Article 20 stated:—

"(1) *The Members of the League severally agree that this Covenant is accepted as abrogating all obligations or understandings inter se, which are inconsistent with the terms thereof, and solemnly undertake that they will not hereafter enter into any engagements inconsistent with the terms thereof.*

"(2) *In case any Member of the League, before becoming a member of the League, has undertaken any obligations inconsistent with the terms of this Covenant, it shall be the duty of such Member to take immediate steps to procure its release from such obligations.*"

In 1925, when Mussolini was asserting himself as arbiter of European destinies, the 1919 proposals which Lloyd George had rejected were resurrected under the auspices of the Dictator of Italy and Sir Austen Chamberlain, then British Foreign Secretary. These proposals were even embodied in a formal Agreement, which was actually registered with the Secretary of the League of Nations under the terms of Article 18 of the Covenant directing that any Treaty or International Engagement should be so registered.

MUSSOLINI AND AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN JOINT NOTE; ETHIOPIA PROTESTS TO LEAGUE OF NATIONS

The result was a Note signed by Sir R. Graham, British Ambassador in Rome, and Benito Mussolini to Ras Tafari Makonnen, Regent of Ethiopia (afterwards the Emperor Haile Selassie I), informing him that the British and Italian Governments had entered into an Agreement to support each other, in conformity with the Anglo-Franco-Italian tripartite Agreement of 1906, in obtaining from the Ethiopian Government: for Britain a concession to build a barrage on Lake Tana and a road thence to the Sudan frontier; for Italy a concession to build and exploit a railway through Ethiopia to unite Eritrea and the Italian Somaliland Colony; this railway would pass west of Addis Ababa. Both the railway and the materials for its construction would be free to traverse the proposed British road from Lake Tana to the Sudan. Further, the Italian Government recognised the exclusive right of Britain to regulate the waters of Lake Tana and the British recognised the exclusive economic influence of Italy in the west of Ethiopia, and in the whole of the territory traversed by the proposed elliptical railway linking Eritrea and Somaliland—virtually, the whole of Ethiopia.