

Persons and Personages

ABYSSINIA'S EMPEROR

By SIMONE MAZADE ROUSSAN

Translated from the *Journal de Genève*, Geneva Liberal Daily

THE King of Kings of Abyssinia is not only the sovereign of this vast empire, he is its image and symbol. He continues the dynasty of Solomon and is heir to the Sage of Sages.

Monarch by divine right, he is not head of the national church—the Coptic Church—corresponding to the Tsar of Russia, for instance. Although he owes his sovereignty to God, he is not God's terrestrial representative. But his position confers on him in the eyes of his subjects somewhat supernatural prestige, certain aspects of which baffle the western mind.

Feared and loved as no sovereign in Europe is feared or loved, the Emperor of Abyssinia does not owe his prestige to a mysterious tower of ivory or ebony. Distant but familiar, mysterious but simple, Hailé Sellassié participates in the life of his people. Anyone can approach him and ask his mercy, justice, and aid. The monarch even attends festivals, at which anyone at all can bring forward supplications or invectives to his heart's desire without running the risk of the slightest reprisal. Such liberty might well surprise most citizens in our republics.

Strong in the confidence of his people, the Emperor nevertheless had in his entourage certain redoubtable enemies, over whom his terrible patience slowly triumphed. Hardened by trials, in which great rewards were at stake, they hoped to win all or nothing. But Hailé Sellassié was aided for three or four years by events that might have cost him dear but that finally favored him, and he has eliminated many individuals whose power asserted itself from time to time and even threatened the throne itself. Occupying the post of Ras, or Minister, and possessing inheritance, wealth, titles, or supporters who flattered their ambitions, they constituted a dangerous element for the court and even for the country.

It must be pointed out that every chief in Abyssinia has an irregular kind of army of more or less importance, depending on his rank and representing a force that must always be reckoned with. The monarch cannot send a courtier home for no reason or exile him in chains. He is required almost to find the victim flagrantly guilty of treason or to make his guilt completely evident. For, being faithful to their master, the armed supporters of an exile are not inclined to submit to obvious

injustice. The sovereign has often required months and even years to oust certain dignitaries, who enjoyed his apparent intimacy and whom he could not condemn on the basis of his suspicions or on moral grounds alone. On the other hand, in defending his person against certain individuals, the Emperor is often compelled by custom to take momentary measures of discipline for peccadillos that he regards as insignificant.

Succeeding Emperor Menelik II, alas, not directly, which has often complicated things dangerously, Ras Tafari, the regent under Empress Zeoditu, became King of Kings of Abyssinia when she died in 1930. He was crowned at the Cathedral of Addis Ababa under the name of Hailé Sellassié I, meaning 'Power of the Trinity,' before representatives of the greatest nations. Marshal Franchet d'Esperey came in behalf of France, bearing good wishes and gifts from our country. The Duke of Gloucester and the Duke of Udine represented their respective fathers, the Kings of England and Italy.

Of small, slender, almost frail stature, Hailé Sellassié I is an enormous worker. Eating and drinking little, suffering from delicate health, he has a surprising capacity for work and an indomitable energy. His official day begins before seven in the morning and often lasts late into the night. During his first audiences he receives reports, which he discusses with his advisers. His clear, logical, yet perfectly secret mind astounds, perplexes, and confuses his enemies, especially when they think they have put him in a hole. His large, gentle, keen eyes follow the smallest details of expression on the faces of his interlocutors. His very small fine hands resemble his face in that they are extremely gentle and nervous. Already Sellassié I gives the impression that in knowing how to dominate others he knows first of all how to dominate himself.

Sacrificing none of his occupations, stepping into the shoes of any minister who is absent or sick, the Emperor sacrifices several hours of sleep to daily prayers. His most intense interest goes out to his country and to his second son, young Prince Makonnen, a child of twelve full of courage and authority. One feels that the sometimes weary gaze of the father is resting joyfully on his son's face and deriving immense comfort from it.

Surrounded by this austerity, the petulant intelligence of the young prince, who is almost always at the sovereign's side, expresses itself in unexpected bursts of animation. Whether to distract the King of Kings or to amuse his son, a little dog, the gayest little dog imaginable, always bears them company. Some pretend that the sovereign regards it as a sign of Providence when his son greets visitors cordially. I think the Monarch's paternal love is slightly overemphasized, for it is no greater than that of any happy head of a family, who is also hatching future dynastic schemes.

Both a traditionalist and a modernist, for the imperial figure is always one of contrasts, Hailé Sellassié I not only makes a point of having his subjects preserve the customs that their ancestors cherished but encourages them to revive forgotten or abandoned customs. Meanwhile, he is also bringing to bear all that western civilization has to offer his country, sending a picked group of Abyssinian youths to perfect themselves abroad and praising European culture and technology at home.

Although many young Abyssinians study in Great Britain and the United States every year, they nevertheless prefer French or Swiss universities, where they are no doubt more favorably received. It is in Switzerland that two granddaughters of Abyssinian sovereigns have pursued their studies, and young Prince Makonnen will probably complete his own there, too.

VISITING THE LIVING BUDDHA

By A SHANGHAI CORRESPONDENT

Translated from the *Neue Freie Presse*, Vienna Liberal Daily

THE Tashi or Panchen Lama, who ranks second only to the Dalai Lama as the spiritual leader of the Buddhists, is in Shanghai. The living Buddha in a metropolis? I heard the news in the Shanghai Club, standing at the longest bar in the world. Whether or not it is really the longest, it certainly offers the most varied mixture of languages and cocktails to be found anywhere, and a list of all the nations in the world is a list of the origins of the various drinkers—British, French, German, and Japanese with tiny mustaches.

Here the top layer of the white population congregates. The real international mixture does not begin until you reach the 'Bund,' the street that runs along the river, where, under the bronze statue of the Englishman who founded the local customs office, Indian Sikhs with soft Brahman eyes direct the traffic of rickshas and automobiles. Buddhist students, Russian soldiers serving in the European militia, Hindu ladies with violet veils, members of the Tonkin militia in cone-shaped, copper helmets, Japanese sailors, English officers, ladies from America, Europe, Asia, and Oceania—all races and nations mingle here at the mouth of the Yangtze; the strong and the weak, owners of banks and shipping lines, little brown-skinned money-changers in shimmering silk, who serve both the prostitutes and the minor police officials. All about them surge masses of Chinese, pouring from the skyscrapers and city blocks in the foreign concession, setting up their stoves and shops everywhere and winning back a little of their own soil under foreign