



## BOOKED FOR TRAVEL

### The New Continent—5. Sheba Slept Here

**I**T SEEMS only a short time ago that Ethiopian tribesmen were defending themselves from the grandeur of Mussolini's legions with spears, yet the other day I saw in the paper that Ethiopian Airlines had taken delivery of a pair of jetliners and was about to fly them home to Addis Ababa.

I'm not at all sure that Ethiopia has made quite the progress that the delivery of the jets would on the face of it imply, nor am I convinced that the land offers all the travel comforts and excitements that one might read into the rather spirited campaign that has been generated by its newly organized office of travel promotion. Addis Ababa, when I was there this fall, seemed to me to be a city with certain isolated fascinations, but with no character which I could either grasp or define. Even if I make allowances for the gloom of the autumn rains, the city is a non-descript settlement perched at such an inordinate height that the evolution of an idea leaves one panting. The city's saving grace is its people, dark-skinned, fine-featured descendants of a Semitic-Sabaeen civilization on whose genealogy one could ruminate for endless days. Perhaps three thousand years before Christ, Semitic peoples moved south to intermarry with the Hamitic population.

And then there is the romantic story of the royal lineage of Haile Selassie, whose lines are said to be traceable to Menelik I, first king of Ethiopia, who was born of a liaison between the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon, to whom she paid a state visit.

The people ruled by this Solomonian dynasty speak Amharic, a language which bears certain similarities to Hebrew, and surrounded as the nation is by Moslem influences, they worship as Christians in the Coptic Rite. The Ecumenical Conference in Rome was somewhat startled recently when the mass celebrated by the visiting Archbishop of Addis Ababa was enriched with drumbeats, hand clapping, bell ringing and chants. St. Peter's, a theologian reported, "was jumping in a solemn sort of way."

I happened to have been in Addis Ababa not long ago when the whole city jumped in honor of St. Tekle Haimanot, a day, though I had not previously been acquainted with Tekle Haimanot, I shall not soon forget. An enormous crush of people surged over the muddy grounds where the cere-

mony was being held, and while I tried to follow behind an Ethiopian friend who was knifing his way through the phalanx of humanity, I was trying, with equal difficulty, to maintain my footing in the ooze. The women wore the *shama*, a garment of cotton gauze, loosely woven as a bandage and just as white. As a headdress, many of them affected a netted snood. Iridescent colors in brilliant red and shocking green were the favorites. When we finally worked our way to the small clearing where the heart of the religious ceremony was already underway, I was, I must admit, somewhat startled to find two rows of priests in white robes and turbans dancing back and forth, towards each other and then backing away like a file of folk dancers. The priests themselves shook small instruments of loosely tied metal pieces that one might find at a carnival, but the beat was maintained by a cadre of drummers. Among the ecclesiastical personages, several carried bright, red velvet, gold-fringed umbrellas. Clustered on the steps of the church were bearded, dark-skinned priests in brilliant robes and bright turbans standing under canopies heavily draped with rich fabrics of gold, maroon and turquoise.

When the dancing was done and the drums quiet, the archbishop appeared, severe in black, and began a recitation of the life history of the saint, who had lived ninety-nine years, ten months and ten days, who was a great monk, who had prayed standing in one place for seven years, a feat which caused him to lose a leg. The recitation was delivered in Geez, the liturgical language from which Amharic is derived, and when the archbishop reached the high points in the career of Tekle Haimanot, the women erupted in their high-pitched wail, beating their tongues against their palettes and emitting a shrill *la-la-la-la-la*, like the sound of soprano crickets breaking the silence of a thicket at night. It stirred me then, no less than it had when I had heard it come swirling off the tongues of Arab women in the North African cemeteries on memorial days.

When the ceremony was over and the drums packed, the crowd surged out again, flooding the narrow gates and carrying us with it. But suddenly spaces would open up before us and there in the clearing I would see a footless or armless beggar with horrendous lesions on his remaining limbs. Without thinking, I fought to keep my footing in the muck lest the crowd send me sliding into the arms of these diseased persons. Only later did I find out they were lepers.

**A**DDIS, as the city is loosely called by its English-speaking colony, does have one reasonably stately quarter, where the new Africa Hall faces the Jubilee Palace. Some modern apartment houses are scattered nearby and the view sweeps off to the mountains and the surrounding stands of eucalyptus with pockets of fog stored in their tree-tops. Africa Hall, a sort of UN of the New Continent, would seem to be Haile



—H.S.  
Arusi Galla Woman—Skin skirts,  
plaited hair, bandoleers of beads.

Selassie's own bid for leadership among the myriad of new nations that now interlock across the face of Africa. Designed, ironically enough, by an Italian—the memories of the massacres are still green here—it is easily the best building in Ethiopia. Its main hall is dominated by a huge block of stained glass showing an African in white tunic and white trousers holding aloft—what else?—the flaming torch of freedom, behind him the broken shackles of colonialism. The

conference hall, where African problems are presumably being thrashed out among Africans before East or West can see them, is done in UN blue, with microphones and earphones at the seats. There is a gallery upstairs for the use of His Majesty and the Crown Prince, and behind their royal pew, seats for visiting dignitaries.

**T**HE use and nomenclature of the various palaces in Addis Ababa may prove rather perplexing for the visitor since the Emperor seems to have pursued a hobby of tiring of them and turning them over to other uses. He now lives in the Jubilee Palace (having given the former royal abode to the new Haile Selassie University), which was originally built as a guest house. Since the day it opened in 1955, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Haile Selassie's reign, it has housed King Saud, Richard Nixon, Tito, and King Hussein. Besides the Emperor, it also

reflected upon every time I picked my way to my room along a path that led through the middle of the dining salon. The Ras, downtown, is hardly an improvement, and what Addis needs to make good its dreams of tourism is a new Hilton, rumors of which are being actively banded about the capital these days. Even the Hilton hierarchy talks of it, but so far no steel rises from the ground.

Rugs of shaggy colobus monkey fur are peddled to likely looking tourist cars about town, and another popular item are the primitive paintings that recite, in funny-paper fashion, such celebrated events in Ethiopian history as Sheba's trip to Jerusalem (also available on *dik dik* skin) and Menelik II's defeat of the Italians at Aduwa in 1896. Coptic crosses, lion's claws in bracelets, ostrich eggs, and spears carried by the Arusi tribesmen are on display in the market, still called *mercato*, a semantic holdover from the Italian days. Ethiopia, among its riches, has its own deposits of gold, and one or two shops carry some handsome items—gold-and-ivory cigarette holders, broad gold filigreed wedding bands, and golden sunbursts embossed with a gold Lion of Judah, all of them sold by weight.

No visitor's stay in Addis seems proper—hell, it probably isn't even legal—without at least one appearance at the Addis Ababa restaurant for an Ethiopian meal. The restaurant, all that I could see of it, occupies the central foyer of an old house that was once the property of an Empress. The circular room is divided by bamboo partitions into alcoves which have been fitted out with couches covered by rugs and stools draped with colobus monkey hides. A boy comes around with a brass

pitcher of water and a bar of soap and one is treated to the comfort of washing right at the table. Thereafter, the waiter removes the table, made of woven basketry. When he brings it back a short while later, the top of the table is covered with an enormous fold (called *injera*) that resembles a thin sheet of murky foam rubber. Helpings of stew called *wat*, and a boiled egg are dropped on the *injera*. One is called upon to tear a piece of *injera*, and, using it as a combination glove and sop, pick up a bit of stew and eat the whole handful, foam rubber and all. The local libation, called *tej*, is a mead of fermented honey

which is quaffed from a small carafe rather like a vinegar jug. The place was full of *wat* eaters the night I was there, but although there were a number of Ethiopians on hand to give advice and instruction, every table included at least one Caucasian visitor being initiated into the rites of the Ethiopian—may Brilhat-Savarin pardon me—kitchen. Much more sophisticated premises had recently opened at a place called the Sheba, a membership club where the lights are dim, the ceiling is straw, the alcoves dark, the music hi-fi, and the walls, every last inch of them, paved with hides of the hapless colobus monkey.

Such links with the cosmopolitan Western world fall quickly away when you drive out of Addis and hit the highway to the hinterlands. Perhaps highway is putting it a bit strongly, for eventually (and much too soon) the hard surface ends, giving way to crushed rock and dirt. On the path we took, towards a new resort on the shores of Lake Awasa, we came upon the strange Arusi Gallas whose women wear skirts of skins which they knead with butter and milk to make them soft. They plait their hair and wear their bosoms bare, but decorate their necks with bandoleers of beads, and their upper arms with heavy bracelets of brass. Top it all off with an umbrella opened to shield the hot sun, and it makes a fetching and unusual portrait. The men, not nearly so colorful, trundle along beside them, carrying spears and encouraging the ladies to pose for photographs, for pay, of course.

At Hora Abaya, a lake at which we paused on the way, there were fish eagles in the trees, and crown cranes and bee eaters on the shores, but the surface of the lake was covered with hordes of pink flamingoes, and white pelicans—enough to make of this isolated corner of Africa, a superb rookery that would bring the bird watchers a-running.

The flamingoes, who migrate from Europe and Asia in August and stay until May, come as well to the shores of Lake Awasa, where I found a displaced Westphalian named Hans Pauly running a pleasant, if secluded little inn. He has sixteen rooms, rather handsomely and comfortably gotten up, a central lodge for dining and socializing, a lady chef imported from Germany, a pair of golden children who are terrified of hyena cries, and a wife who does her gardening while carefully avoiding the puff adders which now and then come to sniff the flowers.

On the way back home we were flagged down by a pair of more mercenary Arusi Galla tribeswomen who, brown and bare-breasted, were eager to

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—H.S.

Lion of Judah—Also Sheba's trip on *dik dik* skin.

is the home for a pair of cheetahs who are sometimes paraded on a leash, for some royal lions who live in a cageless lair separated from the edible citizens by a moat, and for a nyala, a type of antelope that is unique to the Ethiopian bush.

One expansive retreat on a hilltop was built as a summer palace, later became a billet for visiting dignitaries, and now, as the Ghion, is the leading hotel of Addis. At that it leaves plenty to be desired, especially by those who have been spoiled by the comforts of Nairobi. Architects, as I have come to realize with each new hotel I visit, have strange ways indeed, a thought I

pitcher of water and a bar of soap and one is treated to the comfort of washing right at the table. Thereafter, the waiter removes the table, made of woven basketry. When he brings it back a short while later, the top of the table is covered with an enormous fold (called *injera*) that resembles a thin sheet of murky foam rubber. Helpings of stew called *wat*, and a boiled egg are dropped on the *injera*. One is called upon to tear a piece of *injera*, and, using it as a combination glove and sop, pick up a bit of stew and eat the whole handful, foam rubber and all. The local libation, called *tej*, is a mead of fermented honey





## Ansermet's "Pelleas," Bachauer's Beethoven

WERE Claude Debussy to be granted the indulgence of eternity to observe the Metropolitan's 'Pelléas' in the centenary year of his birth, he could not say, however modestly, "You do me too much honor," for this is a patchwork of a production with formidable deficiencies on every side. But assuming he (or his shade) could be induced to listen to some of it, led by Ernest Ansermet in his debut as a conductor of opera at the Metropolitan, he might observe "Ah! You Swiss—what Frenchmen you are!"

For, in the decades since "Pelléas" was admitted to the Metropolitan's repertory in the mid-Twenties, no conductor has judged, so well as Ansermet, the values of the score in the frame of space in which it is being performed. There have been others of quality, especially Pierre Monteux. But the conception frequently advanced by Ansermet at home in Geneva (and known to many from a recording) is drawn to a scale which makes the perception of Debussy's purpose the first order of business — which is of course, as it should be.

This begins with the orchestra in the pit, which Ansermet treats as something more than a mere commentary on the action. It is rather a physical element of the drama, like the waters surrounding Golaud's castle, swelling, rising, receding, but always bearing, as on a swirling wave, the destiny of the humans involved. Added to his keen sense of texture are the powers of persuasion to make the Metropolitan's fine solo orchestral players eager extensions of his will.

As the values of the stage effort evolved, what was happening suggested not so much the pairing of the title as something like "Pelléas et Golaud." The center of dramatic gravity early settled on the contest of the brothers, impersonated by Theodor Uppman and George London, with some rearrangement of customary emphasis, though in a way that was not without interest. Uppman's Pelléas has matured vocally since he first sang it with Maggie Teyte at the City Center (1948), while retaining a well-gaited youthfulness and a kind of gentility that explain his attraction for Mélisande. Grating against this is London's practised Golaud, more assertive than the average, but so well scaled that one can comprehend, from the start, the effect on Mélisande that will drive her toward Pelléas. This is rather more motivation than the aver-

age performance of opera provides, and Debussy's is one that can profit from all it can get. Jerome Hines's stately but firm Arkel gives two generations of credence to the characters of his grandsons, as Blanche Thebom's well-mannered Genevieve does to her children of different fathers.

In a round of characterizations so well advanced toward credibility it is unfortunate that one of the more essential is presently below the general level. This is the Mélisande of Anna Moffo, which has many qualities to commend it, all downgraded by her lack of background in the part. She looks well, she sometimes moves with assurance, and her vocal effort was all in the right direction. But as a characterization, it is all too much of the here and now, too little suggestive of the remote, perhaps non-existent, world imagined by Maeterlinck and realized by Debussy. Perhaps when the music has become as much a part of Miss Moffo as some other roles she sings, and the generation of feeling is from the inside out, she will come closer to being the Mélisande for which she is so well equipped in voice and physique. Quite the best of the female performers was the minuscule Teresa Stratas, who bore herself well as the child Yniold, and sang out much more than its customary performer. In any case, as long as Ansermet remains in charge, the current "Pelléas" is a rare kind of operatic experience in which a steady view of a totality transcends this or that insufficiency. While the audience registered its favor in the usual way, the orchestra put its "stamp" of approval on their conductor with the rumble of sound heard from the pit before Act IV.

PERSONS accustomed to phrase their recollections of Beethoven's G major Concerto (No. 4) in terms of Schnabel, Hess, Gieseking, Novaes and Serkin (among others) found good reason to add the name of Gina Bachauer to the succession in her recent performance with the New York Philharmonic under the direction of Sir John Barbirolli. Most times previously, Bachauer and pianistic power have seemed a mental equation in her mind, as though to prove that her sex is no barrier to domination of the keyboard. But, as the citations above suggest, sex has never been a barrier to the domination of the special keyboard challenge contained in Beethoven's G major Concerto, and

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**bzzzz**

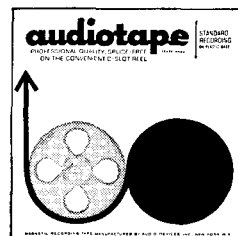
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