

# IN THE COLONIES

## The Scramble for Abyssinia.

By Max Leitner.

The world political struggle among the international rival textile interests, has not come to an end. The Anglo-Egyptian conflict was only a prelude to a policy which is destined to protect the "vital questions" of English textile interests.

The "**Soudan Plantation Syndicate**" held not only the Soudan cotton plantations in its hands, but also the fate of the Egyptian cotton plantations. England has acquired, through the waters of the Nile, absolute influence over Egypt.

This experience was very useful for England, as it reminded her that, although the whole course of the White Nile is in English hands, the Blue Nile, which carries much more water, is not; for the source of the Blue Nile is in **Abyssinia**.

The more oppressive English rule in Egypt became, the clearer it was to English politicians and economists, that England's "vital interests" can only be ensured by her obtaining absolute control over the "Blue Nile", that is "influence" in **Abyssinia**.

**Abyssinia**, a country twice as large as Germany has, up to the present, played a comparatively small part in the struggle between the conflicting interests of the world powers, and it owes it to this circumstance alone, that it has remained the

only "independent" State in Africa. (Liberia was given an American "adviser".)

Abyssinia was, it is true, cut off from the sea by the great powers, and thus there came into being, in a direction from North to South, Italian Eritrea and French, English and Italian Somaliland (Jubaland), which form a favourable region for assembling troops for a future attack. When however Italy once attempted to conquer Abyssinia, she was driven back to the coast by English guns.

In recent times however, a lively interest in Abyssinia has developed. French, Italian and English expeditions have traversed Abyssinia and special value has been attached to ethnographical and geographical studies. Geographical journals have been able to report that every river and every stream in Abyssinia has been explored from source to mouth. The secrets of the Webi and the Juba have been discovered just as have those of the Blue Nile.

Abyssinia was discovered, and now the country is beginning to be included in a most striking manner in world politics.

England then had to act rapidly, for the "Negro king" Garway (who in the meantime had been sentenced to five years imprisonment for embezzlement) was planning, with the help of the American Government, to found a Negro colony in Abyssinia. The enterprise failed, but America had in this way shown herself to be a keenly interested party.

And so England first of all looked round for allies and secondly sought an excuse for interfering in Abyssinia.

An ally was soon found in Italy, and the Anglo-Italian textile interests soon perceived that the time had now come for co-operation. England did not take long in finding a pretext for discovering her civilising heart for Abyssinia.

In the "slave commission" of the League of Nations a memorandum was presented by the Government of His Majesty the King of Great Britain, according to which "conscientious scientific investigation" had discovered that nowadays — in the 20th century — slavery and the slave trade still exist, which seriously threaten the safety of his British Majesty's subjects, especially of those in Kenya (British East Africa) and in the British Sudan, and that this slave trade was being carried on in Abyssinia.

The English Government asked for a mandate "to establish ordered conditions in Abyssinia in the interest of humanity".

The commission chose a select committee, but owing to the intrigues of French interested persons — who were backed by the Americans — the plan was wrecked, and the commission, called the attention of His Majesty's Government to the fact that, if in the interest of humanity slaves were to be freed, this could be done equally well in the Indian Empire of the Emperor of India and King of Great Britain. And thus it came about that Reuter was able to report that festivities had been held in Nepal to celebrate the liberation of the slaves. The "Illustrated London News" produced photographs of these celebrations. England no longer has slaves!

Abyssinia was then accepted into the League of Nations, promised to abolish slavery, and the Regent, Ras Tafari, undertook a journey to London, Paris and Rome.

Then began the bargaining. France promised to declare Djibouti (in French Somaliland) a free harbour for Abyssinia, Italy promised concessions, and England gave not only a royal crown (from the Victoria and Albert Museum), but also an "adviser".

Ras Tafari returned home with this adviser.

The first act of this English "adviser" was a revision of the slave question. In the semi-official "East Africa" of Jan. 22, 1923 we read:

"In March 1924, the Regent Ras Tafari issued an edict for the suppression of slavery. Special judges were authorised to draw up deeds of liberation for the slaves, it being the duty of the Provincial Governor to see that they returned to their homes. The governors and chiefs of tribes and villages were made responsible under heavy penalties for the suppression of any further slave trade. The edict was only in force for nine months as otherwise the precipitate liberation of hundreds of thousands of slaves would lead to a crisis."

An interesting document of capitalistic hypocrisy. England was for the liberation of the slaves as long as she was trying to gain influence over Abyssinia. Now that the latter had its "adviser", the slave question was dropped.

Italy and England continued to negotiate uninterruptedly. The commissioner of the "Soudan Plantation Syndicate", the Governor General of the Soudan, held conferences with the commissioner of the "Societa Agricola Italo-Somala" (the president of which was the Duke of Abruzzi), the Governor of Eritrea, and thus it came about that a community of interests was established.

The "Societa Agricola" has cotton plantations in Eritrea, on the river Gash, which is a tributary of the Adbara, and thus belongs to the district watered by the Nile, and in Jubaland in the district watered by the Webi-Shebéli.

Plans were developed on a large scale. Italy's demand for cotton is to be supplied by these countries. It is assumed that 400,000 hectares are needed for this purpose (in 1924, 16,000 hectares were cultivated). This will be brought about by the English Government handing over for this purpose, the Juba river, which up to now formed the boundary between Kenya and Jubaland, with a hinter-land of 92,000 square miles.

The "Soudan Plantation Syndicate" founded a daughter concern on the Gash, where the Italian plantations are also situated, and in Eritrea the frontiers were regulated. The daughter company was founded under the name of the "Cassala Cotton Company" under the presidency of Mr. A. M. Asquith. There is of course a close community of interests with the "Societa Agricola". The company managed so to contrive matters that the so-called Cassala railway which makes a direct supply of cotton to Port Soudan possible, was built with the money of English workers.

The Anglo-Italian agreement was concluded in London on July 15th, 1924. Italy received as its "sphere of interest" the district containing the sources of the Webi and Juba, i. e. South East Abyssinia, England the districts containing the sources of the Blue Nile, North West Abyssinia.

And thus it came about that Italy ventured on April 13th, 1925 to demand that Egypt should hand over the oasis Djarabub (between Egypt and Tripoli), and that England promised neutrality.

## THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

### The Fifth Congress of the Co-operative Societies of the Soviet Union.

The 5th Congress of the Zentrosoyus (Central Body of the Cooperative Association) was opened in Moscow on March 15th. Six hundred delegates from all parts of the Soviet Union and a large number of functionaries and members of the Moscow Co-operative Societies filled the large meeting hall in serried rows.

The opening words of the chairman of the Zentrosoyus were followed by a number of speeches of welcome by Comrade Andrejev (secretary of the C. C. of the C. P. of Russia), Dogadov (secretary of the All-Russian Central Trade Union Council, Brown (member of the ECCI. and representative of the C. P. of Great Britain), Kujbyschew (people's commissar for the workers' and peasants' inspection), Meschtscherjakov (Cooperative Section of the ECCI.) and finally Comrade Clara Zetkin.

Greetings had been received from more than 40 foreign cooperative centres and from the International Cooperative Alliance.

Comrade Chintschuk read the

Report of the Managing Committee of the Zentrosoyus and said among other things:

On Oct. 1st. 1923 there were 16,188 Cooperative Societies with 20,120 branches. On Oct. 1st. 1924, the number of societies amounted to 20,920 with 27,478 shops. On Oct. 1st. 1923 we had in the towns 1897 societies with 3216 shops. At the end of the year reported on, there were 3656 Cooperative Societies with 7010 shops in the towns. The predominant type of urban cooperative societies is that with several shops, whereas in the country, societies with only one shop prevail. The number of shareholders in the towns has increased from 2½ to 4½ millions. In recent times (October to March) the number of shareholders has been growing more rapidly in the country than in the towns. During the year in question 15 branches of the Zentrosoyus have been transformed into 6 district associations of cooperative societies.