

Birla Central Library

PILANI (Jaipur State),

Class No :- 945.09

Book No :- B694A

Accession No :- 29080

ANNO XIII

*Translated by
Bernard Miall*



Marshal De Bono

ANNO XIII

the Conquest of an Empire

By

Emilio De Bono

with an Introduction by

Benito Mussolini

THE CRESSET PRESS LTD.
11 FITZROY SQUARE
LONDON W.1

First Published
March 1937

Printed and made in England
by THE SHENVAL PRESS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I	The First Steps	i
II	The First, Constructive Period	18
III	Men-Munitions-Magazines-Hospitals	29
IV	Political Preparations	43
V	First Incidents	55
VI	First Formation of the Expeditionary Corps. First Movement of Troops	90
VII	Details and Directions	116
VIII	Civilian Activities and Achievements	131
IX	The Political Situation: The Army Makes Ready	160
X	Final Arrangements	193
XI	Last Steps Before the Advance	209
XII	The First Stride	223
XIII	The Second Stride	273
	Summary	313

*The map of Abyssinia at the end of this
book is reproduced by kind permission of the
Daily Telegraph*

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Marshal De Bono	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Eritrean dignitaries	<i>facing page</i> 58
Blackshirts saluting with lifted daggers	66
Italian soldiers in the native market	110
Italian troops clearing a road through the bush	122
Marshal De Bono and his Staff before action	228
Road-building on stony ground	246
The Coptic clergy carry the sacred pictures in solemn procession on the arrival of the Italian troops	266
Abyssinian landscape in the war zone	284
Italian whippet-tanks advancing	304

MAPS

Map of Abyssinia	<i>Folder</i>
Road-making programme in Eritrea	<i>page</i> 14
Distribution of water supplies	155

PREFACE

I did not welcome with enthusiasm the invitation given me by Senator Gentile—on the part of the Istituto Nazionale Fascista di Cultura—to write, for inclusion in a series of publications, a book on our campaign in East Africa. I have acceded to his request after further urging.

My reluctance is mainly due to the fact that I shall inevitably have to speak of myself, to which I am averse by nature, so that I am afraid I may not be able to preserve the complete objectivity which an historical work should possess.

Fortunately, I have a very good memory, which will always help me to tell the most unvarnished truth, even if I have to resort—though only by exception—to the consultation and reproduction of documents.

Emilio De Bono

INTRODUCTION

MY comrade Emilio De Bono, Marshal of Italy, offers us in this book a sort of report on the work which he accomplished during the period of preparation before the war, and in the first phases of the war itself, together with the conquest of Adowa, Adigrat and Makallè; names that from 1896 onwards were cherished in the unforgettable hearts of the Italians. This book was necessary; both for professional readers, who should derive enjoyment and draw an example from the great experiences of others, and for the people, whose judgments are instinctive, and often—for mysterious reasons—infallible.

This book is interesting because it tells what happened yesterday, so that the protagonists and spectators can give reliable testimony. Above all, it is an impressive book, and destined, as such, to astonish the reader, whether he is an Italian or a foreigner. It requires a considerable force of imagination to realize the nature of the work that devolved upon Emilio De Bono and his immediate and indirect collaborators. One statement alone suffices to give a synthesis of this work: *everything had to be done, or done over again*. Eritrea had been existing for some decades in a state which can

INTRODUCTION

hardly be called living. The Fascist Government, engaged until 1926 in the reoccupation of Libya, had been unable to devote to the first-born colony more than the ordinary cares of administration. But in consequence of the failure to apply the Italo-Abyssinia agreement of 1928—a failure which was entirely the fault of Ethiopia—the attention of Rome was once more drawn to Asmara.

When Emilio De Bono disembarked at Massawa the preparations which had been made before his arrival were absolutely inadequate for their purpose, which was, to settle once and for all the great account which had been left open since 1896. The equipment of Eritrea, in respect of harbours, roads, economic organization, and military strength, had to be multiplied a hundredfold, and not by an indefinite date, but within a very brief space of time, specified and established almost as a dogma: October, 1935.

Not many thought it possible to accomplish such a gigantic work of preparation in ten months. There were moments when the inextricable difficulties of the task took possession of men's minds: but De Bono's determination, his fifty years of experience, his sang-froid, his vigorous, youthful optimism, were elements that made for success. The obstacles—even those that seemed insurmountable in the eyes of the timid and sceptical—were overcome, and overcome within the time-limit,

INTRODUCTION

which Emilio De Bono respected as though it had been divinely ordained.

In the first days of October the great machine was ready for release, and it began by crossing the Mareb. On the 6th October the tricolour was waving over Adowa; a month later over Makallè.

If these were not great battles, it was because the enemy preferred to retire upon positions farther to the rear and removed from our immediate pressure. Without what we may call the De Bono period, the victorious prosecution of the campaign would have been neither possible nor conceivable. On reaching the last page of this lucidly and brilliantly written volume, the reader can but confirm the heartfelt conviction of the Italian people: Emilio De Bono is an artificer of the African victory, and as such he is deserving of the gratitude of the Motherland.

Roma 28 Settembre. Mussolini
Anno XVIII. S. 7.

I

THE FIRST STEPS

TWO ITALIAN colonies were contiguous to the Ethiopian Empire: Eritrea and Somalia (Italian Somaliland). Our successive Governments did not greatly trouble their heads about them, and we may frankly confess that the great majority of Italians regarded them with indifference. The Italian nation had no colonial ambitions or enthusiasms. If, on the one hand, the occupation of Libya did something towards waking up the Italian people, considered from another aspect it was greatly to the disadvantage of the two East African colonies, for the State, concentrating on the new conquest, paid less attention to them than ever. Hence the preposterous budgets, restricted in every direction, and economies which were effected to the detriment of the military organization of the two Eastern Colonies.

A few battalions of native troops; insufficient artillery; and hardly a beginning of a systematic plan of defence. Aviation: none.

Our relations with the neighbouring Empire seemed to argue that we had already forgotten the defeat of Adowa, and had no idea of avenging it.

This being so, it was impossible to conceive that we should undertake a military offensive; and as a matter of fact, no one entertained any notion of such a thing.

For while our military efficiency was less than modest, the same must be said of the inadequate network of highways and railroads, and the equipment of the ports, or, to be exact, of the only port: Massawa. On the whole of the Somali coast there was not—and is not—a single harbour, and for nearly six months of the year the monsoons make the discharging of cargoes a very difficult matter.

In July, 1925—III, in an official letter to the Prince of Scalea—then Minister for the Colonies—the Duce called his attention to the *defensive* conditions of the Colony of Eritrea, and required him to make good such deficiencies as might exist.

Mention was made of the political and diplomatic vicissitudes which led to the signing of our treaty of amity with Ethiopia, and the apparently good and neighbourly relations which had seemed to follow this treaty.

Substantially little was done to increase our military efficiency, whether in Eritrea or Somalia; but an examination of the conditions, especially in Eritrea, resulted in a definite plan of forming and mobilizing large native forces, whose duty it would be to guard us—even *without support*—against a possible invasion of the colony.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

In the years 1927—1930 the Government was chiefly concerned with the colonies of North Africa. In Tripolitania it was necessary to increase our security and tighten our hold of the hinterland, and in Cirenaica we had to make an end of the rebellion.

First of all, therefore, came the operations for the occupation of the oases of the Gulf and the effective conjunction of the two colonies in Sidra; then the occupation of the Fezzan and the oases of Cufra, and lastly the definitive suppression of the rebellion in Cirenaica.

In 1932 the Duce requested me to go to Eritrea, to see how matters stood there, and to report to him.

I left for the Colony in March of that year, and I remained long enough to obtain a definite idea of its needs, which were many indeed. The military governors and commandants were doing their utmost to improve matters, and wonderful progress was being made, considering the extremely restricted financial possibilities.

On my return I gave the Duce a succinct account of the state of affairs; an unvarnished account, but optimistic in spirit.

Everything depended on what Fascism was intending to do in East Africa, and on what were its ultimate aims.

I had told the Duce my own opinion as regards the colonial future of our country. He had fully

approved of my ideas, and gave me permission to declare them, in a very vague form, to the Chamber of the Deputies and the Senate; and further, to divulge them in a few short articles on colonial matters which appeared in certain periodicals.

Reduced to its simplest expression, the idea was this: In Libya, after the frontier problems had been adjusted with the two neighbouring European Powers, there was nothing more to be done, either in the political or in the military sense; all that had to be considered was the economic development of the Colony.

Hence the possibilities of our colonial future must be sought in East Africa, situated on one of the most important highways of international trade, with a hinterland which could be profitably exploited.

But our two Colonies were being stifled; Somalia without harbours, and with a most unfortunate coast-line; Eritrea with one good harbour and a good roadstead at Massawa, and other points where ships could take shelter and discharge their cargoes without the need of extensive harbour works. However, one might say that Massawa, which was the nearest port for the produce of Ethiopia and the Sudan, had almost ceased to be a port with the building of the Khartoum and Port Sudan railways, to which almost the whole trade of the interior now found its way.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

Apart from this, one had to consider the fact that the absolute lack of good lines of communication from west to east—that is, from Abyssinia to our coasts—nullified the possibilities of trade.

Hence, if the Mother-Country was to derive the desired advantage from her two Colonies it would be necessary to abolish the vital inconveniences which I have indicated.

To this end a careful and decisive political action was required, subsidized by plenty of money to supply all the material necessities.

I had the good fortune to discuss this matter with the Duce on various occasions, and from time to time he gave me precise instructions as to the line which I must follow as Minister for the Colonies.

It should be noted at the outset that we had not yet experienced any beneficial results from the famous treaty of friendship of 1928. On our own side we had scrupulously observed its provisions, and Abyssinia, in different ways and under various circumstances, had taken advantage of it. Nevertheless, we continued to note, and to suffer from, a spirit of hostility on the part of Ethiopia, a hostility which continued to increase, greatly to our disadvantage.

Guided by the directions given me by the Duce, I drew up a definite programme, with a view to determining how the more urgent necessities of Eritrea, in the first place, and then of Somalia,

could be supplied without aggravating the inclusive budget of the Colonies.

These needs, however, were considered in relation to the possibilities of war, for this had to be regarded not only as always possible, but as always increasingly probable.

With some sacrifice on the part of Tripolitania and Cirenaica, whose need of strong military garrisons was gradually diminishing, it was possible to make a sensible increase of the Governmental contributions to Eritrea, and even to do something for Somalia.

Thanks to this, in Eritrea, where the effectives of the few bodies of troops existing there had been progressively reduced as a result of enforced economies, the military formations were gradually brought up to their full strength. To a lesser extent the same thing was done in Somalia, a Colony which was regarded as less seriously threatened, despite the onslaught made upon our frontier in 1932, by Gabrè Mariam, with some ten thousand men; who were easily held in check by our levies and a few battalions.

That part of the problem which it was most urgently necessary to solve, together with the increase of our military efficiency, related to the network of communications. *Military operations of any kind are impossible unless there are roads adapted to some sort of traffic and the movement of troops.*

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

In this connection I may be permitted to make a brief digression. It has been said, by not a few incompetent persons, by some who have a smattering of knowledge, and even by a few technicians (though not, of course, by practical experts): "But Marzano, Baratieri, and Baldissera got to Kassala, from one side, and to Adowa, Makallè, and Amba Alagi on the other, with the help of nothing but difficult mule-tracks." It is not worth while to argue with such critics.

Nor is it thinkable that an army on active service should fail to profit by all the improvements that science and industry can place at its disposal. Hence we see in the field aeroplanes, motor vehicles of every kind, and wireless telegraphy, which were unknown in 1896. It may be added that the perfection of armaments involves an enormous consumption of ammunition, such as no one would have imagined at the time of our old and modest Eritrean campaigns.

In 1932 nothing definite had as yet been settled as regards the character and method of a possible campaign against the probable enemy, nor in respect of the force which might have to be employed.

It was my ambition as Minister to persuade His Majesty the King to visit all our Colonies. His Majesty had already visited Tripolitania while I was Governor there. In 1932, on my return from Eritrea, having obtained the Duce's consent, I had

an opportunity of asking His Majesty if he would not like to visit the Colony; for it seemed to me that as the first-born of our Colonies it had a right to this honour. I felt that it was incumbent upon me to accompany His Majesty on this visit, which gave me an opportunity of revising, on the spot, my knowledge of certain matters which would help me to shape the details of the decisions which would have to be taken.

The visit took place at the end of September, 1932.

There was then in Eritrea a commandant of the Royal Corps whom I had known for a long time, and who had served under me in Tripolitania. I valued him greatly as an excellent soldier and commander, who knew the Colonies, was a hard worker, and had clear and simple ideas.

Since I am convinced that in order to decide what should be done under given circumstances it is indispensable to be on the spot, I commissioned the commandant to secure material for a complete and reliable balance-sheet of the Colony's defences, confining myself to giving him the data relating to the resources in men and materials which might be regarded as available.

His Majesty is a keen and profound observer; nothing escaped him, and his judgments on what he saw were conspicuous for their practical good sense.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

The lack of roads and the insufficiency of the railway attracted his attention, and he discussed these matters with the Duce.

As regards the accomplishment of work requiring time and money, it was necessary to pass without more ado from the stage of enquiry to that of execution.

The first funds had already been granted for the continuation of the Massawa-Asmara-Keren-Adigrat-Biscia railway to Om-Ager.

Let me at once say that this undertaking was not of a military character. Its object was to increase the volume of trade in the region surrounding Om-Ager, so as to attract thither the trade of Abyssinia and the Sudan, and enable it to debouch upon Massawa, the shortest route, as I have mentioned, from Abyssinia and the southern Sudan to the sea.

When the Duce had begun to consider the possibility of military operations in Eastern Abyssinia, I proposed, and he agreed, that the millions which would have been spent on prolonging this railway (which was not in accordance with military requirements) should be expended, instead, on the improvement, and partly on the construction, of a strategic line running east and west, which would permit of rapid movements behind the southern front of the still inadequately fortified system of the Colony of Eritrea, a front which was certainly to be regarded as the most seriously threatened, and

the most extensive; and also partly, on widening the Massawa-Asmara road.

But before determining the cardinal lines of the programme to be followed in respect of the preparations as a whole, it was necessary to decide, as a fundamental criterion, whether it was our intention to initiate operations by assuming a posture of defence, or whether we should take the offensive without more ado.

If we intended to assume the offensive the initiative would be wholly on our side, and at first sight it seemed that all that was needed was to fix the date for beginning operations. However, even in the case of an offensive war one must always allow for what the enemy can and will endeavour to do. Now the Abyssinians, under a feudal government, had the advantage of a comparatively rapid mobilization, when one considers that a good part of our forces and *all* materials and munitions of war had to be sent from the Mother-Country, and would be retarded by having to pass through the Suez Canal.

No unusual movement of arms and troops could avoid passing through the Canal, where, one may say, it would be exposed to the espionage of all the nations of Europe.

This being so, the incontestable advantages of our superiority in every military sense would be largely paralyzed, since we should not be able to reckon

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

on the factor of *surprise*, of capital importance in all military operations, and above all in an offensive war.

A very brief calculation, made under my direction in the Colonial Ministry, gave us the approximate strength of the forces required for an offensive war; which was roughly equal to the strength that afterwards proved to be necessary.

The Duce, whose attention I drew to the results of this calculation, was not unduly impressed by the importance of the affair; but he did not consider that we should decide then and there to take the offensive. It will be understood that he had, above all, to take the international situation into account, and the fact that *all* our armed forces, though great progress was being made, had not yet attained the degree of efficiency which the Duce, as Minister for the Army and Navy and the Air Force, had set up as a standard.

It was not enough; the Staff Corps (G.H.Q.), which had its own plan in the case of a possible campaign in East Abyssinia, was greatly pre-occupied with what might happen in Europe if we had to withdraw a great body of troops from Italy. It had even expressed the opinion that in certain cases we should have to count only on the local resources for the defence of the Colonies, whether in men or material or provisions. It is true that we were no longer the Italians of 1896; but

Abyssinia too had made military progress, and merely by force of numbers could have wiped us out under such conditions.

The Staff Corps, always considering the worst possibility, would have liked us to work out a plan of defence for such a case, restricting our operations to the triangle Asmara-Adi-Ugri-Decamerè, from which position we should have to protect the line of communication Massawa-Asmara, the only one that existed. I have never worked out this plan, nor have I had it worked out, for I saw no use in thinking of the worst that might happen when there were so many good and positive things to be done.

It should be noted that preliminary arrangements had already been made by the Staff Corps for the possible despatch of troops to East Africa, but such plans, of course, though all possible pains may be taken to give them an essentially practical form, *never* correspond with the necessities that present themselves in a concrete instance. Of this we had many different proofs.

And here I must be allowed to sound a personal note, which is not without its importance.

It had been my proudest dream to end my public career as a soldier on active service. Of course, it was not yet possible to say in 1933—the year in which we began to consider what practical measures must be taken in the event of

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

war with Ethiopia—whether there would or would not be war in that country; but I made up my mind to lose no time, and one day I said to the Duce: “Listen: if there is war down there—and if you think me worthy of it, and capable—you ought to grant me the honour of conducting the campaign.” The Duce looked at me hard, and at once he replied: “Surely.” “You don’t think me too old?” I added. “No,” he replied, “because we mustn’t lose time.”

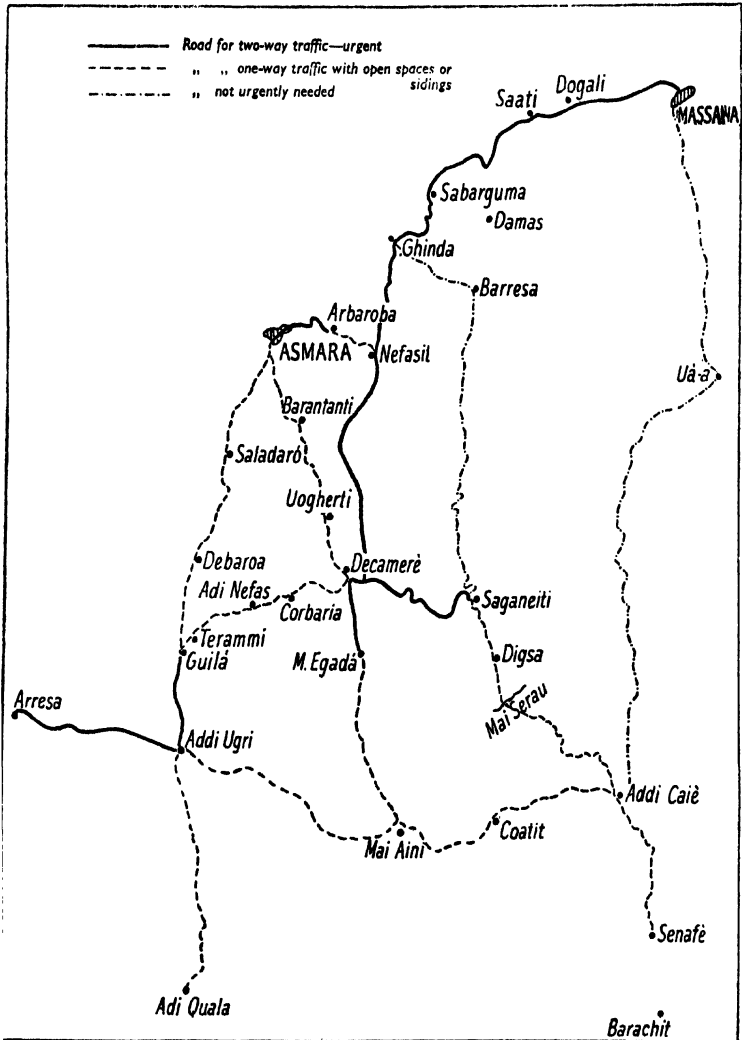
From this moment the Duce was definitely of the opinion that the matter would have to be settled no later than 1936, and he told me as much. I confined myself to replying: “Very good!”—without expressing the faintest doubt as to the possibility that this could be achieved.

The honour and responsibility which I had willingly taken upon myself, thanks to the Duce’s confidence, made me work like a hundred men.

It was the autumn of 1933. The Duce had spoken to no one of the coming operations in East Africa; *only he and I knew what was going to happen*, and no indiscretion occurred by which the news could reach the public.

I put the following considerations to the Duce: “The political conditions in Abyssinia are deplorable; it should not be a very difficult task to effect the disintegration of the Empire if we work at it well on political lines, and it could be regarded as certain after a military victory on our part.

“The unruliness of the Rases, some of whom are



ROAD-MAKING PROGRAMME IN ERITREA. COMPLETED
OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 1935.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

open malcontents, may lead to a movement which will induce one or another of the stronger of them—even without the Emperor's wish—to rebel against the Emperor, and give us an opportunity to intervene. But, on the other hand, the possibility must not be excluded that those chieftains who are situated on our frontier may attempt to attack us, counting on our present weakness.

“This being so, it is incumbent on us to prepare ourselves, so that we could withstand the shock of the whole Abyssinian force in our present positions, and then pass to the counter-attack, and go right in with the intention of making a complete job of it, once and for all.”

The Duce thought as I did, and ordered me to go full speed ahead. I must be ready as soon as possible.

“Money will be needed, Chief; lots of money.”

“There will be no lack of money.”

At the beginning of 1934 the Commandant of the Royal Corps of Eritrea and our military attaché at Addis Ababa came to Italy.

I had various conversations with them, and together we fixed upon certain details to be observed in the execution of the plan established.

I presented the two officers to the Duce, since it was desirable that he should obtain a clearer idea of the actual situation in conversation with the men on the spot.

The Duce wished to have their opinion as to the advisability of the plan which had been decided upon—the plan of the defensive-counter-offensive—and between them they agreed that, given the Ethiopian mentality and traditions, and their customary style of fighting, it was the method which promised the greatest possibilities of success.

Now, if we were to proceed to the execution of the plan in question, the Minister for War, the Chief of the General Staff and the Staff Corps command had to be informed of the Duce's intentions.

This made no difference as regards the pre-determined objective; it was only a question of working in harmony, each in his own department, for the common end.

The Chief of the General Staff wished to send his adjutant-general to Eritrea, in order that he might report on the actual state of affairs. His report, though very able, was by no means optimistic, and the preliminary work that was necessary was so extensive that no hope was left of completing it within the time-limit which we had fixed as desirable. But reports may very well be no more than reports. I was not impressed, but went ahead in accordance with my fixed idea, which I knew was consonant with the Duce's wishes.

To avoid excessive correspondence the Duce decreed that all decisions taken in respect of the undertaking should be recorded in writing. This

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

was done. The minutes were signed, first by the Duce, the Chief of the General Staff, the Under-secretary for War, and myself. One by one, as they took part in the discussions, the heads of the Navy, the Air Force and the Army added their signatures.

As regards all that was done in the Ministry for the Colonies in the years 1933–34 in preparation for the campaign—and also as regards the greater part of it—all practical details were worked out *exclusively* by myself, with the help, of course, of the excellent head of my military bureau.

II

THE FIRST, CONSTRUCTIVE PERIOD

CONDITIONS in Eritrea were certainly not such as to facilitate the movement thither of great bodies of troops, and all that is involved by an extraordinary massing of armed forces. Even less did they permit of the logistic and strategical movement of armed forces. Or to put the matter more simply: In Eritrea there was *nothing* beyond the indispensable necessities of life for the small Italian population, the small military force, and the natives, whose requirements were extremely modest. To be exact, there was a certain stock of cattle, and also of sheep, the principal wealth of the country.

It was therefore necessary to determine beforehand what would be required under the special conditions which the army would find there if it had to send away for what it needed; especially—for economical and financial reasons—to Italy.

First of all, however, it was necessary to recondition the port of Massawa, so that men and materials could be disembarked *in good time* to allow operations to begin on the date fixed by the Duce, *which I always regarded as irrevocable.*

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

Simultaneously with the work to be done on the harbour, we should have to get to work upon the roads.

I have already given a rough idea of the existing network of roads. *All* the roads, including the main artery from Massawa to Asmara, could not be classed, according to our ideas, as practicable for mechanical traffic. True, they were used by a few score of motor-cars which represented the normal traffic; but not one of the roads was asphalted, all had dangerous turns and steep gradients, while only certain stretches were wide enough for vehicles to pass. There were a few small bridges, with a span of twelve or fifteen feet, but none that really deserved the name of bridge; so that during the rains there were often lasting interruptions, and to cope with these it was necessary to resort to various expedients which would have been impossible in the case of intensive traffic.

When His Majesty the King decided to visit Eritrea we had repeatedly to postpone the date of sailing, in order to avoid, as far as possible, such interruptions of traffic.

Lastly, there was the Massawa-Asmara railway, a magnificent piece of engineering, but of very small capacity, partly because the rolling-stock was in need of renewal,⁷ but more on account of the nature of the track. It is enough to say that in 75 miles there is a difference of level of 8,250 feet.

Reckoning from the end of 1933 the Duce had promised me an assignation of funds for the work on the roads. These funds—which were actually placed at my disposal in the following year—I applied *exclusively* to the re-surfacing of the Massawa-Nefasit-Asmara road, *which would have to be the channel of supply for the whole Colony*. The capacity of the railway certainly could be, and would have to be, increased, but we could count on this only to a very limited extent.

The mechanical transport would have to be equal to all the demands made upon it by the splendid principal mountain roads of the Kingdom. I accordingly gave categorical instructions to a distinguished officer of the Engineers, who was placed in charge of the work on the roads; and also to the contractors, who had my full confidence, by reason of the magnificent work which they had already done for the Colony.

I did not wish to cause anyone unnecessary alarm, so I said, at the outset, that the road would have to be ready for 1936. I was anxious, above all, to avoid discussion and gossip, which might have resulted in alarming not only the enemy, but also the people at home.

With the Duce it was understood that no one was to speak of the undertaking. In his mind it was already assuming capital proportions. He knew that at the proper moment he would have all Italy with

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

him. But I need not conceal the fact that there were many doubters, and there were those who favoured peace and quiet, and there were timid people who felt that there was something in the air that pointed to a vigorous campaign, and uttered the pernicious words: "It's unwise to rush into an adventure whose end no one can foresee"; or: "First we ought to see if the game's worth the candle!"

Dangerous people, now and always, these people who count the risks "for the good of the country" (*sic*), and know nothing of the joy of hazard. Better a thousand times those who rush headlong forward, even with their eyes shut. I, if I may be permitted the boast, belong, despite my years, to the second category. And woe to me, in the present case, if I had not belonged to it! The Duce would have sent me off with a kick, and he would have been right.

In the beginning we relied only on black labourers; their output was low, but they were cheap. And in any case, in 1934, given the secrecy which we wished to maintain, it was out of the question to think of sending out Italian workers.

What was accomplished with admirable foresight and acumen, to the great credit of the contractors, was the construction of wharves on a grand scale; they were such as to allow one to count on the immediate possibility of expansion and acceler-

ation and the employment of additional labour.

It goes without saying that while this great highway, with the assistance of the railway, was to answer all requirements as regards the establishment and replenishment of the magazines and stores, it did not solve the problem of supplying the troops on active service or the advanced depôts of the Intendancy.*

Hence it was necessary to improve all the roads running from Asmara to the southern front, which was the most threatened, and to improve and build the indispensable cross-roads between these arteries to meet the strategical, logistical, and tactical needs of the army.

This work, however, was begun at a later period, and was carried on simultaneously with the influx of troops from the Motherland and the traffic which this involved.

On the railway, too, work was done to increase the capacity of the freight depôts, the total length of sidings, and the number of stations, so that we were gradually able to run the maximum number of couples of trains which the intrinsic capacity of the line and its total length of track would permit.

Another problem of capital importance was that of the water-supply. I calculated, to begin with, that drinking-water would have to be supplied for

*Commissariat.—(Tr.)

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

120,000 men and 50,000 animals. If possible, too, the soldiers must be given enough water to wash themselves and their clothes.

The problem of water had given General Baldissera a great deal of trouble in 1896, for which reason our staff officers were greatly preoccupied with it. I knew that there was no lack of water in Eritrea, and that the rains (lesser showers and the rainy season) provided ample means of replenishment. I had firmly convinced myself of this during my last two visits to the Colony, having discussed the matter with natives, and farmers who had been living for years in Eritrea, and with senior officers of wide experience. The problem was to find adequate means of profiting by the existing supply. To this end, still as Minister, I gave instructions to headquarters, sending them an engineer officer who had specialized in the subject, to study the water-courses, the points where the water could best be stored, and the possibilities of canalizing supplies; and also to determine where water was to be found in the subsoil.

Such investigations, often begun during the preceding years, but never completed, and never leading to practical results, as the necessary funds were lacking, were easily undertaken. The torrent beds, which were always full during the rainy season, were the best indications of the direction of flow. In order to be more certain of his data, the

hydrological expert was sent out before the rainy season began.

On the basis of these investigations, undertaken by my orders, and in due course completed, the requisite work was done when the necessary staff of workers was available. And the result? *No one* suffered from thirst—not a single man; and the troops, I may say, always and everywhere had water to wash themselves and their clothes. And there was water enough not only for the troops and the four-footed animals, but also for the thousands of workers who came later, and for all the requirements of the artillery and mechanical transport.

This, of course, within our own frontiers, for until hostilities had broken out we naturally could not enter enemy territory for the purpose of making preparations of any kind.

Another urgent task was the provision of aviation camps.

There was no Air Force either in Eritrea or Somalia. Not until 1933–4 were a few aeroplanes—not high-power machines—sent out to the Colonies, and after some delay the first aerodromes were constructed. To be exact: two in Somalia, at Mogadiscio and Bel-et-cum, and two in Eritrea, at Otumlo and Asmara. But they were not of great capacity, nor were they equipped for the large air force which the Duce intended to send out in the event of hostilities.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

Besides the above-mentioned aerodromes there were emergency landing-grounds on which work had been begun, and which were gradually improved.

It should be noted that while in Somalia, a flat country, it is not a difficult matter, even in the bush, to find means of effecting a landing, this is not the case on the Eritrean plateau, where the possibilities of landing, even for low-power machines, are confined to the places where the valleys make it possible. In this connection too—as Minister—I made my arrangements. In Eritrea, more particularly, we set to work on the enlargement of the Asmara aerodrome and the improvement of the emergency landing-places. Here, however, we had one great enemy—the rainy season, and often the incidental showers, which reduced the landing-grounds to swamps. This shows that in the principal aerodromes it is absolutely necessary to have a properly prepared track for landing and taking off.

The enormous amount of work to be done, and its great complexity, especially when one considered the time at our disposal, called for great confidence and great strength of will, or it would have struck us with dismay.

It will suffice to say that hitherto the funds had been assigned little by little as the work was put in hand. There was and could be no question of a “war finance” which would permit, without discussion, of any expenditure that was held to be

necessary. On the other hand, although the cardinal point was decided: *All must be ready by 1935* for defensive operations, the dates were not yet fixed between which the various preparations would have to be completed, above all as regards the native forces already on the spot and the Italian troops which would have to be poured into the Colony.

But in addition to such work on the roads and aerodromes as was held to be indispensable, it was necessary to make an immediate beginning with such as would be needed the better to assure the defences of the Colony against the possibility of a daring enemy offensive, *even if we were caught in the thick of our preparations.*

As regards this important aspect of our task, I assumed the full responsibility, although I had not the full approval of the General Staff, of giving my first attention to the advanced defensive front on the line Senafè-Mai Aini-Adi-Quala. And this turned out to be very fortunate, considering the actual development of the campaign. At the same time, the lines further to the rear (Adi-Ugri, Adi-Cajè) were not neglected, nor was that further to the north (Debaroa-Decamerè-Saganeiti). Yet another line was roughed out on the western front, and the establishment of fortified posts at Arresa and Tucul was considered, in the event of an advance from Coahin and Deki tesfà.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

So much for the high plateau, where it was thought that the principal actions would take place, for in the lowlands, in view of the climatic conditions and the absolute lack of water, we had no reason to fear operations of any consequence. The eastern lowlands, however, contained the port of Massawa, the Bay of Zula, and the Bay of Assab, which had to be secured against any possibility of surprise from the land side. And this was done.

The political situation in 1934 gave us no reason to presume the possibility of hostile action from the sea, so the problem of defending Massawa against attack from that side was not for the moment considered.

As will be seen, the principal anxieties of the Ministry were in respect of Eritrea, which would undoubtedly be the main theatre of operations in the event of war with Abyssinia. Nevertheless, Somalia was not forgotten.

Somalia is a very large colony, and wherever one goes it is difficult to make one's way. As the country is absolutely flat it is impossible to discover any obligatory routes, but the lack of water would compel the invader, if in force, to follow the course of the two rivers: the Giuba, and more especially the Uebi-Scebeli.

It was idle to think of hard and fast lines of defence. We had to safeguard certain critical points, the essential bases of supply, which as

such would be stoutly defended; places which might eventually serve as points of support for manœuvring troops.

In November, 1934, I had the honour of accompanying His Majesty the King to Somalia, and on this occasion I decided, with the local Commandant, what most urgently needed to be done, bearing well in mind the lessons we had learned from the incursion of Gabré Mariam three years earlier.

Somalia also had need of at least two good roads: Mogadiscio-Bolu Burki-Belet uem-Mustail (mainly for the valley of the Uebi-Scebéli) and Mogadiscio-Bur Accaba-Baidoa-Dolo, and a strategical road between the two, from Baidoa to Bolu Burki.

Paths already existed, and they were very good provided it did not rain. In the rainy season they were impassable. There was no difficulty in following them; the only trouble was the deficiency of stone, which ought to have been provided at definite intervals, but which, especially on the Mogadiscio-Baidoa road, was absolutely lacking. I was able to assign a very modest sum for the improvement of the paths. For actual road-making, at all events in the case of the Uebi-Scebéli road, the cost of which was estimated at about 50 million lire, it seemed that the Government of Somalia would have to open a credit with some financial institute.

III

MEN—MUNITIONS—MAGAZINES—HOSPITALS

FOR US, Eritrea has always been a source of excellent soldiers. Excellent from every point of view, but especially as regards their affection for their own officers.

The Eritrean askari has a profound sense of justice, and a profound respect for it. Disciplined in the strictest sense of the word, he will meet what he considers unjust treatment by flat rebellion. For him enrolment is a bilateral contract with the Government; both parties have to keep their compact; he has no use for compromise, and as regards his rights and his duties he will tolerate no imposition, and still less discussion.

If a company of askaris is ordered to do something that is not properly comprised among its duties, or is kept in one spot longer than the time agreed upon, it will make an *abièt*, which is merely a passive act of protest, and the persuasive powers of the Commandant will be needed to put an end to the *abièt*; he will have to discover its cause and somehow set matters right.

Hence the commander of Eritrean troops must be endowed with special qualities, which, as a

rule, are possessed only by those officers who are conscious of the fascination of the Colony, and of coloured troops. The officer of the native detachment *cannot be improvised*, even if he is passionately in love with colonial life, and is heart and soul a soldier. He needs an apprenticeship under officers of long experience, who have won the full confidence of the troops under their command. Those whom the uninitiated may contemptuously call *insabbiati** are, as a matter of fact, the most efficient officers. It matters little that they may have some of the characteristics of the *lansquenets*; when the moment comes they are ready for the maddest enterprise, certain that their askaris will follow them, without troubling to look round, as they lead them on mule-back, to see if any are lagging behind.

Various inquiries as to the possibility of mobilizing Eritrean detachments had been made since General Baldissera regularised the native troops, transforming the irregular *Ordu di Basci bozuk* into the first four fine battalions, which fifty years ago were covered with glory and honour.

However, until the outbreak of our Libyan war the matter was still under investigation. As we have seen, in 1911-12 it was possible, so to speak, to stabilise the war on the coast. In 1913 El Jebel was occupied by part of Lequio's column, composed almost entirely of Italian troops, after the victorious

* Literally "silted up."—(Tr.)

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

battle of Assab, and Tassoni's raid into Cirenaica. But when it was decided that we ought to penetrate into the interior, in order to proclaim our sovereignty, light columns were needed, capable of exceptional marches, having few necessities in the matter of food and shelter. That is, Colonial troops were indispensable.

The attitude of the Arab population at that time was such that we could not yet place any reliance on local recruiting; but a first experiment was made.

In the meantime the General Staff was anxious to take advantage of the Eritrean contingent. It began by sending permanent Eritrean columns into the two colonies, but as it was not prudent to drain Eritrea of its soldiers new battalions were raised there, which, to distinguish them from the permanent battalions, were known as "mixed battalions."

These—which have given proof of their quality whenever and wherever they have been employed—were at first formed of askaris recruited in Eritrea; but the necessary additions led us to recruit men beyond the frontier, in the direction of Abyssinia, and even in Yemen.

In 1914, when the Colony of Eritrea was threatened from Tigré, the Command of the Royal Corps mobilized, with surprising celerity, and without any difficulty, 22,000 men.

Nothing came of the threats, but they served to

keep us on the alert, and led us to improve the defensive assets of the Colony, and above all, they showed us that it was possible to mobilize a respectable number of men.

The Great War distracted our attention from the Colonies, which were, so to speak, left to their own devices. But after the advent of Fascism the question of mobilization was once more investigated, more especially thanks to the efforts of the new Commandant of the Royal Corps (the then Colonel Gabba, afterwards C. in C. in East Africa), and thorough preparations were made, with practical tests.

Calculations based on positive data showed that it was possible to mobilize some 50,000 to 55,000 men, two-thirds of whom had already served in the Colonial army, about a third being new recruits. In these calculations, for military and political reasons, the askaris beyond the frontier were not taken into account, as it would not be wise to trust to them in the event of a conflict with Ethiopia: it is easy to see why.

In 1932-33 the data were checked anew; with the help of the Commissariats the possible number of new recruits was calculated once again, and the result pointed to the possibility of mobilizing as many as 65,000 men. There was no thought of having recourse to conscription.

As I have already stated, until 1932 the weakened

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

battalions had been gradually brought up to strength. A slight budgetary increase having been conceded to the Corps Commandant, he, with exemplary activity and discernment, modified the distribution of the detachments so that they could be within easier reach in case they were needed.

Round the nucleus of the existing battalions, batteries and squadrons—a little more than 4,000 men—we had to mobilize and train a great military force, with all necessary services. Besides this it was necessary to provide for territorial needs: the garrisons of the fortresses, protection of lines of communication, ordinary garrisons, military stations and *étapes*, etc. And this at a time when no Italian troops had as yet arrived in the Colony.

It was decided to form an Army Corps of two divisions and two brigades, with the necessary artillery and detachments of engineers.

On the strength of my practical experience of coloured troops, I felt at once that the Army Corps, and even the Division, was a cumbersome unit for native troops, with their peculiar characteristics. But it could be foreseen that in this case we should not have to undertake operations like those of France in Morocco, or, on a smaller scale, our own in Tripolitania and Cirenaica; ours would rather be a war of mass formations, with large Italian units fighting side by side with the native forces.

The idea of an Army Corps of native troops had

occurred to the Staff, I remember, on the supposition—already mentioned—that the Colony would have had to defend itself with its own forces only.

At all events, after weighing the *pros* and *cons*, and in consideration of the fact that the necessary preparations for the formation of this Army Corps had already been made, it was gradually built up. In the course of the subsequent operations, as will be seen, this Army Corps underwent many transformations, and several battalions were subtracted from it, being assigned, with great advantage, to the Italian units.

Since we had time to spare, the mobilization was carried out methodically and quietly. It should be noted that a good many of the men who ought to have been mobilized were providing labour for the work on the roads, from which they could not be withdrawn, *being then the only workers at our disposal*.

The mobilization centres, besides the special depôt at Asmara, were the headquarters of the detachments to which the newly enrolled men proceeded. They were promptly incorporated in the detachments in question, which had already been authorized to increase their strength by one fourth. Here those who had already borne arms took up their duties without more ado, while those who had never undergone any military training were drilled at headquarters.

As the necessary cadres gradually arrived from

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

Italy the new companies and battalions were formed of men taken from the detachment as a whole, so that throughout the force the desired ratio of old soldiers and new was observed. These recently formed battalions took the number of the mixed battalions, which were gradually disbanded, as no longer required in Libya; and with the number they inherited the glorious traditions: a kind of legacy always greatly prized by the askari.

The system employed in respect of the battalions was applied to the batteries also. The formation of the special detachments of engineers and the sanitary units was more difficult; both were organized, when the time came, with the help of Italian soldiers.

At the same time, and in the same way, but on a much smaller scale, the mobilization went forward in Somalia. This theatre of operations, since nothing had yet happened there to bring it into the foreground, and above all because it was our intention to remain on the defensive there, was regarded as of secondary importance.

We had calculated that we should be able to mobilize there a force equal to a full brigade, with a good allowance of artillery.

Somalia, moreover, was able to take advantage of an institution which it owed to the wise initiative of Governor De Vecchi: I mean the *Dubats*: bands of volunteers, well armed by us and commanded by Italian officers.

The Somali, though less warlike in temper than the Eritrean, is a soldier with a strong sense of discipline, attached, like the latter, to his commanding officer, sober, and able to endure fatigue. He too is thoroughly trustworthy. A Musulman by persuasion, he will consent to mix with Arab elements, but prefers to have nothing to do with Christians; hence there could be no promiscuity in the make-up of the detachments. For that matter, such promiscuity was hardly to be considered as in the region of possibilities, since there is no appreciable proportion of native Christians in Somalia.

In Somalia Governor Rava—who, although not an army officer, was a true soldier at heart, and a man of great discernment, with a profound knowledge of the Colony, and of Ethiopia as well—and the Commandant of Troops—an old and experienced colonist—gave me full confidence in every respect.

In order to muster the whole contingent on which we were counting we had to resort to summoning the men by *chitet*. Now, many of the men who turned up would have had no military training, and there would probably be little time or money for training them properly. I therefore decided, without more ado, to resort to the *chitet*, by sectional summonses, region by region, for the duration of a month, with a view to breaking in those men who had had no military training. The men of the *chitet* would wear

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

a distinctive badge, but no uniform; and they would receive the pay of the askari for the duration of their course of training.

The result of this arrangement was excellent. More men presented themselves than were needed; they paraded for instruction with enthusiasm, and they made excellent progress; and most of them would have preferred *not* to be sent home.

To make due provision for defending the frontier of Eritrea, a few salient points, and the fortresses of Massawa and Asmara, a mass of artillery of different calibres was needed. There was nothing on the spot but the guns and ammunition of the existing forts, which we should have to make more efficient. It was necessary, also, to form a reserve of artillery, and we should have to provide ammunition for the number of days of active service which we calculated we should have to allow, both for the existing artillery and for that which would be sent out.

From 1933 onwards, with my military staff, on the basis of information supplied by the Commandant of Troops in Eritrea, an approximate estimate was worked out. In 1934, given the kind of operations to be undertaken, and their possible scope, it was possible, by making exact and parsimonious calculations, to determine just what would be needed as regards the classes, calibres and quantities of guns and shells. Our figures were checked and approved by the Ministry for War and the Staff Corps Command.

Now the first conference with the Duce took place. I attended the conference with the Under-Secretary for War, the Chief of the War Cabinet, and the head of the military bureau of the Ministry for the Colonies.

Without hesitation, after listening to my exposition, the Duce decided what artillery the Ministry for War was to supply *immediately* to the Ministry for the Colonies. The Duce undertook that the War Administration should be indemnified immediately (as it was) for the artillery thus transferred.

All particulars relating to transport and despatch to the Colony were settled between the Under-Secretary for War and myself, with that cordial exchange of ideas which is characteristic *only* of us soldiers, stimulated by the unsurpassed spirit of devotion to the Duce and to Fascism.

With the artillery a number of heavy machine-guns were supplied, with the necessary ammunition.

The stores of military uniforms and equipment at Asmara and Mogasdiscio contained only such supplies as were indispensable in time of peace, with a small reserve for unforeseen circumstances.

I have stated the numbers of the troops which it was intended to mobilize. *The existing supplies in the two above-mentioned magazines had to be multiplied by about 20.*

As far as possible, uniforms were manufactured on the spot, the raw material, a particular quality of

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

khaki cloth, being imported from India, where it was obtainable at a very reasonable price—for one thing, because it had not had to pass through the Suez Canal. But since the capacity of the local manufacture was infinitely inferior to the demand, the greater part of the equipment for the native troops was made in Italy and sent out to the Colony.

* * *

The Commandant of the Royal Army Corps of Eritrea, with the consent and the assistance of the Governor, proceeded on his own initiative to deal with the problem of the provisional establishment of magazines and arsenals for the guns, ammunition, uniforms and equipment, etc., sufficient to meet the needs of the coloured troops.

I have said “provisional establishment.” As a matter of fact, it would not have been opportune to undertake the construction of substantial warehouses, or even simple sheds, for a system of stores and magazines while the constitution of what was afterwards the operating force was not yet determined. Remember that all that I have hitherto related happened in 1934. Moreover, there were no funds to allow of anything further; and further, the systematization of everything relating to the establishments of the Intendancy was the concern of the Intendant, who was the principal and responsible judge of such matters, acting on the information of the Commandant and his Staff, and in accordance

with the changing conditions due to the movements of the troops and the probable nature of operations.

One essential question claimed my attention: that of the military hospitals.

In the whole Colony there were only two hospitals: one at Asmara and one at Massawa.

The first of these was good; it was being enlarged, but was already sufficient for the ordinary needs of the Colony. The second was a very modest establishment, and had not the systematic equipment proper to a hospital in a tropical country.

In this matter of hospitals, as in every other department, it was the lack of available funds that had made it impossible to do things that could usefully have been done long before.

I was especially preoccupied with the possible requirements on the high table-land, where the greatest agglomeration of troops would occur. I did not expect to send white troops into the two torrid belts (although Italian troops had lived and fought in the eastern lowlands from 1885 to 1889), nor could I then foresee that it would be necessary to send thousands of our labourers to the Colony.

Speaking from experience, and also from hearsay, the climate of the plateau is excellent; but given the altitude—from 6,000 to 8,000 feet above sea-level—together with the latitude, those who live there must have hearts in perfect condition and absolutely sound lungs, especially if they are to adapt them-

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

selves to the great differences of the diurnal and nocturnal temperatures.

I have had occasion to observe that men of mature years (I never use the adjective "old") resist the climate better than young men. The young must not take this amiss; they too will reach maturity and acquire the maximum of resistance one day. I, who am getting on for seventy, have never spent a day in bed and have never suffered from breathlessness.

On the other hand, the climate of the lowlands, and especially that of the eastern lowlands, has all the drawbacks of a tropical climate, and not all white men can adapt themselves to it.

It was necessary to think of the great numbers of the sick who would have to be provided for when reinforcements arrived from Italy, and also of the wounded.

For service with the troops there was the question of obtaining in time the necessary number of medical officers and field hospitals, and a larger supply of the means of transport; but *the* problem was that of the base hospitals.

Here again, before fixing an estimate, it was necessary to know the strength of the forces in the field. In the meantime we arrived at a provisional estimate that we should need 10,000 bedsteads; but actual work had to be limited to speeding up the enlargement of the Asmara hospital, improving that

of Massawa, selecting sites, and considering the possibilities of building hospitals elsewhere, and also convalescent depôts and fever hospitals.

In Somalia the requirements were less; but owing to the enormous area of the Colony, and the distances involved, we were keenly conscious of the lack of settlements and hospitals in the interior. But the assiduous efforts of Governor Rava and a liberal subvention from the Ministry made it possible to improve the situation even in that Colony.

Little, however, could be done in the way of foreseeing the nature of the military operations; here one could only make estimates and select the sites that seemed to be most suitable for hospitals.

In Somalia the climate is very different from that of Eritrea; it is much worse, and has all the treacherous qualities of tropical climates. Hence the question of hygiene had to be considered; and it was considered, and special measures were decided upon, which were afterwards approved by the specialist in tropical diseases, Senator Castellani.

IV

POLITICAL PREPARATIONS

I SHALL be very brief in dealing with this aspect of our enterprise, confining myself to such definite action as was taken after the famous treaty of friendship of 1925.

Until after 1896 there was no true period of peace and friendship with Ethiopia. Governor Martini was the first to succeed in initiating and maintaining neighbourly relations with Abyssinia. These friendly relations were largely due to the fact that this excellent Governor spent ten consecutive years in the Colony. Nothing is more harmful to the Colonies than a frequent change of Governor. The native is a respecter only of persons; when he has become attached to a Governor, and learned to trust him, he will give himself to him body and soul. But when he sees the Governor changed he cannot enter into all the reasons, which may even be political, that have made the change desirable and necessary; he distrusts the newcomer, who generally has to serve a long novitiate before he can win the native's confidence and esteem.

Also it must be remembered that the Abyssinians, although they were victorious, recalled Adowa with

terror. The carnage they suffered on that day was still rankling.

In Italy the successive Governments, whatever their political shade, were agreed in one particular: they had no colonial ambitions.

Hence no one had the remotest idea of the possibility of fresh African wars. We had ceded Kassala to the English. We were therefore in no danger, even from the Mahdist side; the more so as Mahdism was already completely decadent.

This being so, one may say that no definite policy was being followed in respect of Abyssinia, although we adhered to the agreements with France and England as regards the fixing of various zones of influence on Abyssinian territory.

The Libyan war showed us that Abyssinia had no desire to create difficulties. The Abyssinians raised no objection to the mobilization of the various battalions which we sent to Tripolitania and Cirenaica, nor did they place any obstacle in the way of the extensive recruiting of askaris beyond the frontier.

When the Great War broke out Ethiopia kept us under observation. There was some excitement in the country among the nationalists and the xenophobes. Our entry into the conflict astonished the Abyssinians, for they had no great opinion of our military power and possibilities. This doubt as to the efficiency of our army, and even the valour of

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

our soldiers, was partly due to the memory of Adowa, which was more and more distorted as the years went by; but mainly to the bad reputation given to us by all Europeans, without exception, who entered the country.

There is no doubt, moreover, that the Abyssinians had thoughts of profiting by the engagement of all our forces in Europe to attack us and clear us out of Eritrea.

The nature of our alliances, and also the internal disturbances following upon the death of Menelik, made them desist from any warlike designs.

The advent of Fascism put an end to the separate interests of the Colonial Government and the Nation. Although the attention of the Ministry was at first directed mainly to Libya, and especially to Tripolitania, which, one might say, was almost lost, and had to be reconquered, the two eastern Colonies were not neglected; people began, at all events, to be conscious of their existence.

Our political relations with Ethiopia, coming under the head of external politics, were the province of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, though this Ministry did not fail to bring them to the notice of the Colonial Office. The majority of the consuls, consular agents and commercial residents in Ethiopia were Colonial officials, and as such did not fail to keep in close touch with the Ministry which they represented.

But as we were far from entertaining the notion that we should one day have to settle accounts with the neighbouring native Power, our policy as regards Ethiopia was still based on the principle of preserving friendly and neighbourly relations with that country, so as to increase trade. However, certain circumstances, which were due mainly to the question of the succession to the Abyssinian throne, and a realistic view of our future, made us begin to consider what line of conduct we ought to follow in our own exclusive interest, not only at the present time, but also in the future.

Only one kind of political action is possible and practical when one sees in the background a possibility of conflict. Such political action is of greater value when the Power which may be opposed to us is not on the same level of civilization as ourselves, and when its methods of government are such as to permit of abuses, and give rise to internal dissensions.

In such contingencies one must consider carefully which side it will be expedient to take; further, one must foster ambitions and dissensions, and spend money—a great deal of money.

Venality is a natural characteristic of inferior peoples; it is rampant among the ruling classes of Abyssinia and the Coptic clergy.

After Ras Tafari's visit to London, Paris and Rome we too had recognized his right of succession

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

to the throne of Solomon. This recognition was followed by the treaty of friendship of 1925; hence it was natural to suppose that our policy would be to support the central power.

But it soon appeared that we were mistaken. The same policy was being followed by the representatives of France and Great Britain at the Court of Addis Ababa. Ras Tafari had received a French education; as will be readily understood, his sympathies were entirely for France, and then for Great Britain, of whose power he had the most exaggerated idea. This being the case, we were held of little account in Addis Ababa, and what is more, we were becoming estranged from various Rases who had manifested an unconcealed sympathy for us.

Ras Tafari's government, however, was neither strong nor secure. He was haunted by the fear that he might one day be supplanted by Ligg Jassù, although the latter was kept in safe custody, and he was made uneasy by the turbulence of those Rases who either laid claim to the throne or supported the pretenders.

In this situation we could have intervened with great effect. We altered our course, initiating a peripheral policy, but it was not as shrewd as it should have been. It must be admitted that the general atmosphere and particular circumstances put difficulties in the way of our diplomatists—

partly, it must be confessed, because we had not as yet a definite programme—and we were still rather fearful of risking an adventurous course.

There was in Eritrea a very shrewd Governor, His Excellency Gasparini, who had gained the confidence of those leading chieftains who were not friends of the Negus. He took no advantage of this, considering that the time was not propitious, and allowed Ras Olié's revolt to take its own course. Had we supported this revolt, if only by the despatch of arms and money, a situation might have resulted which would have been greatly in our favour.

In this contingency there were those who asked themselves whether France and England would have allowed us to proceed. I believe the thing could have been done with Fascist audacity. I must add, however, that we were not ready. But in the minds of these long-sighted people who can see far ahead into history—and they are very few—was formed the idea of a direct intervention in the internal affairs of Ethiopia.

The rebellion having been suppressed by the central Government, Ras Tafari acquired greater authority, so that he was able to initiate the centralizing policy which permitted him to crown himself Emperor, and gradually to replace the Rases, chieftains and governors whom he did not trust by loyal subjects.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

While this may have tended to give the impression that the whole of Abyssinia was a solid block in the hands of the Emperor, it was actually nothing of the sort. Personal differences, discontent, and envy were still at work, and to these one must add the displeasure of the people, who saw their chieftains, members of traditional families to whom obedience was traditional, replaced by officials who thought firstly of making money, and in the second place of doing the will of the Negus Neghesti, without troubling themselves about the interests, much less the well-being, of the regions under their control.

On our side the conception of peripheral politics was put into execution with a degree of success which it was not possible to estimate exactly; but in Tigré, where there was an ever-increasing tension between the elder Ras Gugsà and Ras Sioum, we succeeded in sounding Gugsà, who was really a friend of Italy, and counter-balancing Ras Sioum's power in Tigré. But Gugsà, who had a grudge against the Emperor, owing to the division of territory under the governors, died in 1933, and his son, the Degiac, a man of much less influence and intelligence than his father, remained loyal to us, and gave proof of his loyalty after the outbreak of hostilities.

A really active policy was pursued in Ethiopia in 1935 after the constitution of the political bureau

attached to the High Command, in close touch with our legation at Addis Ababa, which had received categorical instructions in this connection from the Duce.

Colonel Ruggero (of the Bersaglieri) was appointed head of the political bureau; until 1934 he had been military attaché in Addis Ababa. With his profound knowledge of men, of the political atmosphere, and of feints and subterfuges, he was able to build up a special network of reliable informers, which enabled him to keep in direct touch with the chiefs of the peoples whom we wished to influence. Two officers of the reserve, who had spent forty years in the Colony, and had been entrusted with important missions beyond the frontier, were appointed to co-operate with him. They had succeeded in gaining the goodwill of the natives by their keen sense of justice, and by the way in which they had always considered the interests of the peoples among whom they had exercised their functions. These officers were of the greatest use to us, especially after we had crossed the frontier.

Parallel with the work done by the political bureau was the continuous work of the intelligence bureau. This was also of the greatest service, thanks to the sources of information which it possessed, even beyond the frontier, which information was often of considerable value.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

It may seem that the functions of these two departments overlapped; but this is not so. Their work was carried on in different fields of activity, which need not be more definitely specified here. The political bureau worked for the most part in contact with the troops on active service.

The Staff of the High Command made use of both sources of information, and verified their reliability.

The political bureau and the intelligence service were not stinted financially, and this fact—apart from the unquestionable ability of the officers appointed to them—was one of the chief conditions of their efficient operation.

And here I must record the fact that the political bureau, in addition to its regular personnel, had the advantage of two most valuable collaborators: Baron Franchetti and Senator Gasparini, the ex-governor of Eritrea.

Baron Franchetti, a noted African explorer, had traversed Danakil during the last few years, pushing far south, and had a thorough knowledge of the topography of this region, and of its peoples and their chieftains. He had written a very interesting account of his explorations, and had corrected the unreliable maps of the region, especially in respect of the most valuable data: communications and water-supplies.

The Ministry had assisted him on this expedition,

though it was undertaken entirely at his own expense. It was Baron Franchetti's aim to gain the friendship of the Danakil chiefs, and also—which for us was of very great importance—of the Sultans of Birù and Aussa, with whom we had already had relations; but we had not been able to rely on the word of these untrustworthy people.

The advantage of being on friendly terms with these populations is obvious; it meant for us, in the event of an advance towards the South, that our left flank would not be menaced, and further, that we should be able to threaten the left flank of the enemy, and the third part of the enemy forces, drawn up to the north of Dessié.

In February 1935 Baron Franchetti returned to Eritrea, and I entrusted him with the task of continuing the work which he had begun on his previous expedition—that of winning the friendship of the Danakil and the people of Aussa.

He settled down at Beilul, where he set to work with alacrity and success. His tragic death deprived us of a vigilant, practical and disinterested collaborator.

Senator Gasparini, as I have said, during his five years of office as Governor of Eritrea, had been in close touch with the chieftains of those regions which were less averse to the Italians, and in which, on the contrary, we had many sympathizers. I must once more observe that during the first

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

few years of the Fascist Government no definite line had been laid down for our East African policy, nor even a definite aim. Gasparini, however, quite rightly considered that his line of conduct would promote the prosperity of the Colony of which he was Governor, and, looking well ahead, would afford us a useful pretext in the event of our intervening in the always troublous internal situation of Abyssinia. Gasparini, who was responsible for utilizing the water of the River Gash (a possibility already investigated and recommended by Governor Martin), subsequently founding the Tessenei factory for the cultivation of cotton, visited the Colony yearly after he had ceased to be its Governor. This enabled him to keep alive his contacts and relations with personages beyond the frontier who had continued to regard him with esteem and affection. For these reasons, and also because of the man's intrinsic ability, the Duce, with my enthusiastic approval, sent him to me to Eritrea.

His work, which proved to be of the highest value, and of great advantage to our military operations, was begun immediately, without anyone being aware of it, since he settled down, as he had always done, near the Tessenei factory, of which he was the president. He professed to be looking after his own interests, and on the pretext that he was there on business he received persons from beyond

the frontier, and sent his own emissaries across it. Senator Gasparini was also on good terms with the English authorities in Kassala and Khartoum, and this had the result that we had no trouble from the direction of the Sudan.

Preparatory work was done in all parts of Ethiopia, but most intensively and with the greatest advantage in the following regions: Semien, Gojjam, Beghemeder, Dongola-Agammeder, Menià, Blesà, Denkbré, Wollo and Wollo Woghera, Ermaniò, Tzeghedé, Wolachit, Kafta, Woldebà, Salenti, Azebò Galla, Aussa, and the Sultanate of Birù.

It can be of no interest to go into greater detail and particularise what was done in the regions named. I believe that those who had special charge of these important services will write of them; also there will be the official account, which will specify as much as the public has the right to know. The important thing to understand is this: *That from the very outset of the campaign there were signs of the results of this disintegrating political action, and that it deprived our enemy of at least 200,000 men, who either did not take up arms, or who, although enrolled and armed, remained inert.*

V

FIRST INCIDENTS

WHILE ALL that I have hitherto described was being accomplished, no hostile action of any particular importance had yet been recorded on the part of the Ethiopians; except, indeed, that warlike speeches were made in commemoration of Adowa, while at the close of every official banquet hymns of battle were sung, containing prophecies of the day when the horses of the Lion of Judah would be watered in the sea, and other rodomontades. The only concrete facts were the attacks upon our mails committed by marauders, and the incivility shown to Italian residents or travellers in Abyssinia by native officials and agents. But these incidents had always been followed by a peremptory demand for satisfaction, which had always been obtained.

In November 1934 came the attack upon our consulate in Gondar. The facts are well known. The firm attitude of the local Italian authorities, and the prompt intervention of Rome, with an emphatic demand for reparation addressed to the Government at Addis Ababa, gave full moral satisfaction to Italy, and compensation to Italian

subjects who had suffered injury. Then came the so-called incident of Wal-Wal.

I need not revert to the facts, which, after all that has happened, have not even a retrospective interest. The Italians and the foreign Press have referred to them only too often ; our journals with the most perfect respect for the truth, but foreign newspapers—especially the British—in a spirit of absolute bad faith.

This attitude of the foreign Press served to warn us of the behaviour we might expect from the foreign Powers, although no one imagined that they would go to the length of hurling threats at us, or imposing sanctions.

It was already decided that I should go to East Africa, although no definite date had been fixed for my departure; but I had hardly returned from accompanying His Majesty the King to Somalia when the Duce said to me : “ I believe it will be advisable for you to anticipate your departure.”

Well, it was then December ; I decided to sail the following month, by the steamer which left Naples on the 7th of each month. And on the 7th January, 1935, I quietly set sail for Eritrea, still in the quality of Minister for the Colonies.

The Duce had decided that on my arrival I should assume the office of High Commissioner for East Africa.

There was no doubt whatever that if there were

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

to be any warlike operations in these parts they would spread to the Somalia front, and on our side they would have to be concurrent, necessitating a single political and military control.

For this reason, while together with my functions as High Commissioner I assumed the Governorship of Eritrea, Somalia too was dependent on me in political questions not of an internal character, and also in military matters.

This dependence, of course, had to be understood in a very wide sense, since at a distance of 2,500 miles it would be foolish to attempt to have a finger in every pie. The man on the spot must of necessity be allowed a great deal of liberty and initiative ; and I behaved accordingly, the more so as I had full and entire confidence in the Governor of Somalia. And in the purely military field I knew I could rely on General Frusci, who went out with me to assume the command of the Somalian forces, which, as they were being greatly increased in strength, required a commandant of higher rank than a colonel.

The Duce's instructions were as follows : " You leave with the olive-bough in your pocket ; we shall see how the Wal-Wal affair turns out. If it suits us to accept the conditions offered us in consequence of the award you will inform the Emperor of your assumption of the post of High Commissioner, telling him that you have been sent

out to clear up any misunderstandings and to collaborate in establishing friendly relations in the moral and material interests of the two States. In the meantime continue to make active preparations such as you would make in view of the more difficult and adverse outcome of the affair.

“ If no solution of the incident is offered, or if it is not such as to satisfy us, we shall follow subsequent events *exclusively in accordance with our own standpoint.*”

About this time the conversations with Laval took place in Rome, which gave us reason to hope that if we did have to take action in East Africa France would put no obstacle in our way.

I reached Massawa on the 16th January ; and from this date began my labours as High Commissioner.

On accepting this post I was persuaded that I could not set to work with the scrupulosity which is proper to the ordinary administration. It is my custom to give free scope to the initiative of my subordinates, always, however, assuming the responsibility for their actions, and for this reason keeping track of even the smallest details. The public forms its judgment on particulars rather than on broad conceptions ; and rightly ; but little regard is paid to the details of their execution.

In my own case, with the little time at my disposal, it was evident that the political problems,



Eritrean dignitaries.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

and above all, the military preparations, would take up all my time ; so I left all other matters (although these were daily assuming greater importance) to Vice-Governor Gabelli, a very upright, prompt, and practical official, whom I myself had selected, and to whom I can never be sufficiently grateful for the assistance which he afforded me.

I got through the usual tiresome but necessary function of the various introductions in an afternoon. I received the Ethiopian attaché privately ; an arrant rascal, with a certain degree of Western culture, but with the mentality of a xenophobe, and a hater of Italy. I told him what I should have to tell the Emperor if the results of the Wal-Wal incident took another turn. Of course, I was absolutely convinced that he did not believe me, and I was right ; but at any rate he too was profuse in his protestations of his genuine desire to co-operate in the maintenance of cordial relations.

* * *

Even before leaving Italy I had drawn up a systematic programme of all that I should have to do.

And now that I was on the spot, when I re-examined this programme, having noted, though somewhat hastily, what had already been effected, I confess that I was impressed, though not dismayed.

At first sight the Colony, in this month of January, was still as quiet, and I might say apathetic, as when I had visited it two years earlier. The harbour

was empty ; but from the railway I could see a few groups of labourers on various stretches of the Massawa-Asmara road. Asmara still seemed the quiet village-like capital of old.

In short, almost everything remained to be done. Courage ! *The essential thing was to get to work and to mean business !*

My first tasks, in order of precedence, were to mobilize the native Army Corps, to make provision for the contingent of Italian troops which would have to be sent out, to set men to work on the roads and wells, and to establish magazines and hospitals.

This order of precedence corresponded with my notion of the relative importance of the various operations, but it goes without saying that they were all carried out simultaneously.

The composition of the contingent of Italian troops which would have to be sent out to East Africa had not yet been decided upon. It was calculated that at most three Divisions of infantry would be despatched to Eritrea, with a proportion of technical troops considerably larger than would normally have accompanied such a unit, even if organized as an Army Corps. The reason for this will be understood. It was easy to foresee that the task of the engineer detachments and specialists, in a country without roads, railways and telegraphs, would be strenuous in the extreme. Moreover, it

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

was necessary to provide for the ever-increasing needs of the Colony itself.

I might repeat this *ad nauseam*, yet those who have never been to Eritrea would never be able to realize that there was *nothing* there, that we *absolutely could not rely on the local resources for anything*.

What there was would perhaps have sufficed for the population and the ordinary garrison ; but no more. Any additional mouths would have to be fed from Italy or Egypt or India, from sources outside the Colony ; in short, imports were a necessity. And if the political skies grew dark the only source of supply would be Italy, and then everything would have to make the costly passage of the Suez Canal.

At first it was not considered that it would be necessary to despatch Italian troops to Somalia, apart from some strong nuclei of specialists; these would have to be sent, for the reasons already explained, and also because for certain special purposes the native absolutely cannot take the place of the white man.

The Air Force, one may say, had to be created in both Colonies, where there were only a few independent squadrons with low-powered machines.

The Duce, who quite rightly expected great things of the employment of aeroplanes, had already decided that 250 machines should be sent to Eritrea and 50 to Somalia.

And even in the matter of making provision for

these aeroplanes, *everything* remained to be done. As I have already indicated, the aerodromes of Otumlo and Asmara were enlarged and improved, and various modest and temporary aviation camps were constructed; but all this, of course, was quite inadequate for such a powerful fleet as it was intended to send out to the Colony.

The construction of airports was included in the estimate of the urgent work to be done in addition to all the other indispensable tasks.

Before leaving for Eritrea, in my capacity of Minister for the Colonies, I came to an understanding with the Minister for War and the Air Minister, that certain generals and other officers of the higher ranks should at once be sent out to East Africa, to superintend the mobilization, to organize the troops as they were gradually incorporated, to supervise the work of the engineers, and to lay the foundations of the aerial Armada which the Duce was anxious to create. A good many of these officers (for whom I had specially asked, as they were known to me and had served in the Colony) went out on the same boat as myself.

Everything relating to the army and the native troops in particular I entrusted to the excellent and experienced Commandant of the Army Corps, General Cubeddu, who—as I have already stated—had made a start with the work of mobilization before my arrival.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

I was accompanied to Eritrea by an Air Force officer, a brigadier-general, who had formerly been entrusted with reconnaissance work in both Eritrea and Somalia, so that he had already formed an accurate idea of what was most urgently necessary, and had therefore drawn up a programme of work which had been approved by the Air Minister and myself.

Only a few days after my arrival I wished to convince myself of the progress of the work on the roads—or, to be exact, of the work on the main artery, the road from Massawa to Asmara. I had already heard it stated here and there that it was impossible to complete such a Cyclopean task in the ten months available. Such rumours had even reached Italy, where they were eagerly swallowed by the many defeatists. I was by no means discouraged ; I must confess, however, that having inspected the work on the road, I too found that it was greatly in arrears, although the task had been vigorously attacked.

I sent for the engineer officer in charge of the work, and the representative of the contractor, who explained why the work was progressing so slowly. Essentially, the delay was due to an insufficiency of labourers, and to the small output of the black labour employed.

I was anxious to hear the opinion of the engineer officers of higher rank who had been sent out to

Eritrea, in order to organize new commands and service corps. *All expressed themselves as doubtful of the possibility of finishing the work by October.* I, on the other hand, was *bound* to redeem the promise I had given, *without reserve*, to the Duce.

* * *

I had formerly considered the problem of employing white labour, and at first I had not thought it possible to send for Italian labourers. Although I knew that the Fascist Government had disciplined our labourers, and had inspired many of them with enthusiasm, I felt that it would be extremely difficult to provide for a great body of navvies in addition to the troops ; for it was easy to foresee that the whole labour force would depend for the necessaries of life on the Intendancy of the Army Corps.

Hence for the moment I restricted myself to asking the Chief for three battalions of Blackshirts, to be employed as labourers. They were granted me immediately, and were the first Italian troops to arrive in the Colony. They were set to work at once.

A fortnight later it was obvious to me that these 2,500 Blackshirts were like a mere drop in the ocean. I then took the fence, and asked without further preamble for another 10,000 labourers.

I was induced to do this by the fact that the natives were being gradually called up by the

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

military authorities, while many of them deserted their task in order to enlist. In order to stop this pernicious exodus I was compelled to enrol the native labourers in companies and treat them as if they were under arms.

The Chief assured me by telegraph that I should have the labourers within a month, during which time steps were taken to prepare conditions which would respond to the demands of hygiene, and also ensure them a certain degree of comfort.

I should depart from my customary candour if I were to conceal the fact that these first batches of labourers gave me trouble in various directions.

It was of course impossible to think of finding quarters for them all, or even, at first, of putting up barracks for them. The time and the men necessary for this would have been deducted from the imperative work of road-making. For this reason the majority were put into tents. It should be noted, however, that we were then in the best season as regards the plateau, and that in the beginning no white labour was sent into the lowlands.

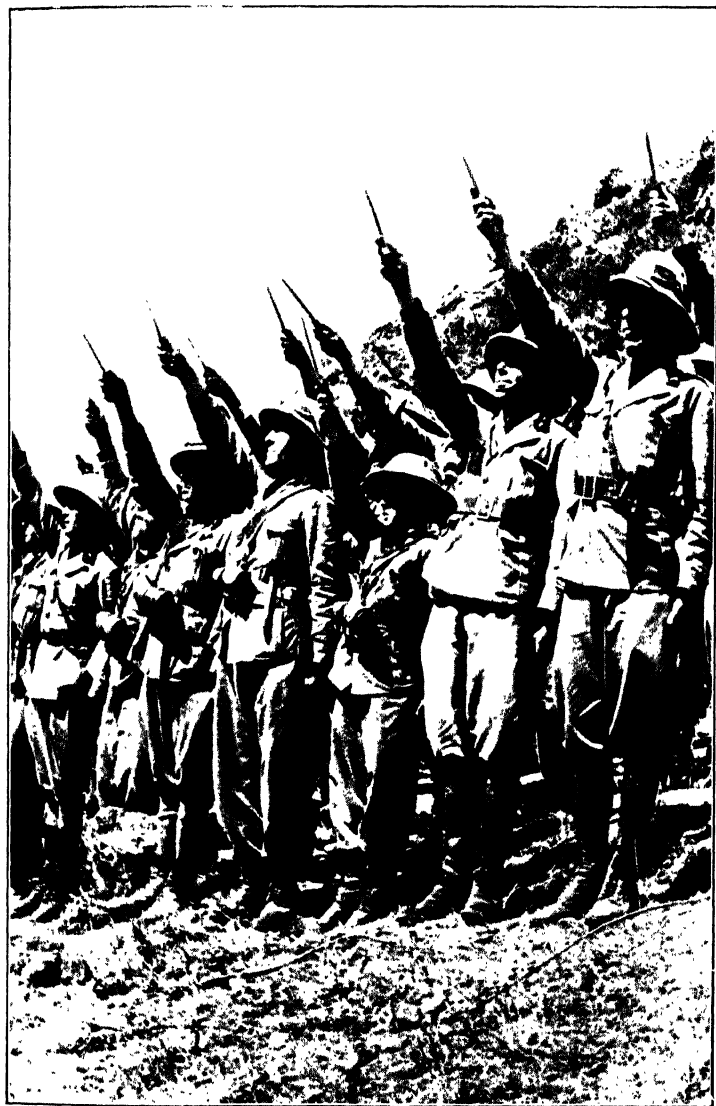
In practice, I wanted the labourer to be treated as a soldier. For was he not really a soldier? Was not he too working for the glory of the Motherland? I may say, without fear of contradiction, that in these first batches of labourers just anyone was sent out; no selection had been exercised, and no warranty was given of physical or moral soundness.

There were men among them who had never held a pick or shovel ; there were 12 schoolmasters, 4 chemists, 3 lawyers, 9 watchmakers, and several barbers.

On the other hand, a number of Federal Secretaries—responsible for the despatch of such undesirables—kept on complaining to the Secretary of the Party of the bad treatment inflicted on the labourers from their province, basing their criticisms on Italian standards, and accepting as pure gold all the lies that were told them.

And both the Secretary of the Party and the Administration passed all these complaints on to me, and I was filled with righteous wrath. For I conscientiously took it upon myself to visit every cantonment, and I sent thither officers whose *sole* duty it was to supervise the arrangements made for the labourers, and in every case I was fully convinced of the falsity of the accounts given by certain mischief-makers.

For the general run of the labourers, they were good, as Italian labourers are. That they found it depressing to be so far from their homes and families goes without saying ; but they cheered up when they thought of the fine sum of money they would be able to put by for the near future. I was inflexible with mischief-makers and idlers and malingerers, and the result of such behaviour was that the men always cheered me when I appeared in the can-



Blackshirts saluting with lifted daggers.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

tonments and chatted with the labourers. I have enlarged upon this question of the labour force in the Colony, because—for devious and underhand reasons—all sorts of shameful lies have been told about it.

These wicked untruths have been refuted by the heroic and orderly behaviour of the great mass of workers, who serenely faced every sacrifice and every danger ; the progressive increase in the number of labourers, which from 10,000 in February rose to 50,000 in October, and later on to an even larger figure ; and the amount of savings sent home to Italy.

True, there were some who fell ill and even died, as a result of the inclemency of the climate, when they were compelled to work in the lowlands also. It should be noted, however, that the labourers in the lowlands and the malarial belts *were all volunteers*, and were paid as much as 45 lire a day.

The arrival of the various batches of labourers was followed by the immediate speeding up of the work. For my part, I no longer had any doubt that we should have by the time appointed a road capable of taking any amount of traffic in both directions ; but if the reader is to form an idea of the difficulties to be overcome he must bear in mind not only the asperities of the soil, the great differences of level, the frequent necessity of covering considerable distances to get water, or flint for

ballasting the road-surface, and the extensive blasting operations ; he must also realize *that all the work of road-making and the operations involved had to be carried on in such a way as to permit of the continuous use of the road* ; for however difficult this might be, this was the *only* road available, so that supplies of every kind had to be conveyed by it.

Simultaneously with the work on the road, work was done towards improving the railway, in order to increase its capacity. All the work on the permanent way and the stations was done with exemplary speed ; inevitably the rolling-stock, on the other hand, was comparatively slow in arriving. It had to be sent from Italy, and then, to a certain extent owing to deficiency of material, and also—in some degree—perhaps even very largely—to bureaucratic obstruction, there was a good deal of delay. It was August before the line was working at its full capacity. In May, however, the traffic had already increased by 500 per cent. ; instead of two pairs of trains we had twelve, and there were also two passenger cars daily, which kept perfect time, and reduced the journey from Massawa to Asmara from five hours to three.

By the beginning of March the southward movement from Asmara, and in particular towards what was to become our first line of occupation, was greatly intensified. New batteries were formed and armed, and the existing fortifications were completed

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

and improved. The advanced garrisons had been strengthened, and lastly, we had begun to establish advanced magazines, and intensive work was being done on the water supply.

All this involved a daily coming and going of carts and motor-cars which the existing road, narrow and poorly ballasted, and terribly crooked (for instance, between Adi Cajé and Senafé—a distance of 18 miles—there were 1,200 turns in the road) was quite incapable of carrying. I have already indicated that all this was part of the fixed programme ; the work had to be done at once, with the stipulation that even this secondary artery would have to be asphalted, for otherwise, owing to the dust, it would have been useless for heavy traffic. *The field of road-making was open to all competitors.* The Ministry for the Colonies invited tenders from all firms qualified to undertake work in the Colonies. A large number of firms came forward. There had been talk in Italy of monopolies, of favouritism, of the impossibility of getting work out of the Governor of the Colony. Nothing could have been more untrue. It would have been more to the point, unfortunately, to state how many firms, when they saw the conditions under which they would have to work, simply quitted the field; when some other firm tried to tackle the job, but was unable to put it through.

The Italian habit—which not even Fascism has

succeeded in eradicating—of inventing unpleasant fictions as a sort of relish had attained an extraordinary development in the mother country. The echoes reached the Colony; moreover, people came out with reliable information relating to changes of those in authority—even to the High Commissioner himself—and galleys that were ready to receive the exploiters and profiteers!

All this was powerless to cause the ever-accelerating rhythm of labour to miss a single beat. The will of the Duce, the persuasive force of the facts, and the positive sense of my onerous responsibility gave me heart to endure all these malicious insinuations. Still, they were doing the perverse work of the defeatists, and they always ended by accomplishing a certain amount of harm.

To supervise the work of road-making a distinguished and long-experienced official of the Ministry of Public Works was sent out to Eritrea.

To avoid overlapping and harmful interference I established a clear division between the different categories of labour, and the consequent work of supervision and direction by competent technicians, each of whom thus had control of a different undertaking in the respective sectors.

It goes without saying that the unity of aim and the distribution of labour were controlled by the High Command of the East African Engineers then in formation.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

At the same time colossal preparations were made by the Air Force. The Minister for Aviation had himself issued orders for this work to be executed, of course, with the approval of the High Commissioner.

As I have already said, provision was made for improving the aerodromes of Otumlo and Asmara, but what had been done was by no means sufficient for the dimensions which the Air Force would have to attain. The basic programme comprised : Completion of the Otumlo camp—enlargement and equipment of the Assab camp (which was afterwards shifted). This Assab aviation camp might have become very important, as it shortened the route to Dessié and Addis Ababa by some sixty miles. As things turned out, however, it was not used as much as it might have been.—The extensive transformation, or rather the re-making of the Asmara camp, and the construction *ex novo* of the central camp of Gura, which was to serve as the principal base of manœuvre of our operations in the air.

The work to be done at these last two camps assumed gigantic proportions. At the first, in order that it might be used in the rainy season, a cement platform was laid down for the taking off and landing of aeroplanes of any type, even under the least favourable conditions as to wind. The Gura aerodrome became one of the largest aviation

camps in the world. In order to complete it various little hills had to be razed to the ground, and also a whole village, for whose inhabitants a much cleaner and more convenient hamlet was built at the charge of the Government.

The aerodrome of Asmara was equipped with everything indispensable for complete functioning : quarters for officers and men, water mains, a large workshop, stores of benzine, and several capacious hangars, having room, altogether, for 60 aeroplanes of whatever type and size. These hangars rose from the ground with surprising celerity. They were built with materials supplied by the Saporiti firm, which also sent out the engineers and special workmen to set them up. Gura was equipped in the same way, but on a smaller scale. When the advance began only a part of the projected hangars were in the course of erection ; but in the course of operations it became evident that it was not expedient to spend time and money on constructing on this site yet another camp provided with every sort of complementary building. The essential thing to be done at the Gura camp was to enlarge it so that it could provide for the taking off, landing and housing of a large number of aeroplanes.

Work was done also on temporary camps, especially the more advanced camps of Senafé and Adi Quala, which—as I have already said—as things turned out, proved to be indispensable ; but

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

this work was a serious business ; for during the heavy rains they were like two lakes, and only after the middle of September was it possible to get them ready, at all events for pressing necessities.

* * *

Having, if not the precise, at least the approximate figures of the strength of the active troops—one Eritrean Army Corps, three Divisions of Infantry, with supply services of the Army Corps and the Army—it was possible to make the estimate of the necessary hospitals, magazines, etc., so that the instructions which I had issued when in Rome were carried out, and new military villages, so to speak, rose from the ground in the positions most convenient in relation to future needs, as far as these could be foreseen, and to the initial plan of operations : defensive with vigorous counter-offensive.

Use was made of whatever material was available locally. Wood, iron, and lime, however, were lacking everywhere, and had to be forwarded to the spot. Where this was found to be hardly convenient, stone buildings were erected ; elsewhere we had recourse to wooden barracks. I ought to observe that as far as the local craftsmen were concerned, who had long experience of the country, they were reluctant to put up wooden buildings, on account of the termites, which would destroy the foundations in a moment. I, although I appreciated this

consideration, had another in my mind : these buildings were indispensable, and would have to be ready for occupation at the earliest possible moment; they must therefore be erected; the termites would not arrive in time to undermine them, because we should finish the war first.

At any rate, we coated the foundations with tar and other suitable substances, in order to keep the destructive insects at bay as long as possible.

I am not attempting in these pages to give the exact dates and statistics of everything that was accomplished. If I have to write of tedious matters, why make things worse by a sprinkling of figures? On the other hand, for readers who are interested in such things there will probably be those who will write in detail of matters relating to the preparation and development of our logistic services. In any case, there will be published in due course the official narrative of the campaign, which will satisfy everyone. Certainly the figures would impress the reader; but I shall give as few as possible; not only for the reasons specified, but because I have neither time nor inclination to ransack the necessary documents.

* * *

I have said farther back that in Italy great anxiety was felt regarding the supposed deficiency of potable water necessary for such an extraordinary number of men and animals. As I have already

indicated, this anxiety was due to our memories of the campaign of 1896. General Baldissera, in the course of his advance upon Adigrat, was himself apprehensive because certain columns complained of the lack of water. People were saying : If there was not enough water for 16,000 men and 7,000 to 8,000 animals, how could provision be made for a force of 120,000 men and some 50,000 horses, mules and camels?

Undoubtedly the question was enough to make one apprehensive. Not because of the comparison with the 1896 campaign, which was so unfortunate for us at the outset, and which did not, during its development, permit of systematic preparation ; but because of the whole nature of the problem.

However, the reports gathered by the specialist officer who had previously been sent out to Eritrea, the information furnished by residents of long experience, and my own personal reconnaissances, removed all doubts ; there was plenty of water ; it was only necessary to prevent waste and to take proper measures for collecting it.

Operations were conducted as follows :

(1) All localities were specified where water existed, whether on the surface or in the subsoil.

(2) Localities were determined where water was needed in respect of present and future displacements of troops and establishments.

This being done, as far as possible, the water

was collected in great basins, from which a ramification of conduits led it to secondary basins.

Wells were cleaned and cisterns constructed in which water was collected during the rainy season. These cisterns were necessarily situated along the projective line of march and in localities which had been selected for *étapes*. In the course of the campaign orders were given that the water of the cisterns was not to be used unless no other water supply was at hand.

Wells, cisterns and reservoirs *were all equipped with pumps*, to avoid stirring up the water.

Each detachment was provided with travelling tanks, and fleets of motor-tanks were assembled in the neighbourhood of reservoirs and wherever there were groups of wells, so as to be prepared for any possible eventuality.

The hydrological detachments of the engineers were amalgamated and employed for this special work, with the assistance of civilian technicians and labourers. These detachments were restored to their respective units or services when operations had begun, so that they might provide for the necessities which would certainly arise beyond the frontier.

* * *

The work on the roads and aerodromes, the building of magazines and barracks, and the provision of adequate supplies of water, all of which

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

I have briefly mentioned, necessitated the despatch to Eritrea of an enormous amount of materials of all kinds. This involved the necessity of providing an equivalent amount of transport ; essentially motor traffic, while the railway did what it could, its possibilities being gradually increased, as I have already described.

In the Colony—apart from the mobilization reserves (which ought not to have been touched) of the Royal Corps—there were in all 200 motor-lorries of medium capacity and by no means in the best condition. The building contractors made ample provision for their own particular necessities, but there were also the needs of the military and civil engineers, and all the other requirements involved by the work in progress and the establishment of magazines.

I immediately sent to Italy for the necessary motor-lorries. As early as the beginning of February I foretold our future needs, urging their immediate supply. All this, of course, quite apart from the individual needs of the units on active service.

I could not obtain the required supplies from Italy as quickly as I wished : the Italian manufacturers would have needed months to provide what we needed ; but I could not manage with less than a certain proportion of what was required without compromising the advance of our preparations.

About the end of March and the beginning of April there was a period of crisis in the matter of transport which caused me great anxiety. Somehow the transport would have to be provided.

First of all, I put into use the mobilization reserve of the Royal Corps (which was consequently worn out before its time). Then I bought motor transport wherever I could. I did not obtain as much as I had hoped. Despite the truly Fascist efforts of our consuls and commercial attachés, little could be obtained from Egypt or the Sudan, hardly anything from Aden, where obstructionism was already doing us injury, and not much from Kenya. I repeat, little could be done, but that little sufficed to avert the paralysis of our transport while we were waiting for the full co-operation of the Italian manufacturers.

However, our urgent necessities had attracted the attention of firms who specialized in motor transport. They now sent representatives to study the problem on the spot, and offered to help the governmental services out of their difficulties, while reserving, of course, the right to work also for private customers.

Since the Head of the Government had sent me a telegram in which he said : " As for the transport, I give you not *carta bianca* (carte blanche) but *carta bianchissima*," I closed with these proposals, leaving the Ministry to draw up the contracts.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

There were, it is true, various drawbacks to this course: no one in the Administration would accept responsibility. The state of the roads, the unskilfulness of only too many of the drivers, and the impudence and arrogance of the more able, caused many deaths and an enormous loss of material. Further, many of the drivers who owned their lorries, and who had a water-tight bilateral contract, were tempted by the perilous attraction of the tremendous profits to be made by carrying merchandise from the sea to the high table-land. This had given rise to a flagrant lack of discipline which was absolutely intolerable at such a conjuncture. I accordingly took the surest measures against the rebels. Further, I recruited native drivers in the Sudan, and these were very satisfactory.

It should be noted here, in parenthesis, that the first detachment of troops and service corps, and even the first divisions, arrived in the Colony before the means of transport were adequate, so that the best that could be done was to provide for their most urgent needs by means of mechanical transport taken from other and important tasks.

The successive requirements conditioned by the displacement of troops and supplies meant that roads had to be traversed which were not suitable even for light motor-cars. Further, our original project of a defensive followed by a counter-offensive entailed provision for a march into enemy

territory, which was known to be absolutely devoid of good roads, and where even the paths left much to be desired. For this reason a type of small motor-lorry was considered which would carry a sufficient load and yet be able to go anywhere.

The Fiat people made an excellent car of the type, which by reason of its adaptability to any sort of ~~track~~ was known to the troops as "the Mule."

But no amount of mechanical traffic would enable us to dispense with pack-animals. The direct and proximate supply of troops cannot be effected save by means of pack-animals. They are used in Europe, and are all the more necessary in the Colonies, where the formation of the ground, and, as I have said, the paucity of roads, very largely limits the use of mechanical transport, and even of carts.

In the Italian Army the baggage-trains consist of mules, and, in exceptional cases, of horses. Almost everywhere in the Colony the camel also is used, and in some regions even the elephant.

As is widely known, there are most excellent mules in Eritrea—strong and thrifty, and almost able to climb up the wall of a house. There are plenty of these animals for normal needs: but in view of the needs of the mobilization the number available was known to be greatly inferior to the demand. I made arrangements for obtaining as

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

many as possible in Abyssinia, but partly on account of ill-feeling, and more in consequence of the turn of events, the exportation was prohibited from the end of 1934. Here and there it was possible to elude the control, and one experienced contractor managed to import mules across the Sudanese frontier, but not in sufficient numbers to supply the great deficiency.

It was therefore necessary to buy and requisition mules in Italy, and means were considered of greatly reducing the regulation numbers allotted to the detachments. We had recourse, especially for the transportation of water, to pack-trains of donkeys, of which we had some thousands, good animals which did useful service—as, for that matter, they did during the war, and later in the extensive police operations in Libya.

There are few camels in Eritrea ; on the other hand, there are plenty in Somalia, where, however, only a comparatively small proportion are used as baggage-animals.

In Eritrea the camel is used only in the lowlands : its character, and the formation of its feet, make it ill-adapted to bearing burdens in the rocky regions of the highlands. Hence there are not many in the Colony. On the other hand, it was impossible to dispense with such help. I made arrangements which resulted in our obtaining some from Egypt, a few from Yemen, and a certain number from

the Hedjaz ; and some were even brought from Tripolitania and Cirenaica.

After some little delay, and the natural process of selection, we finally had a good and plentiful supply of camels, which were of immense service to the Intendancy. Among its other known virtues the camel possesses that of needing only one driver to every five animals, and the problem of drivers was just as serious as that of the baggage-animals, perhaps even more so.

The pack-animals are only one of the many components of a baggage-train, and not the most important. Such a column requires, in addition to the animals, a commandant, veterinary officers, farriers, drivers, pack-saddles and riding-saddles.

It is not easy to command a baggage-train, and not every soldier will make a driver. In Italy officers and men of the baggage-trains of other arms and units undergo annual courses of practical instruction with the Alpine regiments and the Alpine artillery. For the requirements which were manifested during the campaign we were perforce obliged to have recourse to inexperienced people, with the result that enormous damage was done to the baggage-animals during the mobilization, the concentration of troops, and the beginning of operations. The percentage of sick and wounded animals unfit for employment rose to 37 per cent.

Among the natives it should be noted that the

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

Christians absolutely refused to serve with the baggage-trains, holding that such occupation was degrading to a warrior ; hence it was necessary to rely exclusively on the Musulman element, not very numerous in Eritrea.

To this must be added an initial lack of farriers and saddlers ; shoes and pack-saddles too large for the hinnies and even for most of the mules, so that they had to be bent in order to adapt them, and this adaptation did not always result in a proper fit, owing to the inexperience of the men.

In October, however, when the Mareb was crossed, it must be admitted that *the baggage-trains were insufficient*, and those which we had left much to be desired, even in point of discipline, and suffered greatly from wastage.

This difficulty, like many others, was gradually remedied as time went on.

At the beginning of March the Ministry called my attention to the encumbrance of Massawa harbour.

This harbour affords excellent anchorage and shelter from all winds, but was absolutely lacking in wharves and facilities for the rapid lading and discharging of the cargoes of any vessels that might enter it.

It was quite capable of dealing with normal traffic. Its worst characteristic was that it was not a harbour of export (since nearly all the trade from

the interior of Abyssinia and the Sudan converged upon Port Sudan, which, although it was rather farther than Massawa, was reached much more rapidly, thanks to the railway), and this had prevented us from doing such work upon it as would increase its capacity, as the traffic would not have repaid the cost. However, matters were improved by widening one of the quays and lengthening a breakwater. His Majesty, when he visited Massawa, was present at the inauguration of the work.

In the plans drawn up in Rome by the Ministry for the Colonies, in concordance with the Ministries for the Navy and the General Staff of the Army, it had been calculated (always on the supposition that only three Divisions would be sent out, *to be despatched under convoy*) that the harbour ought to allow of the simultaneous discharge of five steamers berthed alongside the quays. To make sure of this—still according to the plans drawn up at the Ministry for the Navy—work would have been necessitated which could not have been completed before the end of 1936, *unless it was put in hand immediately*. This opinion was expressed in the middle of 1934.

For us it was an urgent necessity that by some expedient or other cargoes should be discharged as quickly as possible directly material began to arrive.

On the advice of experienced engineers I made

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

immediate arrangements for filling up the pools of water near the Taulud sea-wall, with a view to the subsequent widening of the Regina Elena breakwater.

Further, since it was impossible to think of berthing all the vessels alongside the quays, I gave orders that the harbour should be well provided with buoys, so that the discharge of certain materials could be effected by means of lighters in the middle of the harbour and even in the roadstead. It should be stated here that the Massawa roadstead is exceptionally safe. The harbour was also equipped, some months later, with two powerful cranes : one fixed and one floating.

One task, which was immediately seen to be urgent, was the reinforcement of the roads leading to the port. These, like the rest, were absolutely inadequate, both in number and in quality, in view of the greatly increased traffic, so that we had to build others, in order as far as possible to avoid sharp turns and the hindrance due to them.

As I explained in respect of the extension work on the roads, it must be realized that in the case of the harbour also we could not wait until the work on the quays and the roads was finished and then open them to the full stream of traffic. This was not possible, since from February onwards the daily requirements were increasing in geometrical progression ; so that in spite of all efforts to prevent an excessive influx of vessels into the harbour by

regular and systematic arrangements, the Government often had to go without vital necessities, and so had the private individuals who were beginning to arrive in great numbers, either to work, or, in many cases, to trade or tempt their fortune.

We had therefore to live from hand to mouth, increasing our output in every way.

Only too many untruths have been told respecting the overcrowding of the harbour. Honest folk, on arriving from Italy, felt it incumbent upon them to call on me and express their satisfaction, for they had expected to find a chaos, whereas all that they found was a really wonderful atmosphere of intense activity.

I never felt the slightest anxiety in respect of the harbour : never !

However, an able officer, Admiral Barone, was sent out from Italy in order to direct the work to be undertaken in the roadstead and the harbour. Appointed Commissioner, dependent on the Intendancy, he superintended the work of discharging and lading the vessels.

Towards May we began to adopt the creek of Dakiat, to the north of Massawa, for the discharging of vessels, and this proved to be of great utility.

A few cargoes, principally forage and straw, were unloaded in the Bay of Arkiko.

The Air Force had decided to equip the Bay of Zula for the disembarkation of its material.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

It may be noted that in 1868 the whole of Lord Napier's expedition was disembarked at Zula. Something still remained of the works then constructed, and it was thought that this could be utilized. But nothing could be done there ; mainly because it would have been necessary to build a road from Zula to the high table-land : an impossible idea. When it came to the point the firm which had intended to undertake the construction of the road declared that it could not do so. *And so all the cumbersome Air Force material was disembarked at Massawa and was forwarded to its destination by the famous road, and no one suffered the smallest inconvenience.*

*“ Bella immortal benefica
Fede ai trionfi avvezza.”*

That is antiquated poetry, the sort that is rhymed and has a capital letter at the beginning of each line ; perhaps this structural form, which has now gone out of fashion, has too little regard for what the verses say.

Assuredly it was faith and faith only that enabled us, who had the most solemn responsibilities, to go serenely ahead and to succeed, notwithstanding the manœuvres of only too many native ill-wishers.

It is no use : at a distance of 2,500 miles it is impossible to obtain, by reading the papers, a just idea of the immensity of our task, of which we have every right to be proud.

Reverting to the encumbrance of the harbour, so constantly lamented in Italy, I do not wish to give this book a polemical tone ; otherwise I should have to dwell upon this point, citing facts to show that the massing of goods on the quays, and the great number of vessels anchored in the roadstead with their cargoes undischarged, were due, to begin with, to the unpractical manner in which the freights were stowed at Naples. I will cite only one example : All the cumbersome, heavy material for wire entanglements was stowed on the top of the rest of the cargo. The result was that the quays were covered with iron posts and barbed wire, which had perforce to be unloaded in order to give access to other and more urgently needed material.

Fifty per cent of the vessels anchored in the roadstead, at great expense, both the ships and the men lying idle, were laden with timber for the barracks and portable huts *sent out to East Africa by the Ministry*, for a purpose which I suddenly decided we should have to abandon, as I shall have occasion to explain presently.

I have confined myself to speaking of what was done in Eritrea, and more precisely, of what was done in pursuance of my direct orders and under my supervision.

I have already stated that my task in Somalia, especially in the matter of preparations, was

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

necessarily restricted to general instructions. At a distance of nearly 2,500 miles little can be done in the way of direction and nothing in the way of supervision ; one must therefore have, as I had, full confidence in the subordinate organizations on the spot. I had no opportunity of going thither to see things for myself ; I was too absorbed by all that I had to *create* in Eritrea.

Others, of course, will write of all that was done in Somalia, which was no less important than what was accomplished in Eritrea.

VI

FIRST FORMATION OF THE EXPEDITIONARY CORPS FIRST MOVEMENTS OF TROOPS

BY THE Royal Decree of the 28th March 1935, I was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the troops in East Africa.

At the same time my Staff and the Intendancy were being organized. The latter had to play a pre-eminent part during the period of preparation, as during the progress of operations.

About the same time two Corps Commandants were sent out to the Colony. This was required by the regulations. The Commandants thus had the opportunity—what with the troops which were being gradually mobilized in the Colony, or were arriving from the peninsula—of seeing the Grand Army which they were destined to command formed under their eyes, and were able to mould it according to their own ideas.

This was particularly useful in the case of the Native Army Corps, which, as I have already explained, had to be formed round the very small nucleus of the existing Royal Corps, and had to complete the cadres of its detachments with a large proportion of officers—principally of subordinate

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

ranks—who needed preliminary training in the command of coloured troops.

The Commandant of this Army Corps, General Pirzio Biroli, was promptly and excellently seconded by generals and colonels of long experience in the Colonies, and whom the Ministry for War, in compliance with my request, did not fail to send me immediately.

In the meantime I completed, on the spot, the plans and preparations for the despatch of the Corps.

It was evident that the advance would have to be subject to variation—I may say, to almost daily variations—because the large units did not arrive *en bloc* in a convoy of transports ; which from every point of view, but most of all from the logistic standpoint, would have been a great advantage, and would have facilitated all the operations of disembarkation and dispatch to the points of assembly. But owing to the circumstances under which the Divisions destined for East Africa were mobilized and organized, this was quite impossible at first. They arrived in separate detachments, as did the auxiliary services, and were reconstituted on the spot.

The advance, then, over and above all the logistic exigencies, had to respond *at every moment* to the possibility of confronting any eventual surprise attack on the part of the enemy.

In Abyssinia it was understood that they would

have to end by making war, as the unrest, the provocations, the mustering and movement of armed men were continual. The High Command had precise information on these points, and it was not such as to cause anxiety.

Through February, March and April the central Government of Ethiopia still had great hopes that the European Powers would bring pressure to bear on Italy. The generality of Abyssinians were convinced that we were still what we were after Adowa.

A few of the local chieftains were fanatical in their hatred of us ; so that some stupid act of aggression might be expected from them. In Tigré, where our contacts with the Abyssinians were easier and more frequent, Ras Sioum declared his loyalty to the Emperor, but he was not really sincere, and was always undecided in his ideas. In his character he was the precise reflection of his father, Ras Mancupare. Unknown to the Central Government, we were still exchanging greetings in February and March, and he had accepted a present which I made to his little boy.

Ras Sioum maintained along our front, in the Adigrat-Adowa sector, a close network of posts of varying strength, which, apart from guarding the frontier, operated a sort of customs service. It must be confessed that it was difficult to escape their observation.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

The espionage of the enemy was much more successful than our counter-espionage. The caravans which made their way across the frontier, which it suited us to let them pass, gathered news and rumours in the markets. The information obtained was of course not exact, but presumptive. The best of the Abyssinian secret agents was the man who filled the post of Consul at Asmara ; however, despite his protests, I placed him under close supervision. Nevertheless, it was impossible to prevent him from taking frequent leave, when he crossed the Mareb frontier, and from the frontier summoned the chiefs and gave them information and advice. Under the circumstances I did not think it advisable to ask the Minister for Foreign Affairs to declare him *persona non grata*, and request that he should be replaced ; this would have caused pandemonium, and his successor would assuredly have been a man of the same kidney, or worse. In self-defence, therefore, we could not go beyond the dispositions which I had already made.

On our side also the surveillance was rigorous, and was effected by very practical means. Besides a series of posts situated at the points of greatest visibility, which might be regarded as the prescribed points of crossing the frontier, and which were supported by others, arranged in a regular system of outposts, on the line of the frontier itself we had distributed our native bands, now increased in

strength, which maintained a vigilant service of patrols, often without uniform, as this enabled them to penetrate beyond the frontier. However, the attempts made by some of these patrols, consisting of the more intelligent men, to entice the Abyssinian warriors were never successful, so that I gave orders that they should be discontinued.

On our advanced line of defence we had distributed the troops as in time of peace, so that from Senafé to Adi Quala we were guaranteed against any rash enemy movement. There were weak coastal garrisons from Massawa to Assab, and the line of the Setit was weakly held.

I had no anxiety in respect of the two lowland regions, although if enemy columns had succeeded in penetrating our lines they could have seriously threatened our rear, and also Asmara, from one side, and Massawa from the other. However, I was taking various circumstances into account. To begin with : Abyssinian strategy is averse from movements of wide range and with divergent objectives. Of this there was proof in the development of the final operations of the war. In the second place : the local conditions in the eastern lowlands were not such as to permit of the continued existence and movement of any bodies of troops large enough to cause us anxiety. The situation in the western lowlands was more dangerous. Here, during the rainy season, the Setit offers a considerable obstacle,

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

and can be forded only at certain points ; but in the dry season it may be crossed anywhere. If once the passage had been forced, light columns could have advanced as far as Asmara. However, such a movement was improbable. At all events, in this sector I reinforced the excellent bands of native troops, forming a body of cameliers and a body of horsemen ; I equipped them with artillery, and increased the strength of the ordinary garrisons.

Beyond this I had to make shift with the troops I had, and above all, to give thought to the zones which I regarded as the most dangerous.

The situation, as regards the concentration and distribution of the troops, appeared to me under the following points of view :—

(a) Before the season of heavy rains : In this period all movements are possible ; the torrents can be forded everywhere ; there is, however, a certain scarcity of water. I had to face four and a half months during which the Abyssinians, if they mobilized and assembled without delay, could confront us with an available force which we might have found it difficult to contend against. Fortunately for us, however, though there were many rumours of mobilizations, concentrations, and distributions of weapons, actually very little was done.

(b) The rainy season : from the middle of June to the end of September. It could be taken for granted that during this period the Ethiopians

would not move ; largely because of the impossibility of doing so in the regions beyond the frontier, especially where there were watercourses ; and to a certain extent because the Abyssinians, by force of tradition and habit, believe that it is impossible to move about during the rains. Hence it might be concluded that they would not change their opinion on this occasion. So there were three months and more of almost absolute tranquillity, during which we should be able to make very great progress. I have never been willing to believe in the *terrible* nature of the rainy season. The only serious inconveniences are that the torrents become impassable, and the aerodromes, unless specially constructed, cannot be used. We had taken means to eliminate these drawbacks almost entirely, working indefatigably during the four months which preceded the rains. The roads, where the bridges were not yet ready for service, had been given concrete and stone foundations which made them available for mechanical transport. In order to cross the streams one had at most to wait for five or six hours, or sometimes a whole night, until the water had subsided. The heavy rains are certainly heavy, but they do not fall all day and all night. They last at most six hours out of the twenty-four, so that there is always time to do useful work. There are no deluges that make a Noah's Ark a necessity. As a matter of fact, the pace of our work was

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

unaffected *and was never interrupted* on account of the rains.

(c) Period immediately following the rainy season: Briefly, I considered this to be the season for military operations. *It had been the Leader's desire that this should be so, and I determined that it should be so.* It came to this, then: we must be ready to the day when the rains had ceased. But by this time the Italian troops would certainly have arrived, so that there was no need for anxiety.

In order that everything should be ready to permit of military operations it was necessary to have the auxiliary services in working order and provided with the necessary supplies. In this matter of capital importance I could not have had a better collaborator. The Intendant-General Dall'Ora, besides being a general of rare professional ability, was a man of exceptional tenacity.

An Intendant who is ready to grant every request will never do anything useful. If this is true where supplies are continuously available, it may be imagined how true it is when it becomes indispensable to cut everything down to the minimum.

I am afraid unprofessional readers will never be able to understand or justly appreciate the value of what the Intendancy did in East Africa.

The "Corps of Operation," even when it was limited to the Native Army Corps and the proposed three Divisions of Italian infantry, was already an

army of respectable strength. Well, an army operating in Europe, or in equally civilized regions, has usually a productive countryside in its rear, and can also supply its needs from other sources ; it is certain to have at its disposal a network of practicable roads, both longitudinal and transversal, and at least one railway with a double track, or two independent lines which will permit of the coming and going of trains. In Eritrea, and also in Somalia, as I have said so often, there was *nothing, nothing* in the way of resources, excepting a moderate quantity of cattle and sheep ; so that everything had to come from outside ; more precisely, from Italy, since the Indian markets were as good as closed to us if we tried to get flour, as were the markets of the Sudan in respect of other agricultural products.

I have already said enough as regards the existing lines of communication. And even when the great Massawa-Asmara artery was completed, and the other roads were made practicable, the conditions of our commissariat were certainly not to be compared with those of an Army Intendancy in a European war.

The Intendant had to be, and was, absolutely ferocious in refusing the continual demands made by the larger units, especially in the matter of transport ; nevertheless, the troops, whether native or Italian, *never lacked for anything*.

* * *

In the meantime the Wal-Wal incident was the

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

object of many debates at Geneva. Our irrefutable documentation, and the evidence which we supplied, had been received in a spirit of complete disbelief. Notwithstanding the delimitation of the neutral zone, provocative incidents were occurring daily.

For a little while all this had the result that the attention of Rome was directed mainly to Somalia.

I do not know if the Central Government had received special information ; but I am obliged to believe that it had, for neither my despatches, nor the direct reports of the Governor of Somalia, were such as to arouse any special anxiety in respect of that region.

The fact is that some time in the first half of February a telegram from the Head of the Government informed me that according to credible information an enemy advance upon Somalia was not improbable ; and this being so, although he was highly satisfied with the work of Governor Rava, he thought it expedient to have at Mogadiscio a Military Governor who would also assume the office of Commandant of Troops, the officer selected for the post being General Graziani. He added that the " Peloritana " Division would be sent to Somalia immediately : in its place the " Gavinana " Division, already in process of mobilization, would be sent to Eritrea.

I had no exception to make to this, although I

did not think an offensive in force against Somalia was probable.

I was very sorry to lose Rava, who had been my best assistant in Tripolitania, and whom I myself had proposed for the Governorship of Somalia; but at the same time I was very pleased to hear of Graziani's appointment.

I am not going to write a panegyric on this incomparable Colonial officer, whom I had had serving under me; I knew him through and through, and was tied to him by the bonds of an enduring and affectionate friendship. Graziani preceded me as Commandant of the Native Army Corps; and, of course, on his taking up the higher post to which he had been so opportunely appointed, the Command, as I have already stated, had to be given to another officer: General Pirzio-Biroli.

I was rather perplexed by the fact that it was intended to send an Italian Division to Somalia.

I was convinced that our splendid soldiers would be able to resist the climate even of those regions, which was anything but pleasant; but I could not express a definite opinion as to the possibility of their undertaking extensive operations or marching in the torrid zone. In case they could not do so it was necessary to provide them with mechanical transport; and subsequently this was done. At this period, when there was still an insufficiency of transport, they had a difficult time.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

Another serious difficulty which had to be overcome was inherent in the business of disembarkation. It is always difficult to unload a vessel at Mogadiscio, especially in the case of heavy articles, despite the harbour works which have been undertaken on this coast in order to render such operations less awkward. It was necessary, in any case, to take advantage of the period of calm, for during the monsoons nothing can be landed ; and this was done.

Subsequently, among the other extensive tasks undertaken in Somalia, the Bay of Bender-Kassin was adapted for disembarkation, which greatly facilitated the always difficult replacements of men and animals, and replenishment of munitions and food for Somalia.

While waiting for the arrival of the Italian Divisions I made arrangements for the reinforcement of positions and the constitution of reserves with the coloured troops. At the end of March the groups were already constituted, although they were not yet in full strength, while the First and Second Brigades and then the two Divisions were already in process of formation. I decided to entrust the command and the responsibility of the Senafé-Adi Quala front to the General Commandant of the Native Army Corps.

I asked the Ministry for a general (and I mentioned a name) for the command of the fortress of

Asmara. It was my intention that this general should see to the completion of the fortress as regards its fortifications and its armaments. I should then, as I have said, give this general the territorial Command of the Royal Corps ; a command which, above all, would function as the base for mobilizing and completing the native troops. I also asked for a general—Mariotti—for the command of the eastern lowlands, and an officer of superior rank to assume the command of the land forts of Massawa ; the maritime forts, of course, would be commanded by a naval officer.

As the various operations and the work of organization progressed, an infinite number of problems arose, of greater or less importance, for which a solution had to be found. It always seemed that something was lacking, and sometimes, I confess, I asked myself whether we should succeed in accomplishing everything by the time appointed.

This question was suggested more especially by the doubts which I saw arising in the minds even of some of my immediate assistants ; in such cases, however, I succeeded, by force of will, in transmitting my faith to those about me.

There was another question which I asked myself at the close of every day : whether I had really thought of everything !

There were not days but months of continual anxiety and alarm ; yet I can say with a clear

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

conscience that not only was my faith unshaken, but that my mind was always calm and serene; and honest observers who came to the Colony bore witness that the completest serenity and the most perfect mental equilibrium prevailed in the spheres of the Commissariat and the High Command.

On the more thorough consideration of the future composition of the Corps of Operation and the additions which it would receive, I felt persuaded that the one squadron of cavalry at my disposal—which formed part of the Royal Corps—was insufficient.

I am of those who are convinced not merely of the utility, but of the necessity of cavalry; even in regions least adapted to this arm, as, for the most part, are the highlands of Eritrea and Abyssinia. I could not overlook the fact that the enemy was abundantly supplied with this arm, and that the Galla cavalry is in all respects worthy of consideration.

It was to be hoped that the Galla would not be against us—and on the whole they were not—but at this time there was no positive reason for supposing that they would not be.

The greatest difficulty was to find suitable horses. Our Italian horses, with some exceptions, are of little use, as their legs and hooves go to pieces; so that I advised the mounted officers not to bring their chargers out with them. The local market

offered a very few sorry animals, which were bought immediately ; I succeeded in importing a few from the Sudan, and I tried Yemen, without success. At any rate, I managed to get together enough to double the existing squadron and form a group.*

The region where, above all others, the cavalry might have been useful to me was in the western lowlands. There, as I have said, I could not send a large proportion of my troops ; the white troops would hardly have stood the climate, and the natives of the table-land are even less able to acclimatize themselves to it.

In the solution of this ticklish question a valiant cavalry major came to my assistance : Aimone Cat, an old Colonial, who had served under me in Tripolitania as commandant of a squadron of Spahis.

He came to me and proposed to form a group of 500 Libyan Spahis. He assured me that if I would let him go to Tripolitania and Cirenaica he would bring me, within four or five months—that is, before operations began—500 horsemen, with their mounts.

I have stated that I had formerly refused Libyan troops—although I have a high opinion of them—because I was afraid that they would either demand leave to bring their families with them, or, when

* Roughly equivalent to our regiment of cavalry.—(Tr.)

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

they found that they would have to be parted from them, would insist on an unduly brief term of service. But now I accepted this proposal without hesitation ; I applied to the Head of the Government for his authorization, which he gave me by telegraph, and despatched the major to North Africa.

With the help of the Governor-General of Libya and other local authorities he succeeded in accomplishing his by no means easy task in time to take part in the operations.

* * *

The commanding officers and the first echelon of the "Gavinana" Division arrived on the 18th April.

They were disembarked at Massawa in eight hours, without the slightest trouble.

The temperature was exceptionally high just then, and the troops, already exhausted by the heat which they had endured during the last 36 hours on board, felt it severely, though happily they were not discouraged by it. As I have already stated, we were in the very midst of the transport crisis, and these troops had arrived without their transport, which was conveyed by later steamers.

I, 47 years earlier, had undertaken marches in the lowlands in the month of May, when the temperature was extremely high. It had then been my conviction that the infantry should, and must,

as a rule, march on foot. For this reason I ordered that the troops, taking advantage of the cooler hours of the night, should make their first move by covering a moderate number of miles at an ordinary marching pace.

It was an instructive test, which, however, convinced me that the troops would have to be transported to Ghinda at least, and preferably to Nefasit. There were a few cases of heat-stroke and one fatal case of sunstroke.

The troops reached Nefasit in fair condition, thanks to the activity and example of the officers, who had marched on foot.

I then sent for General Dall'Ora and told him plainly : " My dear Dall'Ora, from now on one must consider how to convey the troops to Nefasit, if anyhow possible, or at all events to Ghinda, partly by rail and partly by motor transport." I did not want them to stay at Ghinda, which is a malarious locality.

The worthy Dall'Ora's face fell : the problem which I had set him was very difficult of solution. We were already hard put to it to forward ammunition, victuals, medical stores and all the indispensable building material ; the transport of the troops would have paralyzed all the other services for a day.

But General Dall'Ora has the advantage of being an infantryman ; hence he understands the

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

psychology of the soldier who is compelled to go on foot under difficult conditions, so that he confined himself to saying : “ Leave it to me, Excellency.” And it was done.

As regards the successive arrival of the Italian Divisions, and my intentions as to their distribution and employment, suitable positions for *étapes* were selected beforehand, where, above all, there was no lack of water, and to which supplies could be forwarded by motor-lorry.

It should be noted that the troops remained for months in these positions ; some until the end of the rainy season ; so that they were gradually able to make themselves more and more comfortable.

* * *

Here it will be as well that I should elucidate a matter which was represented as being a problem of exceptional seriousness, but which, on the other hand, proved to be—as I considered—of very slight importance.

In the report presented by the general attaché to the Chief of the General Staff on returning from his visit to Eritrea was included an estimate for quartering the whole of the Italian units, indiscriminately, in barracks.

When the Head of the Government communicated this report to me, I, who was a Minister, but also a general, and not ignorant of the Colonies, accepted it with wide reservations.

The Duce admitted the justice of my reservations, but he also added : “ We encamped on the snow on the Rombon during the war.”

But in Rome they had a fixed idea that our soldiers, and even four-footed animals, could not, without great suffering, live under canvas during the rainy season.

They must all be housed in barracks !

I had the Engineer officers make the necessary calculations.

The quantity of timber and accessories necessary for the construction of barracks or the necessary portable huts mounted up to an amazing figure.

But as no limit had been imposed as to cost, the first orders were given.

However, the difficult part of the problem was not the construction of the barracks ; the trouble here, as always, was *the scarcity and difficulty of transport*.

A portable barrack of twenty rooms required, for its transportation, four railway trucks or eight heavy motor-lorries ; the transportation of timber for the construction of barracks required, for the same cubic capacity, about half as many trucks or lorries. Hence it was expedient to import the timber rather than the portable barracks. Among other things, the timber, in case of need, could be used for so many other purposes.

The first few trips were made, after which the

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

Director of Transports and the Intendant himself made it plain to me that if barracks for the whole Corps of Operation—even if restricted to the number of Divisions hitherto envisaged—were to be sent up to the plateau, and then to the localities where they were needed, we should disorganize all the arrangements for the transport of the auxiliary services, and, above all, the formation of supply depôts and magazines.

This being so, I gave orders, without thinking twice, that barracks were to be employed only for (a) hospitals and infirmaries ; (b) food stores and the headquarters of the various units. I also decided that sheds should be built for the animals, which—the mules especially—might really suffer heavy losses if exposed for long to the rain.

Result : The troops lived in tents during the whole of the rainy season. The tents which were issued proved to be excellent. Roman and other types of tent were issued for some of the auxiliary services, and for the regimental and battalion infirmaries. They served well enough.

The health of the troops was always excellent ; the tents were more hygienic than barracks, in which dirt readily collects, and in which the air is less pure.

It was necessary, however, that after the hours of rainfall, which were always followed by some hours of scorching but wholesome sun, the tents should

be opened, in order that the internal humidity might evaporate.

The barracks, notwithstanding my decision, continued, without interruption, to arrive from Italy.

I employed only as many as were necessary for a considerable settlement round about Massawa, where they sheltered the stevedores working in the harbour, the artisans, the detachments doing special work in the neighbourhood of the city, and, in case of need, any troops newly disembarked which could not immediately be despatched to their destination.

But when all this was done, great quantities of barracks and of timber remained on board ship, *because I had to give precedence to the disembarkation of the troops and of such materials as were absolute necessities.*

If I had disembarked all the timber I should not have had room to disembark the other things.

This was the cause of the acute state of plethora which afflicted the port of Massawa, and which was so often deprecated.

* * *

Our Air Force too was gradually increasing in strength.

In the beginning a few squadrons of aeroplanes were sent out by air. This system was said to be the best, and it was the quickest ; but even towards



Italian soldiers in the native market.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

the end of February we could no longer absolutely count on it.

Our machines were obliged to land at Cairo, then at Khartoum, where the authorities, both English and Egyptian, subjected them to strict inspection.

Truth compels me to say that the British Governor of Khartoum and the Resident at Kassala were always extremely uncivil where I was concerned. The vague but persistent menace of measures to be taken to our detriment was already in the air ; so that for every reason it was advisable to keep to the safer method, which was to send the machines out by steamer.

Naturally, the aeroplanes reached us in the dismantled state—and in this condition they were sent by lorry to the camp at Otumlo, where everything was organized to perfection for the work of assembling them. At first four machines were assembled every 48 hours ; afterwards it was possible to assemble six.

In the first fortnight of March we already had 43 machines at our disposal, what with scouts and bombers.

This was a respectable force when compared with that which we knew our probable enemy had at his disposal. The Negus had 13 efficient machines ; however, he had not the pilots, and he never did have a capable or sufficient personnel, even when

various black, white and yellow amateurs consented to enrol themselves in the Ethiopian Air Force.

All the time I was in East Africa I never saw an Ethiopian aeroplane in flight.

Our airmen, on the other hand, were extremely active. Besides the training and endurance flights, I ordered reconnaissance flights along the whole line of the southern frontier. These flights of ours often had the effect of causing apprehension and alarm in the enemy posts.

These 43 machines were not even the fifth part of the aerial armada which the Duce had decreed for the Colony.

In the middle of March the Under-Secretary for Aeronautics, General Valle, came out to Eritrea, to see for himself the work being done by the air arm, to inspect the existing Air Force, and to make such arrangements and give such orders as appeared necessary.

To me he declared that he was satisfied with everything. Asked how long he thought it would be before the air force was completed according to programme, he replied that all the factories were working day and night ; but it would not be safe to count on getting the majority of the aeroplanes by September and the rest within a year.

He persisted in his idea of equipping Zula to receive the cargoes destined for the Air Force, and he would even have liked to have an independent

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

road built to convey these freights to the plateau, without encumbering the one great arterial road under construction, which seemed to him greatly in arrears, so that he concluded that it would be a very difficult matter to get it ready by the appointed date.

I have already indicated that the Air Ministry—always within the limits of the general plan—was acting on its own account. However, I told General Valle plainly that I thought the utilization of the Bay of Zula was highly problematical, and that I considered it neither possible nor expedient to divert labour to the construction of a new road.

To reassure the Under-Secretary, I was able to declare, after close examination, as was the Intendant also, that if the Air Force would consider the question of providing its own mechanical transport, the Director of Transport guaranteed the possibility of sending all the material up country by the great arterial road under construction.

And here I may say at once that I noted that the anxiety lest we should be unable to send everything necessary by the Massawa-Asmara road, and the dread of traffic blocks and obstructions, were peculiar to Italy. A few of the less experienced people in the Colony shared these apprehensions. On the other hand, my Staff, the Intendancy and I—who were most directly interested and most responsible—had always been quite unconcerned.

At all events, hoping to appease the doubters, I had what was known as the "sloping road" reconditioned. This road followed the Asmara-Cherea road for a certain distance, and then turned eastwards, following the eastern slopes of the plateau. The course followed made it a very difficult road, but this was modified. It rejoined the main highway between Ghinda and Saati. By using this we had a circular route whereby which motor-lorries could go and return.

In actual practice, however, this road was of little service. The Director of Transport ordered that it should be used by columns of empty lorries returning from the plateau, but the bulk of the traffic always passed along the main road, a suitable time-table fixing the hours when mechanical transport could ascend to the plateau or descend from it.

Always with the object of allaying the anxieties of Rome—which were certainly kept alive, to serve personal interests, by mischief-makers and defeatists—I consented to give out the contract for the systematic conditioning for direct traffic of the Belesa-Saganeiti road. The work was done well and quickly, but actually the road did little to relieve the congestion.

The Staff, and also His Excellency the Chief of the General Staff, would have liked me to transform the mule-track of the Valley of the Haddas into a

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

road for wheeled traffic. It would have greatly reduced the distance to be covered by troops and materials forwarded from the point of disembarkation to the southern front. This mule-track was followed by the English in 1868, and also by the greater part of the reinforcements which we had sent out after the battle of Adowa.

The work on this track was begun at a time of crisis, at the end of 1934 ; but when the bridge over the Haddas was reached I gave orders that it should be discontinued. The labour involved was stupendous ; it would have cost an enormous sum, out of all proportion to the advantage we should have derived from it.

Still with the object of facilitating the flow of materials and munitions from the port to the plateau, a firm of engineers applied to the Ministry for authorization to construct a cable-way from the eastern lowlands to Asmara.

Good : there was objection to that. The plans were made and the terms of the contract drawn up. Work was to begin at once—at the end of March—and the cable-way was to be ready by November or December 1935. It is not yet completed.

The great faith which I reposed in that magnificent piece of work—the Massawa-Nefasit, Nefasit-Decamerè and Nefasit-Asmara road—made me somewhat sceptical regarding every other project.

However, I was right.

VII

DETAILS AND DIRECTIONS

ON THE 20th December 1934—XIII the Head of the Government *personally* compiled the “*Directions and Plan of Action for the solution of the Italo-Abyssinian question.*”

This document, which was very secret, and issued only in five copies, is a model as regards its clear views, precise intentions, and logical instructions. It touches on all the more important points, and leaves no doubts unresolved in the reader’s mind : still less in the minds of those who had to put it into execution.

In it the provocative attitude of our probable enemy is clearly emphasized, and the military preparations which he was taking with the effective aid of European states are described with equal lucidity.

In these Directions the Duce notes : First of all, that “*time is working against us,*” hence we must *make haste*. He reckons that “*besides 60,000 native troops there ought to be at least as many Italian.*”

He considers that at least 250 aeroplanes are needed in Eritrea and 50 in Somalia.

He says : “*The 60,000 Italian soldiers—better*

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

still 100,000—must be ready in Eritrea by October 1935.”

As the last chapter shows, this programme was being methodically but rapidly carried out.

On the 22nd January—that is, only six days after my arrival in the Colony—I sent the Head of the Government a succinct account of the state of affairs in general and of the preparations in particular.

On the 27th January and the 13th February respectively I sent the Duce two further confidential letters, telling him all that was happening and giving him some of my impressions.

As regards the policy of the Negus, I wrote as follows : “ *At present the Negus Neghesti is ordering too many prayers and fasts to give us reason to think that he wishes to attack us ; however, it would be criminal not to be on our guard ; the more so as one cannot exclude the possibility of some act of rashness on the part of excited subordinate chieftains.*”

Still more insistently I emphasized two facts : that in Eritrea *there was nothing ; everything* had to be done, *and we must do it.*

The Duce replied to me on the 26th February, and in respect of the matter that concerned me most closely he said : “ *In the period of preparation you must act independently, for the same ‘ canons of ordinary administration ’ cannot operate in times which are not ordinary, but exceptional.*”

This was what I wanted.

As for the political situation, he told me that “*the bulk of the indications and the messages intercepted allow us to suppose that the Negus does not wish to take the initiative of the encounter.*”

This, of course, was not quite the same as saying that the Negus was not giving provocation. Advised by European technicians who would never have thought us capable of the powerful and astonishing effort which we put forth, he really wanted to adopt a plan of campaign like that which we had originally proposed to follow. He would then have derived an advantage from the state of the country which we should have to traverse in order to act on the offensive.

The Duce's letter continued : “*In case the Negus should have no intention of attacking us we ourselves must take the initiative. This is not possible unless by the end of September you have at your disposal, besides the blacks, at least 100,000 white soldiers, who will have to be rapidly increased to 200,000.*”

On the 8th March I received another *autograph* letter from the Leader. In this his intentions were even more definitely stated:

“*It is my profound conviction that, we being obliged to take the initiative of the operations at the end of October or September, you ought to have a combined force of 300,000 men (including about 100,000 black troops in the two colonies) plus 300-500 aeroplanes and 300 rapid cars—for without these forces to feed the offensive penetration*

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

the operations will not have the vigorous rhythm which we desire. You ask for 3 Divisions by the end of October ; I mean to send you 10, I say ten : five Divisions of the regular Army ; five of volunteer formations of Blackshirts, who will be carefully selected and trained.

“ These Divisions of Blackshirts will be the guarantee that the undertaking will obtain the popular approbation.

* * *

“ Even in view of possible international controversies (League of Nations, etc.) it is as well to hasten our tempo. For the lack of a few thousand men we lost the day at Adowa ! We shall never make that mistake. I am willing to commit a sin of excess but never a sin of deficiency.” I replied by telegraph, raising no objections, and I had my reward in this telegram : *“ I am glad to note that as always you will second my ideas with your intelligence, your experience, and above all, your faith.”*

It is obvious from the extracts from letters and telegrams which I have transcribed that our programme was undergoing a radical alteration. From the plan of a manœuvred defensive followed by a counter-offensive we were obliged to change over to the plan of an offensive action.

This being so, it was evident that the three Italian Divisions, which were at first regarded as sufficient, were so no longer. The ten Divisions which the Leader had decided upon were the proper number.

Everything that had hitherto been done was

just as completely adapted to ensure the realization of the new plans.

Essentially, one may say, the most serious business before us was the logistic problem. We had, in brief, to multiply by three all that we had accumulated in the way of magazines, dépôts and stores of every kind.

The problem of the roads and that of the water supply remained the same, and again I say that even in view of so tremendous an effort they did not cause me any excessive anxiety.

The orders were precise and peremptory. I had only to obey. But never with a supine, resigned obedience. No, with increased faith, and an ever firmer determination to do my part and to succeed.

To the Leader I gave my usual laconic reply : " Very good." Then, taking advantage of General Valle's return to Italy by aeroplane, I begged him to take General Dall'Ora on board. I sent him to Italy with a long and reasoned memorandum, which the General could elucidate as need arose.

In this, on the basis of our fresh intentions and instructions, I enumerated all the needs with which we should have to cope, and in respect of which I required the unconditional collaboration of all the Governmental departments. I was certain that the Duce would support and second me.

The first thing to be decided was the order in which the troops were to arrive.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

This depended on the time it would take to mobilize them in Italy and make up the formations ; in Africa we should have to distribute them at a rate that would allow us to disembark them and transport them without causing an incumbrance in the port or a block on the roads, and to provide for their commissariat.

Our news of the enemy was not such as to give us anxiety. With the troops which I should have in hand before the rainyseason I should be able to meet any possible attack with confidence.

* * *

The "Gavinana" Division was assembled on the plateau on the 12th May. By this time part of the "Sabauda" Division had arrived, and part of it was still at sea.

The presence of the first two Italian Divisions persuaded me to proceed to the provisional formation of the First (Italian) Army Corps.

The formation of the Army Corps underwent many variations as time went on, due to strategical and tactical considerations as to their most profitable employment ; the Divisions, however, were left intact. This first provisional formation was useful mainly as giving unity of direction in handling them when it came to fighting.

The officers, especially the generals and colonels, were engaged in reconnaissances in the sectors

where they would most probably be employed. All the possible lines of march were studied, so that in practice it would be possible to reduce the depth of the columns to the minimum.

The troops were kept in constant training, and above all, pains were taken to complete the instruction of the many young officers who had been called up.

As notwithstanding the continual arrival of labourers to work on the roads, aerodromes, and water supplies, the need of additional labour was becoming more evident every day, it was arranged that detachments of infantry also should take turns at working on the roads.

Besides the two Divisions of infantry which I have mentioned, the Sixth Group of Blackshirts, commanded by Consul-General Mantagna, arrived in Eritrea ; a very well-appointed and well-officered force ; also the companies of artillery for the guns of the fortifications and such batteries as did not form part of the larger units.

There were numerous battalions and companies of engineers of all the special branches : from sappers to telegraphists and wireless operators. There were companies too of hydrological engineers and railway engineers and bridge-builders.

The engineer troops, as the work progressed and the strength of the army increased, were never sufficient for our purpose. With difficulty, by a



Italian troops clearing a road through the bush.

series of positive miracles, the Minister for War *always* granted our requests.

It is needless to speak of the extreme importance of wireless telegraphy in the Colonies ; in the end, I may say, this was the only means of communication employed. The existing telegraph and telephone lines were insufficient compared with the enormous number of communications. Further, the extension of the lines, with their maintenance and protection, was extremely difficult, since for many miles they ran through impenetrable and uninhabited regions.

I do not mean by this that we made no use of them. Every means of transmission was precious, and was not neglected.

In Eritrea there was only one squadron of armoured cars. We could not neglect this new and effective weapon of war. As a matter of fact, six further squadrons of high-speed armoured cars were sent out in successive deliveries, and were organized in two groups (IV and V).

Two were employed in the lowlands ; the others were divided among the units which were to operate in the table-land.

* * *

The troops sent out to East Africa were for the most part constituted by recalling men of the 1911 class to the colours : excellent soldiers, who had lost nothing of their military qualities and appear-

ance in the short time which had elapsed since their discharge.

I saw regiments defile before me that made one's heart throb with pride ; so that I was moved to telegraph an expression of my gratitude to General Baistrocchi.

Never the least feeling of dejection ; all were longing with enthusiasm to take part in the enterprise and to fight as soon as possible.

I, an old soldier, involuntarily compared them with those who sailed for Africa in 1896.

Even then the trouble was not to be found in the soldiers, still less in the officers. This was proved by the sacrifices they made before Adowa, and the courage they displayed on that disastrous day ; and even more by the revival of discipline, spirit and energy when the forces were taken in hand by that magnificent officer, General Baldissera.

The miracle of to-day is explained by the change that has come over the spirit of the Nation, which knows that it can look with confidence to the glittering future toward which the Duce is leading it.

* * *

This is what I proposed to the Head of the Government :

By October it would have been possible to send out five Italian Divisions in consignments, whose strength I should specify in accordance with logistic possibilities.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

I dismissed all anxieties as to the possibility of moving the troops by road, or in respect of the supplies of water, as long as we were on our own territory.

I declared immediately that it was impossible to establish reserve hospitals in proportion to the troops in the field, to whom we should have to add the army of labourers. I therefore asked for two pairs of hospital ships to ply to and fro ; and one such pair ought to be equipped for Somalia.

I confirmed the absolute necessity of mechanical transport. I ought to be able to count absolutely on having a number of light motor cars at my disposal, sufficient for the opening of military operations, and also for the rapid strategical and tactical movements of large units.

I reckoned that with five Italian Divisions, plus two native, and the bands of irregulars largely reinforced, I should be able to take the initiative at the time appointed. The other three Divisions, according to need, could arrive between December and February.

Given this increase of strength, I proposed to form another Army Corps.

The Divisions of the regular Army which then formed part of the Eritrean Corps of Operation were four : the "Gavinana," the "Sabauda," the "Sila" and the "Gran Sasso."

On the other hand, there were five Divisions of Blackshirts : the "23rd March," the "28th

October," the "21st April," the "3rd January" and the "1st February."

These Divisions were lighter than the Regular Divisions, and therefore of lesser strength; however, they too did very well, being inspired by a high and warlike spirit.

I repeated one urgent recommendation: that all the large units should be preceded by their respective auxiliary services; but in spite of my request this condition was not completely fulfilled, to the serious detriment of the general progress of preparations.

* * *

In Somalia General Graziani, to whom, I repeat, I had left full liberty of action, since he could have taught me, and not I him, in the matter of colonial campaigns, continued his preparations with Fascist celerity, though hampered by innumerable difficulties. The most serious of these, as I have already stated, was the difficulty of disembarkation.

The Bay of Bender Kassin was not yet fully adapted for embarking troops and munitions. When it could be so used there would still be the difficulty of transport on the long stretch from Bender Kassin to Mogadiscio.

In Somalia roads and bases of replenishment would be required.

When the Italian industry was at last able to furnish the necessary mechanical transport every-

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

thing worked perfectly; but it must be confessed that until the second half of September there was a continual struggle against difficulties of every kind, one giving rise to another, or sometimes, which was even more worse, being followed by another of a totally different nature.

The altered plan of campaign did not affect Somalia, which would inevitably have to begin operations with defensive intentions. Only with the progress of operations in Eritrea would it be possible to advise, and even require, an offensive from the South.

General Graziani was perfectly aware of this. He knew that he could not hurl himself against our enemy at a distance of 300 (and afterwards 600) miles from his base without mechanical transport for nearly all his troops. He had therefore to obtain such transport and hold it in readiness.

Moreover, if he had to assume the offensive the troops at his disposal up to the month of May were not sufficient.

He had at first to employ the "Peloritana" Division in garrisoning the coast and in constructing *ex novo* an entrenched camp at Mogadiscio.

He, even more than I, needed native troops.

This being so, I asked that the Eritrean battalions in Tripolitania and Cirenaica, where it had been decided to form Libyan divisions, should be assigned to him, and sent out to Somalia after they had been amalgamated and trained.

I will not enlarge upon what was done in Somalia, as I know that General Graziani will write about it himself, with the skill and competence peculiar to him.

* * *

In speaking of our Eritrean troops I had occasion to mention how, when it was necessary to send various battalions to Tripolitania and Cirenaica, recourse was had even to elements recruited beyond the frontier.

As time went on and the situation became more troublous, it was thought that it would not be prudent to retain in our ranks askaris who might not be disposed to fight against their own countrymen. It is a mistaken belief that the Eritrean by birth regarded himself as of Abyssinian nationality. No, he described himself as belonging to that region of the Colony in which he was born, had produced a family, and owned certain property. The same is true of the askari from beyond the frontier, who is loyal, having enlisted, to the Italian Government, but who always remains a man of Tigré, Serracè, Tembien, Gojjam, etc.

The black man is always a mercenary soldier; he serves the master who pays him. For this reason, in the then state of affairs, it was possible that the askari from beyond the frontier would yield to venal temptations—to hopes or promises held out by the chieftains and notables of their native country.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

Certain it is that we furnished our enemy with considerable numbers of well-trained men, soldiers and non-commissioned officers, who helped to organize and officer the Abyssinian army.

However, when it was rumoured in Abyssinia, and even in Yemen, that we were mobilizing our Eritrean troops, an enormous number of natives offered to enlist, especially among those who had already served in our ranks.

Many of these offers were made in person by men who had succeeded in crossing the frontier and presenting themselves at one of our garrisons, or even at the Eritrean depôt; while many were transmitted through our Consular agents.

Such requests were of value to us as indicating the greater or lesser degree of aversion with which we were regarded in the various regions of Abyssinia.

A problem which I straightway considered was the expediency of admitting such elements to our ranks.

As for mixing them with other askaris and allowing them to fight in our native detachments, that was out of the question, as being altogether too risky.

To send them away was even worse.

I tried to employ them as labourers, but none would consent: none! They had come to enlist as soldiers: nothing else.

Reflecting that they represented so many men

lost to the enemy, I thought of sending them to Libya, to replace the Eritrean battalions which we had taken from there.

I proposed this course to the Duce, who immediately gave his approval; and as soon as I could I put it into execution.

VIII

CIVILIAN ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

WHEN PREPARATIONS are being made with a view to military operations, or when such operations are in progress, everything gives way to military necessity, which is inevitably given precedence. Nevertheless, civilian activities do not cease, and civilian life goes on, assuming an aspect which is no longer normal, but which spontaneously tends to diverge from the normal as little as possible.

And this is a good thing. Substantially, then, civilian life grafts itself upon military life, just as in normal times military life grafts itself upon civilian life.

So many descriptions have been written of Asmara that I myself shall say nothing about our Eritrean capital. Except that "capital" is really almost too big a word for Asmara.

Nor is this the place to argue whether it would have been more expedient to locate the capital elsewhere. But where? Certainly not at Massawa, for the life of Eritrea is really evolving on the plateau. Keren might have done well enough ; it even has been said that General Baldissera intended to remove the seat of Government thither; but no one

can prove this. I, although it was my fortune to be on especially good terms with the General, have never heard him mention the matter.

Asmara is in a certain sense the geographical centre of the Altipiano, and it is from Asmara that the mule-tracks and caravan-trails branch out in all directions towards the lowlands and the other regions of the plateau.

Asmara, then, after our landing at Massawa, the disaster of Dogali, and the expedition of San Marzano, represented the only necessary and convenient territorial objective. Necessary, because Asmara was the seat of our bitterest enemy, Ras Alula; convenient, for the geographical reasons already indicated, as a result of which the produce of the interior converged upon the market of Asmara.

For the rest, even Martini, who governed the Colony for ten years, and was the most active Governor it ever had (even if this was because he had time to be active), and who studied all the problems of Eritrea in the light of practical experience, never thought of leaving Asmara; indeed, it was he who caused the dignified Governor's seat to be built there.

Asmara, then, the principal city of the Colony, was and is still divided into two parts: the native quarter and the Italian.

The Italian quarter had the look of a village which had been gradually enlarged by builders

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

whose ideas of architecture, and whose choice of sites, were marked by an uncontrolled imagination. I have been told that it was laid out in accordance with some sort of guiding plan; but no one could guess, from the existing buildings, what this plan may have been. It was merely a matter of luck if someone built a house where a street was being laid down, or if a villa had been set in alignment with other buildings.

Asmara, at the beginning of 1935, contained exactly 3,873 Italians, including officials and white soldiers.

The civilian officials and the officers attached to Headquarters were all grouped around the Government Palace.

The town had all that was necessary to supply the needs of the inhabitants, who lived a patriarchal life, avoiding rather than seeking excitement.

I had hardly begun to trace my plan of action when I reflected that the town, as it then was, could provide neither shelter nor the necessities of life for all those who would shortly be compelled to settle down there, if only for a season.

I had the approximate data of every aspect of the military organism then in process of formation. Until the moment when our troops would have to advance beyond the frontier, the General Headquarters and Staff and the Commissariat with its various branches would have to be located in

Asmara if they were to function properly, if only because all means of communication were centred upon the capital.

Hence I had to devise means of organizing the offices of an Army Headquarters and an Army Commissariat.

In Europe this is a very simple matter; the necessary buildings are requisitioned, the necessary means of communication are installed, and the thing is done. But in Asmara there was *nothing to requisition* which would serve the purpose.

The whole fabric had to be created from the foundations upwards.

I should like to make it clear at once that nothing was done for the civilian departments, which continued to function in their existing premises; even restricting their use of these to make room in view of the increasing needs. But I must add—and this ought to be known—that notwithstanding the constant increase of work due to the new conditions, *I did not ask Rome for a single additional official*; those who were already in Eritrea contrived to multiply themselves, disposing punctually of all the work that was heaped upon their shoulders.

With the Vice-Governor, the Director of Engineers, and the engineers of the public works, an immediate estimate was arrived at, as to what would have to be done. They decided what it would be expedient to build in masonry, as likely

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

to be useful afterwards when things were normal, and what it would suffice to build with wood, employing portable huts, or building with such materials as offered.

Summary plans having been drawn up and approved, the work was put in hand at once.

But as the work progressed the requirements gradually increased, and the buildings had to be multiplied, to meet not only military, but also civilian needs.

Numbers of traders applied for leave to establish themselves in the Colony. They were needed. The Colony, excepting for cattle, did not produce enough even to supply the most modest requirements of the population, which was increasing daily; nor were the customary imports from Italy sufficient. The steamships of the usual lines, which generally arrived with their holds half empty, were now fully laden; but very soon they could no longer suffice to supply us with prime necessities.

The one modest hotel deserving of such a name was full to overflowing. There was talk of building an annexe. Some pains were taken to improve the conditions of two other so-called hotels, so as to adapt them for the use of officers passing through the town. This was not enough; before long suitable pavilions had to be built, containing only the absolutely indispensable articles of furniture: a bed or hammock, a bench and a small table.

In this way a new city sprang up on the outskirts of Asmara, which certainly did not add to the æsthetic qualities of the old town.

As far as possible I avoided requisitioning the school buildings, which were certainly among the best in Asmara. But we had absolute need of them, as we had to transform them into hospitals.

The hospital problem, apart from the needs of the Army, became serious and importunate when the labourers began to arrive.

The Director of the excellent local hospital had already considered the question of enlarging it by means of Docker pavilions. They had been ordered through the Ministry in Italy, and there were serious delays in their despatch; in the meantime huts were quickly constructed.

All the local school premises were soon being transformed into hospitals.

To this end I had ordered that the date of closing the schools should be advanced to the middle of May. This was not enough, and for a time the classes were held in the open air, so that the premises could be made available even earlier.

By May the 3,873 inhabitants of Asmara had increased to about 15,000.

There was a similar increase of population in Massawa, where, notwithstanding the climate, all those persons had settled who for business reasons

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

had to be wherever the goods sent out to the Colony were disembarked.

The various authorities in charge of the traffic of the port, and especially those who controlled the unloading of cargoes, drew upon themselves the abuse and even the curses of all who were expecting goods.

Neither the traders not the producers were to blame; but the aforesaid authorities were even less so.

The quantity of victuals and materials of every description which arrived in the harbour daily was enormous, as of course it had to be. According to the Duce's instructions we had to make provision for an army and an air force which would presently number more than 200,000 men. To these were added the 25,000 Italians who came out as labourers or for business purposes, and the 30,000—afterwards 50,000—workers on the roads and public buildings. They were all consumers. And apart from them we had to make provision for the native population. Of the 65,000 natives mobilized more than half were taken from their labours in the fields.

At the time of harvest and sowing I managed to mitigate the crisis of the greatly reduced cultivation by granting special leave to the more deserving askaris, and to those who were fathers of families; but there was a dearth of cereals, and the Government had to provide grain, both for reasons of

humanity and in order to avoid creating discontent in the rear of the troops in the field.

Besides this, we had to collect supplies of food for as long a period as possible, taking into account the possibility of sanctions, and even the closing of the Canal. I fixed a minimum of three months.

General Dall'Ora, who has undertaken to write for the *Istituto nazionale fascista di cultura* an account of what the Intendancy accomplished in East Africa, will illustrate with the relevant figures what I have briefly indicated.

Asmara, in normal times, had a sufficiency of water. In 1932 I had noted that there was a certain scarcity in dry seasons; but this was partly due to the faulty construction of the old aqueduct, which lost some of the water. I received complaints of this when I paid my two visits to the Colony, and I myself had experienced the inconveniences of an inadequate water supply; so I decreed that a million lire should be added to the Eritrean budget for the purpose of repairing the aqueduct.

There was a substantial improvement. But the growth of the population and the exceptional needs due to the operations of the various branches of the commissariat necessitated the taking of immediate steps to obtain the largest possible quantity of water.

A little to the north of Asmara are three small lakes; I do not know what their geological origin

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

may be. One of these lakes supplied just enough water for the town.

The possibility of using the water of yet another of these lakes was considered. A chemical and bacteriological examination of this water showed that it was good and potable. Plans were drawn up for constructing a conduit, and work was promptly begun upon it; but I left the Colony before it was finished.

Nevertheless, there was no real water famine even in Asmara.

At Massawa water was provided by the installation of a powerful distilling plant and some ship's water-tanks.

The electrical power available was not sufficient, and this too was immediately increased.

* * *

The greatest and most pressing need of improvement was manifested by the postal and telegraphic service.

In normal times the mails used to arrive regularly once a week. They were carried to Alexandria by Italian vessels, which furnished a weekly service between Italy and Egypt. Thence they were sent by rail to Suez, and from Suez the small steamers of the "Tirrenia" Company, commonly known as "the little mail," took them on to Massawa, touching at the principal ports on both sides of the Red Sea.

Unless the weather was very rough indeed (as it rarely is in the Red Sea) the mail arrived in Massawa every Tuesday.

There was also the mail brought monthly by the pretentiously-named "Rapid Line," likewise run by the "Tirrenia" Company, which took 9 days from Naples to Massawa and 7 more to reach Mogadiscio, after which it proceeded to Mombasa, returning at the same speed and touching at the same ports.

Lastly, by exception, a mailbag would arrive on one of the vessels of the "Libera Triestina", or the "Società Veneziana", which made the circuit of Africa.

This service used to suffice.

All the postal matter passed through the chief post-office at Asmara and the branch office at Massawa, and the few employés attached to these offices were quite equal to their task.

Naturally, the case was altered as the population continued to increase.

As regards the Army, the post-offices of the various units got to work as quickly as possible; but the same cannot be said of the civilian offices.

Complaints and claims in respect of the defective postal service were innumerable, and *at first* they were justified.

However, one had to allow for some prejudice.

Many who had no experience of colonial life, and did not keep in mind the great distance that

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

divided them from Italy, could not be persuaded that it was natural that they should receive letters so rarely and at such long intervals.

Whenever I have spoken to soldiers and labourers I have made it my business to put the real facts of the case before them.

The delays in the postal service, which for a certain period were greater than ever, were due to these causes:

(a) Too small a staff and too few post-offices;

(b) Difficulty of collecting the letters from correspondents who were at a great distance from the postal centres;

(c) The Censorship;

(d) The last and principal reason: because at a given moment, as the hostility towards us increased, especially on the part of the English, the Government in Rome prohibited the use of the "little mail" for postal transmissions, in order to avoid sending our correspondence through Egypt. The result was that *the only regular mail* arrived and left once a month by the "Rapid Line".

Then troops and materials began to arrive in the chartered steamers, so that the mails were able to reach us more frequently. But the same advantage was not obtained from the steamers leaving the port, since the chartered vessels, returning "light", had to carry only the deck hands and a crew sufficient for the purposes of navigation. If they had

taken a single bag of mail on board they would have had to pay the enormous dues of the Suez Canal.

The most insistent complaints came from the labourers, referring more especially to the difficulty of sending money to their families.

Steps were taken to put this right. A beginning was made by allowing labourers who were within reach of them to make use of the military post-offices. Afterwards collecting officers were established in a certain number of labour camps. An itinerant collector called for the mails and took them to the post-office.

This same collector, on pay-days, accepted money and made out the necessary postal orders.

Finally: as the needs of the labourers called for a continual displacement of the labour camps, with the change of their distinctive numbers, and also, to some extent, of their component parts, the interested firms organized, with their own employés, offices of their own for the collection and despatch of correspondence.

For this about six months were necessary; but towards the end of June the postal delays were at an end.

The service was afterwards completed and rendered more elastic by the arrival of the necessary number of postmen and postal employés. Truth compels me to say that in first consignments little

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

pains were taken in respect of physical selection; so that more than a third of the men had to be repatriated after a few weeks in the Colony.

The establishment of the air service was a great relief.

The surveys of the aerial route were begun in February, and at the end of February the representatives of the company which had been granted the concession arrived in Asmara.

Correspondents were allowed, over and above a definite maximum weight of official correspondence, to send letters not exceeding 5 grammes in weight. It was not easy to make the soldiers and labourers understand the necessity of observing such limits; moreover, many of the labourers, despite the ample explanations given, thought it was enough to post their letters to Asmara, because their correspondence was sent by aeroplane to Italy; whereas it was necessary to post them in special boxes outside the post-offices, bearing a conspicuous notice: "Aerial Post."

Letters incorrectly posted went by the ordinary post; hence disappointment and complaints.

* * *

The only means of telegraphic communication was the wireless telegraph, operated by the Royal Navy.

The work accomplished by the wireless telegraph station, directed by an extremely active and expert

officer, Lieutenant di Vascello, was enormous and extremely onerous.

One has only to reflect that the greater part of the official correspondence, both civil and military, was effected by means of wireless telegraphy.

With the pressure of necessities and events it was impossible to correspond by post; the urgency of intercourse demanded the sending of telegrams.

Telegrams four or five pages in length, in which even articles and prepositions were included, in order to render misinterpretation impossible; telegrams *always* and *entirely* in cipher.

The cipher office deserves special recognition for the devoted service of the staff, who laboured day and night, in a spirit of exalted patriotism, at the delicate and extremely important task entrusted to them.

For private persons the telegram was a costly means of communication, and it was, of course, quite beyond the means of the soldiers and labourers.

With the help of the Ministry of Communication arrangements were made for the sending of telegrams of four stereotyped words—the address being extra—by which the sender could give or ask for news of special but not abnormal urgency.

Example: "Well no letters."—"Sent money yesterday," etc. These telegrams—which were despatched, of course, after all others—cost only 4 lire.

* * *

I have already made mention of the air line.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

The company operating it was the "Ala Littoria."

After the trip made by Commandant Klinger at the end of February, of which I have already spoken, I had hoped that the line would have been in operation by April or May at the latest; but it was not, by a long way. Our understanding with the English company met with obstacles on every side.

It must be understood that, to begin with, the Company was not in a position to operate the service independently; it was obliged to have recourse to the English line: Brindisi-Athens-Alexandria-Khartoum.

At Khartoum it linked up with our line, which was limited to the run from Khartoum to Asmara *via* Kassala and *vice versa*.

On the English line certain places were reserved for us (although it was necessary to apply for them long beforehand) and a definite weight of mail-bags was allowed.

The regular service on our section of the line did not begin operation until the 22nd July, 1935.

It functioned well, even during the rainy season. It was sometimes delayed in starting or returning, but the service never failed.

It was greatly to our interest that Somalia also should be able to benefit by the aerial service; but notwithstanding the goodwill and interest of the Air Ministry, the first trip from Asmara to Mogadiscio

(two days) did not take place until the 11th November.

Undeniably our dependence on the English line was always a serious impediment, for we could not be perfectly sure of our own movements. It was essential that we should have an independent service (apart from emergency landings), and we had it from the 1st December, 1935, on which date the direct route was inaugurated: Rome-Asmara-Mogadiscio.

* * *

A department which assumed an ever greater importance in the Colony was the Press. Hitherto Eritrea had possessed only a miserable apology for a Press.

I regarded the Press as a civil function, although all the correspondents who came to Eritrea and Somalia at this period were war correspondents. They were interested more particularly in all that related to our military preparations, and anything connected with them, caring little or nothing for the country, its attractions, its native population, its climate, and so forth.

In Asmara a little daily newspaper was printed—*Il Quotidiano Eritreo*—a single sheet, folded in two. One of the four pages was printed in Amharic and Arabic characters, and one was devoted to advertisements.

It was not interesting reading: it reproduced the

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

telegrams of the Stefani agency, and it had a few items of news, and a few articles on scientific, artistic, or literary topics copied from other publications of antediluvian date.

It will be understood that in the natural course of events the news became more interesting; but the *Quotidiano Eritreo* remained a poor little sheet.

Hence the "local Press" could not undertake to extend its hospitality to the foreign Press which now established itself in the Colony.

I knew that the Duce was very anxious that the correspondents—especially the foreign journalists—should receive the best possible treatment.

An official of the Ministry of the Press and Propaganda—Commandant Casertano—came out to direct and control both the correspondents and their correspondence.

I should like to say before I go farther that in Casertano I had an assiduous, intelligent and able assistant, endowed with that sense of authority indispensable when one has to deal with gentry who by virtue of their very profession are inclined to chafe at the bit, and to ensure that they do not take undue liberties. Fascism has been able to make Italian journalists keep within bounds, but foreign journalists are accustomed to enjoy unbridled liberty in their own countries, and are unused to discipline; hence it was not easy to make them act in a straightforward manner and in accordance with

our own views. But Casertano succeeded perfectly and without ever having to employ forcible means. The few who showed signs of being refractory, or were suspect, were deported without delay.

It was the Duce's wish that the foreign journalists should be favourably impressed in every way. In the meantime we had to find quarters for them.

I have already said that the local hotels had little to offer; hence we had to depend on private houses, and succeeded in finding a certain number of decent rooms.

Another necessity was a meeting-place where information could be obtained and co-ordinated; where the correspondents could write and discuss the situation, and where the person in charge of the Press and in continual contact with the Government could exercise the desired control and censor correspondence.

I felt that the only premises which could be used to advantage were the Fascist headquarters. The Casa del Fascio was well built, with a very large hall, a certain number of rooms which could be put to different uses, and a cellar which could be adapted for the use of servants, or even as a dwelling.

The Federation, in the true Fascist spirit, most cheerfully granted us the use of the premises, and I immediately gave orders for the necessary work to be done. The result was a very decent headquarters,

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

with a clubroom, a writing-room, a mess-room, and even a few bedrooms.

I am descending to what may seem superfluous details, but if the reader will reflect that all these trivial matters called for an elastic consideration of the expedients by which every demand could be met, and will realize that such matters had their importance, as affecting our prestige, and that this called for days of assiduous labour, even while the great preparations were in progress, he may have a clearer idea of the effort which we expended in the course of a few months.

* * *

I have alluded in passing to the arrival of the first nuclei of labourers, their provisional organization, and their treatment.

But since, as I have stated, this problem was the subject of protests and complaints and accusations—almost all uttered in bad faith—I feel that I ought to explain *fully* all that the Government did, and all that it required of the contractors, in order that the workers might receive treatment which would assure them of healthy conditions and good living, and leisure enough to conserve the energy which would enable them to do productive work.

I shall conceal nothing.

It took a good month to satisfy the first requirements.

I had better repeat what I have already said:

People did not sufficiently consider where these labourers were going to work. In Africa, of course; in a hot country . . . and that was all. Simple indeed! No one had seriously inquired as to what were the real climatic conditions of the country, and the consequent physical requirements. But the heat—which was regarded as the principal enemy—affected only a section of the labour front, and not the largest. On the other hand, one had to take into serious account the altitude combined with the latitude of the plateau, which call for an absolutely normal state of the heart and lungs.

No selection was made; it was forgotten that the mass of labourers had to build roads—that is, work as navvies. On the other hand, all sorts of men came out who had never handled a spade, hoping that they would somehow contrive to make money.

The great majority of the men arrived with nothing but the clothes on their backs, which were worn to threads after a fortnight's labour.

For many of them disillusion came at once, whereupon they asked to be sent back to Italy for reasons of health. And many of them had to be sent home, either for physical reasons or because they were incapable of doing a stroke of work.

All this meant hundreds of thousands of lire wasted, for the cost of transportation was high.

Then there were those who expected to find Africa a land of Cockaigne. They too were dis-

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

illusioned, and it was they who afterwards complained of ill-treatment, insufficient food, and discomforts of every kind.

All this unseemly behaviour, and it was very unseemly, was the more serious in that these men came in contact with the natives, who, instead of finding in every Italian a type of civilization, came across individuals who had very small sense of dignity. It may seem that I have painted an unduly gloomy picture, but I assure the reader that this is not the case. I am an idolator of the truth, but I am never a pessimist.

That I have said already. At first it was impossible to house the labourers in barracks; the organization of their messes left much to be desired, and even their bread was sometimes ill-baked and sodden.

But it must never be forgotten that in this new organization, which was constantly growing, *everything, everything* had to be created.

It is no use saying: you ought to have organized first and then sent for the labourers.

I have already shown how urgent was our need of man-power; we could not delay longer lest we should not be ready in time. However, I counted on the spirit of sacrifice and abnegation which, wedded to the love of the Motherland with which Fascism has succeeded in inspiring the masses; who, in the then circumstances, ought to have regarded them-

selves as soldiers. And so they did, when at last we had got rid of the scum.

However, I took it upon myself as a sacred duty to eliminate the hardships that really existed, and I put all my heart into the task of seeing that the workers' conditions of life were all that they should have been.

In this by no means easy task I was helped most effectively by the Fascist Federation, whose Secretary was the Vice-Governor, a Fascist of 1919, and of proven loyalty.

The first thing to be done was to make sure of a wholesome and abundant food-supply. It was arranged that every labour camp should obtain its supplies from the nearest military stores. It could obtain a complete soldier's ration *at cost price*; that is, at a very cheap rate. It must not be forgotten that the soldiers were receiving the abundant war ration.

Every camp had its own cook, *elected* by the workers, who prepared the two meals of the day and the morning coffee. I often tasted the food and always found it good. And, generally speaking, all the labourers whom I questioned expressed themselves as satisfied. Of course, there were gross eaters who thought the meals a little too frugal; there were men with bad teeth who found that the meat was tough; but one must *not* form judgments on the strength of a few rare exceptions.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

It was essential to preserve the dignity of our labourers in the eyes of the natives; that is, to replace the miserable rags that many of them were wearing. The Federation took this task upon itself, having tunics of khaki made for the men—with breeches for those working in the lowlands—which were supplied at a trifling cost.

No one had anything to cover himself with during the cold nights of the table-land. Accordingly I had all the blankets on the market bought up; but these could only partly suffice even for the needs of the moment. I had therefore to send to Italy for more.

In short, I was convinced that from now on it was indispensable that the labourers sent out to the Colony should arrive with a specified kit, consisting of—Colonial helmet; cloak; army blanket; porringer and spoon.

The helmet was necessary even on the plateau in the middle of the day.

In order to provide the first labourers to arrive with helmets, while those which would be needed later were being made in Italy, I turned to Egypt, the Sudan and Aden. It took six weeks to get 5,000 from Egypt; from the Sudan I contrived to obtain a bare thousand, and Aden refused to permit of the exportation of a single helmet. Then the housing of the workers had to be considered. This was a rather more difficult task, by reason of the question of transport, which had forced me to abandon the

plan of housing the troops in barracks. It was actually the contractors' duty to provide barracks for the labourers, but they had also to provide for the transport of all the material needed for constructive purposes, while they had to avoid any traffic blocks on the roads, which were not yet completed.

In August, however, all the workers were provided with barracks; but many preferred to pitch their tents.

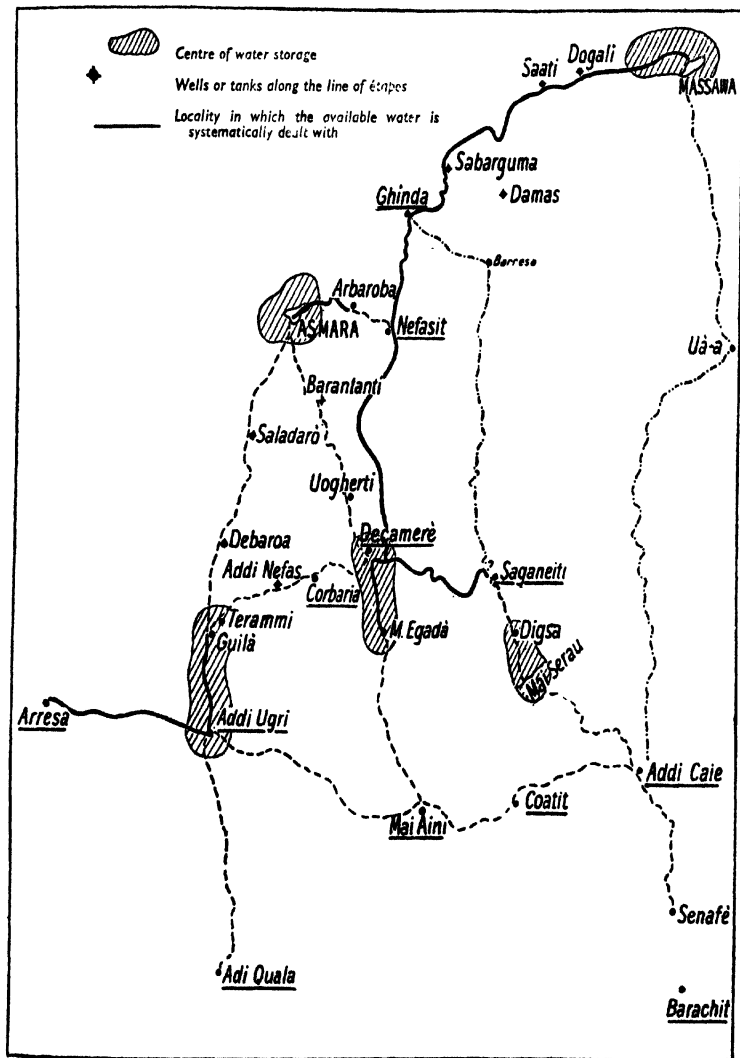
Barracks and tents were furnished with hammocks, which the soldiers *never* had in camp, and even the officers had none during the first advance.

The medical and religious needs of the labourers were the object of special care on the part of the local Government.

Up to the beginning of July the medical personnel available was certainly not abundant; in Italy the recruiting of the doctors whom the directors of the medical service (including the Director of Health of the Intendancy, who had already arrived in the Colony) had judged to be strictly necessary, was not yet completed.

It was therefore necessary, even in this most important branch of the auxiliary services, to resort to the expedient of including specified labour camps in the circuits of the Colonial doctors. But the work was beyond the powers of these kindly and willing physicians, and their help often came too late.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE



DISTRIBUTION OF WATER SUPPLIES.

As more and more troops arrived it was possible to obtain the assistance of the army doctors; and at last, by August, a regular medical service was provided *exclusively* for the labourers. Guides and doctors furnished with motor-cars made the tour of the labour camps in their specified sectors.

In every sector there was a hospital, and where the labour camps contained a very great number of labourers there were camp hospitals: small, but furnished with the indispensable equipment.

As a rule there was someone to be found among the labourers themselves who was qualified to act as hospital orderly and intervene in emergency cases.

A special service, with permanent staff, was established in the torrid and malarial districts.

The worthy Vicar Apostolic—His Excellency Monsignor Cattaneo—naturally put his heart into the mission of providing for the religious needs of the labourers. The Capucin Fathers already in the Colony were too few for such a task. Even with the exceptional measure of allowing each priest to say three masses, the distances were so great that it was impossible to minister to all. The Vicar wrote to Rome, and a strong reinforcement of missionaries was sent out from Italy. Also, within prescribed circuits, the military chaplains of the Army Corps, the Sanitary Sections and the hospitals gave their services.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

A mass in camp is always a moving sacrament: still more moving is a labourers' mass.

Our labourers, as a general thing, are believers, though their faith may be tinged with beneficent superstition.

The hour of mass was the hour of nostalgia. From the faces of the worshippers it could be seen that their thoughts were with their dear ones, who perhaps at the same hour, in the familiar church, were praying for the loved one so far away, who was quietly subjecting himself to a life of hardship in order to provide a livelihood and a little comfort for his beloved family.

It they could have seen the pains that he and his fellows took to embellish and adorn the little wooden chapel or the simple altar dedicated to the sacrament!

At the back of every decoration, even religious, was our flag, and the lictoral Fascio.

And here it should be said that in the exercise of their ministry friars and priests manifested a patriotic spirit which was not inferior to their religious sentiment.

The base organization was afterwards completed, and was able to ensure the progressive betterment of the labourers' conditions, and provide them with some degree of comfort.

The "Dopolavoro" organization did its utmost to extend its activities and offer its hospitality to all comers.

In every labour camp of any importance food and tobacco and other luxuries were offered for sale.

The need of a central organ to supervise this powerful organisation became urgent.

I therefore established a special office near the Government building, appointing as Director the Vice-Governor, as he was also Federal Secretary, and my Chief of Cabinet, Grand Officer Butturini, a man of great resource and an experienced organiser.

A well-distributed intelligence system informed us if anything was amiss, when it was immediately put right.

Certain Syndical officials were sent out from Italy, who gave us valuable assistance in our difficult and onerous tasks. Further, certain persons came out on visits of inspection: among them the Honourable Nannini, Secretary General for Emigration.

It is possible that they landed in Eritrea with certain preconceived ideas. I believe they did. I am sure that I am right in saying that when they returned to Italy they were in a position to refute all the liars and impenitent defeatists.

The proof that the labourers were contented is furnished by the fact that they had a six months' contract; well, even in the first consignments, which were the least desirable, 68 per cent. renewed

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

their contract. Afterwards this percentage increased to 84 per cent.

Another sign of well-being and honest labour may be found in the large sums of money saved and sent home to the workers' families.

In dealing with a few sporadic cases I had to employ the greatest severity; but I am sure that once the campaign had begun I could have counted on all the labourers as auxiliaries or reinforcements to the troops if I had needed them.

Nothing untoward happened; but these masses of white labourers in the rear of the troops were a guarantee against any attempt at revolt on the part of the natives who had been tempted or suborned by enemy agents.

IX

THE POLITICAL SITUATION: THE ARMY MAKES READY

THE HEAD of the Government, both officially, and more directly in his confidential letters, written in the style that is all his own, a style that dispels all doubt, constantly kept me informed of the international situation, in view of its possible reactions on the progress of our preparations.

On the 18th May he gave me details of the satisfactory result of the negotiations with foreign Powers in respect of the supply of arms to Abyssinia.

In this connection I should say that from Aden and Djibouti I was accurately informed of the continuous despatch of arms direct to Addis Ababa; and candidly, I must also say that this disagreeable news had merely the result of making me exclaim: *transeat a me calix iste!* For I had absolutely no means of preventing any of these consignments from reaching its destination.

Even the vigilant patrolling undertaken by the Royal Navy, regardless of sacrifice, was of no avail. We were not in a state of war; but even if we had been at war with Ethiopia we should not have had the right to search vessels, for Abyssinia

had no port of her own, either on the Red Sea or the Mediterranean.

Hence we were obliged to suffer this with no possibility of reaction or even resistance.

In the same letter of the 18th May the Duce spoke of diplomatic action:

"There has even been talk," he said, *"of taking 'steps' . . . I have made it understood that we shall not turn back at any price . . . In the meantime, with the nomination of the two arbitrators on the Italian side, we shall get the better of the next Council of the League of Nations, but in September we shall have to begin all over again. It may be that we shall then find it necessary to withdraw from Geneva.*

"It is precisely in view of this eventuality that it is absolutely indispensable not to alter the date—October—which we have fixed for the beginning of the eventual operations.

"Preliminary to this date you must have on the spot the whole ten Italian Divisions."

The Duce added: *". . . You must make sure beforehand of victuals and munitions for at least three years, and also, however absurd it seems, because there are formal conventions in existence relating to the passage of the Suez Canal in peace and war, one must expect difficulties in respect of its passage. In the House of Commons there has even been talk of closing the Canal.*

"One must always make ready for the most pessimistic and difficult eventuality."

Three years' supplies! Very good; produce and munitions of all sorts must flow into the Colony in a continuous stream. And so indeed they did; so that notwithstanding the enormous drain of victuals for daily consumption by the troops, the labourers, and the population, we managed to fill the magazines as required.

With regard to the political situation in Abyssinia, my special and trustworthy informants gave me news of serious uneasiness; the usual dissensions between the chiefs, and an almost general disinclination to go to war. Apparently the Sultan of Aussa had decided to desert the Negus.

At the end of May the Duce asked for my opinion regarding the expediency of denouncing our treaty of friendship with Ethiopia, which had been concluded ten years earlier.

I was opposed to this; but I decided to consult Graziani, who shared my opinion. With the intensive labour of preparation before us we did not want any possible disturbance to distract us. Any change meant delay, and all delay was detrimental.

I therefore candidly gave my opinion, supported by that of Graziani, and the Duce fully approved of our judgment.

* * *

On the 2nd June, the anniversary of the Statute, I passed in review the troops within reach of Asmara.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

There were only a few thousand. The mass of the Corps of Operation was still being organized in Italy; some part of it was on the sea.

The units already in the Colony, as I have explained in a previous chapter, were so distributed that they could take action in the event of enemy attacks.

Nevertheless, the few who were passed in review had acquired the soldierly bearing that comes of confidence and enthusiasm.

In the meantime, officers of all ranks were still arriving, in order to complete the *encadrement* of the troops, who thereby acquired greater solidity and were more quickly handled.

The echo of the speech which the Duce had delivered at Cagliari, when saluting the "Sabauda" Division, then about to weigh anchor, served to still further electrify the soldiers, and even the askaris, and to fill them with impatience.

Alas! the man who had to be absolutely patient, although he had little aptitude and less inclination for the part, was myself.

Every morning there was some addition to the already vast programme.

By the grace of God I was splendidly and (which counts for much) affectionately assisted by my Staff, the strict and faithful interpreter of my orders. However, in obedience to an inveterate habit, I despatched a great many matters myself. It was

quicker, and I was then sure that my ideas would not be modified in any way.

But there were *honest* differences of opinion. I call them "honest" because they were always inspired by good intentions. And they were all referred to me!

The greater number were due to the insufficiency of the means of transport.

"Excellency, if I am not given so many motor-lorries to carry cement I can't get on with the reservoirs," complained the Commandant of the Engineers—General Caffo, an old Colonial, recalled from retirement; an inflexible man, of unusual ability and versatility, but always harassed by the thought that we might not be ready in time.

"Excellency, I can't possibly arm such and such batteries if the Intendancy doesn't give me the necessary motor-lorries," said General Garavelli, the Commandant of the Artillery, who was one of my best collaborators.

And then I sent for the accused (whom I was already inclined to believe was entirely in the right): namely, the Intendant.

General Dall'Ora, who was the only person, besides myself and my Staff, who could have a simultaneous and complete oversight of all needs, and who had to graduate his concessions in proportion to the urgency of the various necessities, listened to the complaints calmly, stated the amount

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

of transport he had already granted, and asserted that he could not, for the moment, do more.

But I, who was acquainted with Dall'Ora's well-meant parsimony, which had always enabled him to form a certain reserve of cars, intervened and restored calm, and in the end, having fairly well contented everybody, I turned them out of my office with a "growling smile."

* * *

One deficiency which was greatly felt by all the Commandants, especially those who were new to the Colonies, and to Eritrea, was the lack of topographical maps.

This is no mere phrase: it is the truth. The experienced Colonial officer does not feel the need of maps. He has the sun by day, the stars by night, the tracks and the very scent of the animals. His faculties, which are partly innate, grow keener with the years, and on contact with the natives. A good askari never loses his way: he never allows himself to be misled by the accidents of the terrain, and he has at his service a keenness of sight and hearing and sensitiveness to impressions quite inconceivable to us.

But maps were indispensable in giving detailed orders. Columns of a certain strength cannot march without precise points of reference. The orders of the day for the units on active service naturally had to be compiled with the help of topographical

maps, to which they could refer, to ensure, first, the necessary unity of aim, and then unity of action.

As well as the geographical maps of 1:800 000 and 1:1 000 000, our East African colonies had a chorographic chart of 1:4 000; not very exact, although it had been corrected in various places, especially in recent years.

One of the principal revisions was that of Dankalia,* undertaken by poor Baron Franchetti.

Since 1887 a geodetic base had been established in Eritrea, on which all the cartographical work undertaken in the Colony was based; the most important maps were a few panels of 1:50 000 and some consecutive sheets of 1:100 000 of the country round Asmara, Massawa and Keren.

The 1:400 000 map was distributed to the troops.

But if things were bad in our own territory, you may imagine what they were beyond the frontier. There are various maps of Abyssinia; the best is an English map, clear and sufficiently exact, but on a very small scale.

Something had to be done; I left it to General Gabba; I could then be sure that it would be done properly.

As a matter of fact, when the officers had been selected, and sent out from Italy with the necessary instruments, a branch of the Geographical Institute

*Danakil.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

of Florence was established in Asmara, which lacked for nothing.

This was the programme: Revision of the 1:400 000 map. Compilation of itineraries on the basis of a collection of accurate data which had already been furnished by the Intelligence Office working with the Royal Corps, by various garrisons, and by the commissariat officers.

The compilation of a map of 1:100 000 of the regions within the frontier through which our troops would have to pass.

The compilation of a 1:100 000 map of the territory beyond the frontier.

In performing this difficult task our geographical office had relied almost exclusively on "aerophotogrammetry."

We had one officer who was an expert in such matters, and who made a number of daring and successful flights for this purpose.

At the beginning of the campaign we had at our disposal the 1:100 000 maps as far as the line Agordat-Adowa-Aksum, including all the southern slope of this position.

This topographical work was continued even during military operations.

* * *

Before the rainy season had set in I was obliged to conclude, from various reliable items of information which had been collected, and also from certain

signs which had become apparent to the Commandant of the Eritrean Army Corps, that in addition to the espionage from which we were suffering, a certain amount of propaganda was being carried on in our detachments of askaris, urging them to desert, or at all events to remain passive in case of conflict.

I have said that espionage was particularly active in the markets. The askaris, when they were not occupied in drill, or active service, or labour, were perfectly free. They could not be otherwise, as many of them had families, and they did not even have to turn up at mess, as each of them provided his own food.

Hence it was easy to get into touch with the men who frequented the market.

There is no reason to believe that the suborners made much impression; but they succeeded in confusing the minds of the new recruits, many of whom were very young, so that they were not yet bound to their detachment by the ties of affection.

These intriguers spoke of the immense forces of the Negus: "like flies, like locusts." They spoke of the English, who day by day were sending them batteries and machine-guns, and would come and fight beside them; they told them of the chests of dollars which were being sent to the chiefs, to be distributed among the soldiers . . . and so on. Some of the Coptic clergy, always untrustworthy, gave a hand in this task of subornation.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

It was not expedient to take the precaution of closing the frontier then and there. This would have been a hostile act, which would have done us more harm than good, since we must always be in a position to tell the Negus that all the measures which we were taking, our mobilization and our armaments, were merely measures of precaution in view of the excitement and the mustering of troops on his side of the frontier.

However, I restricted the number of points at which the Colony could be entered by caravans, so that the latter could be more reliably and quickly inspected. The men in charge of the caravans were escorted to the market for which they were making; and so, at all events, it was less easy for persons extraneous to the caravan—and these were the dangerous people—to escape our supervision.

But the best antidote, especially to the rodomontade of those who spoke of the Abyssinian forces, was the continual arrival of Italian regiments, the imposing appearance of our artillery, and the incessant coming and going of the motor-cars and lorries full of weapons, munitions, victuals and military stores.

Another hymn of hate was sung to shake the loyalty of our native troops. They were told that *only* natives would be sent into battle, while the Italians would stand and look on, afterwards rejoicing in the victory won by the askaris alone.

This statement, however, had no effect. The old askaris in particular understood and appreciated not only our strength, but our enthusiasm. And in any case, in order the more closely to amalgamate the black troops with the white, I resorted to exercises, and reviews, and every other opportunity of bringing the native and Italian units into contact.

And as regards the formation of the operating Army Corps—as will be seen later on—every Italian Army Corps had its own Eritrean detachments, and the Native Army Corps (which was afterwards known as the Eritrean Army Corps) had a Division of Blackshirts, besides the Diamanti group, also of Blackshirts, who were released from their work on the roads, the original reason of their despatch to the Colony.

In any case, the results of the propaganda of which I have complained were by no means impressive. A few desertions, such as occur in all armies in the period preceding a campaign, and nothing more.

On the 26th July I received another autograph letter from the Duce. In this he spoke of Eden's journey and his proposals, and he concluded by saying: "*You can imagine my reply.*" And he continued: "*The English attitude has helped instead of injuring.*"

In this same letter he informed me that he would

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

be coming to Eritrea about the time when I should have to open the attack (if attack there was to be), "*which ought to be crushing from the very first blows. . .*" "*You have, then, only 120 days in which to get ready.*"

Actually I had less; but I made them suffice.

By the 15th June the "Sabauda" Division also had arrived in Eritrea and was assembled between Nefasit and Decamerè.

The "Gavinana" and "Sabauda" Divisions together constituted—provisionally—the First Italian Army Corps.

General Santini was thus able to expound in full his functions as Corps Commandant.

I should note that the "Sabauda" Division included, among its three regiments, the 3rd Bersaglieri.

I had insisted that the Duce ought to send some of the Bersaglieri to Africa. Apart from my own desire and my feelings as an old Bersagliere, I considered this an act of justice. Our military history in the colonies really began with the disembarkation of a battalion of Bersaglieri at Massawa, and the 11th was the first regiment of the Italian Army to set foot in Tripolitania.

The Bersaglieri could not be left out of the great enterprise.

They came in their old formation—that is, on foot; always smart and active, with no hankering after bicycles and other mechanical devices.

The Native Army Corps still remained in the front line.

I should not have wished this, but with the forces already at my disposal and the possibilities of redistributing them, it would have been foolish to feel any anxiety on this account.

There had already been three or four heavy down-pours of rain: the beginning of the rainy season.

My informers spoke of an increased nervousness and tension in Ethiopia; of intensive military preparation, and frequent assemblies of warriors; while there were still rumours of agreements with England by which concessions would be made in the region of Lake Tana, in return for a strip of coast in Somaliland, so that the country might have an outlet to the sea.

They also spoke of a meeting of chiefs in Adowa, on the 23rd June, at which Ras Sioum had given orders to mobilize in his territory, with the object of aggressive action against our frontier, and also an attempt at invasion.

I did not put much faith in this information, and confined myself to recommending keener vigilance on the whole front.

Our weak point was in the western lowlands, but this gave me no anxiety once the rains had fallen, as then the Setit became impassable.

The 500 Spahis from Libya were to go to this sector.

I had thus the means of forming a tactical group

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

adapted to the special conditions of the terrain.

Accordingly a group was formed as follows: one group of native irregulars on foot; and a body of rapidly-moving troops consisting of a band of horsemen and a band of cameliers, the Spahis, a camel battery, a squadron of rapid armoured cars,* and the 17th and 18th Eritrean battalions. And a due proportion of all the auxiliary services.

To the command of this group, which had the important function of preventing turning movements on the right of our main body, and, in the event of an offensive, of threatening the left flank of the enemy, I appointed General Couture; he too was an old Colonial, and had special experience (having been stationed there for long periods) of the sector entrusted to his command.

At the end of June we had further confirmation of the news relating to the partial mobilization ordered by Ras Sioum. On the top of this news came the information that work was being done to improve the caravan track leading from the Takazzè to Aksum. It was further stated that various stores of grain were being collected.

And here I may say that we had detailed information concerning the whereabouts of the various grain depôts on the main line of invasion: Dessié-Lago Ascianghi-Amba Alagi-Makallè.

Clear and comparatively exact sketches had been

*Resembling our whippet tanks.—(Tr.)

made of this line, which would certainly be useful to our air force once hostilities had begun.

It seemed to be the Negus's definite intention to leave the initiative to the Italians; to defend himself while retreating; to draw us away from our base, in order to counter-attack at an opportune moment, then to hem us in and defeat us.

Ras Sioum too must have conformed to this plan: he was reluctant to do so, as he had wished to defend Tigré to the last.

The information relating to the partial mobilization ordered might mean that the Emperor had acceded to the desire of his Ras.

Ras Sioum was never a fighter. Those who knew him well, having come into contact with him, and our own Consul at Adowa, had no great belief in his bellicose intentions. But in any case it was prudent to be prepared for anything.

As for us—and myself in particular—we should have been glad if the Ras had resisted us with all his forces on the Adowa positions. Convinced as I was that I should attain my first objectives, an Abyssinian rout, even partial, would have accelerated the process of dissolution, which was afterwards evident.

Early in July we had further information: The command of the Eritrean front would be assumed by the Negus. Ras Sioum, the Degiac Chebbedè and Haile Selassie Gugsà would have to operate along

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

the whole of the Tigré front. A second echelon would be formed by the troops of Jeggin and Wollo. Ras Kassa and the Degiac Aileù Burrù would attempt to penetrate into the Colony from the Setit sector.

I communicated this intelligence to the Commands more directly interested, with relative precautionary instructions only in respect of that part of the front which especially concerned them. I have always thought it harmful to give wide diffusion to any news there may be of the enemy; the more so as only too often the information is distorted and inflated.

As will be seen, according to this information even Hailè Selassiè Gugsà was to have played a prominent part in the war.

Gugsà was the son-in-law of the Emperor: but he was a malcontent. His father—our true friend—as he lay at the point of death had prophesied—to the Italian doctor who was attending him—the defeat of the Negus and the dismemberment of the Empire. The Emperor, in a redistribution of commands, had deprived Gugsà—whom he considered to be disloyal—of a good part of his territories, in order to increase the power of Ras Sioum; hence there was little sympathy between the two chiefs of Tigré; indeed, there was positive if not manifest enmity.

Our intelligence agents and the whole personnel of the Consulate at Adowa wisely took advantage

of this state of affairs to win Gugsà over to our side. He was the most direct descendant of the warrior Negus Neghesti Joannes, who died heroically at Metemma, fighting against the Madhists. Hence, by evoking this memory, it was possible to appeal to the young Degiac's ambitions.

I had already received letters from him, containing complaints of his subject position, and asking me for instructions as to his mode of conduct.

We were still too far from the moment when action would be possible, and I had absolute need of the greatest possible tranquillity in order that I might complete my preparations; hence I had to discourage any impulsive act, any premature move, which would have broken the egg before we were ready to make the omelette.

I therefore recommended Gugsà to keep quiet; to show himself apparently obedient and reconciled; for the day would soon come when I should give him categorical instructions.

The development of the air force proceeded very slowly; but there were no hitches in the voyage from Italy, or in assembling the machines which were landed at Massawa.

I had restricted its activities, for as it was impossible to undertake flights which would yield us valuable information, it was better to spare the machines and the petrol.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

When the rainy season set in the possibilities of flight were still further reduced, as the temporary aerodromes were impracticable. The great aerodrome of Asmara was already nearly equipped with a most essential requirement: the concrete platform for landing and taking off.

During the months of May and June I ordered observers to go on training flights, in which several officers took part, of their own free will, and to their real advantage.

To make an observer is not such a simple matter; on the contrary, the observer must have special abilities and a great deal of practice.

On the 23rd July the Ministry for Aeronautics issued its complete programme, according to which 255 bombers and 52 scouts were to be sent out by degrees; some in H.M.S. *Miraglia*, while some, perhaps, would fly from Italy. Among the scouts would be some machines of the R.O. 37 type, which by reason of their speed and armament could also be used as chasers.

On the 30th July I received the royal decree concerning the constitution of the supreme air command in East Africa. In this decree the subordination of the air command to the Commander-in-Chief in East Africa was not made sufficiently clear.

Unity of command is indispensable. *One man only* must exercise command.

Initiative is generally useful, but independence is

pernicious. I at once called the attention of the Ministry to the point. No modification was made; the important thing, however, was that in practice the air force was wholly and in all things subordinate to me.

The general who was to assume the new command had not been named, but the Chief of Staff was sent—Brigadier-General Aimone Cat—who assumed the temporary command, and was afterwards given the actual command at the beginning of the campaign.

* * *

On the 6th July the "Harrar incident" occurred: our consular representative at Harrar was assaulted by an Abyssinian officer.

These provocations were all assets to our cause. No one could have claimed in good faith that we were guilty of provocation.

In Agamè there was a mustering of warriors, amounting to some 3,000 without artillery; in six hours or so they were able to mobilize a thousand on the spot, with arms already distributed.

From Somalia came information that after the Negus had left 100 chieftains of Ogaden had met in secret assembly, in which the loyalty due to the Negus was hotly debated. The chieftains declared that the promises which they had given him had been extorted from them.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

There were also expressions of anti-British feeling at this assembly.

At Addis Ababa, on his return from his visit to Harrar and Somalia, the Negus had confirmed the proposal to allow us to advance to the Takazzè, and then to cut us off from our base and defeat us.

There were also large gatherings of warriors in Somalia. Already some 25,000 men had placed themselves under the command of the Gnasmach Afwork and the Degiac Nasibù.

As I have already stated, General Graziani was not well provided with mobile troops.

For this reason the Head of the Government had ordered General Balbo to get a Libyan Division ready to be sent to Somalia: an arrangement which gave General Graziani the greatest satisfaction.

I too had asked for a consignment of Libyan askaris to be used in the eastern lowlands.

The situation there was not causing me anxiety. I did not think it possible that the enemy could make a serious attempt in the direction of Massawa, turning our left flank. But the front to be guarded was extensive, and the troops assigned to the task were not homogeneous; also they were subject to loss through illness, on account of the treacherous climate. However, they were commanded by an experienced general—Mariotti—another old Colonial who had served under me, and whom I had now summoned to help me.

The Libyans are accustomed to the heat, and even to moist heat; they were Moslems, and for this reason were not sent to fight their co-religionists on the coast. Two battalions would have been providential. I had to content myself with one, which I sent to the Assab sector.

The new plan of operations diminished the necessity of strongly fortifying what would be our defensive front.

I therefore reduced the number of fortified points, limiting fortifications to the points which were most dangerous to us, and those most fitted for defence, and indicated as pivots of manœuvre in the case of counter-offensive action.

There were consequently fewer batteries to be armed, so there remained at my disposal a good number of guns of various calibres, which I held in reserve, so that they could be quickly sent to the positions which we had conquered and had to occupy.

On the 6th July the Head of the Government requested me to send him on the 16th a telegraphic despatch giving prominence to all the provisions I had made and all the work accomplished in the six months of my Governorship.

It was not easy to summarize it all: for my collaborators and I had laboured in every field, and the work accomplished was already enormous.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

With the help of precise data I drew up the despatch myself in such a way as to give a clear idea of what had been done and what remained to be done.

On the 16th the Duce replied to me in a telegram which I should like to produce in its entirety, and which, besides filling me with pride and satisfaction, spurred me on to complete with renewed energy the arduous task entrusted to me:

“7520 (.) In receipt of your important and detailed report which constitutes an exhaustive account of your activity during the first six months as High Commissioner of East Africa (.) I add at once that you may be proud of this summing up whose results are essential and under certain aspects decisive (.) It appears from your report, and I wish to communicate it to the country, that the work of the High Commissioner has expanded into every field with an intense alacrity and without intermission in order to put Eritrea into a position to face present and future tasks (.) All that is necessary for the life of a population increased tenfold and a great Italian and native army, that is`(:) roads, water, victuals, barracks, stores, hospitals and an infinite number of other necessities, has been successfully provided in spite of difficulties which for various reasons were at first enormous (.) The congestion of the port of Massawa which gave us such anxiety at one moment is nearly ended (.) Fascist loyalty and determination have bent things to their will (.) In the logistic sector much still

remains to be done, but on the basis of the data of the outline report I consider that your second half-yearly account will be even more satisfying than the first (.) For this reason I send to you and your collaborators the unstinted expression of my satisfaction and approbation with which the Black-shirts who follow you in your arduous task with the greatest sympathy associate themselves (.) Mussolini."

On the 10th July Ras Sioum had ordered the partial mobilization of western Tigré, in obedience to a telegram from Ras Mulughietà—Minister for War—in which he had ordered for the 2nd of the month a new census of warriors. About 12,000 men presented themselves at Adowa, and were immediately dismissed, so as to evade the necessity of maintaining them.

There were similar mobilizations in various parts of the Empire, and the results of all were disappointing.

At Dessiè the Crown Prince presided over the mobilization. Haranguing the troops, he concluded by saying that war was now unavoidable.

Everywhere it was plainly evident that the men were unwilling to answer the call to arms.

The thought of having bands of armed men in the countryside terrified the people, who knew that this would mean that they would be despoiled of everything.

Confronted with such a situation, our propaganda

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

made rapid strides. It told them that we, once and for all, should bring peace and well-being.

Fresh news gave us information of forces above Makallè—estimated at 5,000—under the command of Hailù Chebbedè; and others—3,000 strong—moving from Cuzam towards Aksum.

This pointed to the fear of unexpected action on our part. This was confirmed also by the earth-works—though these were of no importance—thrown up by the enemy on the Adigrat-Adowa-Aksum line, and by the fact that Aleù Burrù, who at first seemed to be intending to march with his men into the Kafta-Birkutan region, was now said to be concentrating his forces in Shirè, and tending toward the salient of Adiabò.

The Ethiopians were greatly concerned about the passage of the Takazzè, and wished to have a sufficient force beyond the river to cope with any emergency that might occur before the flooding of the streams made the crossing of the river impossible. Mention had often been made of the building of a bridge there, or of ferries; but nothing could be positively verified. Even where our aeroplanes, after hostilities had begun, were able to fly low over the river, they saw no sign of a bridge.

On the 26th July the Ethiopian Government issued orders for the *general mobilization*.

It declared: "By the first of Mascarem (17th

September) all able-bodied men must proceed with rifle and ammunition to the spot which will be indicated by their chiefs. These, when the time comes, will already have received the requisite indications three days beforehand.”

The order then gave detailed instructions and regulations for the various provinces, and closed with the assurance that the Government would provide for the victualling of those who could not provide for themselves. The die was cast. It was impossible, save in deliberate bad faith, to accuse us of provocation.

Nor could we be justly reproached for having sent Italian regiments to the Colony and for mobilizing the natives.

This was purely a defensive measure. Confronted with Abyssinian forces infinitely superior to those at our disposal in the Colony, we had to protect ourselves, and to protect ourselves in time, taking into account all that would be needed for the transportation of a sufficient military force from the Peninsula to Massawa.

Besides the Belgian military mission, which had been reinforced, some Swedish officers had arrived in Addis Ababa, all inspired with a savage hatred of us, and an apparent disdain for our military preparations, a disdain which did not sufficiently conceal a feeling of envy.

They absolutely refused to accept the fact that

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

Fascism had radically transformed our nation; so that in their relations with the Abyssinian chiefs these European mercenaries continued to depict us as the people who were defeated at Adowa.

The Turkish general, Weib Pasha, also made his appearance in the Ethiopian capital: he was intelligent, fairly cultured, and clear-sighted.

It must be remembered that this man became the Emperor's principal military adviser; but even Weib Pasha had not taken the trouble to study and understand the Italian people.

I believe it was he who suggested to the Emperor the plan which I have already mentioned: the plan of drawing us on until we got into a difficult position and then attacking and defeating us.

* * *

At the end of July we received a sensational piece of news.

The Emperor was said to have proposed the following plan: As before, he would at first remain on the defensive; he would allow us to advance, abandoning Tigré, and would then deliver an attack, penetrating into Eritrea between Sittoria and Adiabò.

Consequently his troops would be drawn up as follows:

The Beghemedes and Wogherà troops between Nogara and Amba Birkutan;

The Tigré and Wollo troops to the east of the above position, in positions to the rear;

The troops of Ras Kassa round Gondar, where an entrenched camp was to be constructed.

Tembien, a countryside rich in resources, might be employed as a zone of assembly; this would be very convenient, as from Tembien a constant threat could be made on the flank of the main line of march: Adigrat-Makallè-Lake Ascianghi.

Our informer told us, however, that apparently no work was being done in the way of strengthening positions, nor had any assemblies of warriors been noted; and that the people took no interest in the war, but regarded our doings with indifference.

In view of the general situation and the progress of our labourers, and the fact that time was passing, I felt that I must now send the Administration a complete and organic plan, fixing the order of despatch, between the 31st July and the 1st November, of units, troops, and auxiliary services to complete the Eritrean Corps of Operation.

I divided the time at our disposal into four periods:—1st Period: From the 1st to the 20th August: Various elements of the Intendancy must arrive in the Colony; commissariat troops, rapid armoured cars and the rest of the units which had already arrived.

2nd Period: From the 20th August to the 1st September: the first echelons of the Italian Divisions

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

which had not yet started. These first echelons would have to include the transport and the auxiliary services of the Divisions, so that on their arrival the troops would be able to function with their own services.

3rd Period: From the 1st September to the 15th October: Arrival of all the baggage and equipage still needed for the organizations of the Divisions already in the Colony. The First and Second Divisions of Blackshirts. The "Sila" and "Gran Sasso" Divisions complete. The unit of Engineers of the High Command, still lacking. The rest of the rapid armoured cars.

4th Period: From the 16th October to the 1st November: Fourth and Fifth Divisions of Blackshirts. Two groups of mechanized artillery.

I shall not go into too many details. As will be seen, the bulk of the principal forces had to arrive between the 1st September and the 15th October, so that by the date fixed for active operations I should have at my disposal a force which I considered ought to assure me absolutely of our superiority over the enemy at the moment of the first onset.

I once more urged that the units should arrive complete in all particulars. There was no means of filling gaps on the spot save at the cost of other units, causing harmful delay in the movements of concentration.

The Under-Secretary for War had expressed his desire—and considered it fitting—that the Grenadiers and the Alpini should be represented in East Africa. I accept his proposal most gladly; so it was agreed that a battalion of the 3rd Grenadiers and the “Susa” battalion of Alpini should come with the last echelon. To these a battalion of the Royal Frontier Guard (Guardia di Finanza) was afterwards added.

These proposals of mine were for the most part accepted.

It was obvious that each consignment of troops involved the necessity of sending with it what was needful to support it in the field and enable it to fight. Ample provision was made in this direction by the requirements of the Intendancy, which were fully satisfied by the Ministry for War.

* * *

Here I must speak of a painful episode, which was a grief to all Fascists, and especially to me.

The Minister for Public Works, the Honourable Razza, had obtained from the Duce permission to pay a visit of inspection to the Colony, to see what had been done, and to dispose of such matters as related to his Ministry. I was glad to hear of this visit.

Poor Razza was a true friend of mine. An intelligent man, without preconceived opinions, and

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

with practical views. He would have understood and appreciated the work we had done, and this not only from the standpoint which might especially interest him as Minister. Razza was an experienced organizer; before becoming Minister he had been Secretary-General of the Syndicates; and I had had him with me, in the Ministry for the Colonies, in the quality of Commissioner for the organization entrusted with the colonization of Cirenaica. I knew him well and loved him. There had always been between us a complete identity of views, never troubled by any variance.

I was confident that on returning to Italy he could have enlightened the Duce—who valued him so greatly—in respect of every department of our work; above all, he could have elucidated matters which were still the subject of malevolent criticism: the congestion of the port—labour problems—the preference given to certain contracting firms, etc.

The tragedy which cut him off is known to the world; but the world knows nothing of our hours of shuddering suspense, or of all the inquiries made (in which, I must admit, the British authorities in the Sudan gave us the fullest assistance).

We listened constantly to the radio, and I kept in touch with Rome, Cairo, Khartoum and Port Sudan. After the news of his safe arrival in Cairo we knew nothing until 11.0 p.m. on the eighth day, when we received the fatal news, with a few

particulars, from our Minister in Egypt. We were overwhelmed by the tragedy.

* * *

On the 13th August the Leader telegraphed to me: "I beg you most urgently to advance by 10 days despatch of Divisions '23rd March' and '28th March' which have been more than ready for some time. . . . Reply with a monosyllable."

It is not my way to create difficulties, so I promptly replied: "Yes," confident of the approval of the Intendancy, which was the department most concerned.

I kept General Graziani constantly informed of all questions that directly concerned active operations, so that he could harmonize his movements with mine. It was evident that with the passing of time, and in the course of events, I should be increasingly obliged to leave the Commandant in Somalia full power of acting according to circumstances, and should not be able to give him any instructions over and above the conception of endeavouring to hold engaged the greatest possible number of enemies, so that they could not reinforce the troops destined for the Eritrean sector.

On the evening of the 21st August I received from the Head of the Government this concise telegram:

"Conference came to no conclusion; Geneva will do the same. Make an end."

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

I replied: *"I have never believed in conferences or other such cackle: only results."*

General Dall'Ora, on returning from Italy, was the bearer of a letter from the Duce.

"This is the last letter that I am writing to you before action . . . I believe that after the 10th September you should expect my word of command at any moment. By that time you will already have in Eritrea the two Divisions of Blackshirts and another sixty aeroplanes. The forces are sufficient for the first rush and the winning of the established objectives. You will halt on the line conquered and take steps to organize the rear and await events on the international plan . . .

"After 10th September, when you receive a telegram from me worded thus: 'received your report' with my signature you will give the order to advance within the following 24 hours. You will celebrate Mascal in conquered territory.

"Directly you have received the present reply to me with a simple 'very good.' All will happen as we desire and intend. I embrace you."

I must explain what "Mascal" is.

It is a festival which is held on the 27th and 28th September, on which persons of the Coptic religion—who are in the majority in Eritrea—set very great store. Failure to celebrate it with all its rites would portend some disaster; such is their superstitious belief. It was for this reason that in one of my letters to the Duce I had said it would be as well to wait until after Mascal before advancing.

ANNO XIII

This year the ceremony assumed a prophetic quality, since the principal ceremony, which is performed with great solemnity, all the native authorities being present, consists in burning a tall pyre of wood.

If when it has burnt it falls vertically this is a sign of peace; if it falls to one side there will be war.

We were able to celebrate Mascal at the right time.

I replied to the Leader, *as always*: "Very good."

X

FINAL ARRANGEMENTS

CONCERNING THE position of the enemy at the end of August, we had only the following information:

Ras Kassa Hailù and the Degiac Aileù Burrù were said to have issued a proclamation in which they declared that war against Italy was inevitable. The armed forces were to hold themselves in readiness for the 22nd August, the day prescribed for the commencement of hostilities.

At Adowa Ras Sioum was said to have confided to one Barambaras Gabre Cristhos (probably sent by the Crown Prince) his plan of operations. It was to await the attack of the Italians, deceiving them by a feigned concentration, and then to attempt a turning movement. Hence it seemed that Sioum was unwilling to fall in with the Negus's wish, according to which he was to abandon Tigré.

In conversation, however, it was said that the most obvious fact was the Ras's fear lest he might see his territories invaded by Shioan troops, who, according to him, "do more damage than locusts and the earthquake."

In Gojjam Ras Immerù was said to have ordered the subordinate chiefs to hold themselves in readiness to start for the front, with their warriors, by middle of September.

In Harrar, Ogaden, Sidamo and Jimma the mobilization and concentration of troops were in progress.

Hence all regions of Ethiopia might be regarded as having mobilized. But not all those ordered to mobilize had obeyed; in Gojjam especially various under-officers had distributed arms to their commands, but had shown little intention of moving.

The assembling of the troops was rendered very difficult on account of the deplorable state of the roads, which were worse than ever as a result of the rainy season.

Later information gave us more precise details of the enemy plan of action on the Eritrean front.

The army was said to be divided into two separate bodies: one in the Tembien-Makallè region, with a few covering troops in Tigré, whose task was to engage the Italians in a frontal attack. The second body of troops, from the Karfa-Birkutan and Adiabò regions, was to act on our flank and rear and penetrate into the Colony.

Two other smaller bodies of troops were believed to constitute a reserve distributed around Lakes Ascianghi and Tana. Finally, there was a central

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

body of 40,000 to 45,000 men, of whom 25,000 were picked soldiers who would serve as the Emperor's bodyguard.

The enemy feared an irruption of our forces, with swift mechanical transport, from the Setit in the direction of Gondar and Lake Tana, and had taken steps to block the Setit-Gondar route with a detachment of 4,000 to 5,000 men, situated to the north of the entrenched encampment of Gondar.

The same informer also gave us news of the positions of the armies.

The available artillery was said to be: 450 pieces of calibre not greater than 100 mm.; of which 68 were of modern type; 22 anti-tank and 24 anti-aircraft guns.

Except for the 68 modern pieces, which had 1,000 shells per piece, the allowance of shells per gun was at most no more than 150.

Automatic weapons: 4,000 machine-guns of various types; 1,500 of these, however, were almost past use; 1,200 were already distributed, or were being distributed to the detachments going to the front. Of these: 150 were Mauser machine-guns, heavy and light; 900 Hotchkiss; 150 were automatic rifles. Total ammunition: 150,000,000 rounds.

Rifles: 245,000. Of these 120,000 were Mauser; 40,000 carbines, also Mauser; 20,000 Mauser of an old model; 15,000 good modern rifles of British make; 50,000 Lebel. Total ammunition for the

Mausers, 150 million rounds. The other types had little ammunition.

These details as to rifles are not complete. It turned out that the Abyssinians had also about 20,000 rifles or muskets of '91 type and 10,000 Wetterly rifles.

Armoured cars: 12 of British type, already distributed over different fronts.

The position as regards aeroplanes was unchanged: possibly 12 inefficient machines with an allowance of benzine for 8 months.

* * *

I had already issued contingent instructions for the employment of the troops in the case of attack during the rainy season. These instructions were gradually modified by the arrival of the Italian forces in the Colony.

The Leader had not only given General Dall'Ora the letter already mentioned, in which he told me to hold myself in readiness for any eventuality from the 10th September onwards, but had charged him to tell me that by this time he would probably find it necessary to have a pawn in hand for the purpose of negotiation.

The two Divisions of Blackshirts would not be at my disposal as early as September 10th. However, I thought it would be possible to strike a blow at Adigrat if the Duce really thought it necessary.

The blow would certainly have been successful.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

Agamè was the region least strongly guarded, not very hostile to us, and in that part of the country we had the assistance of Gugsà. However, it would have upset the plan of advance which I had put forward, for which we had been working for months, distributing the auxiliary services and establishing magazines.

I telegraphed as much to the Leader, who, considering the few *pro's* and the many *con's*, thought it better to renounce the attack.

Hence the final plan of which I shall presently speak was still unchanged; for whose execution and assured success I held that I must have at my disposal, besides the three Divisions of Blackshirts, only part of which had arrived during the first ten days of September, the "Sila" and "Gran Sasso" Divisions.

With the arrival of the new Divisions the formation of another Army Corps command became necessary, and the distribution of the troops in accordance with the operations which were to follow.

Hence, on the 1st September the new Command of the Second Army Corps was constituted, and General Marivagna was appointed its Commandant, General Villasanta succeeding him in the command of the "Gavinana" Division.

The resulting Army Corps were at first constituted thus:

First Army Corps with headquarters at Senafé:

“Sabauda” Division; Blackshirt Division “28th October”; Sixth Group of Blackshirt Battalions.

Second Army Corps with headquarters at Adi Ugri: “Gavinana” Division; Blackshirt Division “21st April.”

Native Army Corps, with headquarters at Coatit: First and Second Eritrean Divisions; Blackshirt Division “23rd March”; First Group Blackshirt battalions; Group of Eritrean Squadrons.

It will be understood that all three Army Corps had their allowance of Army Corps artillery, engineer troops, armoured cars and auxiliary services.

The “Sila” and “Gran Sasso” Divisions and the three Grenadier, Alpini and Frontier Guard Battalions remained at the disposal of the High Command.

For the initial distribution the territory was divided into two zones on the line M. Barongià-wells Dorotai-ponds Ferfer-Arresa-Adi Ugri-Mai Aini-Coatit-Arafali.

The northern zone was to be regarded as *territorial* and the southern zone as the *zone of operation*.

This, in its turn, was divided into three subsidiary zones: that of the western lowlands; that of the plateau; and that of the eastern lowlands.

The zone of the plateau was divided into three sectors, assigned respectively, from east to west,

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

to the first Army Corps, the Native Army Corps, and the Second Army Corps.

The Native Army Corps no longer had the entire surveillance of the line, as each Army Corps assumed responsibility for its own section of the front. The special services, such as patrols and outpost duties on the line of the frontier, were still undertaken by the native bands.

In actual fact the arrival of the large units at Massawa was subject to some delay, in comparison with our hopes and intentions. The order in which they arrived was as follows:

Blackshirt Division,	“23rd March”	16th Aug.
”	”	“28th Oct.”
”	”	“21st April”
Infantry Division,	“Gran Sasso”	30th Sept.
”	”	“Sila”
Blackshirt Division,	“3rd Jan.”	20th Oct.
”	”	“1st Feb.”
		1st Nov.

It must be remembered that to assemble a Division on the high plateau took five days, *if the Division had all its means of transport*. And none of them had this; so that it took two or three days longer to muster them at the point of assembly.

The first unit of Blackshirts to arrive in the Colony, the “23rd March,” was concentrated at Mai Edagà, where I reviewed it on the 12th September.

I had the honour of being one of the three Commandants-General of the Militia when it was constituted, and as technical expert I was that one of the three who had most to do with its formation. I am therefore very intimately acquainted with its merits and its defects.

During the twelve years that have elapsed since its creation it has been greatly improved, especially as regards the cadres.

A review will not enable one to form a positive idea of the efficiency of a unit; but the experienced eye can draw concrete conclusions from its bearing.

The appearance of the Division, as it paraded and marched past, was worthy of the highest praise. The spirit that makes a volunteer should make a fighter; so that one had good reason to be confident of its behaviour.

I called the officers into council and gave them special recommendations in respect of discipline, and their attitude towards the askaris and native population. The "Blackshirt" should be the most perfect symbol of the Fascist, the finest pattern of the bearer of civilization.

A number of foreign correspondents witnessed the review, and carried away a magnificent impression.

By the Royal Decree of the 2nd September the Command of the Naval Division of East Africa was

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

created and assigned to the sector—Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean. Admiral of Division, Guido Vannutelli, assumed the command of the Division.

This Division was to comprise two cruisers, two scouts and two torpedo-boats.

The Naval Division, though technically under the orders of the Ministry for the Navy, was to be employed as the Commander-in-Chief saw fit.

From March onwards—in which month the East African naval command was constituted—the principal duty of the Navy was the onerous task of directing all operations relating to the arrival, departure, discharging, and lading of vessels—that is, of course, as regards the waters of the harbour and the roadstead.

In addition to this it systematically reconnoitred the coast. It could not have done more, nor could it have done it better.

I gave orders that one of the ships should show herself and drop anchor from time to time in the Bay of Zula, or at Arafali or Beilul, and especially at Assab. In respect of this last anchorage, I obtained reports on the possibility of employing the ship's batteries against land attacks upon our base, and I also had the sights of the "Bari" accurately adjusted.

The Commandant of the Naval Division had received the most secret instructions, which were confided to me only by word of mouth, relating

to the actions of his ships in the undesirable but always possible case of international complications.

At this period the political activities of the British appeared to be tending more especially in two directions:

The first objective was to obtain sanctions against Italy from the Assembly at Geneva, the chief of these being the closing of the Suez Canal.

The second, which was confirmed by the rumours of a secret agreement with Ethiopia, was to encourage in that country the will to resistance, with the assurance of British help, in return, of course, for ample concessions, even of a territorial character.

As we know, the Negus has never been ashamed to say openly that he might grant the British requests, and even submit to a British protectorate; but that he would not on any account concede the Italian claims.

The Leader would not be deterred by any threats, nor would he shrink from any consequences.

In a strictly confidential note he informed me that in case we should find ourselves engaged with the British we should be obliged, of course, to renounce any offensive action, and content ourselves, at first, with restricting ourselves to a defensive which would assure the integrity of the Colony.

It was indispensable, therefore, to reduce our consumption to the minimum, for the replenishment of supplies—with the closing of the Canal, and

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

the probable superiority of the British fleet over our Naval Division—would become more than problematical.

But even in this regrettable case the Duce was determined to dare.

In the months of June, July and August, and the middle of September, all work progressed in a way that left nothing to be desired.

Above all, the roads were already in a state to permit of a double stream of traffic; including the great vital artery.

On the 16th I inaugurated the Nefasit-Decamerè section, amidst the cheers of the labourers, and in the presence of all the authorities, including the Minister Galeazzo Ciano, who had come to Eritrea to take part in the war as a captain of the Air Force.

From the section then inaugurated one could gain some idea of the impressive nature of the task which had been accomplished. On the same day I traversed almost all the rest of the road, descending as far as Saati, and I travelled in the greatest comfort. The road would be ready by the date appointed, as *my faith* had assured me, and as the officers in charge of the work, and the contractors who were entrusted with its execution, had promised.

It had been actually possible to work through the whole of the rainy season. During the hours when the torrential downpour forced the men to knock

off work on the roads they did not remain idle: they were kept busy at other work, which was equally necessary, and could be done under cover.

Fresh necessities had arisen: among them, the ever-increasing need of stevedores.

If we take into account the number of the troops who arrived between the middle of August and the end of September it will be obvious at once that all the time required for their disembarkation had to be subtracted from the discharging of materials and munitions.

This time had to be made up. This was done by means of night work, which was really rendered necessary by the insupportable heat of the day.

¶ In order to obtain more efficient labour, the Admiral superintending the activities of the port thought it better to employ professional stevedores.

He immediately applied for them, and with praiseworthy celerity a thousand were recruited from Genoa, Sarrona, Leghorn, and other ports of secondary importance.

But Genoa, Sarrona and Leghorn are not Massawa. Some of these stevedores had to be repatriated immediately, as they could not stand up to the work; and the output of the others was no greater than that of the men already working in the harbour. On the other hand, the Yemenites did very well.

The Iman—who had always represented himself

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

as our friend—was loth to let his subjects leave the country.

As we have seen, he had recently signed a treaty of friendship with the Negus; he was afraid lest his men, as they had done in the past, would come and enlist in our battalions. A distant relative of his (who was the contractor enlisting labourers for us) managed to persuade him, so that we were able to obtain a good number of labourers who crossed to Massawa in canoes.

In order to get a maximum of work done in the lowlands, where only a small proportion of our valiant labourers were able to hold out during the summer months, I sent to Libya for workers. I got only a few hundred men, for there was a great demand for labourers in our northern Colony also: but these few were good workers, and were very useful.

The ever-increasing need of haste compelled me to review all the work in progress and classify it in order of its urgency and its expediency; suspending, if need be, all that did not appear to be absolutely necessary, or at least extremely urgent.

Thus, I stopped work on the entrenched camp of Asmara. We need no longer fear that the enemy would succeed in getting so far. We should all have to be dead first.

I also suspended work on the Adi Ugri-Arresa road, which, for that matter, was well advanced,

and at all events quite practicable, only the final section being a little difficult.

Finally, I stopped all labour on defensive works. The idea of defending ourselves must henceforth be excluded from our minds.

Next to the work on the roads, the hydrological work had made most progress.

The rainy season had filled the reservoirs, wells, and tanks; there were plenty of springs, and their output was systematically collected.

So far the troops had had abundance of water, and there was certainly enough even for those who had still to come. I therefore gave orders that such tasks should be completed which did not call for much time or for great amounts of material.

As for the more extensive undertakings, I gave instructions that they should be discontinued, taking care that such work as had been done on them should not be wasted, but would come in useful if it should be decided to complete them.

The men and the materials released in this way were available for the roads.

The Army Corps set their men to work, with the help of a certain proportion of specialized labourers—and of masons in particular—on the systematic developments of the roads and tracks leading from the Senafé-Mai-Aini-Adi Quala front to the Mareb.

These were the lines of march which the advance

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

would have to follow. Three of these roads, namely:
the Senafè-Barachit-Guna Guna road,
the Mai Aini-Belesa road,
the Adi Quala-Enda Gherghis-Mareb road,
had to be so improved as to permit of a double
stream of automobile supply columns.

The greatest acceleration was effected in respect
of the means of communication.

The telephone system between the different
commands, both vertical and lateral, was assured;
but the same could not be said of the telegraphic
and wireless communications. All this was inde-
pendent of the special network of the artillery.

This was a heavy task, and everything was
created *ex novo*, amidst difficulties which cannot be
described, and therefore cannot be realized.

On the 24th August the radio-telephonic con-
nection with Rome began to function.

The first person to use it was myself, and I called
up the Head of the Government. I confess that
I was deeply moved, and I sent a message of
admiring appreciation to Guglielmo Marconi.

The radio-telephone, however, was placed at the
disposal of the public, who were allowed to use it
with drastic restrictions, and especially of the
journalists. For them a time-table was established,
a certain number of minutes being allowed to each
correspondent.

It was useless for official communications, as a

rule; especially for those of a military character, for whatever was telephoned could be heard by anyone who possessed a wireless receiver; hence it was impossible to preserve secrecy. I never made use of it.

I mentioned, incidentally, that the Minister Galeazzo Ciano had come to Eritrea as captain-pilot.

Ciano was a captain, and I treated him as such. However, he was still a Minister, and in his quality as such—although he never insisted on it—he was particularly useful in dealing with foreign journalists.

With him came Vittorio and Bruno Mussolini, both sub-lieutenants in the Air Force. At my instance, and also by the express wish of their father, they were treated like all others of the same rank, and as such they bravely did their duty.

XI

LAST STEPS BEFORE THE ADVANCE

IN THE second fortnight of September the mobilization and assembly of the Ethiopian forces reached its phase of maximum development.

Dessiè was the zone of concentration for the forces destined to operate against Eritrea; Harrar-Jigiga for those that were to act against Somalia.

The *chitet* had been beaten everywhere; nevertheless, there were various chiefs who did not move their forces; their intention being to safeguard their own territory.

In Tigré, subject to Ras Sioum, the *chitet* was beaten on the 15th, when a few hundred restive spirits assembled. The Ras had taken no precautions, judging the general discontent to be due merely to the fact that the men had to give up their work in the fields. However, 6,000 men were said to be concentrated at Fares-Mai, and there was a garrison of 1,000 at Amba Augher.

These forces were evidently the first that we should encounter. The Ras, with his customary indecision, had not yet made up his mind to obey the Negus, who wished Tigré to be abandoned,

and was bragging that he would die at his post rather than give ground.

In Agamè the *chitet* had not been beaten.

There the Degiac Gugsà insisted that he must have precise instructions from me. I sent them through our Consul at Adowa, who had come to Asmara to report.

I told him to hold himself in readiness. At the moment of our advance he was to operate on the flank and rear of the forces sent to oppose us. Afterwards he could join up with our troops.

The Degiac, who knew that he was kept under observation, was afraid that some ambush might be set for him. He had rather more than 5,000 well-armed men at his disposal, but I do not think he could feel quite certain of their loyalty; so that it was not impossible that Ras Sioum or Kassa Chebbedè, his antagonists, might spring upon him in time to prevent his taking action against them.

I sent him word that whenever such fears should assume the form of reality I would receive him, with his men, across the frontier. In view of this possibility we must have a precise agreement as to the manner of crossing the frontier, and the point where he would cross it.

I confess that I really hoped that this would not happen. After all, even if I could trust Hailè Selassiè Gugsà, could I have the same confidence in his men? I should be obliged—at all events at

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

first—to send him and his men to the rear of our lines, and keep a watch on them and feed them. And he would always be a thorn in our back.

The following movements were said to be probable during the last ten days of the month: A large body of Ras Kassa's troops, under the command of his son, with the troops of Ras Immerù, would move towards Lasta and Socotà. Ras Kasso Aliù would remain in the Tana basin.

There were no movements of importance in front of our two lowland sectors.

It was not easy to arrive at a complete estimate of the forces opposed to us: the data furnished by various native informers, the only agents whom we could send out to get into contact with the enemy, were vague in the extreme, and too often contradictory.

The black man has not an exact idea of numbers, and for this reason he nearly always makes comparisons to which it is difficult to attach any real value.

There was reason to think that between the two fronts from 300,000 to 350,000 men had been mobilized and assembled, with rather more than 200 field-pieces and a few thousand machine-guns.

Two-thirds of these troops were facing Eritrea; the rest, Somalia.

The Abyssinian army had as positive co-efficients: a warlike spirit; resistance to fatigue; rapidity of

march even in mountainous regions, and great mobility; knowledge of the ground; and the ability to live and fight with a minimum of requirements.

As negative co-efficients: its *encadrement* was bad; it was almost entirely untrained, and therefore had little cohesion; its marksmanship was poor, especially in the artillery; it was badly off for munitions, and in case of defeat it became discouraged.

Our superiority was indubitable.

In the last chapter I gave some schematic details of the provisional formation of the Army Corps.

It was absolutely indispensable that a certain proportion of coloured troops should be attached to the Italian Army Corps. They were needed for scouting, and because they were familiar with persons and conditions; and lastly, because they knew the language. The askari, among other qualities, has powers of sight and hearing which we should seek in vain even among our shepherds, mountaineers, peasants and sailors.

I therefore gave orders that the Native Army Corps should detach four of its battalions: two going to the first Army Corps and two to the Second.

On the 21st September the Order of Battle of the East African Corps of Operation was as follows:

First East African Army Corps:

“Sabauda” Division of Infantry.

Second (“28th October”) Division of Blackshirts.

Sixth Group of battalions of Blackshirts.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

5th and 25th Eritrean battalions.

Band of the Scimenzana.

Fifth Group of Squadrons of rapid armoured cars.

Third Group of 77/28 (automobile).

Fifth Group of 105/28 (automobile).

Unit of Engineers of the First Army Corps.

Libyan Squadron of aeroplanes R.T.

Second East African Army Corps:

“Gavinana” Division of Infantry.

Third Division (“21st April”) of Blackshirts.

Grenadier Battalions: Alpini and Frontier Guards.

18th and 23rd Eritrean battalions.

Group of bands from the plateau.

First Group of 77/28 (automobile).

Fourth Group of 105/28 (automobile).

Tenth Group of rapid armoured cars.

Unit of Engineers of the Second Army Corps.

118th Squadron of aeroplanes R.T.

Native Army Corps:

First and Second Native Divisions (less 4 battalions).

First Division (“23rd March”) of Blackshirts.

First Group of battalions of Eritrean Blackshirts.

Band of Hasamò.

Fourth Group of rapid armoured cars.

Groups of squadrons of Eritrean Horse.

Second Group of 77/28 (automobile).

Zone of the Western Lowlands:

27th and 28th Eritrean battalions.

ANNO XIII

Group of bands (foot) from the Western Lowlands.

Group of irregulars with armoured cars.*

Squadron of rapid armoured cars (Eritrean).

Section of Radio-telegraphic Engineers.

Zone of the Eastern Lowlands:

14th and 26th Eritrean Battalions.

Libyan battalion.

Band of Massawa.

Band of Northern Dankalia.

Band of Southern Dankalia.

7th Battery of 120/25.

37th Battery of 77/28

Section of Radio-telegraphic Engineers.

The troops of the eastern lowlands had no aeroplanes of their own, but were able to make use of the Assab aeroplanes.

All the troops listed above, excepting the "21st April" Division, were complete in every respect, except for their baggage trains, in which there had been heavy losses from various maladies.

Of this I have already spoken.

The "21st April" Division was not yet completely assembled; it was still without part of its auxiliary services, a good proportion of its means of transport, and more than half its baggage-train.

The Grenadier, Alpini and Frontier Guard battalions had been assigned to the Second Army

* See page 173.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

Corps; but they were still far in the rear, and marching to join up with it.

The Air Force, however, had attained a good standard of efficiency.

On the 23rd September the Air Force was as follows :—

Third Air Brigade (Asmara):

8 squadrons R.T.—Total 68 R.O.I.

1 squadron Chaser Planes—4th C.R. 20.

15th Group of Bombing Planes:

2 squadrons: 15th Army Corps 101.

1 squadron: 4th Army Corps 101.

Independent hydroplane section (Massawa).

4 hydroplanes M.F.4.

Assau Air Command: 27th Group of Bombing Planes:

2 squadrons: 10th Army Corps 111.

1 Section: 5th Army Corps 101.

1 Section of R.T. squadrons: 5 R.O 1.

1 Section of Chaser Planes: 3 C.R. 20.

Between the 21st and 28th eight more scouts joined up.

There were thus 126 aeroplanes. Hence 224 were needed to bring the strength up to the established figure—350.

However, in view of the enemy's lack of aeroplanes it seemed that we could be easy in our minds.

On the 28th September a telegram from the

Ministry for the Colonies asked if it were true that all the Abyssinian troops had withdrawn from the frontier, as the Negus had informed the League of Nations.

There had been no withdrawal of troops, and so I replied to the Ministry.

The enemy patrols continued to penetrate our frontier lines, and the groups of observers and "groups of first resistance" remained at their posts.

Thus, on the night of the 9th September, just two days before the date which Ras Sioum had announced for an assembly of chiefs, the alarm was given along the whole of the enemy line, owing to false information, and the movements of our troops, and the unusual activity of our aeroplanes.

About 11.0 p.m. the signal pyres were ignited; the warriors of Adowa hastened to Ghebè, where Ras Sioum, amidst a scene of clamorous excitement, failed to come to any decision, and gave no orders.

The Wizeró—his wife—took his shield and sword and the insignia of command, and brought them to him, inviting him to place himself at the head of his men.

But after a few hours of this comic tumult they all quieted down.

It had been a false alarm.

On the 27th the feast of Mascál was celebrated everywhere.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

At Asmara it assumed an aspect of exceptional solemnity.

I was present, with all the local authorities. I received the homage of the native chiefs, and witnessed the *fantasia* of various detachments. I distributed the diplomas of the offices and promotions conferred on native dignitaries and officials, and at last, with all the accompanying liturgical ceremonies, the symbolical pyre was burned.

It fell towards the South! The will of Heaven had been revealed!

I delivered a brief admonitory discourse, warlike in tone and phrasing.

Then came the great banquet in the Governor's palace, at which a hundred and fifty guests were present, sitting at two tables, those from each different locality being served in order of their rank.

On rising from the table I spoke a few words in a still more definitely warlike tone. Three notables replied, and the Prior of the Convent of Bizen. All spoke words of praise and augured our certain victory.

The approval of the Prior of Bizen was not without its significance.

The predecessor of the present Prior was certainly no friend of ours, despite his ostentatious devotion to our cause. He received money from the Negus and carried on a peace propaganda to our detriment. He died in Addis Ababa, whither he had gone to pay

his respects to the Negus. His body was sent back to Eritrea by aeroplane.

The Prior who now rules the convent is certainly less intelligent than his predecessor, but more trustworthy. I was lavish in my bestowal of alms upon him, as I did not wish him to accept gifts from Ethiopia; though it was not easy to prevent this, considering the venality of the entire Coptic clergy.

The date for commencing operations was approaching. I therefore telegraphed to General Graziani, asking him if and how far he could cooperate with me.

Graziani replied that in every respect his preparations were in arrears. Men, materials and munitions were still lacking. Some were at sea; some still in Italy. He had only 20 aeroplanes at his disposal. This being the case, he would perforce have to limit himself to operations with a restricted radius, occupying Gerlogubi, Scillave and Dolo; while the aeroplanes would be able to act within the radius Gorrahei, Gebradarre, Dagabur.

Graziani called my attention to the fact that in view of the distance between the two fronts synchronous action was impossible and also unnecessary.

I at once replied to him that I agreed with what he had telegraphed and that I thanked him in advance for all that he would do.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

To a despatch of mine in which I clearly explained the situation, the Leader replied, on the 28th :

Received your report. Tell me the day and go ahead quietly. Order Graziani to remain absolutely on the defensive.

I fixed upon the 5th October as the day in question. I sent Graziani the order; as we had already made our mutual plans nothing had to be changed.

On the 29th September I sent the Duce this telegram:

“

It will be necessary to let me know in good time (.) If a declaration of war is to be made (.) If so whether orders for troops will be issued by His Majesty the King(,) by you or if I am to issue them (.) In this latter case I shall limit myself to ten words (.) I should like also to know if our Legation will leave first (;) this so that I may know what to do about removing Consulate Adowa which I should like to remain on the spot as long as possible (.)

All our Consuls, excepting the Adowa official, had left their posts and were on the way back to Eritrea.

The Duce told me that the order for the advance was to come from me, and that I was not to trouble myself about the Legation or the Consulates. He concluded:

The essential thing is to act quickly and strike hard.

On the 29th another telegram followed:

No declaration of war. Before general mobilization which Negus has already officially announced at Geneva must absolutely hesitate no longer. I order you to begin advance early on the 3rd. I say the 3rd October. I wait immediate confirmation.

That the date was advanced by two days was no trifling matter. It meant two days' marching for the troops that had to close up. It was a question whether a large proportion of our forces would be more or less at hand. Further, the Intendancy had 48 hours less in which to replenish the advanced magazines, which at the end of September were not yet furnished for the requisite number of days.

But I myself was persuaded that it would be as well to accelerate our first rush as far as possible. On the other hand, the situation of the enemy gave us reason to believe that we should not meet with such resistance as to place us in a serious predicament, owing to the incomplete state of preparation of part of our forces and the distance of a substantial proportion of them from the battlefield.

Another reason militated in favour of speedy action: the troops, especially the native troops and the Italian units which had been the first to arrive, were tired of waiting; they could not understand the absolute necessity which had hitherto kept us immobilized, and they wanted to make an end of the delay.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

I replied that I should obey, and issued the following executive orders:

The directions for the advance had already been distributed a fortnight earlier.

The Commandants of Army Corps, the Commandants of the Lowlands, the Artillery, the Engineers, the Air Force and the Intendant had compiled their working orders, which I had revised and approved.

Further: first when the attack on Adigrat was planned, and again on the 30th September, I assembled the Commandants and the Intendant in order to learn whether they wished any points to be elucidated, and to define more precisely the task of each.

All was ready. Among other things the Commandant of the Engineers had organized centuries of labourers, well disciplined, with their various officers, and capable workers by profession, who were to follow immediately in the rear of the troops, to attend to the upkeep of the roads, and work at their further systematic improvement.

On the 30th September I received this other telegram:

In view of the approaching events the strictest orders should be given by you personally to all the Commandants: Inexorable decision against the armed forces, respect and humanity for the unarmed defenceless population. Reply.

I replied *Done*. And it was. I had established the G.H.Q. at Coatit.

Coatit had at least the advantage of being in a central position, in which—always comparatively speaking—there were certain facilities for reaching any part of the front.

A perfect network of communications had been organized and tested before the Command took up its position there.

The Command functioned and was quartered in temporary barracks and suitable tents.

My Staff was transferred thither on the 1st October. I remained at Asmara until mid-day on the 2nd, to give the Vice-Governor all instructions regarding the civil government.

In Asmara, on the evening of the 2nd October, in other centres of the Colony, and in the more important labour camps, the historical address of the Duce was heard with unmixed enthusiasm by the Italian and native population, being translated for the benefit of the latter.

It was followed by an impressive demonstration of confidence and resolution.

The speech was also communicated to all the troops.

XII

THE FIRST STRIDE

OUR FIRST main objective was to re-establish ourselves in the position from which we had been driven by the unfortunate events of 1896.

The broadly psychological aspect of the question was corroborated by strategical and tactical expediency.

The Adigrat-Enticciò-Adowa position, which could be prolonged to Aksum, is naturally strong on both fronts, and lends itself admirably to a defence of manœuvre, even with comparatively restricted forces.

Further, it commands the cluster of roads that enter Abyssinia.

From the valley of Adigrat runs the most direct route to Makallè-Amba Alagi-Ascianghi-Dessiè. From the valley of Enticciò branch off the roads to Ferre-Mai and the valley of Hauzien, and from Hauzien roads of varying degrees of goodness or badness continue to Makellè, branching off into Gheraltà and Tembien.

From Adowa a moderately good road runs downwards through Haddi-Uno to the Weri torrent, and on through Mai Gundi, finally reaching Makallè. Another road runs to Addis-Addi in the heart of

Tembien, and a centre for the roads and trails making for the fords of the Takazzè.

To the west of Aksum is the great zone of access to Shirè, and towards the south are the roads and trails leading to the Takazzè, and then into Tzella-menti and Semien, and—further to the south-west—into Gojjam.

It should be noted that the connections to which I have applied the generic name of roads and trails were actually only paths, in many places no better than mule-tracks; while other sections could be adapted, without excessive labour, for the passage of artillery, and even motor transport.

My plan of operations was based on the necessity of occupying simultaneously, and as quickly as possible, the Adigrat-Adowa position, and of organizing and fortifying it in readiness to sustain any possible attack. In the meantime, to wait until the completion of our preparations, the logistic possibilities, and opportunity enabled us to push the projected offensive home.

For this purpose I divided the effectives at my disposal into three parts:

On the east, the First Army Corps: objective, the valley of Adigrat.

In the centre, the Native Army Corps: objective, the valley of Enticciò.

On the right, the Second Army Corps: objective, the valley of Adowa.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

With such dispositions I hoped to roll up the enemy's advanced positions. Then, with the preponderating force of the central mass, I should break the enemy's resistance and intercept the communications between the places named: if need arose the central mass could then take part in the operations of the First and Second Army Corps.

I am aware that this plan of mine has been criticized. It has been said that in actual fact I was merely delivering a frontal attack by the occupation of a very extended position. That the columns could not give one another mutual assistance, and that therefore they ran the risk of being defeated separately.

However, this criticism was merely negative, since no one has suggested a different plan.

Apart from this: it is true that my front was rather extensive for the forces at my disposal; but it is not true that the three columns could not come to one another's aid. In actual fact they were constantly in communication during the march, and, as will be seen, liaison was very rapidly effected once they had taken up their positions.

On the other hand, I had fairly exact knowledge of the enemy's situation. From concordant reports it seemed that he was not expecting a direct attack upon Adowa from the north, thinking that we should follow the Rebbi-Arienni road as in 1896. Other reports represented him as already retreating.

Further: the nature of the terrain, the sources of water beyond the frontier, and the possibilities of replenishment did not suggest the advisability of acting with a strong force in a single direction for the conquest of our objective, and then—still manœuvring as a concentrated mass—proceeding to the occupation of the other objectives.

Naturally I took no notice of comments and criticisms. *The responsibility was mine*; hence I intended to act upon my own views of the case.

The intelligent and timely use of the Air Force ought to guarantee me against the possibility of surprise.

The two groups of the Eastern and Western Lowlands were to remain on the active-defensive, with this object: the Eastern group was to guard me against any possible disturbance on the left flank of the Santini column (First Army Corps) and the Western to guard the easier passages of the Setit, pushing on with the irregulars (p. 173) beyond the river to guard the right flank (General Maravigna, Second Army Corps) against surprise.

The strength and composition of the three columns is already indicated by the Army Corps of which they were constituted.

The High Command, however, had no reserve at its disposal. I therefore decided to form a reserve with the Third Division of Blackshirts.

This unit, as I have already stated, was not yet

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

complete; hence it could not have given serious assistance to the Commandant of the Second Army Corps if he had had urgent need of its services, while I had no reason to suppose that I should have immediate need of it as a reserve. This being the case, I did not think it would be opportune to change its location; so I left it where it was, between Adi-Ugri and Adi-Quali, in which position it could more readily and easily complete its organization.

However, the Second Army Corps would now be too weak. I reinforced it immediately with the Third Eritrean Brigade, commanded by General Cubeddu, which could enter its radius of action by means of one rather long march.

It may seem strange at first sight that the column to which the most important objective was assigned—the valley of Adowa—should be the weakest. In this respect it should be noted that it had the most difficult and intricate terrain to traverse, where the possibility of drawing up large units existed only at the mouth of the valley. It was therefore highly expedient that General Maravigna should have a considerable strength of native troops at his disposal for the minor actions which were necessary to clear the road.

Adowa, it goes without saying, had to be reconquered by Italian troops.

In the event of strong frontal resistance the co-operation of the Native Army Corps would be

assured and not difficult, in view of the good communications from the Enticciò pass to Rebbi-Arienni-Vallone and Mariam Sciavitù.

On the evening of the 2nd October I issued to all troops the following proclamation:

HIGH COMMAND, EAST AFRICA

Officers and non-commissioned officers, soldiers of the land, the sea, and the air, Blackshirts, Askaris !

You have waited until this day with firm discipline and exemplary patience. The day has come.

His Majesty the King desires and Benito Mussolini, Minister for the Armed Forces, orders that you shall cross the frontier.

Proud and honoured to lead you, I know I can count on the experience of the Commandants and on the discipline and courage of the soldiers.

You will have to endure fatigues and sacrifices and confront a strong and warlike enemy. The greater will be the merit of the victory for which we are striving, which will be the clean victory of the new Fascist Italy.

East Africa, 3rd October, 1935 A.XIII.

General EMILIO DE BONO.

At five o'clock on the morning of the 3rd I went up to a battery situated near Zeban Coatit, whence a wide tract of the plain of Hasamò was visible; hoping that from this point I could watch the advance of the Native Army Corps. I saw nothing.



Marshal De Bono and his Staff before action.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

I was seized with a sort of vexation which I had never been able to suppress, even during the Great War; the vexation that comes from being unable to see, from having to stand stock still, waiting on events, waiting for communications, and constantly fearing that they will not come in time.

Various newspaper correspondents had gathered at the same spot, especially the foreigners, who were, however, disappointed. I had to have it explained to them—indeed, I told some of them myself—that in modern warfare the notion of the Commander who sees, and issues his orders, and disposes his forces as the result of what he sees, is no longer valid.

At nine o'clock, finding it really useless to remain there in idleness, gazing at the landscape through various pairs of field-glasses and making various conjectures, I returned to Coatit, where the telegraphic and telephonic connections had now been completed, and where a receiving station had been established for information despatched from the aeroplanes.

The latest news of the enemy referred to the usual nuclei of covering troops along the frontier, with larger bodies in the region of Adigrat and Adowa; especially where Ras Sioum was now said to be present.

The Air Force had to fulfil the following duties:

(a) scouting near the front of attack and tactical co-operation with the columns engaged;

(b) scouting near the front of defence and tactical co-operation with the troops making offensive thrusts or counter-offensive manœuvres;

(c) long-distance scouting above the front of the plateau and the western lowlands; surveillance of movements from Gondar, Debra Tabor, Dabat, Quoram, Dessiè;

(d) offensive action against Ethiopian concentrations which might presumably be hurrying up in counter-offensive manœuvre from Adi Abo, Medebai Tabor, Shirè, Gheraltà, Tembien, Hauzien, or Makallè;

(e) surveillance of the Assab sector and contingent offensive action against concentrations of Ethiopian forces in that sector;

(f) aerial defence of Asmara, Massawa and Assab.

The air forces available were subdivided in accordance with these multiple duties. For the duties specified in paragraph (a) the aeroplanes assigned to the Army Corps were specially detailed.

In this first phase actions at long range which were not in direct relation to the first objectives for which the offensive thrust was making were excluded on principle.

Two aeroplanes at the disposal of the High Command, on board of one of which was the head of the Political Bureau, were instructed to drop over the localities which would have to be occupied, and in others near them in which agglomerations of

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

men and cattle were observed, the following proclamation, translated into the Amharic tongue:

HIGH COMMAND, EAST AFRICA. PROCLAMATION TO THE POPULATION OF ERITREA.

For forty years the Italian Government has assured the peace and tranquillity in the whole of the Mareb Mellasc, enriching the country and governing it with justice.

Our every endeavour has been directed to seeking the friendship of the Ethiopian Government in accordance with the stipulated pacts.

The Government of Addis Ababa, on the other hand, from the very outset has failed to keep the promised peace, has aided the rebels, has violated the frontiers, and caused the defenceless shepherds of Eritrea and Somalia, our loyal subjects and your brothers and sons, to be despoiled and slain.

We have asked for justice and it has not been done.

In kindness to them we have been patient, but instead of being grateful to us, they have again treacherously attacked our posts on the frontier of Somalia, and have abused us, boasting that they intended to destroy our towns and what we have done for your good, and for some time past they have been prepared to attack us.

To defend yourselves against any molestation, to assure the tranquillity of your families, to punish those guilty of provocation, the Soldiers of Italy and the powerful Black-

shirts have of their own free will taken your part, and many other soldiers too are making war.

Already, in the past, here in Eritrea, in Libya, and in Somalia, you have mingled your blood with that of the sons of Italy in many battles. You too, then, are our children, so that we ought to defend you, and we shall defend you.

So that your lands shall not be devastated by the war, and in order to bring succour to the many in Tigré and other regions who are invoking our intervention, I HAVE ORDERED ALL TROOPS TO CROSS THE MAREB.

Headmen, peasants and traders, apply yourselves quietly to your work in the fields and your trading, and do not listen to the false rumours which our enemies are seeking to circulate against us.

And you, priests and monks, you Shek, recite your ritual prayers, praying that with the help of God the war which we are waging for the triumph of justice may be quickly victorious.

Woe to him who spreads false news and disturbs public order! I shall be pitiless!

Asmara, 3rd October, 1935-XIII.

General EMILIO DE BONO.

A similar proclamation, adapted to the people living in the neighbourhood of the Somalian frontier, was drawn up in Arabic and sent to Mogadiscio by air. However, it did not arrive in time to be scattered on the 3rd October; but it was

distributed two days later, and lost none of its efficiency.

The attack on the small enemy posts was begun at 2 o'clock. All retreated hastily; only five allowed themselves to be taken prisoner.

The frontier was crossed simultaneously at 5 o'clock by the vanguards of the three Army Corps.

On the front of the Second Army Corps, advancing in three columns, the band of Seraè, which was preceding the central column, constituted by the "Gavinana" Division, came upon a nucleus of some 300 warriors in the neighbourhood of Rama. It attacked briskly and, supported by two armoured cars which happened to be within reach, it overcame the resistance offered. It then proceeded to the small fort of Darò Taclè, where it was checked again by superior enemy forces (about 1,000 men). The officer commanding the band—Lieutenant Morgantini of the Bersaglieri—fell, and the band retreated.

But the vanguard of the "Gavinana" Division, drawn up at the cross-roads of Mai Endo Baira, succeeded in containing the Abyssinian advance.

To support the whole column the 18th Eritrean was despatched to the right flank and the 23rd Eritrean to the left.

The 18th had a very difficult route to cover; some of the mules of the baggage-train fell into a ravine. An attempt was made to recover their packs.

It did not encounter any enemy resistance, and by overcoming the most difficult obstacles it was able that evening to reach Chenad-Allà, where it remained, and entrenched itself to bar the road to troops advancing from Aksum.

The 23rd met with feeble resistance, quickly overcome, between Tebai and Enda Joannes. It spent the night in this locality.

The main column, without being molested, arrived at Mai-Enda-Baira.

The Native Army Corps had marched, in two columns, rapidly enough at first; then the difficulty of the terrain and the repeated necessity of rectifying the front to ensure liaison between the two columns and those of the lateral Army Corps had retarded its advance, although it was nowhere engaged with the enemy.

At dusk, after 14 hours' march, the Army Corps reached the Debra-Damo Auiliè front.

The first Army Corps had the easiest march of all. Without anywhere encountering the enemy, about 3 o'clock in the afternoon its two columns, consisting of the "Sabauda" and "28th October" Divisions, occupied the two important passes of Focadà and Magdillè.

While the troops of the Second Army Corps and the Native Army Corps saw no sign of the inhabitants, and hence observed no manifestations on their part, the First Army Corps was saluted, as it

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

passed, by the natives, who waved white or tri-colour flags.

The line reached on the 3rd—running from west to east—was as follows: Chessad Allà-Mai Enda Baira-Amba Beesa-Guzzat-Auiliè-Debra Damo-Amba Aber.

The strategical aeroplanes did not discover anything of particular importance. The tactical aeroplanes, in the performance of their special task, had bombarded enemy nuclei in the neighbourhood of Darò Taclè.

The bombing squadrons, dense rifle fire being signalled, reacted by bombing the Ghebì of Adowa and the valley of Adigrat, where groups of warriors had been observed.

We all know what an uproar this bombing created in the international circles which were hostile to us.

There was talk of the massacre of women and children. In reality the only victims were one woman, one child, and a certain number of cattle.

The night was very quiet.

In the daytime the reports and observations of the aeroplanes were received very clearly. On the other hand, it was not easy to communicate by telephone and telegraph with the Commands of the Army Corps; and I had some difficulty in getting into radio-telegraphic connection with the Second Army Corps, with whose activities I was most concerned.

I note this detail, because those who are not soldiers by profession cannot imagine the distress of a commanding officer, condemned to blindness, who has also been rendered deaf.

Information that came to hand during the night—but not from the troops in action—stated that Amba Augher was strongly occupied, and that there was a gathering of warriors at the head of the Feres Mai.

Of this the Third Army Corps was immediately advised.

The troops of the two lowland regions had carried out the orders received. On the west the group of irregulars had thrust forward as far as Barai without meeting resistance. On the east aeroplanes had effectively bombed an enemy encampment at Aura Terù.

On the morning of the 4th a radio message from the First Army Corps reported that without firing a shot elements of the "Sabauda" had occupied the pass of Cherseber during the night.

The first day of operations had passed off well, and I (who believe just a little in my luck) drew good augury from this.

I have said that I appointed the "23rd April" Division to act as my reserve. This Division, I repeat, was not yet in a state of full efficiency, and was on one wing of the formation. It occurred to me at once that if events had rendered it necessary

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

the First Army Corps, once established and entrenched in the valley of Adigrat, could give me, for the time being, one of its two Divisions. But it was not needed.

The advance was resumed at dawn.

The Commandant of the Second Army Corps had withdrawn the band of Seraè, as it was fatigued, and rather shaken, and without a commander. He had replaced it by the 3rd Eritrean Battalion.

This battalion, about 7 o'clock in the morning, had encountered the enemy in position. The enemy's resistance had been overcome by a combined frontal and flank manoeuvre, with the co-operation of the tactical aeroplanes, which flew low and bombed the defenders.

About 5 o'clock in the afternoon the "Gavinana" Division, after a march which the heat and the scarcity of water had rendered difficult, rejoined its vanguard at Daro Taclè, where it halted. The Third Eritrean Brigade followed the "Gavinana", moving a little to the west.

On the 4th, the Native Army Corps had again a most difficult route to follow. It was undisturbed by the enemy.

About 6 o'clock its two columns occupied, respectively: That on the right, the hill of Zalà; that on the left, the important hill of Chessad-Auilié Tzecchià. Both these passes are on the lateral road from Adigrat to Adowa, so that once they were

occupied the liaison between the three Army Corps was still more assured.

An enemy concentration was signalled to General Pirzio-Biroli, while his columns were rectifying their front, on his right, towards the defile of Af-Zehib. He sent the two Eritrean squadrons to reconnoitre, supported by elements from the band of Hazamò, but they found no trace of the enemy.

The march of the First Army Corps proceeded, one might say, triumphantly; partly, perhaps, because its route was undeniably the easiest.

About noon the right-hand column ("Sabauda") had already reached the heights to the north of the valley of Adigrat. To our troops, who were filled with enthusiasm, the valley looked green and inviting. The "28th October", on the left, had greater difficulties to overcome, on account of the rugged track; but by the evening it had reached the objective assigned to it.

At 7 p.m. all the troops halted.

The line of outposts ran through Chessad Allà-Daro Taclè-Mai Cio-Amba Béesa-Enda Zebo-Zala-Hill-Chessad Auiliè Tshokia, the northern edge of the Valley of Adigrat, and the heights to the south of Mai Megheb.

The aeroplanes had nothing relevant to report. There had been no objectives to be bombed on the plateau. In the eastern lowlands encampments near Golimà had been bombed.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

During the operations of these first two days the auxiliary services had functioned well, continuing to replenish the front line.

The troops, however, had all had to eat without drinking.

There was no need to replenish the supplies of ammunition.

However, the insufficiency of the baggage-trains, whether of the troops or of the Commissariat, was keenly felt. Fortunately, thanks to the exemplary activity of the labour hundreds, in two days' time the trails in the rear of the advanced troops were conditioned for an average of six miles beyond the frontier, permitting of the passage of mechanical transport.

On the whole, this second day also was marked by the notable progress of our advance.

The First Army Corps, especially, and the Native Army Corps, outstripped the Second Army Corps, whose line of advance was not only more difficult, but was also contested by an enemy lying in ambush.

From now on, however, its advance would be more secure, as the Native Army Corps was in a favourable position to fall on the right flank of any enemy columns which might hurl themselves against the Second Army Corps. The High Command gave the Native Army Corps instructions to this effect.

The night of the 5th also was quiet.

The advance of the Second Army Corps was still more difficult, owing to the rugged character of the ground covered. It had to cross the pass of Gasciorchi, which proved to be occupied, and also that of Mai Darò.

About 4.0 p.m. the pass of Gasciorchi was bombed from the air. The Seraè band, which had just returned to the head of the left-hand column, followed immediately by the 3rd Eritrean battalion, and also by the vanguard of the 70th Infantry, attacked the hill with a rush, and occupied it. However, it had to give way before an enemy counter-attack, the forces opposed to it outnumbering it by three to one. The vanguard of the 70th Infantry intervened, supported by a group of the 19th Artillery. The Abyssinians were compelled to withdraw, leaving many dead on the field.

On the right the vanguard of the 84th Infantry was troubled by enemy snipers; it also proceeded towards Mai Darò, and reached Mai Turcuz, where it was compelled to close up, as it was attacked from various directions by small bodies of enemies. After a lively engagement it repulsed them, and at a quick march it pushed on to the building of our consular Agency. Patrols were sent into the town, which proved to have been evacuated.

There was no overt act of hostility on the part of the population. Rumour spoke of the presence of Ras Sioum at Rebbi Arienni, although that after-

noon our aeroplanes reported it to be completely evacuated.

The column in support on the right had not moved all day from Chessad Allà, the better to safeguard the flank of the main column. The column on the left (23rd Eritrean) proceeded to Amba Sebhat, where it came into contact with detached bodies of the enemy; but owing to the lateness of the hour it did not think it expedient to engage them in battle, and halted.

In the early hours of the morning the Native Army Corps rejoined its column from the right of the watershed and entered the valley of Enticciò.

The left-hand column, consisting of the Second Native Division, prepared for the forcible occupation of Amba Augher, which proved to be still strongly held by the enemy.

The Amba had already been bombed and machine gunned from the air, but owing to its conformation—it is full of wide crevices and caves—it was an unsatisfactory target. The Commandant therefore decided to take it by assault. It was impossible to take it by frontal attack; he therefore made his dispositions for an enveloping manœuvre: The Fourth Brigade made a thrust for Mount Chissat Abrò and Amba Wsarà, in order to envelop square 2929 of Amba Augher, while at the same time the sixth Brigade advanced from the east towards Amba Manatù, aiming at square 2917.

The Army Corps air squadron co-operated with machine-gun fire from a low altitude.

At 10.30 the Fourth Brigade occupied Mai Darò and made an energetic thrust at the back of the Amba. The advance had to proceed slowly by reason of the extremely intricate terrain and the necessity of liaison, and also on account of the enemy fire.

By about 4 o'clock the Second Brigade also had enveloped the Amba. The circle contracted more and more, and the enemy was obliged to give in.

Amba Augher was immediately occupied by our troops and put in a state of defence.

The First Army Corps continued its march, henceforth without difficulty as regards the terrain, as it was going downhill. Its feverish anxiety to arrive at its objective lent wings to its feet.

Every man wanted to be first. The troops had been told what had happened in 1896, and were eager for an early revenge.

They had not had the good fortune to encounter the enemy; but then—they said—General Baldissera, when he liberated the garrison of the fort at Adigrat, had not encountered the enemy.

General Santini formed up his troops, which entered the valley with the flanking Divisions; he placed himself at the head of the "Sabauda" Division, and at 12 noon our flag was hoisted above the ruins of the fort of Adigrat, where General

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

Santini himself, then a lieutenant, had seen it hauled down on the 18th May, 1896.

Nothing worth mentioning occurred during the night of the 5th. I felt that at last the way was cleared for the Second Army Corps. In any case, the Native Army Corps had already received categorical instructions to co-operate on the left of the Second Corps if need should arise.

At dawn on the 6th the Second Army Corps resumed the advance with the definite aim of occupying Adowa during the day.

The main column easily overcame the feeble enemy resistance with its vanguard.

It was threatened on the right from Debra-Sina. Here the enemy was opposed by the 70th Infantry and the 18th Eritrean battalion, which was brought up from Chessad Allà.

At 10.30 General Ranza, commanding the 3rd Air Brigade, informed us that he had seen our troops entering Adowa. About 11.0 I received confirmation of this from the Commandant of the Second Army Corps, and only then did I telegraph the news to Rome.

Enemy offensives continued to come from Amba Sebhat, in front of which the 18th Eritrean battalion had remained. The Commandant of the Army Corps despatched in reinforcement of this battalion a battalion of the 70th Infantry and a group of the 19th Artillery. Attacked in the early hours of

the 8th, the enemy was driven off, leaving enormous numbers of killed and wounded on the field.

On the evening of the 5th, from Coatit, I was able to get into telephonic communication with the Duce. From the manner in which he spoke to me I realized how the good news had been awaited in Italy. We, so far away, with newspapers which were stale when they arrived, had had no precise idea of the effect which the reconquest of Adowa had produced on the Italian people. We had no need to know; yet this first success undoubtedly contributed very greatly to supporting the morale of the troops.

The Duce telegraphed to me as follows:

“Announcement reconquest of Adowa fills the soul of the Italians with pride (.) To you and all the troops my highest praise and the gratitude of the nation (.)”

This was a great reward for us. I at once communicated this telegram to the troops.

We had not had the good fortune to meet the enemy in force.

This was due to two considerations: the first being that the Negus was persisting in his plan of initial retirement, to which, up to the present, at least, Ras Sioum was likewise adhering. The second was, that the size of our forces, the means at our disposal, and our determination had undoubtedly impressed the enemy, who was not yet fully assembled and prepared. However, the minor

encounters had been enough to give us an idea of the solidity of our detachments, and the valour, discipline and impetuosity of our soldiers.

Our losses were small; those of the enemy were considerable, and he left in our hands some hundreds of prisoners.

All the troops (and especially those of the Second Army Corps) had suffered great fatigue and many sacrifices.

For some consecutive days only a fraction of the "Gavinana" Division had been able to have a hot meal.

The Intendancy had worked miracles; but the deficiency of the means of transport was more evident every day. Fortunately, both in the valley of Adigrat and in that of Adowa—where the bulk of the troops were Italian—there was plenty of water. There were also abundant supplies in Enticciò.

General Graziani, in Somalia, had occupied Dolo and Oddo on the 4th and 5th. He had not been able to push on to Shillane on account of the rain. He intended, as soon as the weather made it possible, to occupy Gorrahei.

The first thing to do in the conquered positions was to put ourselves in a position to resist any enemy attack; it was therefore necessary to fortify them, and make perfectly sure of our lateral communi-

cations. We needed a strategic road which would permit of safe and rapid movement from wing to wing of the front.

We were under no illusions as to the anticipated retirement of the enemy. Credible information of the assembly of masses of armed men was reaching us daily. The news that interested us most for the moment was that Ras Kassa was making towards Tigré with a force whose strength our informants put as high as 40,000. Another 27,000 were said to be gathered on the frontier between Shirè and Tigré, guarding the fords of the Takazzè. These numbers were undoubtedly exaggerated, and aerial reconnaissances made in this connection gave negative results.

It was essential to safeguard and improve the functioning of the auxiliary services.

To this end it was a matter of prime necessity to increase the means of transport, both motor-lorries and pack-animals.

The feats of acrobatic activity performed, and the provisions made by the Intendancy in support of our efforts, would need a special volume. What with rearrangements, and new arrivals, and new acquisitions, and the formation of camel trains and other expedients, it certainly succeeded in its aim. The crisis was not serious and did not last long.

The tracks which had been adapted for traffic by such cruel labour, and which had made it possible



Road-building on stony ground.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

for motor-vehicles, although at considerable risk, to reach, in the course of a few days, the positions we had conquered, were deteriorating day by day as the traffic increased.

It was a *conditio sine qua non* of the constant movement from the sea that they should be transformed into ballasted roads; and for this purpose it was necessary in certain stretches (especially in that leading to Adowa) to modify radically the course of the existing tracks.

The labour hundreds worked away indefatigably, assisted by the troops which were gradually arriving in the Colony, and which were rushed to the spot.

It had been my intention to pay a visit of inspection to the positions conquered and the troops which had occupied them. I had to curb this legitimate desire for some days, for the urgent necessity of deciding upon the measures to be taken in respect of the people who had now become our subjects tied me to Coatit.

As I have already mentioned, at Agordat the First Army Corps was received with manifest signs of rejoicing. It was not so at Enticciò when our askaris arrived there.

At Adowa the people were undecided in their attitude; but when Ras Sioum, with a nucleus of loyal followers, and the Abuna, had fled, and when it was known that all resistance had been overcome

at Ramà, Darò Tacle, Debra Sina and Amba Sebhat, the population, with the clergy at their head, decided to make the act of submission.

In each Army Corps there had been organized a Political Bureau subordinate to that of the High Command. At its head was a Colonial official selected from among the most experienced and the best fitted to treat with the natives.

To the Second Army Corps I had assigned our ex-Consul at Adowa. This plucky official had remained at his post until the evening of the 2nd October. In the night, after burning the archives, he made his way towards the Maravigna Army Corps. Knowing the country, and accompanied by four of his faithful servants, he contrived to elude vigilance of the enemy until about noon on the 3rd, when he fell in with some Abyssinian warriors who intercepted him and forced him to retreat. On the 5th, after Ras Sioum had left, he was able to join the Army Corps to which I had assigned him. His knowledge of native life and personalities was of great assistance to the Commandant of the Second Army Corps.

Very soon, both at Adigrat and Adowa, people began to flock to the Political Bureau. The greater number of the applicants made claims in respect of damage done by the troops; but many boasted of their services to our Government, and some came to ask for help.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

We had to appear wealthy, if only to disperse the rumours to the effect that we should bleed the people white in order to continue the war. England had made abundant use of this slander.

The Head of the Government had left me a free hand in this matter. I had told him beforehand that I should need Maria Teresa thalers, the only coins valued, which had almost disappeared from circulation in Abyssinia.

Rome had acquired from Vienna the press for the coining of real Maria Teresa thalers. (I say this because in 1890 we struck thalers which were not immediately accepted.)

Altogether, in successive batches, a million of the new thalers were sent out to me. They were handsome, glittering coins; regarded at first with some diffidence, and then eagerly accepted.—I should observe that the value of the thaler rose to 11 lire.

Although all the territory which we had occupied was of the same character as that of Eritrea, it seemed to be much more fertile.

The crops were flourishing, and the cultivation, especially in the valleys, was intensive.

It is understood that I use the word "intensive" in a relative sense: the cultivation, of course, was not like that of our Padana valley.

There was great wealth of cattle, although many herds had been sent away to the south, lest we should requisition them.

The first thing to be done was to annex the territory, proclaiming our absolute sovereignty.

This I did, issuing the proclamation which is printed below.

This, of course, had to be issued from the ex-capital of Tigré, Adowa; for which reason it bears the date October 14th, the day on which I made my entry into the city.

PROCLAMATION CONCERNING THE
ASSUMPTION OF GOVERNMENT BEYOND
THE FRONTIER.

PROCLAMATION.

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE
ITALIAN FORCES IN EAST AFRICA.

In the name of His Majesty the King of Italy I assume the government of the country.

From to-day you, the people of Tigré and Agamè, are subject to and under the protection of the Italian Flag.

The Tshikka remain in office and are responsible for the order and discipline of their respective districts.

They will present themselves before the nearest military authority together with the clergy of the parish church in order to make the act of submission.

Those who do not present themselves within 10 days will be considered and treated as enemies.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

The Meslenié and all those invested with rank or command will present themselves to receive orders.

Let whomsoever has suffered injury present himself to my Generals and he will receive justice.

No tribute: the collection of such payments of tribute as were exacted is annulled.

The market dues, tolls, and customs duties are abolished.

Traders, continue to trade; husbandmen, continue to till the soil.

Given in Adowa the 14th October 1935-XIII.

(3 Tekemt 1928 a.m.)

General EMILIO DE BONO.

The Head of the Government notified me that it would be expedient to abolish slavery in the new territories.

This, of course, was already on our programme; so that I immediately published another proclamation with this object.

This too, for the reasons already explained, was dated from Adowa.

HIGH COMMAND E.A.

PROCLAMATION OF SUPPRESSION OF SLAVERY IN TIGRÉ.

People of Tigré: *HEAR:*

You know that where the flag of Italy flies, there is liberty.

ANNO XIII

Therefore, in your country, slavery under whatever form is suppressed.

The Slaves at present in Tigré are free and the sale or purchase of slaves is prohibited.

Whosoever shall contravene the provisions of the present Proclamation will be severely punished as transgressing the orders of the Government.

Given in Adowa the 14th October, 1935-XIII.

(3 Tekemt 1928).

General EMILIO DE BONO.

It was not easy to calculate how many slaves there were in the whole region.

In Rome, of course, they were very anxious to know the number, in order to give foreign Powers yet further evidence of our mode of procedure in conquered territory.

It would have been easy for me to send an impressive figure which nobody could have verified; but such expedients are absolutely foreign to my character and my way of thinking. I have never even held that it may sometimes be convenient to exaggerate facts and figures.

From the natives—even from the more intelligent—from the clergy, from the chiefs, it was impossible to obtain reliable figures. One notable, thinking to please me, told me that the number of slaves was not less than 50,000.

On the other hand, there were degrees in slavery.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

The Roman sense of the word *slave* was unknown. The slave women were usually articles of luxury; of the men, some were servants and some had the conditions of serfs attached to the land—*adscripti glebae*.

A person who gave me a certain amount of accurate information was the Prior of the Lazarist Mission at Adigrat, who came immediately to pay his respects to me.

From data gathered from various sources and verified by such means as were at our disposal it appeared that the total number of slaves of all kinds and species was between 15,000 and 16,000.

If the absolute truth be told—as it is, strictly, in the whole of this book of mine—I am obliged to say that the Proclamation did not have much effect on the owners of slaves, and still less, perhaps, on the liberated slaves themselves.

Many of the latter, directly they were set at liberty, presented themselves to the Italian authorities, asking: “And now who gives me food?”

We provided for them. Then, through the medium of the Tshikka and Mesleniè—flattered at being kept in office—I explained that the liberation of the slaves must not mean their abandonment.

The landowners would still need labourers in the fields; the nobles would always try to find people willing to act as servants. Well, the ex-slaves could be engaged as agricultural labourers, herdsmen and

shepherds and servants; but now for an adequate reward. But the most important thing was the fact that if they wished they could change their employer and choose another, or work as they pleased, independently.

* * *

On the 8th October I issued instructions for the organization of the conquered territory, in preparation for a new offensive advance.

The conquest effected had great moral importance; but it was to be regarded as the beginning of strategical operations which would undergo further development.

It was not easy to foresee a solution which would satisfy us; for the present we had the larger part of Tigré, but only a part, and Tigré is one of the least fertile regions of Ethiopia.

And the whole of Europe was against us, and was extending the sanctions.

The instructions given, as regards their military aspect, referred to:

The reorganization of the forces.

The organization of the territory, the lines of *étapes*, lines of communication in general, telegraph and telephone services.

The forwarding of stores.

For this purpose I ordered that the limit between *the territorial zone and the zone of operations* should be carried forward to the line of the old frontier.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

The Territorial Commandant of the Royal Eritrean Corps had jurisdiction (exclusively in military matters) over the *territorial zone*. The civil jurisdiction remained intact.

The Commandants of the Army Corps, which were in occupation of *the zone of operations*, had *full authority* over this zone, which was subdivided for convenience into three sectors.

The fortress of Asmara was dismantled, as were the forts and batteries of what was the *second position of resistance*. I still maintained, however, the armament of the old front line, which became the *rearward position of resistance*.

On the line of the positions conquered a *first position of resistance* was organized: without an excessive amount of labour. This line had to have centres of resistance—and these were provided—on which we could base a defence on manœuvres.

But above all, as it was our intention to continue the offensive, the line when organized must accommodate and protect the guns necessary for the imminent new advance, and must require the smallest possible force to garrison it.

The forces of the western lowlands were to continue to act as agreed at the beginning of operations.

The forces of the eastern lowlands, which had been very considerably reinforced by the abundant influx of recruits to the Dankalia band, had to

make preparations for advancing parallel with the troops of the plateau in the next push.

The Air Force was to continue its work of reconnaissance and the contingent bombing of enemy forces.

The reorganization of the forces involved necessary modifications in the formation of the Army Corps.

Above all, I had to reinforce the Second Army Corps, as I intended to entrust it with the responsibility for the entire Adowa-Adigrat front when I was in a position to make a fresh advance. Further, this Army Corps was to guard our right flank, pushing offensive reconnaissances as far as the Takazzè, and it would also have to maintain more active contact with the western lowlands, operating in the direction of Scirè.

The units still at sea were gradually arriving; so that I was able to form a solid reserve, placing the "21st April" Division of Blackshirts entirely at the disposal of the Second Army Corps.

The formation of the Corps of Operation was then as follows:

First East African Army Corps:

"Sabauda" Division of Infantry.

Second Division ("28th October") of Blackshirts.

Sixth Group of Battalions of Blackshirts.

10th and 25th Native Battalions.

Band of Scimezana.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

Fifth Group of squadrons of rapid armoured cars.

Third Group of 77/28 (automobile).

Fifth Group of 105/28 (automobile).

Command of Position Artillery* of Agamè.

Commands I-VII-XI Groups of Position Artillery.

Batteries of Position: 1st undef. of 70/15; 13th, 17th, 18th, 21st, 28th of 77/28; 6th of 120/25; 27th of 105/28.

Engineer unit of the First E.A. Army Corps.

Libyan squadron of Aeroplanes R.T.

Native Army Corps:

Second Native Division (less 10th and 25th Native Battalions).

First Native Division.

First Group of Battalions of Eritrean Blackshirts.

Band of Hassamò.

Sixth Group of squadrons of rapid armoured cars (less one squadron).

Groups of squadrons of native horse.

Second Group of 77/28 (automobile).

Third Group of 100/17 (automobile).

Command of Position Artillery of East Tigré.

Commands VI and XVIII of groups of Position Artillery.

Batteries of Position: 4th Native of 70/15; 15th and 18th Native of 77/29; 26th of 77/28; 4th of 120/25.

*Heavy Field Artillery.

Engineer Unit of Native Army Corps.
34th Squadron of Aeroplanes R.T.

Second East African Army Corps:

“Gavinana” Division of Infantry.

Third Division (“21st April”) of Blackshirts.

First Division (“23rd March”) of Blackshirts.

Group of Bands (of the highlands—of Seraè,
Cheren, Hamasien).

10th Squadron rapid armoured cars.

Command of Artillery Group of 100/17.

1st and 2nd of 100/17 (automobile).

1st Group of 77/28 (automobile carriage).

Command of Position Artillery of West Tigré.

Commands IX-XIII and XX of Groups of
Position Artillery.

Batteries of Position: 19th undef. of 70/15; 25th
of 70/15; 30th - 36th and 41st of 77/28; 12th
of 104/32; 5th of 120/25.

Engineer Unit of the Second East African Army
Corps.

118th Squadron of Aeroplanes R.T.

Troops at the disposition of the High Command
East Africa:

“Gran Sasso” Division of Infantry: in the Adi
Ugri-Adi Qualà zone.

“Sila” Division of Infantry (on the way out from
Italy).

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

Group of Grenadier, Alpini and Frontier Guard Battalions (on the way out from Italy).

*Fourth Division ("3rd January") of Blackshirts.

*5th Division ("1st February") of Blackshirts.

*6th Division ("Tevere") of Blackshirts.

*Three Storm Battalions.

*at present still in Italy.

7th Group of 149/13.

7th Group of 77/28 (automobile carriage) in formation at Asmara.

Engineer Unit of the High Command Army Corps.

Bombing Planes, Scouts (strategical reconnaissance) and Chaser Planes.

The troops of the Army Corps not engaged in guarding the line or in reinforcing it were employed on the improvement of the roads in the immediate rear, and on the creation or adaptation of tracks in the direction of the future advance.

In this way, foot by foot, our occupation was prudently pushed forward, which had the advantage of facilitating and shortening the advance which had still to be made.

* * *

Still on the 8th October General Santini sent word that Hailè Selassiè Gugsà had asked for our assistance in order that he might attack the Degiac Ailù Chebbedè, who was then at Makallè with some 7,000 men.

I must explain that Ailù Chebbedè—who had been the Ethiopian representative in Asmara, and had also been there at the time of His Majesty's visit to Eritrea—had been sent into Tigré by the Negus at the end of June, with the task of taking charge of the preparations for war and the mobilization and concentration of troops. The Negus did not trust Gugsà, and knew Ras Sioum to be weak and undecided. Substantially, Chebbedè had to see that the will of the Negus was obeyed in Tigré.

At the outset he was regarded with ill-will by both the chiefs, who had almost come to an agreement between themselves; but Ailù knew what to do; he made approaches to Sioum, and by favouring him rather than Gugsà he induced the Ras to listen to him. It was believed, and with reason, that Sioum had abandoned Adowa in obedience to Chebbedè's urging.

The Degiac, though simulating friendship, was still actually hostile to him.

I should not have had much difficulty in sending a detachment of natives to occupy Makallè. In all probability this little operation would have been successful; but it would have been difficult to keep the troops replenished, and impossible to hold the position.

The actual situation of the enemy was by no means clear. The two or three battalions that I could have sent (I could not have sent more)

would have attained the objective; but afterwards? I am sure the Abyssinians could never have resisted this easy mouthful, and the result would have been another Amba Alagi, which would have done us enormous injury.

We can imagine what the foreigners who were daily fabricating news of an Italian defeat would have invented if we had had a real set-back, however quickly repaired.

I was never able to forget (and no calm and qualified judge should forget) the restrictions imposed upon me by logistic necessities.

In the meanwhile I had aerial reconnaissances made over Makallè, where an agent of the Adowa consulate had remained unmolested.

Colonel Ruggero, head of the Political Bureau, took part in this reconnaissance: it was his impression that the town was evacuated. On the existing aerodrome—which is small and dangerous—there was a series of white streaks. Colonel Ruggero flew down to a low level without being molested in any way. This fact could not modify my decision.

On the morning of the 10th General Santini sent me word that he had been informed that Ras Gugsà intended to pass through our lines with his men, and asked me for instructions.

I told him to welcome the Ras, and to make the warriors withdraw well behind the troops, keeping an eye on them as opportunity offered.

About noon the air service confirmed the fact that a long column, marching in good order, and followed by a fair number of animals, was moving from Makallè towards Adigrat, and was now perhaps half-way between the two.

On the morning of the 11th the column was in sight from our outposts in the neighbourhood of Endaga Hannus.

At 4 o'clock a radiogram from the Commandant of the First Army Corps informed me of the arrival of Hailè Selassiè Gugsà at Adigrat, with 1,200 men armed with rifles and 8 good machine-guns.

I notified Rome, where the news was very welcome, but it was improperly exaggerated, so that according to Rome Gugsà's men were 10,000 in number.

I telegraphed to General Santini that on the following day he must ask Gugsà to come and see me. He did actually reach Coatit about 11 o'clock on the 12th.

I received him in my hut. He protested his devotion to me, and gave me some hints as to the situation. He said, in substance, that no one in Abyssinia wanted to make war, and that the Negus had decided to do so because he had been instigated by the British agents, who had assured him that it would be impossible for us to conduct the campaign to a finish.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

He urged an immediate occupation of Makallè, declaring that we could remain there in absolute safety.

I offered no opinion, saying that I would come to a decision after my visit to Agordat, which would take place a few days later.

I asked him what impression our troops had made on him. "One of great strength," he replied. He was more astonished by the roads we had built (which really, where he had seen them, did not yet amount to much), and still more by the abundance of motor transport. And yet we were in such need of more.

He was greatly preoccupied about the maintenance of his men. I reassured him in this respect, and gave him to understand that he too would receive a generous emolument.

Then I asked him outright: "But have you complete trust in your men?" It is difficult to read a black man's face; but I had the feeling that he entertained some doubt of them. Indeed, he did not reply in the affirmative. He nodded his head and added: "It will be all right, as I tell you; go to Makallè as quickly as possible."

I kept him to lunch with me. Since he had told me that he would like to see Asmara, and also to make some purchases there, I sent someone with him and put him up at the Forestiera. However, I did not wish him to amuse himself there for more

than one day, but preferred him to return to Adigrat. I felt easier at seeing him under someone's immediate tutelage.

On the 12th I decided to leave for Adowa on the following day, and to go on to Adigrat, finally inspecting Enticciò.

* * *

On the 13th I passed the night at Adi Ugri, and on the following morning, almost before daylight, I set out for Adowa. We arrived there before our time—that is, about 11.0.

This was made possible by the miracles which had been accomplished in the reconditioning of the track. In theory we had expected to spend about six hours on mule-back; on the contrary, it was a pleasant and grateful surprise to find that the work on the track had reached such a stage that I was able to arrive in Adowa by motor-car.

The ceremonies were fixed for the following morning. However, I did not want to spend the afternoon in idleness; so I employed it profitably in inspecting the positions held by the troops, and the plan of the entrenched camp which I had ordered should be constructed in the valley, with the purpose of reducing, as far as possible, the garrison which would be kept on the spot, so that I should have a greater strength of troops at my disposal for manœuvre.

The valley of Adowa lends itself admirably to

the construction of a defensive system; from the mountains which enclose it the whole of the surrounding terrain is commanded, and there are easy outlets from the valley in all directions. The weakest part is towards the west, approaching Shirè by way of Aksum. This was the most dangerous side, to which I had drawn General Maravigna's special attention, giving him appropriate instructions.

The clergy had already paid homage to the Commandant of the Second Army Corps, as soon as he had set foot in the town.

I knew that on the following day, at the solemn ceremony of submission which would then take place, the whole chapter of Aksum would be present; indeed, it had already arrived in Adowa.

It would be necessary to occupy Aksum also, and now the occupation did not call for any exceptional preparations of a military nature.

I therefore arranged with General Maravigna that on the following day, without more ado, he would send the Third Eritrean Brigade to take possession of the town.

Aksum, as is well known, is the Holy City, which has always enjoyed special privileges. There every Negus Neghesti was crowned, until Menelik II ascended the throne. He, being a Shioan, was the first to be crowned in Addis Ababa. Its occupation was invested with great political significance for the whole population of the Empire, and also in

the eyes of the European nations, even though the fact would only serve still farther to envenom them against us.

Among the natives, who, although they are mostly Christians, have absorbed much of the Moslem fatalism, our possession of Aksum was attributed to the will of God, to which it is proper to resign oneself.

I spent the night in our ex-Consular residence, which had been less damaged than might have been expected.

At 8 o'clock on the following morning, after passing in review the Third Eritrean Brigade, which had not been employed in the occupation of the valley, and after witnessing the inauguration of the monument erected by the "Gavinana" Division to commemorate the event of the reconquest and vindication, I entered the town on horseback, amidst the cheers of the population, *who had been told that they must applaud me*. I was not so ingenuous as to think this applause sincere.

I inspected the Ghebè, a poor building, with nothing interesting or artistic about it. It had been devastated; nothing was left, save a few fowls which were scratching in the courtyard, and a lion-cub, formerly the property of the Ras, and which General Maravigna now gave to me. (I sent it afterwards to Rome, to the Duce.)

I then repaired to the principal church, where



The Coptic clergy carry the sacred pictures in solemn procession on the arrival of the Italian troops.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

the clergy were awaiting me, wearing their most showy vestments.

After this I went outside the town, whither the people were flocking, and where the notables had already been convoked, with the local clergy (who came from the Cathedral, where I had already seen them) and the Chapter of Aksum. I made a short speech, in order to declare our sovereignty, and to explain clearly the nature of our rights, and the mission which Italy had assumed in undertaking the conquest.

The acting head of the Chapter of Aksum replied to me; the real head had followed the Abuna* in his flight.

He was a man of forty, very intelligent and dignified in appearance. He spoke with great eloquence; he said that he knew that the Aksumite civilization owed much to Rome (I was really not aware of this), and assured me of the sincerity of his sentiments, which were shared by the more elect of the whole population, and he promised that the labours of the clergy would be directed to making our new subjects realize and understand all the privileges and benefits which they would derive from our rule.

The ceremony was finished.

Directly after lunch I returned to Coatit, proceeding to Adigrat on the following day.

*The Catholikos of the Ethiopian Church.—(*Tr.*).

As had been previously arranged, at 4.30 on the 16th October the Third Native Brigade, reinforced by three batteries of 77/28 (automobile) and the 10th Squadron of rapid armoured cars, moved on to Aksum, and at 7 o'clock the tricolour was hoisted amidst the joyful cries of the inhabitants.

At 10 o'clock of the same day General Maravigna, as my representative, and in the name of His Majesty the King, took possession of the Holy City and proclaimed the sovereignty of Italy.

On the morning of the 17th I left for Adigrat. The road leading thither was without comparison better than the road to Adowa. Its course was easier, and the solidity of the ground had prevented any subsidences.

Here too the work done in less than ten days was surprising. The road could already be quite *comfortably* traversed in a motor-car.

I reached Adigrat about 10.30.

The usual reception, the usual functions and the customary speeches. Less solemn, however, than at Adowa; for obvious reasons.

As I went by the warriors of the Degiac Gugsà were drawn up with the rest of the troops. They were men of proud but certainly not benevolent appearance; armed with rifles of at least five or six types. One maniple, about 40 strong, was equipped with khaki uniforms and military berets;

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

it was armed with '91 rifles, and gave a flourish on its trumpets which was deliciously out of tune. These *regulars* (sic) were commanded by one of our Shioan *basci*, who had been sent to Makallè as a secret agent, and who had drilled and trained them.

The Duce had telegraphed me to the effect that he intended to appoint the Degiac Hailè Selassiè Gugsà the Chief of Tigré. This was good business, although the fact would assuredly give rise to rumours and comments. Gugsà was certainly not a great man, and he is not even a warrior. He was respected by virtue of his father's memory. His father ruled his dominions wisely, but the son had accomplished very little.

I announced the appointment, in the name of His Majesty the King, before the population and the assembled warriors.

It goes without saying that for the moment the Degiac does not exercise any power.

General Santini had already told me his impression of Hailè Selassiè. I found him not only undecided but timid. His insistence on the necessity of the prompt occupation of Makallè by our troops was really due to the pressure brought to bear upon him by his warriors, who had left their district reluctantly, being perfectly aware that it would be pillaged by those who had not followed the Degiac, but would have joined Chebbedè.

Makallè was, as a matter of fact, pillaged.

The Degiac asked me to grant him a consultation at which only General Santini and the interpreter would be present. A great nuisance, having to speak through the medium of an interpreter! One is never quite sure that the dialogue is correctly translated.

Gugsà merely repeated to me what he had frequently urged upon General Santini.

I had telegraphed to the Duce as to the possibility of making a lunge at Makallè on the day after Gugsà had been presented to me. The Head of the Government would be glad to have another pawn in hand so promptly.

To General Santini—General Gabba also being present—my Chief of Staff expounded the reasons (which have been already enumerated) why the possible advantage was without comparison inferior to the almost certain risk. I therefore telegraphed my decision to the Duce from Adigrat.

The Duce replied:

“11890 (.) I reply your telegram dated from Adigrat (.) Agree that must not march on Makallè before organizing your rear and before receiving my orders (.) Intensify defensive system in the lines Adigrat-Aksum-Adowa, extending to the right (.) My orders will reach you when the European situation has cleared up in respect of sanctions, and above all, Anglo-Italian relations . . .”

The same evening (the 17th) I returned to Coatit.

The Duce wished me to transfer my headquarters

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

into occupied territory. I had already decided to do so; but this could not be effected in twelve hours, nor in twenty-four. Not as regards the removal of persons and correspondence: nor yet that of the barracks and offices.

We were all ready to settle down under canvas. Camping out had no terrors for us who had been soldiers for forty or fifty years.

But the higher the rank of a commander the more he needs to be able to keep in contact with all his subordinates, with whom he may at any time have to communicate directly. It was therefore essential, before anything else, to establish communications, and this is a task which, if it is to be done well, calls for many days of assiduous and fatiguing labour.

The Air Force continued its work of scouting, and also its bombing. It was especially active in the direction of Sciré, repeatedly bombing Amba Bircutan, where enemy forces were attempting to concentrate.

It was now time for our aeroplanes to operate at longer range, and it was also opportune that they should do so. They ought to have been able to get at least as far as Dessiè, the central zone of the Abyssinian concentration: but we had not yet any machines of sufficient power to attempt the flight.

General Aimone Cat wanted to make the attempt to reach us from Assab, when the voyage would have been reduced by nearly 250 miles, as compared with

the distance from Gura; but the clouds and the dense mist which he encountered on the way up from the lowlands to the plateau made the flight impracticable.

In order to accede to a request made by various European Powers, and also by the United States, the Duce telegraphed to me ordering that the Air Force, in consideration for the many Europeans who lived there, should refrain from bombarding Addis Ababa and Dire-Daua, where the Harrar railway station is situated.

As I have said, we were not yet in a position to make long flights; nevertheless, categorical instructions were given as the Duce desired.

XIII

THE SECOND STRIDE

ON THE 16th October Marshal Badoglio arrived in Eritrea with the Under-Secretary for the Colonies.

I had already been advised of his visit by the Duce. Its object was to examine still further, with me, the possibility of undertaking operations towards the Sudanese front.

The reasons which had formerly caused me to stress the difficulties and dangers of such a plan were still perfectly valid; indeed, our actual conditions rendered the expediency of taking action in a direction so divergent more doubtful than ever.

The bulk of the troops was progressively moving southwards. Our line of operation was increasing in length; and it was becoming more and more evident that we needed more troops if we were to continue our advance.

Operating towards the Sudan would have to be considered as acting in another theatre of operation.

I did not need to persuade Marshal Badoglio of the cogency of my objections, which were clear and obvious as the day; so that we both telegraphed to the Duce that any operations whatsoever towards the west were absolutely to be avoided.

Badoglio was the Chief of the General Staff, on whom rested always a certain—though indirect—responsibility for all that was done as regards the Army; so that he was obliged to have his say in respect of what was being done in the Colony.

It was therefore natural and indeed necessary that I should put him *au courant* in respect of what had been done and what I intended to do. Although the Chief of the General Staff had attentively followed, from Rome, all the phases of our preparations and our operations in the field, there were certain particulars, which were yet of very great importance, which could not be known to him.

Marshal Badoglio had been in the Colony in 1896, and although between that period and 1935 something had been accomplished in Eritrea, he was able to compare the Colony as he had left it then with the Colony as he found it.

The Under-Secretary for the Colonies, during the period when I was High Commissioner, had been to Eritrea twice, and was able to form a summary notion of the progress made there; but in matters more especially relating to military preparation and organization the clinical eye and objective spirit of the expert was needed.

I was therefore very glad of the visit of the Chief of the General Staff, who, in his own department, was able to give me useful advice.

During the few days which he spent there he

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

covered the whole of the new front, and in respect of what had been accomplished he found that all was going on well.

Whenever we met we discussed the possible repercussions on the Colony of the sanctions which we already knew would be applied; though we did not yet know to what extent.

We therefore agreed, on the 18th, to telegraph to the Duce:

"14448/85 CSAO (.) Here in conjunction with His Excellency Badoglio and His Excellency Lessona it has been unanimously decided (.) First: Given the defensive attitude which must now be assumed it is expedient and necessary to delay departure of the two Divisions of Blackshirts (.) Second: Accelerated influx of troops in these last two months has necessarily slowed down disembarkation of victuals and materials (.) After disembarkation of Sila Division and other secondary elements already on the way provision will be made for rapid clearing of Massawa harbour and subsequent transportation to plateau of victuals ammunition and materials which are at the Massawa base (.) Third: Rationing population and troops it is calculated may have victuals for about six months considering that meat and salt are abundant on the spot (.) Continual consignments benzine wanted of which notwithstanding recent consignments there is a deficiency having two months' supply exclusive of that for aviation which the competent Ministry has always provided directly (.) DE BONO."

I should explain that the "defensive attitude" refers only to the period necessary for the reorganization of the forces and logistic preparations; the basic *offensive plan* was unchanged.

The refusal of the two Divisions of Blackshirts was Marshal Badoglio's responsibility. The Duce, who had these units ready in Italy, did not think it advisable to postpone their departure. He did well; and the person to be most thankful for them was Marshal Badoglio himself, who succeeded me in the Command.

I, undoubtedly, ought to have asked for them once I had reached Makallè, where I found myself, at first, a little "in the air."

On the 20th October the Duce telegraphed:

"12096 (.)"

There will be no complications for us in Europe before the English election fixed for the middle of November (.) Well by that date all Tigré to Makallè and beyond ought to be ours (.) In your letter of the 6th October you asked me for a month and a month is at your disposal (.) In waiting for my order which may reach you between the 1st and the 5th November push forward the occupation of the territory, an occupation like the spreading of a spot of oil, so that the last push need not be of excessive length (.) It is also my duty to remind you that with the end of the embargo modern arms and munitions are arriving in great quantities in Ethiopia, for which time is working against us, and, on the other hand, a too long delayed

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

occupation of Makallè may embolden our enemies and cause perplexity among our friends (.) After having spoken with Badoglio and Lessona, reply to me (.)”

I replied at once:

“88 CSAO (.) To your 12098 (.) Badoglio and Lessona are away and will be back to-morrow. Their presence cannot influence my possibilities of action which are merely in functional dependence on logistic preparations (.) Consider that every step forwards means greater consumption barrels of benzine (.) You must be confident that your programme is mine and that substantially progressive advance is already modestly proceeding (.) It is a question at most of some difference in time (.) I will consult with Badoglio and Lessona. Now what matters to me is that you should know that I am following your wishes with the utmost activity and pertinacity of myself and my coadjutors (.) Affectionate regards (.)

DE BONO.”

What I did is shown by this other telegram:

“C5AO (.) To your 12096 and continuing my 88 of yesterday (.) Their Excellencies Badoglio and Lessona have returned and have expounded my plan to them which has been approved (.) In view of the clear political exposition which you have given me and resulting necessities have conferred with General Dall’Ora (.) Converging all effort for object which it is desired to attain shall be in position to march in strength on Makallè by the 10th

November (.) Before sending here fourth and fifth Division Blackshirts is expedient to wait for my next request (.) Affectionate regards (.)

DE BONO.”

During our halt, as I have mentioned, the First Army Corps and the Eritrean Army Corps had done a great deal of work in tracing and improving roads to be traversed in the next advance.

The Second and First Divisions of Blackshirts, and the Montana and Diamanti Groups of battalions, had accomplished cyclopean labours with the cheerfulness and enthusiasm that distinguish Fascist youth.

These labours, and certain partial advances made after due reconnaissance, had enabled us to shift a good part of our lines in a southerly direction.

The First Army Corps had already strongly occupied Edagà Hamus, thrusting out points towards Debra Sion and Hauzien.

The Eritrean Army Corps had completely occupied the head of the Feres Mai, which opened the way to the valley of Hauzien.

Everywhere the population had welcomed our men with visible signs of satisfaction.

Before he left I had another meeting with Badoglio, my Chief of Staff being also present.

The situation having been re-examined from every point of view, I repeated to the Marshal that

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

I considered that I should be able to resume our movements on the morning of the 10th November. He took no exception to this, and messages in this sense were sent to the Head of the Government, who replied to me on the 25th in the following words:

"12298 (.) It is necessary to expand and accelerate what you call progressive advance which ought to bring our troops nearer to the objective (.) See if it is possible for you to advance to the 5th what you propose for the 10th (.) Am confident that summoning all energies for a supreme effort you will succeed (.) The European situation has not improved and the lessening of tension is purely formal (.) Cordial greetings (.)"

I replied at once:

"91 CSAO (.) To your 12298 (.) This morning's news will show you that what you wish is already being done (.) You must bear in mind that our extension is subordinate to the logistic necessities and in particular to available water supplies which often prescribe or limit our objective (.) Certainly it is in our interests to accelerate movement as much as possible; but you will admit that I cannot operate in a thorough manner save on the condition that I do not find myself with the detachments unfed and unreplenished at need (.) Those who declare it to be possible without more ado are speaking without positive authentication of the possibilities of the moment (.) Affectionate regards.

DE BONO."

On the 27th the Marshal and the Under-Secretary embarked for Italy.

With them was Senator Castellani, who had followed the Under-Secretary in his two previous visits also. As always, the said specialist in tropical diseases had to report that our troops, notwithstanding the great difference in temperature, the altitude, the climate, and the privations suffered, were bursting with health.

On the 28th I thought it expedient to put the Duce *au courant* of certain details of the situation.

I telegraphed to him as follows:

“ . . . Secret (.) Decipher personally (.) This telegram is long but is necessary so that you may be apprized of the military situation certain details of which are really professional but which you will certainly appreciate (.) Before moving the command to Adigrat (,) which I will do in a few days after despatching certain affairs which require my presence in Asmara (,) I wish to make a fresh inspection of the front, proceeding as far as Feres Mai (.) All goes well and more than ever I wonder at what our troops have been able to do in 20 days (.) The next stride will find all inspired with the same determination and the same spirit as inspired the first (.) From the strategical and tactical point of view it would be practicable at once (;) on the other hand, it is not practicable on account of logistic needs (.) The greatest deficiency is in the baggage-trains (.) Lessona has offered to have mules sent me (.) The mules are one of the five components of a baggage-train (,) which

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

are: mules, pack-saddles, saddles, drivers and commandants (.) The mules we have would be sufficient, but unfortunately more than a third of them, through organic deficiency or because too young, or because their pack-saddles do not fit, because of the lack of saddlers to adapt them, and because of the incapacity of drivers and officers, are lying brutally exhausted in the animals' hospital (.) Remedy reducing baggage to be carried after us and gradually conditioning track for motor-cars as we advance (.) But lengthening by about fifty-five miles the line of étapes, as it will be to reach Makallè, the Intendancy will need two fresh motor-detachments, and there will be a greatly increased consumption of benzine (.) To make the push we supply with transport in advance of advanced magazines and with expedients (.) To feed a line of étapes like that from Asmara to Makallè, always threatened, especially on the right flank, in a Colony where, apart from meat on the hoof (,) nothing exists, really nothing, is a task which would make even a bald-headed man's hair stand on end (.) This, my dear Head of the Government, I feel it my duty to tell you in order to put you on your guard against any frivolous statements which may have been reported to you as having been made by Lessona and even Badoglio (.) Someone may have let fall the phrase: I am ready even to-day (:) but then this is always followed by the famous if, followed by many buts, when it is a matter of coming to the actual performance (.) I on the contrary hate and am ready to swear that I have never employed the said prepositions (sic) (.) After this kind of com-

plaint I conclude by saying that I consider that I can put forward the date of beginning operations to the 5th or 6th (.) Note that besides remedying the difficulties which I have explained to you I must be sure that I shall be able to employ the Sila (.) Except for what the enemy has in store for us the advance will be rapid but not overwhelming, because prudence requires that at every étape I should have the columns so disposed that they can front in any direction (.) Afterwards there will be many things to be considered (.) Reflect that I have a front that runs from the Sudanese frontier of the Seiti to the sea at Assab (:) so it is not such an easy matter to safeguard it—knowing for the present nothing definite as to the enemy's intentions (.) But there is God, there is you, and there is also Fascism, which must triumph (.) With unchanged and affectionate devotion (.)

DE BONO.”

My brusque mention of irresponsible statements was perfectly justified. Too many people are given to saying: “If it depended on me I’d do it.” But such people, if they are told, “Do it!” reel out a string of requirements which make it more than evident that they are not in the least prepared to do it. If the things needed could be made to rain from heaven by Divine intervention it would be another matter. But God does not take a hand in these affairs and set everything right.

On the morning of the 29th, before my long

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

telegram had reached its destination, came a fresh telegraphic order from the Duce:

“To synchronise the political exigencies with the military I order you to resume action objective Makallè-Takazzè the morning of the 3rd November. The 3rd October all went well, now it will go better. Reply.”

I replied:

“Action will be resumed 3rd November with objective Makallè.”

I followed this shortly afterwards with another telegram:

“With reference to and in completion of my telegram 14988/92 of to-day I explain my plan of operation (.) Earlier advance gives me reason to suppose political necessity requires above all prompt occupation of Makallè (.) This being so, after advancing on the 3rd with available forces I shall immediately have Makallè occupied by a strong column with suitable support (.) The other troops will follow methodically working at the same time on the road, a matter of prime necessity to feed troops, especially Italian, and for advance of rapid armoured cars and automobile artillery (.) All this of course depending on situation of the enemy who as we know has concentrated considerable forces between Amba Alagi and Ascianghi (.) If my explanation receives your approval I beg you to telegraph me (.)”

This elicited the reply:

“Your plan of operation all right. It is necessary to occupy Makallè advancing as I ordered you on the 3rd November. Pivoting on Makallè, which must be strongly

garrisoned and immediately munitioned, the other troops will advance evenly on all the rest of the sector. Forward then! Cordial greetings."

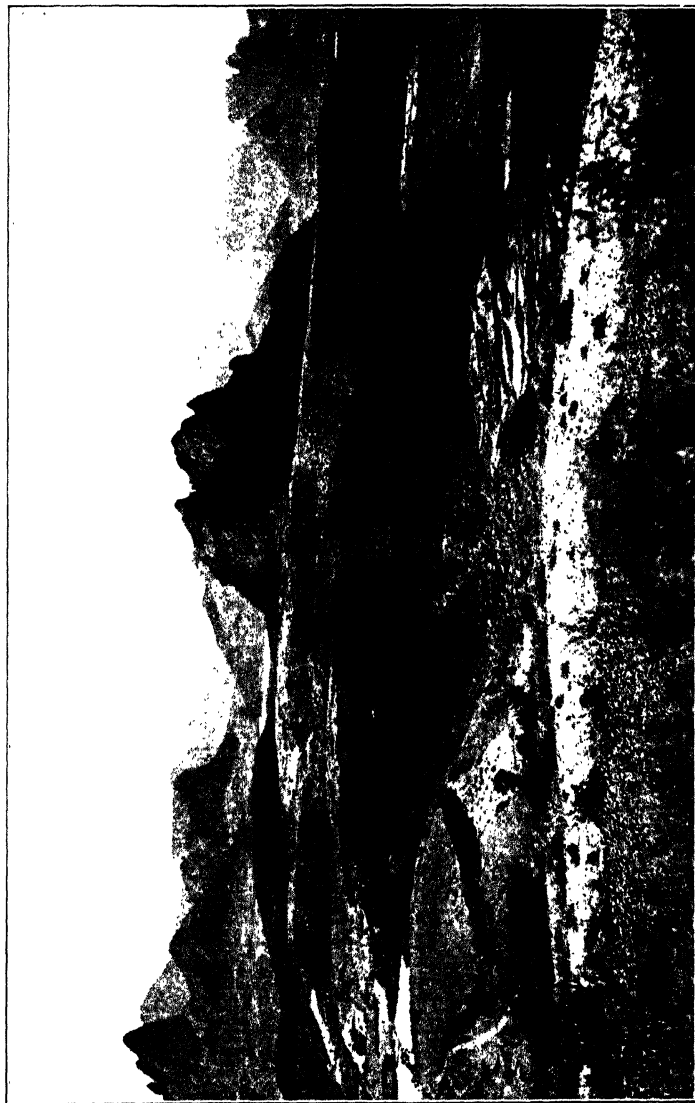
On the morning of the 1st November I assembled the Commandants of the Army Corps, the Artillery, the Engineers, the Air Force, and the Intendant, in order to comment upon, and explain, at request, the dispositions made in my order of operations respecting our continuation of the offensive.

Above all I insisted on the necessity of concordance between the operations on the plateau and those in the lowlands, in order that cohesion should always be preserved.

My plan of operations appears in synthetic form in the telegram reproduced farther back, in which I communicated it to the Head of the Government.

Substantially, my intention was to advance with the bulk of the forces in the direction Adigrat-Lake Ascianghi; to preserve a predominantly defensive attitude on the Adigrat-Enticciò-Adowa-Aksum front, in the event of enemy attacks; and to carry out certain offensive actions in the two lowland districts as rendered advisable by expediency and the situation. Further, a column from the eastern lowlands would have to flank the march of the mass advancing towards the south.

The principal offensive action was entrusted to the First Army Corps and the Native Army Corps.



Abyssinian landscape in the war zone.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

It would have to be developed in two phases: 1st phase, attaining the triangle Mai Makden-Makallè-Dolo; 2nd phase, advancing in accordance with the political situation and the military conditions.

For this purpose it was necessary, before all, to occupy the skein of communications leading to Hauzien; and this task was given to the Eritrean Army Corps. In the meantime the First Army Corps had to occupy the region Megheltà-Sincatà-Wizero.

In the second phase, which, unless something unforeseen happened, must immediately follow the first, we should advance by long *étapes* along the two routes: Sincatà-Enda Wizero-Dongollo-Agula-Mai Makden-Dolò with the First Army Corps; Hauzien-Enda Abuma Simon-Enda-Chercòs-Makallè with the Eritrean Army Corps.

Troops of the First Army Corps would also have to co-operate, with one advanced echelon, in the occupation of Makallè, diverging from Endagà Hamus by the Agula Makallè road.

In this way, besides the advantage of bringing the troops more rapidly to a common front on the line to be occupied, I should absolve the moral obligation of making a thoroughly representative body of Italian troops take part in the reconquest of the town.

During the push the Second Army Corps would have to devote the greatest energy to the defensive organization of the great Adigrat-Aksum position, so as to render it inexpugnable.

Further, it would have to undertake reconnaissances beyond the line of resistance towards the Takazzè, and guard itself against attacks from the direction of Shirè.

The troops of the western lowlands would have to remain predominantly on the defensive.

Those of the eastern lowlands would have to remain essentially on the defensive towards Assab and Thiò.

A light column would have to make towards Agulà from Rendacomo by way of Ghersat-Elifan-Demalè-Lelegadi-Au-Arbì.

This column—commanded by General Mariotti himself—was to provide effective protection for the left flank; the more so as credible information from that direction spoke of the presence of the Degiac Kassa Sebhat and his people.

The Air Force was to continue its task of strategical reconnaissance on the whole of our front, pushing out as far as possible: with tactical reconnaissance and bombing whenever the opportunity offered.

As my reserve I could count on the “Sila” Division the Grenadier, Alpini and Frontier Guard battalions, which I distributed in the region of the Chersebar hills, and the “Gran Sasso” Division, which I stationed more to the rear (as it was not yet complete) between Adi Ugri and Adi Quala.

The Intendancy, in correspondence with the main direction of advance, provided for:

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

the constitution of an advanced logistic base in the region of Adigrat; which, as soon as possible, would be shifted into the Sincatà-Tzadà region. In the complex of depôts there established it would have to provide rations for 60,000 Italians and 40,000 Eritreans;

the concentration in the same region of Adigrat of the automobile detachments of the Intendancy; the available motor transport; the baggage-trains of mules, asses and camels, to cope with the various logistic demands where it was not possible to penetrate even with the light motor-lorries;

the sending forward of at least a fraction of the Enticciò magazine directly the Eritrean Army Corps had reached Hauzien;

the establishment of an advanced depôt in the Valley of Adowa to facilitate the replenishment of the second Army Corps. An adequate store of victuals and forage was also established at Rendacomo for Mariotti's column.

What I am succinctly describing in a few lines represented a colossal amount of labour, of which only those who have had practical experience in the field of logistic organization can form a complete idea.

On the eve of this second stride, despite the fact that the pre-established date had been anticipated by *seven* days, all the necessary measures to render the advance possible had now been taken.

And this after a single month of the first offensive in a region where everything needed to enable great masses of troops to live and fight had still to be created.

Before the beginning of the advance on Makallè His Royal Highness the Duke of Bergamo arrived in the Colony, to take part in the operations as Vice-Commandant of the "Gran Sasso," and also His Royal Highness the Duke of Pistoia, who assumed command of the "23rd March."

The Corps of Operation felt honoured to have in its midst two royal princes of the House of Savoy.

Other arrivals were Senator Suardo, several Deputies and Fascist functionaries, and also the Academician, Marinetti (who came to me at Adigrat on the first night of the advance with only a brief-bag for all his luggage).

All had some rank in the Army, the Militia, or the Air Force.

Such co-operation pleased the soldiers, and it was a great testimony to the fact that the enterprise had found an echo in every heart. And this fact made a great impression on the foreign journalists.

On the 2nd November the High Command was transferred to Agordat.

The most recent news of the enemy was as follows:

A body of 40,000 men, at the orders of the Degiac Aileù Burrù, to the north of Gondar, with a detachment of 1,000 men on the frontier of the Setit.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

Ras Kassa, with 25,000 warriors, moving towards Quoram, which his vanguard was said to have reached already.

About 20,000 men, subdivided into smaller groups, were near Amba Alagi.

Other forces, with Ras Mulughietà (60,000) and Ras Ghattacciù (35,000), seemed to be moving from Addis Ababa towards Dessiè. At Dessiè the Merdas-mac Asfauossen was said to have arrived with an unspecified number of warriors.

From this information I drew the following deductions:

Fronting us we should have the 20,000 men noted at Amba Alagi, which did not cause me much anxiety.

The forces of Aileù Burrù might certainly give me a great deal of trouble if they were to march towards the Setit.

I shall explain, later on, why they did not cause me much anxiety.

It was obvious, however, that the march on Makallè was not free from danger on the right flank. This could not be remedied by flanking columns, for these could not have moved, owing to the absolute lack of roads. Hence we had to go ahead cautiously and act as the circumstances directed.

The greatest danger threatened the supply columns, which, although they were escorted, were more subject to surprise by bodies of partizans, who,

thanks to their great familiarity with the country, could attack them from the rear, and easily escape any counter-stroke.

It was important that we should occupy Gheraltà, Tembien, and the points where the Takazzè could be crossed. But this was an operation which had perforce to be postponed, both on account of logistic exigencies and because we had not sufficient troops.

The despatch of the two Divisions of Blackshirts, which was to have been delayed, was already seen to be necessary.

Our projected move was certainly known to the enemy; preparations on as grand a scale as those which were being made could not have escaped even the uninitiated, and we could not be so naïve as not to believe that we were surrounded by numerous spies.

However, on the night before the advance all was perfectly quiet.

On the morning of the 3rd, with my Staff, I repaired to Edagà Hamus, to witness the advance of the First Army Corps.

Before us lay outspread a belt of green country, slightly undulating, which extended for many miles towards the south, and which made it possible, on this occasion, to see what was happening.

The First Army Corps advance on either side of the established itinerary, in three columns, preceded

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

by an echelon of scouts, composed of native battalions and irregulars.

One Division of the Eritrean Army Corps marched in the direction Feres Mai-Enda Mariam-Hauzien; the other, in the direction Chened Dagamit Hauzien.

The exposed flank of this Army Corps was protected by a special detachment which was making for Barracò.

The troops marched very quickly; the Italians seemed as though they wanted to show that they could run like the askaris, and the askaris regarded them with enthusiasm.

At 10.30 the First Army Corps reached the Adi Abaghiè zone, and the troops came to a common front.

The Eritrean Army Corps, almost at the same time, reached the Enda Maria-Rugheitò-Enda Mariam Settà zone.

They resumed the march in the afternoon, and at twilight they came to Chessad Af Currò and the important strand of roads leading to Hauzien.

Everywhere the population had given our soldiers a good welcome and hastened to supply them with meat.

The strategical aeroplanes had discovered nothing beyond the movement of small bodies of warriors marching northward from Lake Ascianghi. Similar movements were noted from Tembien towards Makallè, which, however, seemed to be evacuated.

The tactical aeroplanes were engaged more especially in maintaining liaison between the various columns.

This first day of operation confirmed the difficulty which the Air Force encountered in the performance of its duties, owing to the rugged nature of the ground, and the tracts of wooded country, and also the absence of emergency landing-grounds, which compelled the machines to take off and land in aerodromes to the rear, thus greatly restricting their freedom of movement.

In the whole of the conquered zone the aerodrome at Aksum offered the only possibility of landing; but as soon as we reached Makallè I should see to it that the inconvenient aerodrome existing there was properly reconditioned.

In the western lowlands were concentrated Mariotti's column, consisting of two Eritrean battalions; a camel battery; the Massawa band; and the Dankali irregulars (about 600).

On the evening of the 3rd the following information relating to the enemy reached the High Command:

There were about 1,000 men in the Hauzien-Cacciamò-Zwaroa-Baia zone.

Between Amba Alagi and the Lake of Ascianghi was the Degiac Chebbedè with about 2,000 men; the Degiac Uorcherò with 4,500; the Degiac Bognalè Burrù with 3,000; the Degiac Adasman Burrù with 5,000.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

A column of some 5,000 men was reputed to be marching northwards from Ascianghi.

Hence a total of rather more than 20,000 men, who, even if they had succeeded in uniting, could not have caused me any great anxiety.

As I have stated, the two advanced Army Corps showed a great determination to accelerate their movements; it was as though the First Army Corps and the Eritreans were running a race; only to grumble afterwards because replenishments did not reach them in time.

I admired all this dash, and it was a real grief to me that I had to check it.

I had wanted to confer with the Intendant in order to determine just how far I could give my troops the rein. The result of the conference was that I must curb them.

And I agreed to do so; not only on account of logistic necessities, but also in order that I might the better co-ordinate the movements of the two advanced Army Corps, so that I could appear in force in the positions which I should have to occupy.

I therefore issued orders:

5th November: halt.

6th November: movements limited to facilitating march of the following days for attainment of objectives.

7th November: advance of the First Army Corps in the zone of Mai Makden.

Advance of the Eritrean Army Corps, with one Division only, on the positions dominating the valley of Makallè from the north.

The night of the 4th was without incident; except for a heavy downpour of rain, which did some damage to the track which had been conditioned with such labour.

At dawn the movements were resumed.

The Eritrean Army Corps completed the occupation of Hauzien, taking special measures to protect its right flank.

In the course of the afternoon the two Army Corps reached the line: Addi Cané, zone of Debra Tzien. Advanced elements were already at Mount Masobò and beyond Sallat.

The Mariotti column in the eastern lowlands had begun its movement and had reached Elifan with its vanguard.

The functioning of the auxiliary services had been perfect.

For the occupation of Makallè, which in all probability would occur on the 8th, I gave the following precise instructions:

The Eritrean Army Corps will occupy the town and the valley, taking up its position on the heights which enclose it on the south, with the co-operation, for the moral reasons of which I have already spoken, of a column of Italian

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

troops commanded by Colonel Broglia and composed of one battalion of infantry, one of Bersaglieri, and one of Blackshirts.

With this column Selassìè Gugsà was to march with his band; I gave him the satisfaction of entering his town with our troops.

On the 5th, during the prescribed halt, a detachment of the Eritrean Army Corps, consisting of two battalions and a battery, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Marchegiano, while it was taking up its position towards Mount Gundè in order to guard the right flank of its Army Corps against attack from the direction of Gheraltà, was unexpectedly engaged by rather more than 300 warriors of the Degiac Gabriet and the Degiac Woldegabriel, who received reinforcements as it was growing dark. The engagement, an affair of desperate rushes and ambushes, continued during the night. The valiant Lieutenant-Colonel Marchegiano kept his troops well in hand, and at 10 o'clock compelled the enemy to retire, leaving in our hand 10 prisoners and 40 dead. Other casualties, dead and wounded, were carried away by the enemy.

On our side two officers were wounded—one died later—two non-commissioned officers and one askari were killed, and seven askaris wounded.

This episode, though apparently insignificant, increased my anxiety in respect of our right flank, so I ordered the Eritrean Army Corps to leave fixed

posts of respectable strength on the lines of communication.

On the 6th and 7th the two Army Corps continued their forward march without incident.

On the night of the 7th the greater part of the First Army Corps was straddling the Adigrat-Makallè road between Taclè Aimanot and Bet Micael.

The 6th Group of Blackshirts had reached the Sallat pass.

The bands of the Scimenzana, the band of the Degiac Gugsà, and the 8th Group of Eritrean battalions were between Enda Micael and Mai Makden, a few miles from Makallè.

Of the Eritrean Army Corps our Division was in the region between Cin Feres and Mai Mesam, and on the heights to the north of the valley of Makallè. The other Division was in the region of Jesus Aulalò.

Mariotti's column had reached Damalè. At 9 o'clock on the 8th Makallè was occupied, and our flag was hoisted over the ruins of the fort of Enda Jesus, where the gallant Lieutenant-Colonel Galliano, 40 years earlier, had so strenuously defended against forces tenfold superior to his own.

The Eritrean Army Corps proceeded at once to occupy the positions to the south of the valley in which it barred the road from Amba Alagi.

Hailè Selassiè Gugsà and his men were to be left to garrison the town of Makallè.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

In the meanwhile the First Army Corps had reached Dolo and the surrounding positions.

When the news of the occupation of Makallè was received in Rome the Duce sent me this congratulatory telegram:

“News reconquest Makallè thrills with pride soul of the Italian people. Give greeting of the Government and self to all troops. Mussolini.”

Unfortunately we had to halt in the positions conquered in order to make sure of our communications with the rear; or rather, of a road which would permit of the replenishment of the troops.

The war we were fighting was pre-eminently a war of movement; but this movement was inevitably restricted by the absence of roads.

It was already a miracle that it had been possible, little by little, to open up a route which enabled columns of motor transport—with difficulty, and at enormous disadvantage—to reach the troops from Adigrat.

But even these columns could not effect a regular service. Not rarely they had to halt for hours and hours in order to make or re-make a road for themselves.

Since the solidity of a track is really in inverse proportion to the ease with which it was constructed, in the stretches where it was only necessary to level the ground a little the passage of a column of motor transport was enough to ruin everything, and the

work had to be done again: on the other hand, where work with the pickaxe was needed in order to open up a proper route, intensive use only served to render the surface more practicable.

It must be borne in mind that if motor-cars ruin a track, tractors and armoured cars do ten times as much damage.

The labour hundreds came and performed a true labour of Sisyphus. I sent troops to the assistance of the engineers—part of my reserve: the “Sila” Division, a Grenadier battalion, the Royal Frontier Guards, and the “Susa” Alpini battalion. This latter furnished the most invaluable assistance, as it consisted of men already experienced in road-making, and included in its ranks a good number of miners and even masons.

The First and Second Army Corps proceeded to improve the formation of their front and strengthen their hold on the positions attained.

Mariotti's column, in the meantime, had continued its march with surprising celerity, without encountering any serious difficulty, and without catching sight of the enemy.

On the 11th Aù was reached. Leaving Aù at 5 o'clock on the following morning, it was making for Arbè, when on reaching the edge of the plateau it was vigorously attacked by 500 of Kassa Sebhat's men, of whom 400 were very well armed and provided with machine-guns.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

After a moment of hesitation the troops drew up, and our battery went into action; but the advantage of the position occupied by Kassa Sebhat, who was almost vertically above our men, meant that our superiority in numbers was of little avail. The battle grew fiercer and lasted until sunset.

Kassa Sebhat was overpowered and retreated, leaving 15 dead on the field; he succeeded in carrying off his wounded.

We too had perceptible losses: 20 Eritreans killed, 4 officers and 52 askaris wounded. The column arrived at Asbi during the night.

The Second Army Corps, in the accomplishment of its task, had searched all the surrounding country and had found it evacuated by the armed forces. An offensive reconnaissance of a battalion of the 87th Infantry, reinforced by a battery, pushed on as far as Enda Micael. The group of bands had reached Selaclacà, an important caravan centre, from which the best of the tracks for Shirè start.

On the sixth day the 2nd Eritrean battalion, on reconnaissance from Aksum in the Tzana region, encountered a body of the Cagnasmac Mesfun Arsià's warriors, and put it to flight, taking some prisoners.

The attitude of the population, wherever our troops appeared, was always unperturbed and even joyful.

The reconquest of Makallè, which had for us,

before all else, the moral significance of a necessary vindication, was important for other reasons: since the town is the capital of Endertà, it is the site of one of the most frequented markets, and the centre of numerous trails leading to Dessiè-Hauzien-Adowa-Adigrat and the eastern lowlands.

I cannot judge whether its conquest, being effected without striking a blow, has been an influential factor in the estimate which the other European Powers may be forming of our enterprise.

Certainly, however, in the total consideration of our operations, at present and in the future, as regards the accomplishment of our final purpose, Makallè represented a good step forward, and nothing more.

Thus, our situation, regarded from the logistic and strategic standpoint, was not so favourable as it had been.

We had lengthened our line of operation by 56 miles; and this was represented by a track still in the worst condition. We had a front whose left wing was thrust forward, leaving the right flank exposed to all offensives which might come from the zone in which no serious reconnaissances had as yet been made. Of course, our aeroplanes had flown over Tembien and Gheraltà; they had observed the fords of the Takazzè, and all seemed to be clear; yet there were many signs that things were not as they ought to have been.

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

It is difficult to be precise: such matters are a question of scent, of sensibility to impressions; although positive facts which confirmed their feeling were the surprise on Mount Gundè and the sudden attack on one of the First Eritrean Division's convoys of food and ammunition a little to the south of Hauzien, in broad daylight on the afternoon of the 9th.

A remedy was necessary, but if it was to be effective we must not be in a hurry. I kept on recalling to my mind the old adage, that the cat that would hurry made blind kittens.

The Fourth and Fifth Divisions of Blackshirts had arrived: not yet ready for active service, although they were marching from Massawa to the region to which they were allotted; but within a few days I should be able to make use of them.

Hence I had sufficient forces at my disposal for the substantial occupation of Tembien as far as the valley of the Takazzè.

I was not greatly pre-occupied with the Setit front, although, to tell the truth, the forces posted there to hold it were rather weak. And this is why:

I said further back that the forces of Aileù Burrù did not cause me much anxiety.

Our Political Bureau, and also the Intelligence Bureau, had done very good work there. Aileù Burrù's sympathy with the Emperor's cause was by no means boundless. He had been the principal

factor in suppressing the revolt of Ras Oliè; without the intervention of Aileù Burrù the troops of the Negus Neghesti (notwithstanding the three aeroplanes with which they had spread terror in the rebel ranks) would certainly have got the worst of it, and who knows what would have happened to the poor Emperor?

Aileù Burrù had hoped for an adequate reward, which should have taken the form of an increase of the territories subject to him, and the title of Ras.

In the moment of victory the Negus allowed him to hope; but he did nothing concrete.

This left the Degiac seriously discontented, and cherishing secret thoughts of vengeance. The son was even more furious with the Negus than the father.

Our Political Bureau knew perfectly well how to profit by this situation, while the son sent one of his cousins to us, who presented himself to the outposts of the Second Army Corps near Adowa.

This messenger bore a letter in which the son declared his intention of entering our ranks with his warriors.

He added that if he were authorized to tell his father that we approved of his suggestion, and that he would be rewarded, he would guarantee that Aileù Burrù would refrain from any hostile action against us.

I did not myself trouble to receive the bearer of these proposals, but I wrote two letters; one for the

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

son, assuring him that his father would be generously rewarded for his submission. I then decided to write to Aileù Burrù himself, charging the son to see that he had my message. In this I repeated the assurances given to the son, pledging my honour that they could be relied on.

All this I reported *only to the Duce in person*. The matter was so important that secrecy was indispensable. The Head of the Government approved what I had done, reserving to himself the right to decide, at the moment when the proposal was realized, what concrete reward should be bestowed on the Degiac, going by whatever the situation and the results of the submission might lead me to suggest.

Owing to my return to Italy I was not able to follow the matter farther. I do not know whether my successor continued the negotiations.

As far as I was concerned, their mere proposal, though it did not justify me in unreservedly relying on the sincerity of the suggestions, did enable me to be comparatively inactive in this sector.

If I mistake not, Aileù Burrù was never actively hostile to us throughout the campaign.

* * *

The directions issued on the 10th November for the further development of offensive operations may be summarized thus:

(a) to preserve, for the time being, a defensive attitude on the positions facing Dolò-Makallè.

(b) to organize the long line of Adigrat-Makallè *étapes* in such a way as to assure us against any ambush.

(c) to undertake, along the rest of the front, in the general scheme of a wide wheeling movement pivoted on the left, offensive operations of varying range, with the object of extending our dominion and effective control over the whole control as far as the Takazzè; and at the same time to give better protection to the wings of the formation.

(d) to advance the aviation camps as far as possible so as to enlarge the radius of strategical reconnaissance.

For the execution of these instructions I issued the following orders:

The Mariotti column was to occupy Dessà the better to guard our left flank.

Preparations were to be made for the advance into Tembien, the Second Army Corps to occupy the region Enda Macael Zongui (along the caravan-route from Adowa to Makallè), and the Hasamò band the ford across the Takazzè at section 1546, and the ford across the Mai Werè at section 1350.

The same Second Army Corps was to assure dominion and control over Shirè (including Tzembalà), occupying the fords above Tembien at Addi Rassi and Addi Encatò and the Jelaca ford in the region of Adiet.

The same Army Corps was to continue a firm



Italian whipplet-tanks advancing.

hold on the positions of Enticcìò and the Valley of Adowa.

In consideration of the multiplicity of the tasks assigned to the Second Army Corps I ordered that the "Gran Sasso" Division, which had reached the region between Adi Ugri and Adi-Quala, should be attached to the Second Army Corps.

The Eritrean Army Corps was to continue the occupation of the Hauzien centre, whence it could exercise control over Haramat and Gheraltà and co-operate in the surveillance of the Hauzien-Makallè caravan-route.

In a second phase the Second Army Corps, standing fast on Adowa-Aksum and Selaclacà, was to continue to extend its control to Seloà and Avergallè, occupying the region between Calzinchelat and the pass of Arabo and occupying Abbi Addi.

Only when the operations here specified had been carried out would it be possible to begin operations for the continuance of our offensive in the principal direction: Amba Alagi-Ascianghi.

* * *

On the 11th November I received from the Duce the following telegram:

"On the right bring the Maravigna Army Corps to front on the Takazzè and with the native divisions march without hesitation on Amba Alagi while the national divisions remain at Makallè-Sheicot. Reply to me."

This time, for the reasons explained further back, I could not fall in with the Duce's wish. If I had done so I should undoubtedly have met with disaster, which we had at any cost to avoid.

For this reason I replied to the Duce, without need of further reflection:

"To your 13061(.) I am summarizing my letter already posted express in which I explain our logistic situation and consequent possibilities of operation. I tell you at once that the programme includes occupation on Takazzè to south of Adowa and advance beyond Weri into Tembien (,) operations which in any case ought for our safety to precede any other push southward from Makallè(.) It seems to me plain it would be a mistake to march now on Amba Alagi even with natives alone(.) Remember that we have at present a line of operation over 300 miles in length of which more than a third is bad track(.) Further 60 miles still liable to ambush call for special measures of security(.) Positions occupied three days ago are not yet organized for defence and no heavy field guns yet arrived there(.) My reserve is all divided into gangs for work on roads(.) Added to this political contacts are taking place which promise serious and efficacious results and which would be compromised by our untimely action(.) Note lastly that apart from painful historical memory which to my thinking needs no vindication(,) position of Amba Alagi has no strategic importance and is tactically defective because can be completely surrounded(.) Occupying this we shall have a detached point in front without possibility of replenishment

THE CONQUEST OF AN EMPIRE

and an Army Corps, even native, is not like a battalion which can pick up its own living(.) Against it all the enemy detachments now assembling could act in one body, so obtaining a success, even only partial, but which for us might have very injurious results(.) This is what the actual situation says which I hear being on the spot and after having had reports from all subordinate Commandants and those of the Intendancy which finds itself involved in ever-increasing difficulties(.) I beg you to give time to do its work for I am confident it is now working in our favour while an advance on our part would be playing the enemy's game(.) I believe that at this moment the military situation must have precedence over any other consideration whatsoever."

I received immediate approval of my proposals in this further telegram:

"Reply your telegram recognizing validity your reasons for a reasonable halt on Makallè line while you make advance on the Takazzè(.) While waiting till operation political negotiations result in conclusive end reinforce line of Makallè and rapidly systematize lines of communication."

Finally, on the 16th November, it was possible for me to move, and I went to inspect the Dold-Makallè front.

The track at some points was a positive disaster, which had its repercussions on the means of transport, which were falling to pieces!

Both on the front of the first Army Corps, as on

that of the Eritrean Army Corps, I found all in order. Only the right of the Corps seemed to me somewhat exposed.

Drawing it farther back would have exposed it to a possible enemy attack; if it had been advanced it might have had a better position as regards the topography of the ground; but actually it would have been even more exposed.

Radically, the position could have been remedied only after the occupation of Tembien; in the meantime I recommended General Pirzio-Biroli to keep his reserve within easier reach of this wing.

I also recommended the Commandants of the two Army Corps to improve the closure between the two sectors of the front.

As I have already stated, I took care to give immediate orders as to the enlargement and improvement of the wretched aerodrome. I was assured that if a sufficient number of labourers were employed it might be set in order within a fortnight. I entrusted General Pirzio-Biroli with the task.

The valley of Makallè appeared flourishing and well cultivated. Many crops, and dhurra especially, had not been harvested. I ordered that they should be reaped and distributed to the reapers—who might be askaris also—and the needy of the district; unless the landowners made their appearance, in which case they must be made to understand that

they must not allow such bounteous gifts of God to be wasted.

Makallè is a wretched place, as are all the towns of Tigré. The Ghebì, built by Naretti for the Negus Johannes, towers above it; but internally it is merely a ruin.

My Staff and I were lodged in our old telegraph-office, which was still the best building in the place.

In the afternoon I repaired to Fort Enda Jesus, remembering those who had so heroically defended our prestige and our flag. Poor Galliano! He was a fine soldier, and at Makallè he confirmed the reputation which he had already gained at Agordat; winning the gold medal for military valour.

In the evening Hailè Selassiè Gugsà asked leave to confer with me.

I received him, of course, alone, with his interpreter. He begged me to receive two of his subordinate chiefs. I consented.

They were two very old men. They were profuse with their compliments and acts of homage, but finally told me that they could not feel safe in Makallè, and that they would be subjected to terrific reprisals if by ill fortune the Abyssinians should succeed in retaking Makallè.

I rose to my feet indignantly, saying that I could not even admit that one could think of such a thing. I sent for my interpreter and asked my Chief of Staff to come in; then, looking the Degiac full in

the face, I told him that if he was afraid, I would give orders that he and his men should be interned at the rear of all our troops.

Gugsà apologized, and apologized for his two companions, saying that they had not managed to explain themselves properly. They wanted to advise me to secure the valley of Selicot and Amba Aradam; only then could we consider ourselves safe in Makallè.

I had no heed of either advice or suggestions. The valley of Selicot was overlooked by our troops and completely commanded by our artillery; its people had already come into our lines to offer us milk and vegetables, and frequent reconnaissances had traversed the whole of it.

Amba Aradam ought to represent—as it afterwards did—the first steps on our march southwards.

On the 17th I returned to headquarters.

On arriving at Adigrat about 4 o'clock I found this telegram:

“13181. Personal(.) With reconquest of Makallé I consider your mission in East Africa completed, a mission which you have accomplished under extremely difficult circumstances and with results which point you out in the present and the future to the gratitude of the Nation(.) Your incontestable and universally recognized merits will be explicitly consecrated with your deeds(.) I inform you

*that as your successor I have chosen Marshal Badoglio(.)
While waiting to see you once more I embrace you with
unchanged cordiality(.)*

MUSSOLINI.”

The advance to Makallè had been my swan song!

I replied at once. Among other things I said in my telegram that it gave me pleasure to learn of my recall. But that was a great lie. A soldier always quits a command, and those who have cordially aided him and followed him in a difficult undertaking, with profound sorrow.

On the morning of the 18th, I received the announcement of my promotion to Marshal of Italy.

I ought to have felt satisfied. I had achieved—and by active service—the highest military rank, which would give me an undying name in the regular Army; above all, my work had satisfied the Duce, to whom, as he knows, I was always loyal and obedient.

I packed my bags; but I waited, of course, for my successor in the Command of the Troops and the High Commissionship.

I—and I alone—had to put my successor *au courant* as to the situation.

Before leaving I wished to confer the rewards for military valour awarded by me *in the field* to those

who had deserved them. Marshal Badoglio arrived on the 26th. I went to meet him at Massawa. Our encounter was that of two soldiers who had already fought side by side on the Sabotino and whose actions were guided only by love of the Motherland and the sense of duty.

Badoglio himself wished to tell me at once that he had fully approved of my resolution to make no further progress southwards before the troops were completely ready and before our position in Tembien was secure.

SUMMARY

In ten months the face of the Colony had been changed, these months having given it roads, bridges, water supplies, and all the means which enabled an army of 170,000 Europeans and 65,000 natives, with 60,000 pack-animals, to live, move, and fight with modern weapons. Fully 38,000 labourers had accomplished tasks of Roman grandeur (and this is no euphemism). An Italian population, increased more than tenfold, had been able to live and pursue its activities with the intense and exceptional rhythm of life introduced by the war.

The port of Massawa had been able to sustain a movement which cannot be expressed in percentages as compared with the normal poverty to which it was accustomed.

From a plan of defensive operations we passed to an offensive, and in one month and five days we penetrated 75 miles into enemy territory, building the road yard by yard, and able actually to dispose of only $\frac{2}{3}$ of the forces despatched to the Colony for these operations.

In this fortunate period we had no great amount of fighting, and still less, alas! had we any pitched battles.

ANNO XIII

But it assuredly was not we who avoided them; it was the enemy who held that he could not yet risk them.

If the enemy had allowed us to overtake him, or had confronted us, we should have been victorious then as we were later.

THE END.

DATE OF ISSUE

This book must be returned
within 3, 7, 14 days of its issue.
A fine of ONE ANNA per day will
be charged if the book is overdue.
