

Harar Under Egyptian Rule

By E. Sylvia Pankhurst

Egypt, under Ismail Pasha, 1865-1879, was building up its military strength for expansion in Africa. Foreign commanders and instructors were engaged for the Army, among them Sir Samuel Baker and General Gordon from England, William Dye and Chaillé Long from the United States, Schnitzer, known as Emin Pasha, from Austria. An Egyptian attempt to secure Uganda and to reach the sea through the territories of the Sultan of Zanzibar was prevented by British opposition. A determined effort to invade and conquer Ethiopia in 1875 met a disastrous debacle. A second expedition to avenge the first was defeated in the following year. In 1875, however, another force under Rauf Pasha attacked the Somaliland coast, seized Zeila and Berbera, then marched inland toward Harar. On nearing the city they mounted heavy artillery on the neighbouring heights, in order to menace the town, then seized the gates and disarmed the population. The cavalry entered from the Hakim Gate to the south. The Hararis were in no condition to repel them. All this has been recorded by Alfred Bardey,* a French merchant, then resident in the city, who had the details from the Egyptian Commander, Hassan Osman. Bardey tells further that Sheikh Mohamed Abd el Shaker, who ruled the city at the time of the Egyptian conquest, submitted to the conquerors, but was afterwards executed, being charged with conspiracy against them. After the seizure of the city, Rauf Pasha conducted expeditions against the neighbouring tribes. He permitted the Egyptian officers to purchase land which had formerly belonged to the peasant cultivators and also gave to some Egyptians concessions of such land. Powerful families of Harar seized most of the land the Egyptians had left**.

General Charles Gordon,† (Colonel Gordon, as he then was) recorded in his diary on April 17, 1878, that he was setting out for Zeila, eight days' journey, "to turn out" Rauf Pasha who he wrote "seems to be a regular tyrant." Rauf was dismissed and replaced by Raduan Pasha, who was followed by Nadi Pasha. The Egyptian Army of occupation was now increased and numbered between four and five thousand men. Nevertheless, they were never able to come to terms with the surrounding tribes. The country outside the town remained unsafe.

The British occupation of Egypt, established in 1882, was an immediate result of the Army rising of Arabi Pasha against Turkish, and particularly against British

and French control which had dominated Egyptian affairs since 1879, when Khedive Ismail had become unable to meet his commitments to his European creditors. This was partly due to his imperialist wars.

The year before Arabi's famous rebellion, the Mahdist revolution, against the Egyptian conquerors broke out in the Sudan and increased with such magnitude that when Egyptian forces led by British officers had been repeatedly overwhelmed, the British decided to limit their operations to Egypt itself, and to compel the Egyptian garrisons in areas further south to withdraw. These southern areas included, as we know, the Red Sea Coast. The Italians were allowed by the British to occupy Massawa as the Egyptians withdrew from the port and the British somewhat later took possession of Zeila and Berbera.

Events in Harar proceeded very differently. The French merchant, Alfred Bardey, had left Harar by this time, but a series of letters written to him by the agent he had left there give a vivid account of what was rumoured, and what was happening. In the first of these communications, dated November 30, 1884, the writer states that an English delegate has arrived at Harar with a former Egyptian Governor of the city, Raduan Pasha, who has ordered the population of all ranks to obey the orders of the English delegate and to put themselves entirely at his disposal. The British Consul has taken up residence at the house Rauf Pasha occupied and the British flag is flown there. It is said that when the Egyptian troops evacuate the city, Abdulahi, one of the sons of the last Emir who was executed by Rauf Pasha will be officially invested as ruler of the city. A second English delegate has arrived with an escort of only ten mounted soldiers and has begun enrolling an indigenous force of Hararis and Somalis at a monthly stipend of 15 rupees.

(The rupee was a small silver coin valued in 1927 at 1s. 6d.). A hundred men had enlisted. Meanwhile, he wrote, "the Egyptian troops are departing, battalion by battalion. It is said a British force will appear soon, but there is no sign of its arrival at the coast."

The agent writes bitterly: "Therefore we anticipate finding ourselves in a very dangerous situation within a few weeks, though we have perhaps the hope of seeing Major Hunter, the Political Resident at Aden, who has set all this movement in train and who holds the key of our destiny—we merchants and the rest of the population." The agent who wrote thus was doubtless the French poet, Athur Rimbaud, who was employed by Bardey as his Harar agent.

He adds: "It is exceedingly probable the Egyptian occupation will end without the English having the power, or the wish to extend their protection; we shall be able to do nothing other than burn our shops and

* Alfred Bardey, *Notes sur le Harar*. Bulletin de géographie historique et descriptive, No. 1, 1897, reprinted 1900.

** Adrien Zervos *l'Empire d'Ethiopie*.

† George Birkbeck Hill, D.C.L. *Colonel Gordon in Central Africa 1876-9*.

beat our retreat as quickly as possible to the coast, for the certain and immediate revolt of the Galla and Somali tribes around the town will render our sojourn impossible and will prevent transport to and from the coast. The armed intervention of France from her Colony at Obock, would be cordially accepted."

The terror and indignation of the foreign merchants and the agents of commercial firms established in Aden is reflected in every subsequent letter. On December 15, 1884, the agent writes that the British representatives are having the fortresses and the road to Ballura repaired. "It is perhaps a good sign." It is said the British will soon arrive at Zeila and that the position will be definitely regulated. Nevertheless he suspects "all the manoeuvres of the English agents, repairing the forts, the road and the rest have no other aim than to tranquillise the fears of the population while hastening the evacuation of the Egyptians and then to abandon us."

On January 1, 1885, he writes "the Egyptian troops are departing as rapidly as possible. The English delegates are building outside the town batteries, without guns and without gunners. They say there are to be ten of these forts and each fort is to have ten Indian soldiers, whereas one Egyptian fort on the summit of Mount Hakim commanding the town employs 2,000 Egyptian soldiers. When the Gallas have finished putting their hay in the silos they will be able to collect rent from these fortresses. It is announced that the future Emir will be elected from among the members of the princely family by the Harar public and perhaps also by the neighbouring Galla tribes outside.

"In preparation for the election, the brother of the late Emir and five or six other persons have been imprisoned."

On January 11 the agent writes that Egyptian troops not yet embarked have returned from burning several villages of the Babelle and Bursuk. To allay discontent Raduan Pasha has had all the prefects of Harar beaten with the Kurbash, a heavy hide whip, and fined 200 dollars. Hadji Jusuf Barkatly, whom Bardey described as head of the slave-trade has been deported to Zeila. His son, the prefect of Bubassa, a district outside the city has been fined 200 dollars and beaten with the kurbash. The Gallas were not, however, appeased by the punishments of these scapegoats and the troops made a second sortie against the Bubassa.

The English delegates were arranging for camels required for the evacuation of the Egyptian troops and had made a preliminary gift of 8,000 rupees to the Ugaz of the Issa Somalis for this purpose. Consequently the Ugaz had declared he must have a dollar for himself on every camel hired by the foreign merchants. Moreover they could not secure the use of any camels, because the British had hired them all for the Egyptian evacuation.

Meanwhile the timorous agent protested that the agents continued forming a militia "with all the bandits of the country."

On February 25, 1885, he deplores that when Raduan Pasha and the Egyptian troops have left, Mr. Piten, the second English agent, will remain alone with the new Emir and the new militia which comprise now about 500 Gallas and Somalis.

Most important was the official announcement that there would never be a British military occupation of Harar. This announcement accords with Clause IV of

the subsequent Anglo-French Agreement of February, 1888, stating that the two governments agreed "not to annex Harar or to place it under their protection."

The French were exceedingly jealous concerning the possession of Harar, and the routes from it to the coast. Their local representative had long and bitterly contested with the British representative a junction of routes in this area. This was a local conflict; Britain and France at the time of the Egyptian evacuation of Harar had already attempted to reach a settlement of their respective spheres in Africa. Britain had other interests in view than the possession of Harar and was not disposed to enter into a dispute with France concerning it, either in 1885 or later.

The declaration of the British representative that British troops were not to occupy Harar caused consternation among the foreign merchants. Who would protect them and ensure their trade?

In company with Monseigneur Taurin of the Roman Catholic Mission, they addressed a protest to Raduan Pasha, stating that when the Egyptian evacuation had been announced in 1884, they had received an assurance that Harar would not be left without a government to protect them; they declared the militia the British had enrolled would prove a danger rather than a protection.

While the foreign merchants were consumed by fear and anguish at the departure of the Egyptian troops, the people of Harar, as Bardey's agent recorded, were dancing fantasias of rejoicing that their tyrants had been removed. No doubt they agreed with the former British Vice-Consul, A. B. Wylde* who wrote that all the Egyptians had done to build improved houses for themselves in Harar city "did not balance the blighting effect of their rule and the horrible cruelties they practised on the peaceful agricultural Nole and Hargeta tribesmen."

Bardey's agent recorded, not without a trace of anti-British sarcasm, that the unfortunate Mr. Piten had ridden out of town at the head of his 500 militiamen to restore order on the road to Zeila. He had arrived at the scene of action in two days, but had "returned in haste, having abandoned to the Gallas the horses and mules and even his own rifle and tent. No one had been killed, but the horses were said to have taken fright at the sound of shots and both cavalry and infantry had fled in all directions."

A letter of May 15, 1885, describes the crowning of the new Emir, Abdulahi and the reading of a firman from the Khedive of Egypt appointing him and advising him to protect commerce and guard the country from invasion. Bardey's agent subsequently records the prohibition by Emir Abdulahi of the brewing of the native beer on pain of fine and beating with the kurbash, also the handing over of the militia to the Emir, the departure of the British representatives carrying their flag on June 10, 1885.

On July 20 of the same year, the agent wrote: "We are like prisoners in the city, without freedom to send or to receive any post, forbidden even to go outside the fortified walls of Harar." The tribes on the route to Berbera, he said, had detached themselves from the administration of the Emir; those on the road to Zeila

* A. B. Wylde, *Modern Abyssinia* (1901), page 1,430.

were in rebellion. The Emir had formed the project of raising the tribes who had submitted to Isham against the infidel Gallas. Freedom for the slave-trade was announced. The Gallas occupying lands between Harar and the coast were ordered by the Emir not to allow passage to any European or Turk seeking to enter Harar, but the Nole had rejected the order. In the agent's last letter he predicted Ethiopia would take over the Government at the close of the great rains.

Abdulahi had meanwhile prohibited the growing of coffee, in order to reserve it for himself and his favourites. He had forbidden the wearing of silk and wholesale trading, declaring the latter activity a form of usury and thus contrary to Moslem law. For engaging in wholesale trading an Italian Gaetano Sacconi was expelled from Harar. He returned to Italy and formed in Milan a society for African commercial exploration. This organisation in 1886 equipped an expedition of eight Italians, some of whom were doubtless genuine explorers and scientists. It was hoped they would be able to ingratiate themselves with the Emir and open profitable commerce with Harar. On reaching Artu, east of Gildessa on April 9, 1886, they sent a messenger to the Emir, stating they were bringing him valuable gifts and asking to be received.

Abdulahi's response was immediately to despatch a body of soldiers to kill the unwelcome intruders, but a couple of hours later he ordered a second force to countermand his first instruction and to allow the Italians to proceed. The two forces met at Artu; the first refused to obey the order conveyed by the second. Seven of the Italians were massacred, the eighth escaped on horseback, but died on the way to Zeila.

The soldiers returned to the Emir with his presents and the arms of the murdered Italians. Abdulahi, to purge his conscience, cast the soldiers into prison.

The unhappy position of Harar had long been a sorrow to the rest of Ethiopia. Menelik in his letters to the European Powers had protested against it and also against the slave-trade encouraged by the Egyptian officials. The Egyptian withdrawal caused Menelik, the future Emperor, then King of Shoa, to consider the time had come to reintegrate Harar into the Ethiopian realm. The extraordinary developments after the Egyptians had left emphasised this opinion; it was time to establish reasonable government in this unfortunate area.

Menelik accordingly wrote to the Emir, informing him that Harar had been an Ethiopian province for 400 years, that Ethiopian government must now be resumed and that the annual land tax must be paid in respect of the province as in former times. Abdulahi, unwilling to brook any restraint, replied he knew no master save the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. Menelik wrote a second time, ordering the Emir to submit. Abdulahi responded curtly by the gift of a Harar Moslem dress, a turban, a carpet for use at prayer and a message, "When you are a Moslem, I will consider you my master." Menelik answered, "I will come to Harar and replace the mosque by a Christian church—Await me!"

Without loss of time the general Dejazmatch Wolde Ghioghis was instructed to prepare the Shoan forces to march on Harar.

The Emir also made preparations for war; he had

two Krupp cannon, a number of modern rifles, a quantity of ammunition, the militia and some other non-Egyptian forces. Moreover he summoned the more fanatical Moslem tribes of the Province to join him, insisting that his struggle was in defence of their religious liberty and a holy war for the faith. These tribes were not without firearms, owing to the illicit arms traffic, of which Menelik had already complained to the European Powers who held all the Ethiopian ports.

Menelik led his forces into the battle, which was fought at Chalanco on January 7, 1887. Abdulahi sustained a crushing defeat; his army dispersed, leaving the greater part of their arms and supplies on the field. Ras Makonnen had had an important part in the victory; already he was widely recognised as one of the ablest administrators Ethiopia possessed. Menelik therefore wisely conferred the Governorate of Harar Province on him. His name henceforth became intimately associated with Harar Province and City.

Harar as Part of Ethiopia

Ras Makonnen introduced many reforms in Harar. He first took energetic measures to restore order; all the villages were visited, informed concerning the Government and its intentions. Civil and military leaders were appointed for each village.

Next he proceeded to establish land registration, in order to impose, with fairness and equality, the customary small land tax, which was essential to assist in maintaining the administration and its diverse functions.

As we have seen, the peasant cultivators of the Province, had been deprived of their lands under Egyptian rule, and reduced to the position of rent-paying tenants who could be evicted at any time. No redress was possible under Egypt, but Ras Makonnen's reputation for justice emboldened the peasants to lay their grievance before him. He had their case examined in court, and on their claims being proved, their land was restored. This act of restitution earned for the Ras the high esteem of the cultivators, who formed the vast majority of the population. Their affection for him increased as the years advanced.

The able Governor also regulated the customs. Merchandise had formerly been taxed by each baggage-mule passing the gates of the city, the result was that the animals were grossly overloaded. Ras Makonnen fixed the tax for merchandise at 8 per cent *ad valorem*. Merchants were allowed to import their personal effects without customs payment.

The establishment of schools and hospitals, a Government of equity and probity, the prompt and equal administration of justice were his constant care. All the people, men and women alike, were given the right to elect the Municipal Council.

"The justice of Ras Makonnen" became a household word. Under his guidance the old disorders disappeared; Harar no longer needed walls and fortifications for protection against besieging hordes from the province outside.

The memory of Ras Makonnen's Governorate, that of his son, the future Emperor Haile Sellassie, and his grandson the late Duke of Harar are dearly cherished in the province and city.