

## Social Moment at Addis Ababa



European Photo

Haile Selassie Entertains

Emperor Is at His Best When He Meets Wives of Diplomatic Representatives and Newspaper Correspondents

# Emperor Is Good Handshaker But Never Despotic Monarch, Talk With Haile Selassie Shows

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ADDIS ABABA—Haile Selassie I, who is the Emperor of Ethiopia, is a handshaking ruler. On one single afternoon, for example, he shook my hand three times, and didn't seem to think he was conferring any special honor upon me either even though he is a descendant of Solomon and king of all the kings set in Africa.

I met him in his new, modest, and attractively furnished palace, situated on a hill beside a forest, up above Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, which means "the New Flower."

To go to the Emperor's reception, which he gave to the 30 foreign correspondents who had come to Africa to study his side of the Italo-Ethiopian issue, I passed in an excellent American car through many long, well-paved streets. Since there are no sidewalks in the Empire and since an astounding proportion of the inhabitants of the capital spend their time on the streets, we had to wend our way between two unbroken lines of rapidly walking white-clad people.

### Police Watchful

A few years ago that would have been very difficult, for the pedestrians here resented the intrusion of cars and flowed indiscriminately up and down the pavements, freely intermingling with one another, regardless of all traffic rules. But since then a vigilant police force has been steinily ordering everybody to the right, so that black cars can now rush between the two white streams without too much dodging. Still every self-propelling inhabitant considers it beneath his dignity to make more than the barest minimum of concessions to the insolent machines from the West, while every lordly chauffeur scorns to drive at anything less than full speed, so a taxi ride here is a hairrowing voyage between a human Scylla and Charybdis, with the fenders ever brushing scores of flowing white togas.

I've often wondered why everybody in Addis Ababa wants to spend every shining moment on the street. There's nothing much in town to buy, very few opportunities for "going places" or "seeing things," no circuses or football games and not much reason for visiting the station from which very small trains with very few passengers depart only two or three times a week.

### "Showing Off"?

I am sure the real reason is that the people want to show off. This is the only way they have of demonstrating their social position to their neighbors.

One never appears alone in this or any other Ethiopian city. If you're a great chief, you wear a thick black coat over your white clothes, ride a spirited mule, with a gilt saddle over a gay blanket and have 20 rifle-carrying men trotting along beside and behind you. Following this formidable bodyguard will be a corps of servants.

Since moving about in Addis Ababa is fully as safe as in Chicago, and since life is so primitive that most of the servants are idle, so great a retinue serves no practical purpose. It's only a way of making your mule look like a Lincoln instead of a Ford.

But, of course, everybody in Ethiopia is not a big chief and you see all grades of less imposing citizens with fewer warriors and servants until you get down to the very modest status of the correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor who has only two mules, an interpreter and a "boy," who doesn't carry so much as a spear or a bow and ar-

row. My outfit I am afraid would almost correspond to an ancient Model T flier, but still I cannot refrain from adding that I have the comeliest and most amiable yellow mule in town.

### Got Our Equipage

However, delightful as it is to be borne from one lofty petal to another of this New Flower by Gentle Jenny, one doesn't go to an Emperor's reception in that way. So we had a boyish, white-clad chauffeur wearing a flowing toga as gracefully as a Roman senator, drive us up to the Imperial Palace in a shining Pontiac. The approach was past rows of rather squallid little houses, but when we switched off the main street and started up the Imperial Drive it was by no means difficult to imagine that we were approaching a small and modest replica of Maria Theresa's famous Schonbrunn palace at Vienna.

I was met at the steps by the handsome chief of the Ethiopian Official Press Bureau, who cordially greeted me and conducted me through a spacious hall into a little waiting room where I joined my fellow journalists.

We had been instructed to come in black, although we were given freedom to choose any cut from flowing swallow-tails to a modest Sunday suit and the director of ceremonies tactfully but firmly reproached one of our colleagues who seemed to be showing too little respect for the Empire and its ruler by appearing in light clothes.

### But He's Not "High Hat"

One must not infer from this that Haile Selassie is pompous or has an undue opinion of his own importance. Just the opposite is the case. The palace with its furnishings and the Emperor's apparel, as well as his

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bearing and manners, all spoke of modesty, dignity and cordiality. There was not a trace of savage or Oriental ostentation.

His Majesty at times undoubtedly makes concessions to the age-old habits of his people by presiding at feasts of raw meat and at wild dances of the priests, but in his domestic business and diplomatic relations he is completely western. There was no grand throne, very little bowing and scraping, no gorgeous display or gaudy color, no lion or leopard skins and not a single gesture that one would associate with an overbearing despot. His servants came and went at ease and the press bureau officials, although exceedingly respectful, seemed to be somewhat less in awe of him than I am of my own editor in chief.

The Emperor is a rather slight man, 45 years of age, with much black hair, a well-kept black beard, dark eyes and sharp, firm, cold features. Being neither restless nor nervous, he is equally at home whether engaged in a conversation or sitting out periods of silence, such as occur even at imperial teas. He is unhurried, punctual, gracious and dignified. He is approachable though reserved. He seems frank, but is calculating. He is genial, but not intimate. He is hearty, but displays no enthusiasms. He smiles, but doesn't laugh and works very hard.

He was dressed in the native costume of his people, wearing a long black cape over white trousers, fitting tightly below the knees and reaching to his black shoes.

## Father and Son

As we were ushered into the small reception room, the Emperor and his young son, the Crown Prince, were standing before large, double windows that looked out upon a garden and surrounding forest. Both the father and son shook hands with all the newspaper men and women and those of us who had not yet met the Emperor were introduced to him personally. He made suitable, though banal enough remarks to all and after this meeting we went into the palace dining-room, finished in native mahogany with long gilt curtains, hanging at the windows, and tall red-backed chairs standing against the walls. Six tables laden with European dainties filled the center of the room. There were two large silver teapots and smaller golden tea services. Butlers in green coats and red breeches poured our tea into gold rimmed cups and gave us spoons made from native Ethiopian gold.

The Emperor sat at the end of the room and invited the five ladies each in turn, to come sit beside him and chat with him as he drank his tea. Later he invited a number of the men journalists also for private conversations on commonplace subjects. He revealed no state secrets but showed himself a thoughtful and entertaining host, ever speaking excellent French.

## Dogs Instead of Lions

According to tradition two young lions sit at the feet of the Emperor on such public occasions, but today their places were taken by two very lively small white dogs who, instead of sitting by their master, went from guest to guest begging for sweets and often interrupted His Majesty's quiet remarks with unrestrained barking.

After the conversations had ended the Emperor made a short speech in which he urged the correspondents to study Ethiopia at first hand and assured them of his co-operation. After that he proposed a pledge to the triumph of world peace.

Then we all shook hands with him again and took our leave. As we sped once more through the streets of the New Flower, descending from the Imperial hill, we looked out over as magnificent a country as is commanded by any capital in the world. There spread before us, in unending succession—fertile valleys, forest-covered mountains and fecund plains abounding in fruit

and grain, coffee, cotton and herds, offering treasures and beauty, which the Ethiopians and their Emperor are determined to defend from every invader.