

# Mule-Power Vital to Ethiopian Life

*Buying Two Brown Mules Proves Difficult Problem, but It's Finally Accomplished, at Some Saving—Mere Correspondent Imagines He's 'the Governor of Wisha-Washa Come to Town'* •

*This is the fifth of a group of descriptive articles by a staff correspondent of THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, recently sent to Addis Ababa to cover developments there. Previous articles appeared on Sept. 10, 12, 18 and 20.*

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ADDIS ABABA—At last I own some property: a nary day's running about, you make out your account, brown Ethiopian mule. In fact, two, writing your hands and moan, "For my taxi fares today

I have a deed to each of them, written in Amharic, I could have bought a first-class Ford out in Michigan!" And on special occasions, when a ministerial banquet follows an imperial tea, you see sums pass from your hands that would almost buy a Packard or Cadillac.

which is the official Ethiopian language. I don't understand these documents very well and am not sure which lines in them contain my name and which my mules' names. They're a kind of driver's license and I must carry them with me all the time, so's to show that I came by my treasures in a perfectly honorable way.

I am especially glad to have two exclusive deeds to two brown mules, unreservedly my own. It may be the beginning of opulence. And it seems all the more thrilling that it was in distant Ethiopia that I began my climb toward wealth.

Of course, I don't want you to think that I have gone into the mule business. I bought these only as a means of locomotion. And they are absolutely essential, for Addis Ababa is an enormous city. Ethiopia, you know, is bigger than the whole of Germany and Delaware together, and its capital seems to me to be scattered over practically the entire empire. There are no street cars, subways or autobuses, so the only way to get about is to hire taxis or own your own animals.

In order to hire taxis you must be at least as rich as Croesus. They are fabulously expensive. After an ordi-



or something like that. Horses are far more imposing, but not so hardy. They cost less, but eat more, and in the end aren't so easy to sell. Mules eat less, are tougher, less emotional, and can be sold for a good price at any time.

After long and profound contemplation I decided, for

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# Mule-Power Vital To Getting About Among Ethiopians

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bargaining purposes, to leave the matter in suspense. I went to the mule market with my native interpreter and my "boy," and when someone tried to sell us a mule we extolled the advantages of owning a horse, and when a horse seller appeared, we sang the praises of the mules, hoping thus to make a better bargain. But I discovered that, however good one's line of talk, he can't bargain an Ethiopian down very much.

## To Horse Market

The mule and horse market is beyond the city limits, so you can imagine how far it lies from the center of this enormous town. My taxi fare out there consumed no small part of the sum I had set aside for the mule.

The morning gave very meager results, for not many people had brought horses or mules to market. They didn't seem to realize that I had come 5000 miles or so to buy an Ethiopian steed. By 12:30 midday the only promising animal we had found was a gray mule for which the owner demanded 70 thaler (\$28) and he wouldn't even think of taking a cent less. So after leaving my two assistants at the market with instructions to bring me two horses or mules, if anything good turned up, I walked back to the hotel.

I had barely finished dinner before my dark men appeared with two white horses, which were strong, in good condition, spirited and cheap. Only 70 thalers for the two. Quite a chance. But my fatherly hotel proprietor, a German, completely queered that deal. He said the horses were wild, unused to city ways, afraid of automobiles and decidedly dangerous.

The prospective sellers jumped on their bareback steeds and rode back to market very disgruntled, while I reconciled myself to purchasing a nice, tame animal.

But how? I donned my raincoat, took my umbrella, without which one dares not leave his room, and strode off to market once more with my two faithful retainers.

## Mules Aplenty

We had to go into a little native house to wait through the second half of the daily cloudburst, and on reaching the market some time later found quite a collection of animals, mostly mules. I rode the 70-thaler gray once up and down the road and was quite pleased with him. Then I tried out a 90-thaler black one. He was large and had an excellent canter, so I was much inclined to buy him.

I was putting on quite a show as I rode mules up and down the crowded highway with the whole market looking at me.

All the animals behaved admirably. A small brown 55-thaler mule seemed a very good buy. But a lively 100-thaler one pleased me most of all. She was what you might call "classy." Young and full of life, she gave promise of going up all the hills on high and Addis Ababa is built on hills.

Finally, I began to bargain. I offered 40 for the 55-thaler brown and the owner was outraged. When I offered 90 for the 100-thaler mule the aristocratically dressed owner was furious.

I consulted with my native staff, and after long deliberations offered the offended gentleman 91 thalers. His honor was saved, my shame was wiped out, my offer was accepted. My 55-thaler seller also accepted my 50-thaler offer and—I had two mules.

## A Good Showing

I rode the best one back to the hotel. She cantered along in a dainty, nimble way, shying at automobiles just enough to make riding interesting and to show that she's young, unsophisticated, observant and full of ardor. She forded a muddy stream and scrambled up the steep bank like a cat up a tree. It's plain she's going to show me that she was worthy of being picked out of Addis Ababa's whole mule market.

We bought her a gleaming red saddle with a shiny gilt bridle and a magnificent brass necklace, so when I ride up main street with my interpreter following on the second mule and my "boy" trotting along behind, I imagine the whole population staring and saying to each other, "The Governor of Wisha Washa has come to town!"

In the face of this pomp how chagrined those old neighbors of mine out in Cora, Kansas, would feel, who used rather derisively to sing to me, "When Reuben comes to town!"

All I can say is that they ought to see Reuben and his retainers now riding down the boulevards of Addis Ababa, "The New Flower," founded by Menelik II, "Lion of Judah and King of Kings."