

(October 19th, 1936)

Some Experiences in Ethiopia

BY DR. E. RALPH HOOPER, SUDAN INTERIOR MISSION.

President Mess introducing Rev. Dr. Hooper of Toronto, said:—

This Club has, on many occasions welcomed Toronto citizens who have distinguished themselves in other countries, or reached the front pages of publicity through some accomplishment of note.

How seldom do we welcome someone who adds to such accomplishment, the spice of adventure — in the case of our guest speaker, possibly adventure without romance! Imagine the sordidness of a leper hospital, then the mud and disease of the Ethiopian campaign: an experience for repetition.

A physician of note — a friend to many of you present — Dr. E. Ralph Hooper.

DR. HOOPER:—Mr. Chairman and members of the Canadian Club: I want to thank you for this privilege of addressing the members of this Club. I deeply appreciate the welcome you have given to my father, soon to complete ninety years of age, as also to the others of my family representing three generations.

This is not my first acquaintance with the Canadian Club. Some years ago I was present when Booker T. Washington was the speaker. The Chairman on that occasion was Mr. Mark Irish. He invited the members who had come late to finish their luncheon, as it was necessary that the meeting proceed, stressing the fact that time was a very important factor, as many had to return to their business.

Mr. Washington in responding to the introduction said that the remarks of the Chairman reminded him of an incident in the Southern States. "There was a man visiting the farmers who sought to sell them a special brand of

hog food. The salesman did not appear to be very successful in his efforts to convince the farmer of the superiority of this hog food so he sought to clinch the bargain by saying, 'Why this food can be digested by the hogs in half the time of an ordinary food.' But the farmer came back with the reply, 'Say Mister, what is a hog's time worth anyway?' He said no more but the subtle implication, that there was some connection between their time and that of the hog, filtered into their minds and in a minute or two the whole audience was rocking with laughter. I am glad to see that the present members have just as keen a sense of humour.

On a later occasion when General Booth was speaking the Chairman introduced the speaker with the confession that in his early days when the Salvation Army first came to his town he with a number of kindred spirits had proved themselves a torment to the army and had given them a great deal of trouble.

The General when he arose lost no time in paying back the score as he brought his keen wit to bear on the Chairman much to the delight of the members, if not to the Chairman, Mr. Mark Irish.

Kipling has said, "That East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet." In spite of this the East still makes its gesture to the West, when a merchant advertised as follows, "We make false teeth, modern methodists".

Abyssinia first came into notority, or rather thrust itself into unenviable prominence, when King Theodore, the most brilliant and the most bloody of all the figures that have filled the pages of Abyssinian history, imprisoned sixty-seven persons, most of them Missionaries, but also some of other nations than the British and some who were Consuls or Interpreters.

His viciousness was only surpassed by his vanity. He aspired to the hand of Queen Victoria, and wrote her a letter to that effect. Her silence on this advance nettled the pride of Theodore and he vented his spite on his prisoners.

His cruelty knew no bounds and, for a mere whim, destroyed hundreds of lives and hurled over the appalling

precipices, which surrounded Magdala, scores of his most faithful followers.

That marvellous expedition under Sir Robert Napier, which culminated in the defeat and suicide of Théodore, and the release of the captives in 1868, opened the way for a change of Government. King John for a time was the ruler until he was killed in a battle with the Dervishes.

It was then that Menelick came into prominence and was the most outstanding of all the rulers of that land. His dominant personality, his distinction as a member of the line of Solomon, the superiority of his Shoan army and the prestige acquired by his defeat of the Italians at the Battle of Adowa in 1896, enabled him to subdue the various opposing tribes and to consolidate them into some form of national life. On his death in 1913 the reins of Government were placed in the hands of Lij Jasu his grandson but his espousal of Mohammedinism and his dissolute life caused the people to rise in rebellion and in 1916 he was defeated and a regency was formed with Princess Zaudita and Ras Tafari in control. On the death of the Princess, Ras Tafari was crowned King of Kings and Conquering Lion of the Tribes.

The Coronation of Hailie Selassie was an event of great importance and marked by the presence of Royal representatives from almost every nation.

The aggressive attitude of several of the European nations created in the heart of the Ethiopian Government both fear and suspicion, so they hurriedly sought a place in the League of Nations as a measure of protection and security.

The Ethiopian Government therefore viewed with distrust the presence of any foreigners within her borders and our Mission did not escape the difficulties associated with this attitude.

The Coptic Church, which was closely identified with the Government, in like manner interpreted the presence of the Sudan Interior Mission, of which I was a member, as prejudicial to their interests. Both of these bodies were however eager to have medical work undertaken in the Country. When therefore our Mission pledged themselves as willing to undertake this work, as far as they were able, the opposition in a large measure subsided, and permission

was finally given to us to establish Stations among the tribes to the West and the South.

In 1929 we entered the Country with one physician, Doctor Lambie. In 1931 he left for a short period to secure another Doctor and knew that the Mission would not be permitted to continue without one.

None of the younger men being available and not sensing the opportunity, it remained for this toddling old Medico in his sixty-first year to fill the gap.

"Knowest thou not, Horatio, that dead Caesar's body, dead and turned to clay, may stop a hole to keep the wind away?"

I was at least useful as stopping a gap. Within a month of landing in Addis Ababa I was outfitted and ready to go on trek down South two weeks into the interior.

For the first year I was practically six months in the saddle. I had unparalleled opportunities of seeing the Country, attending to men of distinction and also to the daughter of Haile Selassie, who was married to Dejazmatch Bayenneh of the Province of Gofa; (To make this one call on her excellency took me one month); and I also went all along the line to preach the Gospel and tend the sick.

After a year in Wallamo, I was asked to come to Addis and take charge of the Hailie Selassie Deprosarium. I was there for three years and was joined by both my daughter and my wife.

This institution grew from nothing up to one hundred beds and hundreds passed through for treatment during this time.

For the past few years the sense of war was in the air. Every traveler, every caravan and every request for a permit to journey through the country was regarded in the light of a possible act of hostility.

While the formation of Red Cross units was deemed essential yet the Government was loath to organize these lest they should be interpreted as preparations for war.

In Ethiopia the Red Cross previously had no significance apart from its use indicating that such huts bearing this sign were used for immoral purposes.

Sweden, Norway, Britain, Egypt, Holland, Finland, Greece, sensing the need sent on their Units following the magnificent and heroic example set by Dr. Hockman of the

American Mission Hospital in Addis, who formed and led No. 1 Unit to the Ogaden front and there lost his life in de-fusing a bomb which exploded and snuffed out as grand and as brilliant a life as any country has produced.

It was only fitting, in view of the fact that our Mission had dispensaries in various parts of the Country, we should offer our aid and in November the Sudan Interior Mission organized Red Cross Unit No. 4, with myself in charge.

We were assigned to Ras Desta Dumpba, son-in-law of Hailie Selassie, commander of the Southern army, at his own request.

Assisted by Mr. Alan Webb of England and Mr. Allan Smith of New Zealand, together with servants and interpreters and food and drug supplies we left Addis on November 12th, '35. All our equipment was loaded on two motor trucks and our destination was first to Yerga Alem the present Capital of Sidamo. As soon as we left the city all motor roads ceased. It was going through the country, picking the best path that presented itself. The first night we arrived at our destination so late that we did not put up any tents and slept out in the open. In twelve hours we were plunged into the brushless age. No shaving brush, no hair brush, no tooth brush. Yes! we had them, but they were buried deep beneath loads of supplies, and we just let it pass, rather than have the whole truck unloaded.

We got stuck in sand drifts and in the bed of running rivers and had to make detours through unknown country for seventy miles because rivers were in flood. We roared through low swampy ground at the rate of two miles an hour. The wheels were in soft ground and the engine was red hot. We were going "in low" for fifteen miles and the water was boiling over with every turn of the engine. That night found us struggling to get out of an unknown and uninhabited country. We could not advance, so we threw off our cots amidst clumps of thorn bushes and went to sleep without an effort to get supper. In the morning the Arussi Gallas came to our rescue and assured us they knew a way out. They pounded before us from rock to rock and hill to hill indicating the way that we were to take.

At last after being 36 hours without water we came to a stream where we filled the radiators, and drank freely

ourselves. Water determines almost everything in Africa. The trek we make, the camp that we settle on are determined by the water supply. In the afternoon we were going down a rocky hill with a gentle slope in a pouring rain. Then the rocky ground ceased and it was the slippery mud of Africa. Our motor-truck began to slide towards the precipice and then toppled over with passengers, supplies and dirt poured down hill with a hiss like a volcanic eruption. The odor of ether served notice on us that our bottles were broken. Fortunately no one was seriously injured and the scene presented a hopeless prospect. In due time help arrived and that in the person of the superintendent of a neighbouring estate owned by Herr Blaize. The gentleman sent to direct the salvaging operations was a native dressed in his native costume and his head crowned with a plug hat. No one thought that there was any incongruity, and no one even smiled, as this newly appointed Superintendent of the "Push and Pull Company of Abyssinia" seriously addressed himself to the task of getting this truck back to the road. In an hour or two his helpers had the car back on the path and another road cut into the side of the mountain to permit our second truck to get by.

That night we accepted the hospitality of a German who lived near by. It took just five languages for us to say all that we wanted. We tried French, German, English, Galla and Amharic. When one failed we brought up another and wheeled it into action and stuttered out our sentences in the hope that some might be understood. It was a famous victory. We were given a hut in which to sleep. A mattress was laid on a pile of gasoline boxes but this being a German home they did not provide blankets but another mattress to cover us. It was very narrow. If the feet were to be kept warm it was at the expense of the chest. If the chest was to be favoured it was at the sacrifice of the feet. Careful measurements revealed the fact that this covering extended from the tubercle of the tibia to the tip of the ensiform cartilage. This would not do so I got out a dunnage bag with blankets and thus solved the problem. Our real difficulty came with Mr. Smith who was six feet four inches. I suggested that as the door was just opposite that we place a box outside to support Mr. Smith's feet. Mr. Smith protested against this excellent idea on

account of the rain. It was finally arranged that his feet should extend Southward to the end of the bed then bend sharply to the East and thus form the Southern boundary. The blankets were called into service and we had a splendid night.

Saturday we made ten miles. We had to cross a low lying plain covered more or less with water and shallow streams. We loaded and unloaded throughout the day. Every half hour we formed and dissolved a new Push and Pull Company of Abyssinia, limited or unlimited. Night found us up to the axles, hopelessly mired and the rain gently falling. We knew of a Belgian planter, Monsieur Collares about five miles away and we determined to spend the night there. We got the services of a native who assured us he could guide us there. After spending hours in following paths that crossed and recrossed we finally persuaded the guide that he was lost and as he at last yielded the point we just threw down our loads and slept out for the night, supperless for the second time.

The morning light came and as we climbed a mountain we got our bearings and visited the planter and had breakfast and saw his estate of 10,000 coffee trees. Sunday afternoon we arrived at Yerga Alem and representatives from the Governor Ras Desta Dumpta, the "Son-in-law" of His Majesty Haile Selassie came out to meet us. From our own Mission we were welcomed by Mr. Cliff Mitchell and Mr. Tom Devers who escorted us in. These two fine splendid specimens of manhood both over six feet were murdered on May 9th, by these same Arussi Gallas whose territory we had just passed through. The days following the evacuation of Addis by the Emperor, the whole country was given over to looting and murder and these two ventured forth from their Mission to afford protection to their loved ones in Addis. On the second day out they were attacked and these two heroic men were killed and the twenty-five members of their escort. On the Monday the officials of the Government visited us and we told them that we would require forty head carriers and a number of mules to carry our loads forward. Here we left our motor trucks, the country from that on was impassible for motors. It was extremely mountainous.

It took us nine days to make the next 140 miles. Every day presented its difficulties. In fact it was seven days before we were able to leave the capital. Steep mountains, heart-testing climbs, that would wreck a bad heart in ten minutes, had to be negotiated. Getting fresh head carriers and mules were daily difficulties. Frequently we were invited to dine with the ruling Shume and that included raw meat feasts, which I skillfully avoided. These raw meat feasts are the prolific source of tape worm which every self-respecting Abyssinian boasts of. They take their native Kosso but prefer what they call the "ferangie" Kosso which is the Extract of Male Fern. At last we arrived at Wadara only to find that the army had gone further South East to Nugallie. After some days we got a motor transport which had come up from Kenya, the British Colony to the South and these took us to Nugallie, fifty miles into the desert.

Here we now left the high land and the tall trees and the fine forests and were exposed to the open plain which stretched hundreds of miles between the two rivers the Dawa and the Guali Doryia. When we arrived at Nugallie it was only to find that the army had advanced two hundred miles further into the Desert along one of the rivers. This place had been bombed before we arrived and we were shown on arrival the holes in the ground and through the walls of the huts where the bombs had exploded. This was intended to make us feel quite at home and to put us at our ease. A day or two after we arrived we had our first taste of a bombing from the Italians. It left much to be desired. To say the least it is disquieting and disturbed the happy and peaceful state of our village. However on this occasion little damage was done as they did not seem to have got the range. A few days later the planes came over again and this was a different story. There were three squadrons of five each. They were in beautiful formation and the drone of the three motor Caproni bombers was very pleasant but unfortunately we were not long permitted to enjoy the hum in comfort. In a moment all the huts were evacuated and every one flew in some direction only to run into the exploding bombs. There was no protection and no safety except perhaps in lying flat down which some of us did. Soon they were down and exploding with devastating power

and thunder. A few incendiary bombs interspersed among these set the huts on fire. Clouds of dust rose in the air and smoke filled the place. What a sight greeted our eyes as we ran to those who had been injured! Weeping and dismayed groups were running hither and thither. Eyes, faces, legs, arms, shoulders, chests and abdomens were pierced by the flying fragments. We urged them to come up to our clinic and we made preparation to attend them which we did from 9 a.m. to 4.30 in the afternoon. Some were killed outright others died later of their wounds but we were able to assist a large number who came up limping or on improvised stretchers.

That night we had planned to go forward in an effort to reach Ras Desta Dumpta but after we had proceeded a short distance the guides deserted us and we were compelled to make camp just where we were. Two days later the Swedish Red Cross unit arrived with five splendid motor trucks. They were magnificently furnished with men and means. They all were the very best and a credit to their country. In a few days they went forward over the desert and established their camp and for nine days under the protection of the Red Cross flag attended to their patients. During these days the planes flew over daily but did not molest the Swedes but on the tenth day they bombed them and machine gunned them to pieces. Of their 60 patients 28 were killed outright and others were wounded. Dr. Hylander was knocked down three times by bomb explosions and twice he rose but was picked up having no less than seven wounds. He was lifted into the truck and taken to Nugallie and nursed for a few days then carried by plane to Addis Ababa where he was operated on and finally made a good recovery; and returned to the front again and following on the days of lawlessness, occasioned by the departure of Hailie Selassie, escaped into Kenya. Lindstrom was fatally wounded and died on the way back to Nugallie.

In spite of the fate of the Swedish Unit it was decided after investigation that our No. 4 Unit should be sent on to take the place of the badly mauled Swedish Red Cross. The Swedes gave us the use of two of their trucks and we left on Monday night, Jan. 13th, at 5 p.m. and rode until midnight. We had a few hours rest and then continued

until dawn. We then hid for a few hours and continued again and then by hiding and advancing reached the site of the army at nine p.m. on the Tuesday night. During that day the Italians had brought up 30 tanks and with their machine guns hemmed in the Ethiopians and poured bombs from the air and the bullets from the tanks. It was a slaughter. There was no escape. Yet we were in time to meet the remnant of the decimated army and turning around we threw off all our supplies and took on board the Ras and his secretary and Captain Frere the Belgian military adviser to His Excellency Ras Desta. We filled up again with the gasoline that we carried with us and roared through the mountain and plain at top speed with the report that the tanks were following us. An hour or two after daylight we managed to find a place to hide from the planes that had been momentarily expected. Their arrival would have been the death sentence to all but they did not come as they had not been informed of the escape of Ras Desta. After 48 hours of almost continuous running we arrived back at Nugallie.

The next morning the planes had marked our flight and came over the forest where we were with fifteen planes and bombed us three times. By one o'clock we had decided that it was necessary to retreat to Wadara 50 miles back, to the forest and mountains which provided some protection and permitted the reorganization of the Ethiopian Division in the South. For several days we continued work but on the Monday night we were informed that the Italians were following up with two hundred motor trucks and machine guns. We were ordered to dress and pile on one truck such supplies as were necessary and convey them to a forest where there were some camels waiting to carry the supplies out to a place of safety. However before this could be completed the word came that the army had arrived and we were compelled to flee with the clothes we wore and to leave everything behind. As there was no motor trail beyond Wadara, the motor trucks had to be abandoned and all our excellent and costly equipment of instruments and drugs were left behind.

After 20 hours of being on the move we had the delight of a pork sandwich, and again the next day we had another

one. The nights were quite cold and, as the blankets were few or none, in some cases we got little sleep. After five days of flight we reached Yerga Alem and the following day the plane from Addis arrived and I, with some others, was taken back to Addis.

There was one lesson that was brought home to me with great force. The whole country seemed to be on the lookout for a hiding place from the planes that threatened them at all times. Men and women were looking for a hiding place. Some of these were good but many were poor. All were looking for safety and protection.

All through the East I saw the same thing. I sensed the fact that the great Religions of the world were engaged in the same effort. Mohammedanism, Confucianism, Bramanism, Buddhism and the Coptic Religion were so many mighty institutions engaged in vital task of providing a hiding place. We know, however, from the Word of God that these are utterly unavailing. God in His divine love and wisdom and mercy has provided a hiding place in Christ. This is substantial, approved and guaranteed. It is accepted by Faith in Christ. We go to Ethiopia and to other countries to announce this fact.

Everywhere men are conscious of the guilt of sin. They are seeking to escape its penalty. God offers this refuge that is in Christ.

I close with the words of Brewster, in which he says so aptly and truly:

"Hail! Sovereign love that first began
The scheme to rescue fallen man.
Hail! matchless, free, eternal Grace,
That gave my soul a hiding place.

Against the God that built the sky,
I fought with hands uplifted high.
Despised the mention of His Grace,
Too proud to seek a hiding place.

'Enrapt in thick Egyptian night,
And fond of darkness, more than light.
Madly I ran my sinful race,
Secure without a hiding place.

And thus the Eternal counsel ran.
Almighty LOVE, arrest that man.
I felt the arrows of distress,
And knew I had no hiding place.

Indignant justice stood in view.
To Sinai's fiery mount I flew.
But justice cried with frowning face,
'This mountain is no hiding place.'

Ere long a heavenly voice I heard,
And mercy's angel soon appeared.
He led me in a placid pace,
To Jesus, as a Hiding Place.

On Him almighty vengeance fell,
That must have sunk a world to hell.
He bore it for a sinful race,
And thus became their hiding place.

Though seven fold storms of judgment roll,
And shake this globe from pole to pole,
No thunderbolt shall daunt my face,
For Jesus is my Hiding Place.

A few more rolling years at most,
Will land me safe on Caanan's shore,
And I shall sing the song of Grace,
And see my glorious HIDING PLACE."

—A. W. Brewster.

Gentlemen, this is the hiding place we all need and this hiding place is free and provides every guarantee for time and eternity.

Once more I thank you for your kind and patient hearing.

At the close of Dr. Hooper's address, President Mess thanked him as follows:—

We thank you very much for your remarks. It is most interesting to hear first hand, of the conditions prevailing during the Ethiopian campaign. So much was written of a purely sensational character, that it is well to get a true story.

I am sure your Father must be very happy to be with us. We extend him a special welcome.