



## The League: Answering Ethiopia

In his Geneva hotel suite one morning last week young British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, his brow worry-puckered, argued and pleaded with dusky members of Haile Selassie's entourage, trying to persuade them to advise His Majesty not to inconvenience the Great Powers by personally arising in the League Assembly to air Ethiopia's wrongs.

"Tell your Emperor that no head of a State has ever addressed the League-it would be unprecedented!" cried young Tony Eden with his British reverence for precedent. "The Emperor really must not appear. It would compromise his imperial dignity."

The Ethiopians, as they left Captain Eden and proceeded to blab his solicitude for Haile Selassie's dignity, knew that both the Credentials Committee and the Steering Committee of the Assembly had been secretly considering British formulas to bar His Majesty from speaking before the League. It was now or never, and His Majesty might not even have been permitted to address the League Assembly last week had not impetuous Irish Free State President Eamon de Valera blazed: "I am unwilling that there should even be discussion of his undoubted right to speak!"

**"Sacred Mission."** President of the Assembly was that famed little Czechoslovak, Dr. Eduard Benes, but he could not leave home, having been elected President of his Republic. The Assembly therefore had to elect a President last week, chose Premier Professor Paul van Zeeland of Belgium, who played an important backstairs role in promoting the Hoare-Laval deal which nearly made peace between Italy and Ethiopia last winter. Once in the chair, Professor van Zeeland read to the Assembly an extremely long and conciliatory note from Italy most pleasing to Britain. It promised that Il Duce will not raise a great Ethiopian army of conscript blacks-the one thing Britain fears, since with it Italy might upset the balance of power in Africa-and concluded in Benito Mussolini's nearest approach to a dove-cooing vein: "Italy will consider it an honor to inform the League of Nations of the progress achieved in her work of civilizing Ethiopia. . . . Italy views this work as a sacred mission and proposes to carry it out according to the principles of the League Covenant."

Meanwhile Ethiopia's ousted Emperor had quietly entered the Assembly Hall in tropical white tunic and black cape, having checked his broad-brimmed hat outside. His Majesty, taking a seat in the fifth row, sat quietly through van Zeeland's reading of Il Duce's note. He also sat through a long speech by flowery Delegate José Maria Cantilo of Argentina, the country which had demanded that the Assembly meet on the Ethiopian Question. Harking back to President Hoover's meticulous Secretary of State Henry Lewis Stimson, the Argentine recalled in rosy terms the "Stimson Doctrine" of simply not recognizing that Japan has made a great conquest in China and dominates Manchukuo. According to Señor Cantilo this Stimson Doctrine could well be applied today not only to Manchukuo but also to Ethiopia-its great attraction to harassed

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statesmen being that it enables them to give an imposing name to doing nothing and omitting year after year to make up their minds.

**Bedlam.** Finally Professor van Zeeland called Emperor Haile Selassie, and the bird-like little Ethiopian advanced to the League tribune. As he picked up the 17-page typescript of his speech a flutter of applause stirred in the general gallery. For Italian journalists in the press gallery this was the last straw. Jangle-nerved after months of watching Italy badgered with Sanctions at Geneva, they jumped up, bellowed jeers and curses at the Emperor, screamed "Viva Il Duce!" Swiss police had never before in the polite League's history had to deal with hecklers in the press box. For ten minutes the Fascists kept up bedlam, until they went down before an entire platoon of Geneva's finest, who yanked them by their coat collars off to jail. Next day the Socialist canton of Geneva expelled them all—some Italian journalists of ten years' standing with families in Geneva. But they received wires of praise from Italy's new Press & Propaganda Secretary Odoardo Dino Alfieri for a Fascist escapade at which the London Times looked down its stern nose thus: "Nothing else was wanting to add the last touch of dignity to one side of the contest and to remove the last traces of it upon the other."

**Selassie Speaks.** Always the embodiment of bird-like grace and dignity, Ethiopia's Emperor read his speech in Amharic, a dignified language in which the syllables telescope into each other so closely that for minutes at a time His Majesty seemed to be uttering one enormous word. Small League fry had no idea what he was saying, but big League wigs listened through earphones to simultaneous translations of the speech, getting it by the flick of a switch in either French or English. Everyone agreed that it was a great speech—one of the noblest, most factual, irrefutable and moving ever made before the League of Nations. Yet it was totally without effect on Geneva's sleek, hard, slippery statesmen. Noble excerpts:

"I, Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia, am here today to claim that justice which is due to my people and the assistance promised eight months ago, when 50 nations asserted that aggression had been committed in violation of international treaties.

"It is my duty here to inform the Governments assembled at Geneva—responsible as they are for the lives of men, women and children — of the deadly peril which threatens them by describing to them the fate which has been suffered by Ethiopia. It is not only upon the warriors that the Italian Government has made war. It has above all attacked populations far removed from hostilities in order to terrorize and exterminate them ... Special sprayers were installed on board aircraft so they could vaporize over vast areas of territory a fine, death-dealing rain. Groups of nine, 15 or 18 aircraft followed one another so that the fog issuing from them formed a continuous sheet. It was thus that, as from the end of January 1936, soldiers, women, children, cattle, rivers, lakes and pastures were drenched continually with this deadly rain. In order to kill off systematically all living creatures and in order more surely to poison the waters and pastures, the Italian command made its aircraft pass over & over again.

"These fearful tactics succeeded. Men and animals succumbed. The deadly rain that fell from the aircraft made all those whom it touched fly shrieking with pain. All those who drank poisoned water or ate infected food also succumbed in dreadful suffering. In tens of thousands the victims of Italian mustard gas fell."

Concluded Haile Selassie, whose name means Power of Trinity: "Apart from the Kingdom of the Lord, there is not on this earth any nation superior to any other. Are the

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States going to set up the terrible precedent of bowing before force? ... It is international morality which is at stake! ... Representatives of the world, I have come to Geneva to discharge in your midst the most painful of duties for the head of a State. What reply have I to take back to my people?"

**"Almost Ridiculous."** In reply to His Majesty, thousands and tens of thousands of weasel words were pronounced by the orators of over 50 nations. Of these Premier Léon Blum of France, new to Geneva, drew the most eager audience for a speech which rose entirely above Italy and Ethiopia, a land which Orator Blum succeeded in mentioning only once. There was no one theme in Premier Blum's discourse, but there were many themes, and he sounded them like an organist pulling out random stops here & there with a not unmelodious effect. "The world is filled with menace. The shadows grow heavy," cried Léon Blum. "Mystery enshrouds the armaments of celtam States. . . . They are shaking the dice of war!"

"Collective Security," went on Socialist Blum, essaying another theme, "Collective Security must be nothing more than a pure implement for peace, and its operation ought not normally to contain any danger of war. That means that, if it is to be complete, Collective Security must be combined with General Disarmament." Chances for obtaining that, admitted M. Blum, are so poor as to seem "almost ridiculous."

Nobody was to get the idea that France would not fight if duly provoked. To this theme Léon Blum passed dexterously, seeking to reassure the Little Entente allies of France who today are afraid his new Socialist Cabinet may not prove trustworthy in their defense. "Because we had dedicated ourselves to peace," said the Premier, "we did not resist when the Rhineland was occupied in defiance of treaties. But, Messieurs, does anyone think our reaction would have been the same if [the Germans] had so much as touched our soil or the soil of other countries which we guarantee?"

In print these might seem bold words, but Premier Blum spoke in the low, monotonous voice of a teacher reading some well-worn lecture to his class. Gloomily he concluded: "Faith in peace is shaken. The final catastrophe seems to be preferred to the anguish of waiting."

Strengtheners V. Modifiers. South Africa's clean-cut Charles Theodore de Water alone demanded pressing on with Sanctions against Italy, saying that to lift them "will shatter for generations all international confidence and all hope of realizing world peace!"

At the other extreme Canada's mealy-mouthed Vincent Massey called for immediate lifting of Sanctions on the startling theory that that would be "fairer to Ethiopia."

"The hope of millions of men has been extinguished," orated Australia's smooth Stanley Melbourne Bruce. "We must rekindle that hope."

Only the great League powers whose capitals are London, Paris and Moscow could give Geneva any lead in attempting this obvious task. Speakers for small nations took cues from them, and at length it loosely appeared that the Assembly was divided between those who would "modify" the League by weakening it and those who would "strengthen" the League. Irresolute French Foreign Minister Yvon Delbos hunted with the Strengtheners, led by Soviet Foreign Minister Maxim Maximovich Litvinoff, and ran with the Modifiers of whom British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden was among the most fleet.

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A sort of stooge for Mr. Eden was The Netherlands' Foreign Minister Dr. A. C. D. de Graeff who wanted to modify the League until it became "purely consultive," coax Germany back into it, and abolish forever all Sanctions "except the one Sanction that an aggressor would be automatically expelled from the League." On the other hand, Comrade Litvinoff claimed that existing League machinery is basically excellent, only needs strengthening. Cried he: "The League made a tremendous step forward when an overwhelming majority of its members, regardless of substantial material sacrifices, came to the assistance, even unsuccessfully; of the fellow member which was attacked!"

"Next time," predicted optimist Litvinoff, "the victim will be saved from the aggressor altogether!"

This was flatly contradicted by President Eamon de Valera of the Irish Free State. "In the next conflict the same situation will prevail," he predicted with such contagious gloom that the only female delegate, Swedish Spinster Kersten Hesselgren wailed: "Why bear children into a world so hopeless and insecure?" A Czechoslovak photographer was so depressed that he became last week the first individual ever to shoot himself in the Assembly, put a bullet through his chest and fell weltering in a gush of blood.

"Is there a doctor among those present?" calmly queried President van Zeeland. To the suicide rushed Canadian Delegate Philippe Roy, M.D., the patient later dying in a Geneva hospital from internal hemorrhages.

**Last Stands.** Emperor Haile Selassie last month embarrassed London by asking for "safe conduct" back to Ethiopia through the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Last week the Imperial Ethiopian slipped into the League's woodpile two more demands which seemed to be his last stands. Immediately the Geneva logrollers countered with a so-called "resolution." President van Zeeland of the Assembly claimed that this intentionally vague resolution sufficiently covered the Emperor's first demand, which was that the Assembly vote yes or no on whether it would refuse to recognize Italy's conquest. Therefore Ethiopia's No. 1 last stand never came to a vote.

Ethiopia's No.2 was a demand that the Assembly vote yes or no on whether \$50,000,000 shall be loaned to the Ethiopian Government of Haile Selassie. Professor van Zeeland asked for a poll by vocal roll-call. So visibly ashamed were the League delegates not to vote \$50,000,000 into the pockets of the Emperor that 23 said "no" in tones barely audible, 25 maintained shamefaced silence, nine were not present, and only the Emperor's doughty General Ras Nassibu shouted out the solitary "YES!" for Justice and \$50,000,000. At this result His Majesty was afterward said by his entourage to be "disgusted, disheartened and disillusioned."

**Sanctions Lifted.** By the time the League Assembly finally got down to cases after a fatiguing midnight session many correspondents were so muddled by the confused events of the week that their dispatches were far from newsworthy, obscuring in many cases the actual result of the final vote: SANCTIONS WERE LIFTED FROM ITALY BY THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS AND ETHIOPIA IS FINISHED.

The Assembly can only "decide" so momentous a point by unanimity and to the last the Ethiopians resisted all pressure to make them join in voting to lift Sanctions. It was

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therefore necessary to "resolve" to lift Sanctions which could be done by a simple majority. In the final count Ethiopia alone voted to keep Sanctions on. Notwithstanding all South Africa's brave talk, she abstained from voting, as did Chile, Venezuela, and Panama. Every other League State represented in the Assembly last week (44) "resolved" to end Sanctions. This week the Sanctions Committee set July 15 as the official Sanctions ending date.

Not the End. As the delegates hastily left Geneva for their home capitals, most privately agreed that by far the best speech of the week had been made by the Irish Free State's Eamon de Valera and that these were his most trenchant words: "If the great powers of Europe would only meet now in that peace conference which will have to be held after Europe has once again been drenched in blood; if they would be prepared to make now, in advance, only a tithe of the sacrifice each of them would have to make when war was begun, the terrible menace which threatens us all today could be warded off. "The problems that distract Europe today should not be left for soldiers to decide ... They should be tackled now by the statesmen."

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