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NOEL EDWARD BUXTON, THE ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY AND BRITISH POLICY WITH RESPECT TO ETHIOPIA, 1932-1944[1]

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The attitude of British humanitarians to the Italian attack on Ethiopia, in 1935, and to the question of slavery in Ethiopia, with which the Italians tried — not very plausibly — to link their attack, forms a striking illustration both of the impulse to give effect to humanitarian purposes in foreign policy and of the difficulty in so doing.

This paper is not, for the greater part, concerned with British secular policy towards Ethiopia. That policy has been studied sufficiently by other hands. It always had been, and remained, limited and essentially defensive in purpose. Its chief aim was to protect the head-waters of the Nile, waters which were a matter of life and death to Egypt (of whose interests the United Kingdom was steward) and only slightly less important to the (British-ruled) Sudan. A corollary of this aim was to provide against an (always possible) break-up of Ethiopia and against the Italian annexation of Ethiopian territory which was likely to follow such a break-up.

By contrast, the humanitarian campaign against slavery in Ethiopia represented a deliberate attempt to bring about vital changes in the Ethiopian state. That the League of Nations had ever concerned itself with the question of slavery had, in Lord Lugard's words, "been due principally to the initiative and insistence" of the British Government. The setting up of the Temporary Slave Committee (1924) and, later, of its successor, the Permanent Slavery Commission, were both due to this initative, and the efforts of the Government were largely prompted, in turn, by the efforts of the Anti-Slavery society. It is with these efforts that this paper is concerned.

I have suggested, elsewhere,[2] that British policy, from the time of the religious revival of the early nineteenth century, is not intelligible unless account is taken of the pressure which was brought to bear, from time to time, by an influential body of Englishmen who were bent on having policy put at the service of righteousnesss. This pressure often affected, and sometimes determined, policy. Its exponents were usually splendidly confident of its efficacy. Thus, as late as 1938, Lord Noel-Buxton[3] told a German audience at Stuttgart:

> If you want your colonies, the people from whom you may expect them are the British humanitarians and idealists who exist in immense numbers in our

> electorate, and in our politicians of all political parties . . . . We humanitarians are not the Government, but we influence Governments. We are able to ensure that policies directed towards general reconciliation and pacification and the rectification of injustice are not forgotten by the Government in power . . . .

This was a claim the truth of which successive Foreign Secretaries, from Lord Lansdowne and Sir Edward Grey through Sir John Simon to Mr. Eden and Lord Halifax, would — whether with gratification or with irritation — have had to admit. On the other hand, at the end of his long period in office, Grey had come to realise that these humanitarian quests were a chief source of the mistrust of British policy on the Continent. When British Governments took steps to protect secular British interests, foreign Powers might be inconvenienced, but they were neither incensed nor puzzled. In such cases, Britain was, in their view, simply playing a known game according to known rules. But when British Governments took up the cause of the Macedonians or the Armenians or the Abyssinians, in circumstances in which no perceptible British interest was at stake, foreign critics were invariably stimulated, as Grey put it, "to search deeply for some concealed motive, though the true one lay on the surface before their eyes."[4]

In the case which forms the subject of this paper, one older humanitarian effort was cut across, not by secular interests, but by a more recent impulse to high-mindedness. The efforts of the Anti-Slavery Society to mitigate the evils, and, if possible, to secure the abolition of, slavery in Ethiopia were pushed aside by the wish to support Ethiopia against Italian aggression. The Italian attack was so wanton[5] that British (and, with it, Canadian) public opinion mistakenly, if naturally, proceeded to idealise the Ethiopian victim as a sort of immaculate and Christian African Belgium, being savaged as Belgium was savaged in 1914.

In fact, had the British and Canadian electorates known it, Ethiopia in 1935 was far from being, by their standards, immaculate. Its whole economy rested upon a system of slavery and represented the dominance of the (originally, Semitic) Amhara over a whole congeries of subject peoples, most of whom had only been forcibly incorporated in the Amharic Empire[6] in the second part of the nineteenth century. Therefore, when Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, those who, like Buxton, knew something of that country, might deplore the Italian aggression: they could hardly accept the *simpliste* view of the victim as being immaculate. Ethiopia might be *sans peur* (on the eve of war, a qualified British observer wrote that the Abyssinians' ignorance of what they were up against was "pathetic"[7]). It could not be *sans reproche.*

As a great-grandson of the Liberator, Noel Buxton had, as Viscount Cecil of Chelwood once remarked,[8] an almost hereditary preoccupation with the question of slavery, a preoccupation reflected in his presidency of

the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, and in his close working alliance with the Society's tireless Secretary, Sir John Harris.[9] The Society was concerned with slavery wherever it existed, or was alleged to exist, and if there was, sometimes, a particular edge in its complaints about the situation in Ethiopia, it was because that country was ostensibly, not to say ostentatiously, Christian.[10] Thus Buxton wrote of his visit to Ethiopia, in 1932: "It was surprising to find ourselves in a country the uniqueness of which lies in the fact that, though it is Christian, its social life reposes on the institution of slavery";[11] and, by 1942, after a decade of unremitting effort, he was driven to confess that: "The world has really been lenient to Abyssinia on account of slavery, and I have no doubt that if the country had been a Mahomedan country a great deal more would have been heard of it."[12]

If the Anti-Slavery's efforts to see that "more was heard of it" are to be understood, something must be said, briefly, of the character of slavery in Ethiopia. It is true that it was mainly domestic — as opposed to industrial or plantation — slavery, and that the fact that owner and slave, alike, shared the primitive simplicity of Ethiopian life did something to mitigate the harshness of slave-status.[13] However, it is equally true that, under a system in which (in the formula adopted by the Slavery Convention) one person exercised over another the power attaching to the rights of ownership, the door was open, in the case of a brutal or callous owner, to abominable cruelties.

Further, the widespread character of slavery implied a continuing demand for, and a supply of, slaves. This, in turn, implied the slave-trade, with all its concomitant horrors. The Amharic governors and other officials, and their soldiery, were seldom paid. It was their practise, when being moved to another province, to recoup themselves by seizing and carrying off numbers of native tribesmen for sale as slaves. In the two 'black-spots' of the south-western province of Kaffa and Maji, British Consuls were reporting, by 1933, that slave-raiding in these areas had virtually come to an end, for the good reason that their populations had been decimated, and villages and cultivation abandoned. According to these reports, the population of Maji had been reduced by the Amharic soldiery from 40,000 to 3,000.[14]

We have said that the Amharic officials and soldiery quartered on the subject peoples were not paid but were left to live off the country, with every opportunity for, and inducement to, rapacity. The opportunity was provided by the *gabar* system. In theory, the *gabar* was a free man and an owner of land. In fact, in the subject provinces, he was a serf who was compelled to provide for, and to do forced labour for, the members of the Amharic garrison. A common soldier might have two to five *gabars*

allotted to him, and a Governor, as many as three hundred. The distinguished Africanist, Margery Perham (now Dame Margery Perham), wrote to Buxton (22 April 1941) that "the *Gabar* system seems to me an even wider evil than slavery"; in the same month, Mr. de Halpert reported that the *gabars* "were slaves in all but name, and it was a common saying in Abyssinia that a slave was happier than a *Gabar* of the subject races."[15]

When, in September 1923, Ethiopia was admitted to the League of Nations, she undertook — following the example of other sovereign States which had given special undertakings on the occasion of their admission — to adhere to the Convention of St. Germain-en-Laye of 1919, which had provided, *inter alia*, that the signatories would "endeavour to secure the complete suppression of slavery in all its forms and of the slave trade by land and sea."[16] She was, further, a signatory of the international Slavery Convention (1926), which had stipulated that signatories should "communicate to each other and to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations any laws and regulations which they may enact with a view to the application of the provisions of the Convention." So far as the assurances given to the League were concerned, the Anti-Slavery Committee's mission of 1932 (i.e. nine years after Ethiopia had joined the League) had to report that "slavery is fundamental to the whole economic system." So far as the Convention was concerned, Sir George Maxwell, the British Member of the League's Advisory Committee of Experts on slavery, reported in mid-1934 that Ethiopia had still to ratify her adhesion to it and, in the intervening decade, had supplied the League with none of the stipulated information.[17]

On the other hand, in March 1924, the Regent Ras Tafari had promulgated a 'Reglement' which, by providing for the liberation of slaves born after the date of this edict, would — if really carried out — have meant the eventual, if slow, disappearance of slavery. There were, however, grave doubts as to whether the edict was, in fact, being enforced and, indeed, doubts as to whether its terms were even known outside the capital.[18] The attemps of the League's Temporary Slavery Committee, in the 1920's, to suggest improvements on them were either rejected or ignored.

This, then, was the background of the Anti-Slavery Committee's Mission of 1932. It was very much a family mission, since its members, Noel-Buxton and Lord Polwarth, were brothers-in-law and were accompanied by Lord Polwarth's daughter, the Honourable Grizel Hepburne-Scott, whom Buxton described as "good at amateur shorthand." They reached Addis Ababa on 12 February and remained in Ethiopia — chiefly in the capital — for five weeks.

The Society had announced their coming in a letter to the Emperor (27 January) conveying "the warm appreciation of large sections of the British

public for your decision to bring about reforms which you hope will lead ultimately to the total abolition of slavery," and it had entrusted its Mission with a tactful Memorandum in which it confined itself to bringing to the Emperor's attention a number of administrative devices which, in its experience, had been found to be either necessary or helpful in the not dissimilar cases of Nepal, Sierra Leone, Burma, and Hong-Kong.[19] It concluded with the — in the light of what was to follow, ironical — assurance that "Your Majesty will doubtless realise the value of a sympathetic public opinion in Europe and America. . . . The League of Nations and the public generally is becoming profoundly interested in the development of Ethiopia. . . ." With the greater candour possible in a private letter, Buxton struck the two notes from which the Society was never to diverge when he wrote from the ship which was carrying the Mission from Marseilles to Djibuti: "Yesterday I dictated a long screed to Tafari in the form of a memo, sympathising with his difficulties, but really designed to show that we know the scandalous disorder and failure of his Government."[20]

The work moved slowy. The Emperor was away from his capital when the Mission arrived and it was ten days later that he received it for the first time. In the meantime, Buxton had handed the Anti-Slavery Society's documents to the British Minister, Sir William Barton, and had urged him to work for a written reply.[21] Before the interview, he had also confided them to the Ethiopian Minister of Foreign Affairs.[22] The first interview was formal — the Emperor sitting enthroned in state and both sides speaking through an interpreter. However, Buxton ventured to say that "the Slavery Centenary was next year and we hoped to celebrate the abolition in *all* the world." The Emperor replied that "he had determined to abolish slavery because his was a Christian country, and slavery was not consistent with Christianity." "The slaves in Ethiopia," he said, "were well treated which showed that it was a Christian country." He had instructed two of his ministers to discuss the matter with the members of the Mission and he would, then, receive them again. Nearly a week elapsed before, on 26 February, the first of these conferences took place ("Such is the way in the East, always," wrote Buxton) but there were further meetings on 29 February and 2 March. It was not until 9 March that Buxton could report "the first chance of a *human* talk"[23] with the Emperor, with both men speaking French and so dispensing with an interpreter.

In the upshot, the Ethiopians accepted the Mission's recommendation that a Slavery Department be set up, though it was not to be an independent department but would be under the control of the Minister of the Interior. They agreed that registration of slaves should be enforced and claimed that manumission was already provided for. They said that it was

His Majesty's intention to decree that, when master and slave agreed to do so, they might move the Slave Court to register the liberation on the condition that a fixed sum — at an unspecified rate — was to be paid by the slave as his redemption price. On the other hand, they rejected the plea for the abolition of the status of slavery, alleging that "public opinion would not tolerate it" and "stressing the fear of revolution if anything too sudden were attempted." They rejected the suggestion that the League of Nations might name an adviser to the Slavery Department, since they already had, in the person of Mr. de Halpert, an English adviser to the Ministry of Home Affairs, who would act in this capacity. "They had had this in view when he was appointed though they had not thought it politic to name him as specially appointed for this purpose." Finally, "the proposal that His Majesty should invite the Society to send someone to investigate and report . . . was also repudiated with the remark that if this was the price for the support of public opinion in Europe it was too high a price to pay." They did, however, ask to be "furnished with our British Consular reports as these would be a help in detecting cases of slave-trading."

Buxton and Polwarth had left the second interview with the Emperor "with a feeling of great disappointment." "We felt," they had written to him, "that all we had really secured — with the exception of the possible scheme for redemption — amounted to no more than promises to ensure that the existing edicts would be more strictly carried out." They pointed out that "none of the proposals affected the general body of slaves born or acquired before 1924 and the total abolition of slavery must be a very slow process." It was in reply to this appeal that, on 10 March, the Emperor summoned them to the Palace and made his oft-quoted statement that he thought that twenty years would see slavery finished. "He added," they reported, "that he meant what he said in using the word translated in his letter 'suppress' — it meant 'destroy'."

The report which Buxton and Polwarth submitted to the Society, on their return, dealt both with the fundamental moral evil inherent in any system of slavery and with the tactics to be used to secure the abolition of the system in Ethiopia. In so doing, it defined the limits within which their agitation was to be continued, and the alternatives which they were to canvas, right down to the time of the Italian invasion of 1935. It also foreshadowed the divergent views which were to come to the front when Commonwealth forces had expelled the Italians in 1941. It is with this question of tactics that we are concerned.

The problem was one with which Buxton had been familiar through his experience of the relations of his Balkan Committee with the Young Turk régime of 1908-12. In a situation in which an unregenerate society, overwhelmingly illiterate and politically unsophisticated, is ruled by a

progressive and would-be reforming ruler, how does one hit upon the precise degree of pressure which will help and not hinder, fortify and not endanger, stimulate and not irritate, the régime which one wants to guide and influence? Fail to apply pressure, and the régime may be content to plead its impotence in the face of the obscurantism of its own people and relapse into passivity. Apply too much pressure, and one may expose the well-meaning ruler (on whom one pins one's hopes of reform) to a revolt by the chauvinist elements in his own country, on the ground that he is a puppet of the foreigner, using his office to subvert the 'good old customs of the realm' and to introduce alien ideas. What is the exact — the judicious — amount of pressure which, without endangering the régime, will enable the ruler to convince his domestic opponents that a modicum of reform is necessary in the light of the international interest being focussed on their country?

In the case of Ethiopia, the problem was posed in an acute form. The Buxton-Polwarth report repeatedly paid tribute to the Emperor's sincerity. "He appears to possess the mentality," they wrote, "which we associate with European political ethics, in a degree which is singular in an Eastern, and still more singular in the ruler of an Eastern state whose traditions are those of violence, disunity and incompetence." They were frank to confess that: "We consider the Emperor a godsend in relation to slavery."

On the other hand, they saw that "his power to reform is another matter." He was, they wrote, "surrounded by a world which may be compared with the Turkish Empire, or with Persia, as they were a generation ago . . . . His task is extremely difficult. If the country was a British Colony, the situation would tax even the resources of a policy such as Lord Lugard's in Nigeria . . . ." Balancing these two considerations, they concluded: "Haile Selassie is entitled to sympathy, but admiration for him must not distract us for a moment from the interests of the slaves. Pressure from abroad is probably the strongest lever towards progress, and even if personally unwelcome to the Emperor, may be the means of enabling him to advance reform."

The report recognised that "a very good case can be made for giving the Emperor time — for going slow in regard to external pressure." It could be said — and was said — that there was evidence that some progress was being made; that the economic value of slavery was diminishing; that the Emperor had had no real power, as Regent, but was now steadily consolidating his position; that the, still paramount, Ethiopian Church was hostile to the abolition of slavery; that "the idea of law as a rule which must be obeyed is, of course, unfamiliar to the Abyssinians." All these considerations lent support to the view that "excessive speed in reform would endanger the Emperor's position and the social order."

To these arguments — and in favour of exerting pressure and of action by the League — the report rejoined that "Ethiopian development is too backward to admit of public feeling against slavery, or even against the trading in slaves . . . ," so that "liberation cannot come from within." It pointed out that: "The proposals now made by the Emperor deal with the machinery for enforcing the laws of 1924, but not with any change in the status of slavery," and argued that, from the point of view of the world outside, "one must regard the evils as far too great for palliation, and the progress made as having been far too slow." To the fear that pressure might provoke a violent reaction, it opposed the view that "the Emperor is a man of great caution whose record proves that he would exercise the necessary deliberation and would not risk defeat."[24] They concluded by laying down what was to remain the official policy of the Society and its officers — though not, as we shall see, of all its allies. We conclude, they wrote:

> that, although the Emperor has not had time to make good his reforms since his latest utterance, it would be a mistake to withhold criticism in our propaganda or remove the influence of publicity to which Ethiopians are very sensitive. Especially does the fear of losing position in the League weigh with them, and we suggest that the Society should use its influence towards an utterance by the League expressing not only encouragement to the Emperor, but a warning that within a year very definite progress will be expected, and a hint that the proposal of a Commissioner of the League, made in Gt. Britain in the past, might be adopted. We deprecate silence, because though criticism may seem premature, the League Committee may be of short duration.
>
> We have come to this conclusion in spite of the fact that the Emperor is doing his best and should be given any possible encouragement. We think that encouragement would not be undermined, but assisted, by a criticism which both expresses sympathy with him in his work against opposing forces, and lays the blame on factors which have been till now beyond his control. We think the Emperor himself would regret a cessation of reasoned criticism. When he is charged with being too favourable to foreigners he needs to be able to point to the necessity of meeting world opinion. He is inventing means of teaching his people for example, his new Parliament and his newspapers.
>
> There is a special reason for losing no time in the fact that the Emperor himself constitutes an abnormal opportunity. If anything were to happen to him there would be little means of reform, and slavery might remain so long as Abyssinia was an independent state.
>
> The League offers an exceptional weapon because it is a fact that it was the reactionaries and the late Empress who advocated entering the League, so that the advocates of slavery are also the most anxious to retain the League's favour. Another argument for inducing the maximum speed is that the Arabian slave market, now depressed by world conditions and the impoverishment of Arabian buyers, may recover so as to increase the export of slaves from Abyssinia.
>
> When we are told that no great suffering is represented by Abyssinian Slavery we must remember the degradation which slavery produces. The slaves, even if not miserable, are reduced to a low irresponsible type which educators and missionaries find deplorably lacking in self control. Yet they are of a type

> which in Africa generally has shown its essential capacity, and while sympathising with the Abyssinian we may well ask what these particular black tribes have done that they alone should be left outside the opportunity for a better life which has in our day been conferred on the African in general. Essentially the difficulties are no greater than those with which Lord Lugard had to contend in West Africa.

It was, as they wrote, after all, "fifty years since General Gordon declared that the end of African slavery was at hand."

The Buxton-Polwarth report was a confidential paper for the use of the Society but Buxton summarised its arguments and recommendations in an article for *The Times* (7 April), in an address at Chatham House (23 May), and in *The Contemporary Review* (July 1932). In all of these, he reiterated his two-sided theme: sympathy with, and appreciation, of the efforts of the Emperor; the imperative need to get more done — and done quickly. The issue of tactics was quickly joined.

In *The Times*, having revealed that the Abyssinian Finance Minister had said to him, "Europe should give us time,"[25] Buxton had asked, "Will the world give Ethiopia the time that she asks?" and had gone on to give an ominous hint by referring to the alarm of the Ethiopians lest they might be subjected to an Italian mandate. *The Times* (12 August) promptly said everything that could be said in the Emperor's favour and concluded that "he must be given both credit for good intentions and time to fulfil them. Above all, there should be no talk of a Mandate for Abyssinia. The Abyssinians would not tolerate it; no Power would care to undertake their conquest."

On 18 August, the paper returned to the subject and, while admitting that Buxton's visit to Addis Ababa "may well become a landmark in the history of the abolition of slavery" in that it had "caused the Ethiopian Government to study seriously the complicated problems involved," went on to say: "Having got the Ethiopian Government at last on the move, Lord Noel-Buxton seems to want to keep it moving, and, if possible, to increase the pace. The bogy of a mandate is to scare it along the road of reform." The *Manchester Guardian* (22 April) thought that the reforms being adumbrated in Addis Ababa were a "personal triumph for Lord Noel-Buxton and his companions on his recent mission"; agreed that "It [slavery] must go if Abyssinia is to remain"; and depicted Haile Selassié as an "Ethiopian Henry II, carrying much of the work of the government on his own shoulders." In *The Times*, Buxton had said that "the problem is to bring modern efficiency to the Emperor's aid," and that "the League . . . may well consider that pressure from world opinion would be the best support for Haile Selassié . . . by enabling him to point to *force majeure.*" Of the two elements — pressure and help — the *Guardian* avoided mention

of the first and laid stress on the second: "If slavery in Abyssinia is to be quickly and smoothly brought to an end, the active support and encouragement of the West and of the League will be especially essential."

If the actual situation in Ethiopia with respect to slavery had improved in the three years which elapsed between the Buxton-Polwarth mission and the Italian invasion, the debate on tactics would have resolved itself. Unfortunately, all the evidence suggested that the situation had become worse. In August 1932, the Government had fulfilled its undertaking to set up a special Slavery Department and had appointed Mr. Frank de Halpert to be its Adviser. By May 1933, however, nothing had been done, the Department being stultified by a feud between its Director and its Secretary. In June, the latter was placed under arrest by his superior "on what were obviously trumped up charges," the real cause of his undoing being his zeal in the discharge of his duties. Another five months elapsed before another Secretary was appointed and he — under an absentee Director — proved unable to cope with the confusion which had followed his predecessor's imprisonment. Such was the part-apathy, part-paralysis of the Department that at the end of the year, after a personal appeal, earlier, to the Emperor, Mr. de Halpert felt himself compelled to resign. As Sir William Barton reported: "It is difficult to resist the impression that the reforming activities of the Slavery Department in the first flush of its enthusiasm were too unpopular to last. The number of highly placed officials in sympathy with the anti-slavery ideals of the Emperor remains extremely small, and the activities of the Department brought it into conflict with the conservative majority who lack this sympathy."[26]

If these manoeuvres at the level of the ruling Amhara partook of *opera bouffe*,[27] the results were not comic for their subject-peoples. Captain R.C. Whalley, His Majesty's Consul in Maji, was moved to depart from the studied language of consular reports and to write, at the end of 1932: "The present régime has been in office in this area just over a year. In the interests of humanity and in the hope of assisting the unfortunate and ill-treated negro tribes of the district, I venture to place the following information before you . . . . I have served," he concluded, "in Africa and Asia in various parts for twenty years, but never have I seen or experienced conditions of such dreadful nature as obtain in this province."[28]

With the situation apparently deteriorating, there was a noticeable sharpening of tone and temper in the debate as to tactics in 1933-34. Even in 1932, on the morrow of Buxton's return from Addis Ababa, Julian Humphreys[29] had written to express complete scepticism as to the value of Ethiopian promises and had gone on to say that "there was one thing in my time that put the fear of God in most of the chiefs . . . and that is the idea of

an Italian Mandate." He realised that the granting of such a mandate was not practical politics but thought that if the interested Powers would give their support, *sub-rosa*, to the Society in waging a campaign with the League for placing Abyssinia under mandate, "that would create such a scare in Abyssinia, that the Abyssinian Government, in order to stop the campaign, would arrive at a settlement . . . of all the questions outstanding, including that of slave raids, slave trade and slavery itself." On the other hand, Colonel (later, Brigadier) D.A. Sandford[30] had written (21 July): "Perhaps we differ fundamentally on the question of who is going to abolish slavery in Abyssinia. I think the Emperor is, and I cannot see what is to be gained by discouraging him and antagonising him."[31] Like *The Times*, he deprecated Buxton's hint that the world might not give Ethiopia time, and asked, "need your Society incur the risk of being suspected of being used by a certain Power to further its political schemes?" He had felt constrained to admit, however: "You ask whether the Emperor's authority has been increased by recent events. The answer is that it has. But I do not expect to see him increase the pace of reform very noticeably for a year or two."

Now, in 1933-34, Buxton's appeals to public opinion found less room for the — by now almost conventional — tributes to the Emperor's sincerity and more for pointing out how little had been done and how much remained to be done. One example will suffice, an example which also serves to illustrate his relations with Government. He always enjoyed a remarkable freedom of access to Government papers and Departments[32] and was now being allowed to see, and make confidential use of, Foreign Office papers on slavery.[33] In July 1933, he prepared an article of which Harris wrote: "if you could only get it into *The Times* — but can you?"[34] Buxton took the precaution of submitting the draft to the Foreign Office, which suggested some half-dozen modifications, some dealing with questions of fact, others on the ground that it would be "preferable to commend his (i.e. the Emperor's) efforts to establish his authority rather than to emphasise his weakness in certain respects."[35] In particular, because "publicity is the greatest weapon on the side of reform," Buxton's draft had suggested that both the League's Permanent Slavery Commission and the Foreign Office should make the reports which they received from consular and other sources available to the public. When the Foreign Office demurred Buxton made the marginal comment: "Agree in return for advice but say not convinced." When his article appeared in *The Times*, (24 November), it reiterated the appeal for continuing pressure by responsible opinion but asked of the Permanent Commission and the Foreign Office only that "they will increasingly bring the force of publicity to bear."

This access to confidential material had its own delicacies. One innocent use of it, by the Society, caused passing friction with the Minister

at Addis Ababa, Sir William Barton.[36] Sir William also objected to the Society's repeated assertion that there were two million slaves in Ethiopia, "figures", he wrote, "to which the Emperor has always taken objection, considering them far too high." Colonel Sandford also took objection to these figures and, in declining an invitation from Buxton to become a corresponding-member of the Society, wrote: "I think that the Society's policy of hostile criticism is a mistaken one, as it makes the Abyssinians suspicious of the Society's motives and definitely discourages them from seeking assistance again from outside. Moreover I dislike very much the Society's methods of propaganda, i.e. the making and repeating of reckless statements that have not been substantiated in order to whip up recruits for the Society's campaign."[37]

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia was fatal to the Anti-Slavery Society's policy of continuing to put pressure on Ethiopia in the matter of slavery. Even before the invasion, but when it was clearly pending,[38] *The Times* had rejected a letter from Buxton on the ground that it might "be used by interested persons as evidence that Great Britain is hostile to Abyssinia", and Buxton had made the minute: "real reason is Walwal (kick Abyssinia when down)." It was not merely that Haile Selassié now had more pressing things to attend to.[39] It was not merely that the Italians were making play with the pre-war criticism of Ethiopian conditions made by such unimpeachable friends of the African as Buxton and Lord Lugard.[40] The great difficulty was that the question of slavery was now unavoidably entangled with that of the maintenance of the principle of collective security. The humanitarian might feel that the public should not be left in ignorance of the internal condition of Ethiopia, but the supporter of collective security would feel that to criticise Ethiopia, in the current circumstances, was to give aid and comfort to the Italian aggressor. Sir William Barton put the point in three sentences. Having said that "the Italian menace has of necessity side-tracked reforms for the time being," he wrote: "Here is a problem for the moralists. Does the existence of evil in A justify his 'absorption' by B when both are members of a society guaranteeing the independence of the individual? I wish I knew what answer would be given by the legal and spiritual advisers of the society."[41]

A single-minded enthusiast such as Buxton's brother, Leland, with his preoccupation with missionary work in Ethiopia, might welcome the Italian invasion,[42] but no such single-mindedness was possible for Buxton himself. He saw, as did many others, that "the mistake was made when Abyssinia was admitted as a full member of the League," and he thought that "the position in Abyssinia cannot be compared to the maintenance of Austrian integrity,"[43] but he was adamant in insisting that, "though Italy may have excuses for her action, the means she has adopted cannot be admitted."[44] He set himself, therefore, to keep the

two issues — reform in Ethiopia and collective security — distinct, and to try to show that the two principles — the humanitarian and the internationalist — might still be pursued together.

On 17 July, in rising to call attention to the Report of the Slavery Committee of the League, and to move for papers, he told the Lords: "There is a special reason . . . in these days for condensing what one says about Abyssinia. We shall all agree . . . that this is a question which must be kept perfectly distinct from that of the present international crisis in which the country is involved. While it is not possible in such a debate as this to omit all discussion of conditions in one of the main centres of slavery in the world, what has to be said on that subject must not be taken as an apology for aggression."[45] Four months later, he developed his argument further. Having said that "one hesitates, naturally, to utter any criticisms of a State which is the victim of aggression," he went on to agree with Lord Mottistone that "those concerned with slavery had been very gravely concerned about what was passing in Abyssinia," and to add that "Italy would have had an overwhelming case if she had brought it before the League in an orderly way." However, he sharply repudiated the conclusion which his fellow-peer had drawn from the sorry tale of Ethiopia's pre-war condition. "Because he has learned scandalous facts in regard to disorder in Abyssinia, he would justify Italy in her policy." "But is Italy," Buxton asked, "invading Abyssinia in order to free slaves?" Italy must be checked but, if they were to avoid Italian annexation, "it may be necessary to provide some other means of administration, and I think we have got to face the possible necessity of a League administration." For, "granting that the chief aim we must have in view is collective security . . . there are other aims that we must bear in mind when we think about the moment of mediation." What he had in mind, of course, was "the future of those non-Abyssinian tribes, perhaps two-thirds or more of the population of Abyssinia, whose welfare has suffered in the past and for whom better conditions have long been over-due." He foreshadowed the disputes of 1941 when he said that "a complete re-establishment of Abyssinian sovereignty without any League control would inevitably sow the seeds of renewed trouble in the future."[46]

Committed equally, then, to the maintenance of the League system of collective security and to the abolition of slavery in Ethiopia, Buxton came more and more to invoke the League's intervention in the second matter as a corollary and, indeed, a condition of its success in the first. He had begun with a letter to *The Times* (24 July 1935) in which, while agreeing that "the breakdown of reform has been largely due to the action of Italy," he had suggested that, "if Ethiopia would demonstrate her determination to advance as fast as is practicable in the reform of abuses, by the appointment of League advisers with powers to act under the Emperor, she would powerfully reinforce that public opinion which

refused to condone aggression." In November, in a joint letter with Harris,[47] he placed first among the *desiderata*, if they were "to promote both the maintenance of peace and the progress of Abyssinia and the Abyssinians," the appointment by the League, in conjunction with the Emperor and the American Government, "of a highly competent official, who should be in the service of the League, to advise the Abyssinian Government in regard to administration and reform." At the end of the year, he wrote again to *The Times* and for the first time invoked the possibility of revision of the Ethiopian frontiers. *The Times* had said that no settlement of the Italo-Ethiopian dispute must give Italy more than she could have got by peaceful negotiation, and Buxton agreed that "an object lesson must be furnished to would-be aggressors." But *The Times* had also said, and Buxton agreed, that other aims beside collective peace must be kept in view, including "guarantees for much-needed reforms." He now pointed out that "these two aims are liable to conflict" and that "a narrow path has to be pursued if we are to avoid injury on the one hand to international law and order, and on the other to the welfare of the inhabitants of Abyssinia."

The "narrow path" led to revision. Buxton reminded his readers that "the Covenant provided not only for territorial integrity but for revision, and in particular for the welfare of weak native populations — aims which are not easy to harmonise in this very peculiar case." As for the terms of revision, on the one hand "the interests of the natives certainly require that a distinction should be drawn between the regions peopled by Abyssinians and the provinces which are subjugated and in some areas raided for the slave-market." On the other hand, "if areas larger than those foreshadowed by the Committee of Five were to go to Italy, the cause of League order would suffer." His solution was that "the semblance of gain to Italy can only be avoided if the League itself is prepared to administer the areas concerned. The alternative of a mandate to Italy," he wrote, "or to any other power is excluded. The difficulties of collective rule are obvious, but the experience gained in Tangier, in Shanghai, in Dantzig and in the Saar, shows that they are not insuperable."

This proposal had been strongly reinforced by the report of the Committee of Five which had been appointed by the League "to make a general examination of Italo-Ethiopian relations." The report (23 September) had proposed that the League should offer collaboration and help to the Ethiopian Government "to enable it resolutely to undertake wide measures of constructive action." The help would be given under a Charter of Assistance which would take the "form of a protocol recording the acceptance by the Ethiopian Government of a plan of reforms drawn up by the Council of the League." In view of the obligation of members of the

League to respect the independence of others, any plan of assistance should receive the previous consent of the Ethiopian Government.

The recommendations of the Committee were, obviously, very close to Buxton's position. In the Lords (11 March, 1936), he strongly opposed any suggestion, whether from isolationists or from pacificists, for the watering down of the obligations of the members of the League. However, earlier (18 February) he had told the House: "I desire to urge that we should aim at a settlement which not only vindicates collective peace . . . but which also meets the need of a stable system in Abyssinia after the war." A complete Italian victory — representing an appalling failure from the League point of view — would defeat the first of these aims; but a complete Abyssinian victory would defeat the second. "Just consider," he invited their Lordships, "the difficulty that would then arise in bringing about any sort of League guidance for Abyssinia, such as was envisaged by the terms of the Committee of Five last autumn." Re-affirming his unchanging position, he avowed his adhesion to the cause of collective peace. "That interest," he said, "is paramount." "But must the cause of collective peace," he asked, "conflict with the cause of reform?"

The Italian victory in 1936 put paid to all such plans to combine the defeat of Italian aggression with the promotion of reform in Ethiopia. During the occupation the Anti-Slavery Society could do little save to press the Government to get Italy to define its attitude to the Slavery Convention of 1926, of which it was a signatory, and to accept its responsibility for reporting to the League's Committee of Experts on Slavery.

It is noticeable that at this time the Society and its allies were much more candid about the state of affairs in pre-war Ethiopia than they had felt it politic to be when there had still been hope of getting reform through the now, exiled Emperor. Thus, on 5 November 1936 Sir John Harris sent Buxton the latest reports from the Legation at Addis Ababa and added his comment:

> I suppose that what it amounted to was that for the two or three years before the invasion of Abyssinia, the Emperor had been so absorbed in the growing menace of Italy, that the situation went all to pieces, for it is a dreadful story. You will see that at some date prior to the war, slaves were sold in the markets, probably up to one thousand slaves. You will also note that one of the Consuls watched a slave raid of quite the old-time barbarity. Then there is the complicity of the Emperor's relatives in slaving activities, and the corruption of the slavers' judges. It all makes dreadful reading, and if it could be published would undoubtedly cause a sensation.

In a letter to Buxton (3 December), in which he reflected on the wasted years, Mr. de Halpert wrote that "nothing or next to nothing was done . . . after the first year or two of the Emperor's reign because the administration became more and more confused as time went on." This confusion, he

thought, was due to the Emperor's insisting "on retaining personal control of every branch and activity of the Government."[48] "He gave multitudinous orders but . . . he could not see if they were carried out. His officials were alive to this and took full advantage of it. They had always been idle and indifferent and they became more so as the confusion increased." "In the last year before the war," de Halpert concluded, "the Emperor was completely bewildered by the chaos and corruption and theft which surrounded him . . . . To what extent the Emperor was personally unpopular I could not tell, but the Shoan Government which he represented was execrated and vengeance was wreaked on it during the war . . . ." This made sorry reading but none was more qualified to judge than its author.

Another authority, Lord Lugard, told Buxton that in the areas not effectively controlled by the Italians, local custom and law and administration by headmen had continued, with the result that "the Emperor's anti-slavery efforts have been stopped. Therefore slavery just as 15 years ago."[49] Captain Whalley, by now in the Sudan just across the Ethiopian border, kept open one door to the future: "It is quite useless... for Haile Selassié to go back *unless sponsored by us in case of war with Italy*"[50] For the present, Eritrians had told him that, should the Emperor return, they would desert the Italians and join him, but he added: "I am afraid I have always looked sideways at anything that any Amhara told me and there is, I assure you, no reason to do otherwise now."[51]

The door to the Emperor's return which Whalley had left narrowly open was forced when, Italy having declared war on the United Kingdom, Commonwealth forces proceeded, in the course of 1940-41, to roll up the entire Italian position in East Africa. The success of this operation at once re-opened the questions on which, as we have seen, the Anti-Slavery Society and its friends had been divided before 1935.

To the Emperor (he had re-entered his capital in May 1941), the issue was simple. He had never renounced his sovereignty and, now that the fortunes of war had brought about his return as they had brought about his exile, that sovereignty should be restored — in full. For the British Government, the question could not be so simple. There was the immediate problem of securing elementary order in a country in which the pre-war confusion of the Emperor's régime had been compounded by the Italian occupation and by guerilla and bandit resistance to it, and then re-compounded by the Italian debacle.[52] Beyond that was the fact that, for the British, the clearing of the Italians out of East Africa could only be one step in a general war in which the supreme pull was yet to come.[53]

Those who, being outside the Government, were free from responsibility for these two great preoccupations, but who were concerned

with the future of Ethiopia for its own sake, fell into two schools, the attitudes of both of which might have been predicted from what we have seen of their earlier history. One school may be said to have elevated the principle of national independence above all considerations of humanitarian reform. As Lord Hailey described them,[54] they formed "a section of opinion which, deeply impressed with the strong nationalist spirit of Abyssinia . . . and also . . . feeling strong sympathy with the present Emperor, could think of no solution whatever but the restoration of the fullest, the amplest independence to the Emperor." If this condition were fulfilled, then, in the view of this section of opinion, "all these difficult questions of slavery and all the difficult problems of slave raiding that we have had in the Sudan, in Kenya and elsewhere would speedily find their settlements."[55]

The second school, of which Noel-Buxton was the obvious examplar, recognised, in Hailey's words, that "the outlying provinces had been held. . . in a form of degradation and serfdom certainly far greater than that which you could find anywhere in other parts of Africa." It had hoped that "an opportunity might be taken of relieving those people from the serfdom from which they have sufferred . . . and that something might now be done to introduce civilisation in that one remaining part of Africa where civilisation is practically unknown except in name." It is with the inter-action of these two schools of thought with the Government's necessary preoccupation with the security of the British forces in Ethiopia and with the further prosecution of the war, that we are concerned.

In February 1941, Mr. Eden had laid down the Government's policy in terms which, so far as they went, were unexceptionable. Reaffirming that they had no territorial ambitions in Abyssinia, the Government welcomed the reappearance of an independent Ethiopian State and recognised Haile Selassie's claim to the throne. The Emperor having intimated that he would need outside help and guidance, the Government considered that such help in economic and political matters should be by international arrangement at the conclusion of peace. The temporary measures of military guidance and control made necessary by the continuing military operations would be carried out in consultation with the Emperor and be brought to an end as soon as the situation permitted.[56]

On Buxton's initiative, the Anti-Slavery Society set itself to press its views on the Government.[57] In a memorandum prepared for Mr. Eden (21 July), it argued that the "British support of the re-establishment of Ethiopia as an independent state will place upon the British Government the obligation to ensure that there shall be no return to the abuses which undoubtedly existed in Ethiopia in 1935-36," and that "the people of Ethiopia should be told in unequivocal terms that British support of an

independent Ethiopia at the Peace Conference will be conditional on acceptance by them of the abandonment of slavery and forced labour and on their cooperating during the British military occupation towards that end." It proposed a number of specific measures to be taken during that occupation,[58] all of them, if they were to be effective, requiring the vesting of real authority in outside advisers. The memorandum concluded: "It must be admitted that these measures would detract largely from the real sovereignty of the Emperor, but we are compelled to state that complete sovereignty would perpetuate the deplorable conditions of the past, and though the Emperor would naturally hold out for complete independence and sovereignty, the keen interest which we must believe him to take in progress would lead him to welcome, at the same time, what he knows to be the only means to secure it."

Guileless as this last hope may seem, the Society did not underestimate the difficulty of reconciling the two aims of restoring an independent Ethiopia and securing the abolition of Ethiopian slavery. In some rough notes for a speech in the Lords, Buxton wrote: "Faced with dilemna. On gen'l principle we sh'd wish to withdraw from administr'n. Particular duties compel us to stay." The duties, he told the Lords,[59] were to the Emperor who had shown his zeal for reform; to the Abyssinian population; to the immense number . . . of slaves who belong to them; and to the subject tribes of the Empire conquered by Menelik.

However, even among those who, like Buxton, supported the restoration of the Emperor but were also bent on securing reform, there were apparent the old differences as to the tactics of pressure. The Society had the authority of Mr. de Halpert for its view that it was useless to appoint foreign advisers unless they were given authority,[60] but Margery Perham wrote that she did not believe "that the method he [Buxton] suggests could be used without (a) bringing upon ourselves among white and coloured peoples the charge of bad faith (b) causing the Emperor's authority to be weakened and alienating the Amhara still further from foreign assistance." She went on to suggest that the desired results might be obtained "by making the supply of loans and of arms dependent upon the reports of the Advisers to the new League of Nations." When the Society's Secretary pointed out that this plan would require a considerable number of observers to watch the performance of the promises of reform (observers whose presence might be resented as much as that of officials under a mandate) and that the need to collect and report the information to the Finance Control Authority would spell delay and friction over the payments of instalments, she struck the more general note on the subject of "pressure", which had come before the war from Colonel Sandford.

> What a little disturbs me [she wrote] is the note of high moral disapprobation and coercion running through the draft . . . . We shall never make a success of

> our task in Ethiopia, I believe, unless we can gain the active support and the understanding of at least a minority of enlightened Amhara. . . . Personally, I have not the slightest doubt that without too much talk about control and sovereignty the realities of the situation give us so much authority in Ethiopia that we can relay the economic foundations in such a way that slavery and forced labour will become superfluous and uneconomic.[61]

The Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement and Military Convention of 31 January 1942[62] may be fairly described as having met the immediate needs of the British Government and its Armed Forces in Ethiopia and as having satisfied all but the most extravagant champions of untrammeled Ethiopian independence, at the cost of almost completely disappointing the hopes of the Buxtonians. In a submission to Mr. Eden the Committee of the Anti-Slavery Society said that it "views with disquiet the absence of any reference to slavery in the Agreement and interprets its exclusion as disinclination on the part of the Government of Ethiopia to bind itself to suppress slavery actively." The Committee knew that the negotiations leading to the Agreement had been long and difficult and recognised that assurance might have been given which were not expressed in the Agreement. If such assurances had been given, the Committee would welcome the information that this was so. If, however, such assurances had not been given, they trusted that "the matter may be made the subject of a separate Agreement, providing for a Slavery Suppression Service under European guidance, with adequate powers and an efficient staff. . . ." They pointed out that Ethiopia was believed to be going to advance claims to territory taken from her by Italy before 1936, and to an outlet to the sea, and rejoined that "British people would not wish to see British influence used to extend Ethiopian rule to these territories unless such rule is purged of the oppression which it has inflicted in the past on a large number of its subjects in the form of slavery and forced labour." Moreover, British money had been promised to help in regenerating Ethiopia and the Committee asserted that "the historic tradition of Britain is sensitive to slavery and British people will wish to know that part of their contribution towards the regeneration of Ethiopia is being applied to abolish the most serious abuse known to exist there — slavery."

The issue was thrashed out in the Lords when Buxton rose to ask whether the Government could make a statement on Ethiopia.[63] How, he asked, under the terms of the Agreement, could they be sure "that the termination of slavery is real?" There had been only two levers to ensure that it should be so. One was the presence of British advisers. But he asked, "are they advisers such as the adviser so-called in Egypt who, under Lord Cromer, could make sure of his advice being carried out, or are they to be no more than the advisers hitherto known in Abyssinia?" The other lever had been the chance to make financial aid "dependent on compliance with reasonable suggestions," but the undertaking in the Agreement to

make grants unconditional had struck this weapon from the reformers' hands. Above all, he kept returning to the issue of moral responsibility. "The Emperor," he said, "is helpless without our protection. We are responsible for his restoration and consequently for the welfare, up to a point, of the population . . . . Being responsible for the restoration of the Emperor, we surely must not be responsible in any way for the prolongation of this gigantic evil. We could not ignore the question of slavery without real dereliction."

Viscount Cecil of Chelwood met this argument head-on, denying that the United Kingdom had special responsibility for Ethiopia. "We have undertaken to make Abyssinia free and independent," he said. "If we are going to try and constrain the Government of Abyssinia, she will not be free and independent, and if we meant to do that we ought to have told the Emperor candidly that we could only engage in operations to restore him to the Throne if he were prepared to submit to guidance and direction by us." We had not, he pointed out, said anything of this kind. Even in the matter of slavery (which, he agreed, "is a great scandal, a great disgrace to Abyssinia"), he was "confidently of opinion that if we made it a condition of the restoration of the Emperor that he was to carry out our wishes with regard to slavery, it would be most improbable that we should succeed in doing anything to diminish slavery, and it is quite certain we should gravely interfere with the authority of the Emperor."

In a speech which is, perhaps, best described as jaunty, Lord Wedgwood criticised the Agreement for reasons precisely opposite to those which had moved Buxton. Ascribing those elements in it which he disliked to "a victory for the pro-Italian-Roman clique in Cairo, which has always been against Haile Selassié," he dismissed the matter of slavery very cavalierly,[64] and said flatly that his "comrade", Lord Noel-Buxton, "emphasises over much the slavery side of the question and has been unduly impressed by the slavery question in Abyssinia." Noting that Buxton had said that he wanted good government in Abyssinia, Wedgwood said, with a glance at their old political friendship: "It has always been an old Liberal maxim dear to him and to me, that self-government is better than good government. I think that if we had had in this White Paper a real establishment of self-government under the Emperor Haile Selassié, we should have produced a better document than this."

The Times must have felt that its Special Correspondent had been right when he had written, some three months earlier (30 October 1941): "By accepting the responsibility for establishing more or less civilised conditions of government in Ethiopia . . . without having direct control the British Government have set themselves a harder task than most people realise."[65] He might have added that the Government was not at all anxious

to accept that responsibility and that its critics were, as we have seen, flatly opposed to each other as to the degree in which, if at all, it should intervene.

Buxton and the Society did not abandon their efforts. They continued to press their views on the Foreign Office throughout the term of the first Agreement, during the uneasy interval between the Emperor's denunciation of that Agreement in August 1944 and the conclusion of the second Agreement in December, and on into 1945.[66] But the issue was really settled in 1942. It was in vain that the Society argued that in international law the United Kingdom, having once recognised Italian sovereignty in Ethiopia, could only be entitled by its own later military conquest to administer the country and provide for the security of its forces there during the war and was not entitled, pending the conclusion of a formal treaty of peace, either to annex the country or to divide it or to set it up as an independent entity.[67] The Government could not be expected to relish an argument which would have invalidated its own Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement and, in its pre-occupation with the war with the Axis Powers, it proposed to leave the question of slavery to be dealt with by the Emperor, "an ally," said Mr. Eden, "about whose good faith and intention to remove as speedily as possible the remaining traces of slavery there is no present reason to doubt."[68]

If the account which we have given is valid, then the conclusion, from the point of view of the Anti-Slavery Society and of humanitarians of Buxton's school, must be a melancholy one. They had pressed reform on the Emperor before the Italian attack and had achieved little. When that attack came, they had tried to keep the issues of slavery and collective security distinct and, again, they had failed. There can be no doubt that much of the uncritical admiration for Haile Selassié, expressed by such men as Lord Wedgwood, sprang from the sense of shame, felt by many in the United Kingdom, that they had not gone to his help in 1935-36.[69] In 1941 reformers had hoped to take the opportunity of the Emperor's restoration by British arms to place him in some kind of tutelage, but Government, in London, had never seriously thought of adopting this policy.[70] Even Miss Perham's more modest hope, that they might be given "five years or more" in which so to re-lay the economic foundations as to make slavery superfluous, had not been vouchsafed to them. In the immediate months of the British occupation, British officials (working under the, perhaps, not happily named Enemy Occupied Territories Administration) achieved miracles in restoring life and organisation to the country, but the British began to withdraw their troops and material as soon as the Agreement of 1942 had been concluded. With the second Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement of December 1944,[71] the last vestiges of any special British position of influence disappeared. Ironically, if the position of slaves in Ethiopia underwent any amelioration, it would seem to have

been due not to the efforts of the reformers but to a by-product of the large spending by the Italians on road-building and other construction which, substituting paid (if forced6) labour for slavery, did something to fulfil Miss Perham's hope of making the institution "superfluous."

Unless, therefore, we cling to *The Times*'s view of 1932 that the Buxton-Polwarth Mission might well "become a landmark in the history of the abolition of slavery" (in that it had caused the Ethiopian Government, at last, to take the matter seriously[72]) and regard the Anti-Slavery campaign as yeast slowing working in the Amhara dough, the story is one of failure. If so, it was an honourable failure. This paper has been concerned with tactics. However, we should not forget the moral imperative to which these men answered. Their purpose was unalloyedly humanitarian and they made Ethiopia their immediate concern because, as Buxton wrote, "here, almost alone, is the black race suffering from hardships which have in the rest of Africa been removed." They had faith, however, that the rewards of their success, if achieved, would reach beyond Ethiopia. "If we could succeed," Buxton wrote to Mr. Eden, "if Abyssinia could be guided towards civilization without paying away her independence as the price, we should have given to this world of greedy imperialisms and racial feuds something of incalculable value." Here, already, was the language of "the winds of change."

NOTES

[1] Save for those from Parliamentary Papers, from the Parliamentary Debates and from newspapers, all quotations in this paper are from the Buxton Papers in the McLennan Library of McGill University. All references to the Parliamentary Debates are from the Fifth Series.

[2] In Noel Buxton and A.J.P. Taylor's "The Trouble Makers" in *A Century of Conflict, 1850-1950.* (edit. M. Gilbert. London, 1966).

[3] Noel Edward Buxton (from 1930, Baron Noel-Buxton), great-grandson of The Liberator, was, perhaps, the best exemplar, in this century, of what A.J.P. Taylor has called 'high-mindedness' in public policy. He was always emphatic in insisting that Christiantiy was not merely a religion of personal salvation but must also be practised in public life.

[4] Viscount Grey of Falloden, *Twenty-Five Years* (Toronto, 1925), vol. 1, p. 189.

[5] The incident which the Italians blew up into a *casus belli* was no different in kind — with the usual elements of an ill-defined frontier and its violation by pastoral nomads in search of water-holes — from sources of such incidents with which the British had had to deal on their Sudan-Ethiopian and Somaliland-Ethiopian borders.

[6] I have used the term 'Empire', and Noel-Buxton, than whom the Ethiopians had no more single-minded friend, was frank to use it. "We ought never to forget", he told the Lords, "that the vast majority of the inhabitants are not Abyssinians but are subjects of an Imperial race, the Amhara, who rule tribes conquered not so long ago . . . After all, Abyssinia is an empire, and it is very doubtful whether its existence as an empire over vast subject tribes is really an advantage to the Abyssinians themselves". *Parliamentary Debates (Lords),* 18 February 1936. Cf. Dame Margery Perham: "It remains true that the conquest of the greater part of the vast area lying south of Addis Ababa was achieved only between fifty and sixty years ago by the Emperor Menelik, and that very large numbers of its peoples are still only

slightly assimilated by their conquerors." *The Government of Ethiopia* (2nd edition; London, 1959), pp. 293 et seq.

[7] F. de Halpert to Buxton, 6 June 1935.

[8] *Parliamentary Debates (Lords),* 17 July 1935.

[9] In the years with which we are concerned, he was Joint President with the Lords Lytton and Meston. His brother, Charles Roden Buxton, was Vice-Chairman.

[10] Official pronouncements of the rulers of Ethiopia, surrounded as it was, by Muslim states, almost invariably made high play with the Christian character of the Amharic culture.

[11] *The Contemporary Review,* June 1932.

[12] *Parliamentary Debates (Lords),* 4 February 1942. In an undated memorandum which is not signed but which Buxton attributed to his one-time secretary, T.O. Conwell-Evans, the author contrasted the failure of the League of Nations Slavery Commission to secure effective reform in Ethiopia with the case of Liberia, in which strong diplomatic pressure had been applied on the initiative of the American government.

[13] Cf. Buxton to Lady Buxton, 17 February 1932, from Addis Ababa: "We were shown slaves in the neighbouring huts living in the one-room dwelling with the employers all in the same very primitive and dirty conditions".

[14] Annual Reports on Slavery in Abyssinia for 1933 and 1934-5: being reports from the British Minister in Addis Ababa, including reports from His Majesty's Consuls in the various districts.

[15] "Notes on Abyssinia". Confidential report by Mr. F. de Halpert, April 1941.

[16] When the Sixth Committee of the League recommended Ethiopia's admission, its 'rapporteur' drew "particular attention, in the Assembly, to the assurance given by the Ethiopian Government on the subject of slavery".

[17] Memorandum for the Foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon. Sir George asked that the Council of the League should exercise its power to call an extraordinary meeting of the Slavery Committee to report and advise on the situation in Ethiopia.

[18] It must be remembered that, as his apologists often pointed out, Ras Tafari did not become Emperor (under the name of Haile Selassie) until 1930, though he had been recognised as heir to the throne since 1913 and had held the title of Negus since 1928; and that, in his years, as Regent, he was fully occupied in consolidating his, always imperfect, control of the country. Further provisions of the edict of 1924 were: that, in case of an owner's death, his slaves should be freed, but should continue to serve his family for a further period: that the buying and selling of slaves was forbidden: that a slave who could prove cruelty on the part of his owner should be set free; that runaway slaves should be entitled to freedom if not recaptured within a specified time: and that a system of 'slave courts' should be set up to oversee the application of these provisions.

[19] For example: the etting up of a special Slavery Department of Government; the preparation of a complete register of persons held as property; the provision of manumission certificates; a solution of the question of compensation to slave-holders; above all, the fixing of a definite dat e for the abolition of the status of slavery.

[20] To Lady Buxton, 8 February. His comments on his fellow-travellers make artless reading but, on 31 January, he had reported: "We had church in Walker's cabin and found that the best bits suited to liveration of slaves are Psalm 73 and Isaiah 61 and the hymns 'Hark the glad sound' and 'Hail to the Lord's anointed' ".

[21] To Lady Buxton, 17 February.

[22] To Lady Buxton, 22 February.

[23] To Lady Buxton, 9 March.

[24] The Report admitted that even Dr. Martin, probably of all Ethiopians closest to the

Emperor in his wish for reform and, later, Minister in London, had criticised the Emperor's promise to 'suppress' slavery as "being impossible of fulfilment and risky."

[25] "Our reforms are hampered by want of money, but that is due to the world depression. It would be wrong to destroy us for a failure which is temporary. We are doing our best with the little money which we have."

[26] Annual Report on Slavery in Ethiopia for 1933.

[27] Tracy Philips, an unorthodox Colonial servant, then stationed in Uganda, preferred another term. He had just completed a tour of the Italian colonies in North and East Africa and, in a letter in which the persiflage of his tone only thinly disguises his anger, wrote of Ethiopia as 'this human plague-spot.' Recording his own experience of the slave-trade, he wrote: "When one knows how every Consular area, in the immediate vicinity, is insulated by the Abyssinians, and how Addis Ababa is a Grand Guignol of bluff, one can only ask USQUE DUO, DOMINE?" (To Buxton, 1 July 1933.)

[28] Annual Report on Slavery in Ethiopia for 1933.

[29] To Sir John Harris, 3 May 1932. Humphreys had been a resident of Ethiopia for sixteen years before 1923 and had been head of the country's armament supplies.

[30] After service with the Sudan Government Administration and as a Consul in Addis Ababa, Colonel Sandford became a resident of Ethiopia. He led the invasion of Ethiopia, from the Sudan, by Military Mission 101, in 1940, and, after the Liberation, was appointed, successively, Principal Military and Political Adviser to the Emperor (1941); Principal Adviser to the Ministry of the Interior (1942); Personal Adviser to the Emperor and Director General of the Municipality of Addis Ababa (1945).

[31] At the time when he wrote this letter, Sandford had reason to believe that the Society had treated the Emperor with grave discourtesy in not supplying him with a copy of the Buxton-Polwarth Report. By the time that he sent the letter, he had learned that a copy had been received.

[32] In 1915, as President of the Balkan Committee, he had asked to be supplied with the Foreign Office telegrams on the Balkans. Lord Grewe refused this request but, at the time of the Czech crisis of 1938, Lord Halifax was to allow Buxton to see official papers and to encourage him to see the chief permanent officials.

[33] W. Roberts (F.O.) to Buxton, 14 June 1935.

[34] Sir J. Harris to Buxton, 25 July 1933.

[35] W. Mack (F.O.) to Buxton, 31 July 1933.

[36] Travers Buxton to Buxton, 21 September 1933 and Sir J. Harris to Buxton, n.d.

[37] To Buxton, 9 September 1933. Colonel Sandford had, earlier, expanded this view in two letters to Lord Lugard (18 May and 9 July 1932), letters whose substance Lord Lugard passed on to Buxton (11 August). In particular, Sandford cited the reforms which the Emperor had already accepted at the suggestion of Mr. de Halpert. Buxton showed some mild scepticism. Thus, when Sandford wrote that "as far as I know . . . there has not been a large caravan of slaves brought through this country for at least ten years", Buxton made the marginal minute: "What is 'large'?".

[38] 20 December 1934.

[39] It soon became a commonplace to say that the Emperor's relative failure to cope with the matter of slavery, after the time of the Buxton-Polwarth mission, was due to his preoccupation with the danger from Italy which had distracted both his attention and his resources, and which had roused anti-foreign feeling in opposition to reforms which were known to be urged on Abyssinia by foreign opinion. Cf. Buxton to the *Manchester Guardian*, 29 February 1935.

[40] See G.C. Baravelli. *The Last Stronghold of Slavery* (Rome, 1935) and the

Memorandum by the Italian Government on the Situation in Ethiopia. (League of Nations Official Publication. C.340.M.171. Geneva, 1935). Mr. de Halpert who, since his resignation from the Ethiopian Slavery Department, had been travelling, on his own account, in the south-western provinces, wrote to Buxton on 6 September: "I presume that, for the moment, the British Government is not saying much about slavery. The Italians would certainly give a good deal to know what I have found going on in the South West."

[41] To Buxton, 1 May 1935.

[42] To Buxton, 8 June 1935. "Cannot you do something to stop the folly of quarrelling with Italy on behalf of the Abyssinians?. . . Surely we have fought enough for the Serbs of Europe, without starting again on behalf of the Serbs of Africa." A slice of Ethiopia given to Italy would, Leland wrote, mean that "large numbers of Somalis and others will be saved from slave-raiding and annihilation."

[43] Notes for a letter to *The Times.*

[44] Notes for a speech on Abyssinia.

[45] Parliamentary Debates (Lords), 17 July 1935.

[46] Parliamentary Debates (Lords), 23 October 1935.

[47] On 27 August, in reporting to Buxton that it seemed probable that Italy would demand Abyssinia's expulsion from the League because of the failure of Abyssinia to abolish slavery and the slave trade, Harris had said: "Upon an issue of this kind, from the standpoint of our Society, I take it that we have only one view, namely, that what we want most is the abolition of slavery, whether by Abyssinia or by Italy."

[48] "It was the Emperor's besetting fault that he was jealous of the initiative of others. The Abyssinians are a treacherous race and it may be that the Emperor could trust no one. The fact remains that he was alone when he needed help most."

[49] Notes sent by Lord Lugard to Buxton, July 1938.

[50] Author's italics.

[51] Extracts from a letter from Whalley to de Halpert, 2 June 1938, supplied to Buxton.

[52] It is worth noting that, while the Emperor took a somewhat impatient and ungenerous view of the military requirements of the British forces, he was not above asking that these forces should be used to carry out the work of disarming dissident tribes — the Azebu Gallas and the Raia — in the disaffected province of Tigre. Cf. Sandford, C. *The Lion of Judah hath prevailed* (London, 1955), p. 108.

[53] When the fall of Gondar put an end to Italian resistance, in November 1941, the British capitulations at Tobruk and Singapore still lay in the future, and it was to be another year before, with the Allied landings in French North Africa, Churchill could say that "the gleam of victory has caught the helmets of our soldiers."

[54] Parliamentary Debates (Lords), 4 February 1942.

[55] This view had the strong, not to say truculent, support of the *Manchester Guardian* (e.g. 4 November 1941) and of such varied individuals as Professor Berriedale Keith, the distinguished legal authority, Mr. Arnold-Forster, member of the National Executive of the League of Nations Union, and Buxton's old political ally and fellow-Labour Peer, Lord Wedgwood. It goes without saying that it had the support of the *New Times and Ethiopian News,* under the editorship of Miss Sylvia Pankhurst. In all that concerned Haile Selassié, Miss Pankhurst was more royalist than the king. It is only fair to add that Miss Pankhurst's private letters to Buxton were much more reasonable than the headlines and articles in her paper. She protested against anti-Ethiopian propaganda which called for stricter control of provincial governors and chiefs who were guilty of misrule and which, at the same time, blamed the Emperor and his Government "for any of the crimes which these unsatisfactory rulers commit." (To Buxton: 27 and 28 March 1941.)

[56] Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 4 February 1941.

[57] From February on, Buxton produced a series of drafts and these were submitted to a

Sub-Committee on which Lady Simon, Margery Perham, Colonel Hore-Ruthven and Mr. C.A. Willis were invited to join.

[58] e.g. steps to avoid the dislocation which would be caused by a sudden emancipation of all slaves; the setting up of a Slavery Repression Department such as had been effective in the Sudan; steps to check the rapacity of provincial Governors; provision for raising a public revenue through a Financial Commission with authority to organize taxation and regulate revenue and expenditure.

[58] Parliamentary Debates (Lords), 9 April 1941.

[60] Confidential *Notes on Abyssinia* from F. De Halper, 11 April 1941. A characteristically laconic account of the pre-war position with respect to the corruption and ineffectiveness of the slavery laws; to the *gabar* system; to the rule of the Governors in the conquered provinces ("spoliation and exploitation unashamed and unchecked"); and to the impotence of foreign advisers.

[61] Dr. Perham to Buxton, 28 April 1941; C.W. Greenidge to Dr. Perham, 30 April; Dr. Perham to Buxton, 21 June. Greenidge had succeeded Sir John Harris as the Society's Secretary.

[62] Ethiopia No. 1 Cmd. 6334, 1942.

[63] Parliamentary Debates (Lords), 4 February 1942.

[64] The *New Times and Ethiopian News* (21 February) found that Wedgwood had handled Noel-Buxton's observations "with much point and not a little sarcasm."

[65] In general, on these issues *The Times* showed itself more responsible than, for example, the *Manchester Guardian*. See the thoughtful and balanced articles by Margery Perham in *The Times* of 26 and 27 November and 6 December 1941.

[66] Memoranda from the Society to Lord De La Warr, negotiator of the second Agreement (10 October 1944) and to Mr. Eden (6 December).

[67] "Slavery in Ethiopia" (December 1943) and "Ethiopia and International Law" (January 1944): prepared for the Society by its Secretary, Mr.C.W. Greenidge.

[68] Eden to Greenidge, 18 February 1942. In a letter to Lady Simon (2 May 1941), Mr. Eden had said: ". . . from the moment when the Italian aggression . . . made it necessary for us to work actively against Fascist rule in East Africa, we have kept prominently in minde the *sine qua non* that there can be no return to the abuses which undoubtedly existed in 1935-36, and against which the Emperor was equally undoubtedly beginning to struggle with success. The campaign which . . . Haile Selassie was conducting against slavery was indeed one of the several factors which influenced His Majesty's Government in supporting his claim to the restoration of his throne. Experience has shown that here is an enlightened native prince who not only desires the modernisation of his country, but realises that it can only be achieved with outside assistance."

[69] As Greenidge wrote: "In the not too distant background, lurked the unpopular shadow of the Hoare-Laval Pact." In a letter to Buxton, at this time, Major Orde Wingate, who had led the invasion of Ethiopia by 'Gideon Force', in January 1941, also protested against Buxton's estimate of the amount of Ethiopian slave-raiding, comparing cultural standards "of black people under our rule" (i.e. in the Sudan) with those "of black people under Ethiopian rule," to the general advantage of the latter. Writing "from a full heart," Wingate said that he spoke "for the British officers and men who fought under my command for Ethiopian liberty, humbly and devotedly hoping that our efforst might avail and the *treacherous desertion of 1935 be atoned for* . . . ." (Author's italics.)

[70] In his notes for his speech in the Lords on the Agreement of 1942, Buxton wrote: "The motive may be a desire to avoid the charge of imperialism or to avoid responsibility."

[71] Ethiopia No. 1 Cmd. 6584, 1945.

[72] Leland Buxton had reported (3 February 1933) that: "De Halpert says your visit to Abyssinia had a tremendous influence on the only people who could be influential — the Emperor and the intelligentsia".