

THE ENTOTO SPEECH ON CHURCH SCHOOL TRAINING

Haile Gabriel Dagne

The speech reprinted below was addressed to the congregation of St. Mary's Church, Entoto, perhaps on the occasion of some important Church festival. From internal evidence it appears that the date of the speech was some time during the reign of the Emperor Menelik, most probably before the year 1902 E.C. (roughly, 1910 in the Gregorian calendar), when Menelik became a permanent invalid. The fact that the speech was committed to writing and preserved in one of the great parchment manuscripts of the church¹ suggests that the speaker was an important official of Church and Government. He was, most probably, the Dean of St. Mary's Church, Mälaka Sähay Afäwork Esdros², who also held the newly-created post of "Minister of Religion". In this position, which had been established by the regulation of 1900 E.C., he was responsible for "National Schools"³.

The background to the speech is Menelik's effort to revive the Church (with its traditional school system) and his attempt to centralise and strengthen the feudalistic social order. With these aims in mind Menelik issued a number of proclamations (Awadj), of which the two referred to below have a bearing upon the content of this address.

The Awadj of 2.4.1.1900 E.C.⁴ made school attendance obligatory for all children (girls as well as boys) from the age of six upwards. In the proclamation Menelik promised that the Government would provide teachers and schools, but made it clear that it was the parents' responsibility to assist and encourage their children to attend. If parents failed to support the training of their children, it was the state and not their children who would inherit their possessions.

In another proclamation, that of 17.10.1900 E.C., "This is the proclamation given to the churches"⁵ Menelik ordered the clergy (Art. 9) to support the training of youth. School children were to receive free food from the "mähfäu" of the church as well as täskär" without any obligation to serve an official in return.⁶

The original text of the speech is followed by an English translation:-

እንደዚህ ፡ ያለ ፡ ነው ፡ (አብረሃም ፡ ልጁን ፡ ለሞት ፡ አሳልፎ ፡ ሰጠ ፡ ያው) ፡
ሌላ ፡ ይረደው ፡ አላለ ፡ (እሱ ፡ ሊያርድ ፡ ተነሳ) ፡ (እናንተም ፡ ለሹመት ፡ ለሽል
ማት ፡ እንደምን ፡ ልጃችሁን ፡ ሰጥታችሁ ፡ አታስተምሩ ፡ ልባርጋችሁ ፡ አስተ
ውሉ) ፡ (ጃንሆይ ፡ የሹመላችሁ ፡ ሹም ፡ ብቻ ፡ አይደለም) ፡ (ሊገዛችሁ ፡ የሚወድ ፡
ክርስቲያን ፡ 4 ፡ ከሆነ ፡ ሁሉም ፡ እናንተን ፡ ለመግዛት ፡ ይፈልጋል) ፡ (ይህ ፡
መሆኑ ፡ አልተማሩም ፡ ወገናችን ፡ አይደሉም ፡ እያለ ፡ ነው) ፡ (ደግሞ ፡ እቲጌ ፡
የሚሰሩትን ፡ ስራ ፡ ታያላችሁ ፡ ይህ ፡ ሁሉ ፡ ካህን ፡ መሬቱን ፡ ሰጥተው ፡ ቤቱን ፡
ሰርተው ፡ ሽህ ፡ ሽህ ፡ ብር ፡ እየሰጡ ፡ በራሱ ፡ እንዳይሸከም ፡ ቀለቡን ፡ ፈርስ ፡
በቅሎ ፡ የሚፍጭሉት ፡ እንዳይቸግረው ፡ ሽልማቱን ፡ ከሰው ፡ በላይ ፡ ማረጋቸው ፡
ቢማር ፡ ነው ፡ እንጂ ፡ ወንድማቸው ፡ ዘመዳቸው ፡ ሁኖ ፡ ብቸገር ፡ ይረዳኛል ፡ ብረ

ው፡ አይደለም)፡ (ይህ፡ ካሁኑ፡ ሁሉ፡ የመጣው፡ ከጉጃም፡ ከጉንደር፡ ከመንዝ፡ ከየሀገሩ፡ ነው)፡ እንጂ፡ ከዚህ፡ አይደለም፡ የተወለደው)፡ (የናንተማ፡ ልጆች፡ ተምረው፡ ቢገኙ፡ ጃንሆይና፡ እቲጊ፡ ምን፡ ባደረጉላችኋ)፡ ዘላለም፡ ሲገዙ፡ ከመኖር፡ ዓመት፡ ልጅን፡ አስተምሮ፡ ነፃ፡ ማውጣት፡ ይሻላል፡ ብዬ፡ (ልጆቻችሁን፡ አስተምሩ፡ ስል፡ እለምናችኋለሁ፡ ኮሶ፡ ለጊዜው፡ ሲጠጡት፡ ይመራል)፡ (ኋላ፡ ግን፡ ከማር፡ ከወተት፡ ይልቅ፡ ደስ፡ ያሰኛል፡ አሁንም፡ ልጆችሁ፡ ይማር፡ ብላችሁ፡ ከብት፡ በግና፡ ፍየል፡ እንዳይጠብቅልን፡ ይኸን፡ ለምን፡ ይለናል)፡ ብላችሁ፡ (ልባችሁ፡ ያዝናል፡ ኋላ፡ ግን፡ ልጆችሁ፡ ተምሮ፡ የመሪታችሁ፡ ግብር፡ ሲቀር፡ ገንዘብ፡ ባሪያ፡ ሲያገኙ፡ መንግሥቱንም፡ እኔንም፡ ትመርቃላችሁ፡ ይህ፡ የነገርኳችሁ፡ ሁሉ፡ ሐሰት፡ የለበትም)፡ (አውጥታችሁ፡ አውርዳችሁ፡ በልባችሁ፡ አስቡት)፡ (የሚያውቅ፡ ልቡናን፡ ለፈጠረ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር፡ የሚሳነው፡ ነገር፡ የለምና፡ እግዚትን፡ ማርያም፡ ከልጁዋ፡ አማልዳ፡ በየልቡናችሁ፡ ደገን፡ ነገር፡ ታላድርባችሁ፡ ለቁም፡ ነገር፡ ታብቃችሁ፡

"This is how matters stand: Abraham offered up his son's life himself; he did not say that someone else ought to put him to death, but rose up to slay him himself. And yet you will not even take it upon yourselves to send your children to school so that they may enjoy the position in life and the other rewards that come with learning. Observe: it is not merely because His Majesty has appointed officials to rule over you that you occupy subordinate positions; even if there were no more than four Christians with an ambition to govern, they would all think it their right to rule over you, for, they say, you are ignorant folk, people of a different order of being from themselves. Now you can see what the Empress is doing: she has given lands to all the clergy, she has built them houses, given them thousands of thalers, provided them with horses and mules so that they need not carry their provisions, and seen to it that they should not lack someone to grind their corn for them. And these rewards she has given, not because she looks upon the clergy as kinsfolk who might rally to her aid in time of difficulty, but simply because they are men of learning.

All these clerics, too, are incomers, people from Gojjam, Gondär, Mänze and other places, who do not belong to these parts. What, then, would Their Majesties have done for your children, if only you children had been as well educated?

It is better to educate a child for a year and thereby make him free than to let him live his whole life as an underling. For this reason, I beg you, let your children go to school. Kosso⁷ is bitter at the moment of drinking, but afterwards it gives greater pleasure than honey and milk. At this moment, because I have told you to send your children to school, your hearts are heavy and you mutter, "Why do you tell us to do this? Our children will not be able to tend our cattle, sheep and goats." But afterwards, when your child has become a learned man and the taxes on your land are reduced and you acquire money and slaves, you will bless the Government and me. What I have said to you is true. Take heed of what I have said and ponder these things. For nothing is impossible to God, Who created thought and knowledge. May Our Lady Mary mediate for us with Her Son and make you mindful of these good things. May She make you ready for worthy deeds."

The text throws some light on the motives underlying formal education in

the hierarchical society of Christian Ethiopia. As it clearly implies, the attraction for those who attend the higher stages of the Church schools is not primarily the religious and ascetic ideals of the Church, which preaches the emptiness of worldly rank and possessions — though the asceticism of the monks is rather more rigorous than that of the *sämonäña* or altar priests.⁸ Though the content of his education is religion, the Church school student is motivated not so much by otherworldly considerations as by the chances of promotion in the elaborate hierarchy of the Church. Once admitted to this hierarchy, he will receive promotion in rank and corresponding rewards from the Emperor and his landlords (in our text, from *Itégé Taytu*). The members of this traditional elite are known as *däbtära*, here understood as 'learned ones', regardless of whether they are ordained or not. "Because they are learned" (*Bimaru naw injil*), the *däbtära*, like other members of the hierarchy, enjoy a position of privilege vis-à-vis the peasants. They are eligible for awards of land, cattle, servants, slaves and money according to their rank. Those who enjoy this privileged status are referred to in the text as "free" (*nasa*), while the unlettered peasant is said to be "dominated by others for ever". Here freedom, such as the learned enjoy, means freedom from the manual labour which is the lot of the peasant. Formal training in the Church schools, according to our text, is the road to freedom from domination by the privileged; through education the underprivileged can rise to become members of the privileged class themselves. Here we see one of the most significant functions of formal training, the keeping open of vertical social mobility. As Dr. J. Markakis puts it, "Ethiopian society was stratified. The principle of stratification, however, was neither birth nor wealth, but appointment to the hierarchy that ruled the state under the Emperor. With appointment came titles, control over large areas of land, social status and power."⁹ The ambition to rise to a higher rank through achievement in the Church schools was a strong motive for many, and in order to realise their ambitions they put up with long years of hardship as wandering students. It might be noted, in passing, that some still do. This hierarchical order which gives so much weight to achievement looks positively dynamic when compared to the static caste system of, say, Indian villages. Even compared to post-mediaeval Europe, where education was more or less restricted to the children of the privileged classes, the attitude revealed by the text is a dynamic one — or, at least, a potentially dynamic one. It was in this spirit that the speaker appealed to the peasants of his congregation to send their children to school and train them. The peasants of his congregation, however, like the peasants of today, saw little immediate value in Church school training. They were more interested in keeping their children at home as labour than in the prospect of future rank and wealth — if, indeed, they were able to conceive of such things. Thus the Church schools were usually attended by no more than a small fraction of the school-age population.

1. Until 1963 the original of this text was in the hands of the Qe'sä Cäbüz of St. Mary's Church, Entoto.

2. The transliteration employed in this article is that suggested by Stephen Wright, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. ii, No. 7, pp. 1-10, Addis Ababa, 1964.

3. See Maheme Sellassie W. Meakel, *Zekrä Nägär*, Addis Ababa p. 523; "Yähaymanotna Yätmhert minister Damb".

Art. 1.

ጁ ፤ የሃይማኖት ፡ ነገር ፡ ያቡን ፡ ሥራ ፡ ነው ፡ እርሳቸው ፡ የሃይማኖት ፡ አለቃ ፡ ናቸው ።

ጁ ፤ የሃይማኖት ፡ ሚኒስቴር ፡ ባቡንና ፡ በመንግሥት ፡ መካከል ፡ ይሆናል ፡ ቁሶችንም ፡ ይገዛል ።

፫ ፤ ዋና ፡ ሥራው ፡ የቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ የቁሶች ፡ ጠባቂ ፡ ነው ።

፬ ፤ ያገር ፡ ትምህርት ፡ ቤቶችን ፡ ይጠብቃል ።

፭ ፤ የጤና ፡ ሚኒስቴር ፡ ይረዳዋል ፡ የፈረንጅ ፡ ትምህርት ፡ በሚያስተምሩ ፡ ቦታ ፡ ሁሉ ።

4. This text is known to me in the Italian translation of L. de Castro, *Nella Terra dei Negus*, Milano, 1915 p. 142 vol. II. It reads as follows:
Bando emanato nel Mercato di Addis-Ababa 1 Sabato 5 Ottobre 1907 (24 Mascarem 1900) da Menelik II Imperatore D'Éthiopia.
Finora era detto che chiunque esercitava una professione era un uomo dispregevole, e per questo nessuno si è data la pena di studiare e di educarsi: persistendo uno stato di cose così dannoso, le chiese potranno essere chiuse e non sussistere più alcun cristiano. Negli altri paesi non solo si impara ogni cosa, ma si inventano cose nuove. Quindi da oggi tutti i bambini, sia maschi che femmine dopo i sei anni dovranno essere condotti alla scuola.
Avverto quella famiglie che non si prendono cura di fare educare i loro figli, che alla morte dei genitori la loro eredità anziché andare a favore di essi, passerà a beneficio dell'erario. Il mio governo provvede e per il mantenimento delle scuole e degli insegnanti.

5. Mahteme Sellassie W. Meskel, *Zekrā Nāgār*, Addis Abeba 1942 E.C. It reads:

ዘጠነኛ ፡

በተማሪ ፡ ቤት ፡ ያለ ፡ የሚማር ፡ ተማሪ ፡ እየተማረ ፡ እቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ ያገለግላል ፡ እንጂ ፡ እሹም ፡ ሥራ ፡ አልሠራም ፡ ተብሎ ፡ መክፈልትና ፡ ተዝካር ፡ አይከልከል ። ይልቅ ፡ እተማሪ ፡ ቤት ፡ ለሚማር ፡ ልብሱን ፡ ቀለቡን ፡ አድርጎ ፡ መስጠት ፡ ነው ። እንጂ ፡ ይህንን ፡ ማድረግ ፡ የሚማር ፡ ጠፍቶ ፡ ቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ ይዘጋ ፡ ማለት ፡ ነው ፡ አይሆንም ።

6. Compare also the attempt of His Highness Ras Tafari Makonnen to use the Church school for his general literacy programme through his proclamation of 11.2.1921 E.C. Cf. *Zekrā Nāgār*, p. 903.
7. Kosso: a violent purgative, the taking of which is a regular and ritual event. The taker acquires privilege through suffering: he may demand special dishes and delicacies from relatives and superiors. He may also earn a temporary freedom (i.e. freedom from toil) and take a day off work.
8. Cf. the Treaties of Ras Kassa Hallu in *Fenotā Aemero*, Addis Ababa, 1952 E.C.
9. John Markakis, *An Interpretation of Political Tradition in Ethiopia*, p. 10. (A paper prepared for the Interdisciplinary Seminar of the Faculties of Arts and Education, H.S.I.U., 1967, mimeographed.)