**Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia (1844-1913)**

Menelik II The son of King Haile Melekot of Shoa (1847 - 1855), was born in 1844 in Ankober, Shoa and heir to the Shewan branch of the Solomonic Dynasty which claimed descent from King Solomon of ancient Israel, and the Queen of Sheba. On the death of his father in 1855 he was taken prisoner by Emperor Tewodros II (Theodore II), a former minor noble originally named Kassa of Kwara, who had usurped the Imperial throne from the last Emperor of the elder Gondar branch of the Solomonic dynasty, Emperor Johannis III (John III). Menelik was imprisoned on Tewodros' mountain stronghold of Magdala, but was treated well by the Emperor, even marrying Tewodros's daughter Alitash. However, he would eventually succeed at escaping from Magdala and abandoned his wife, returning to Shoa to reclaim his ancestral crown and at once attacked the usurper claiming the Imperial throne for himself as well. These campaigns were unsuccessful, and he turned his arms to the west, east and south, and annexed much territory to his kingdom, still, however, maintaining his claims of divine right to the Imperial Crown of Ethiopia in addition to the royal one of Shoa.

In 1880, at the time when he was claiming the throne against Mangasha, Menelek signed at Wuchale in Wollo province (Uccialli in the Italian version), a treaty with Italy acknowledging the establishment of the new Italian Colony of Eritrea with its seat at Asmara. This colony had previously been part of the northern Tigrean territories from which Ras Mangasha had generated support, and the establishment of the Italian colony weakend the Ras. However, it was soon found that the Italian version of one of the articles of the treaty placed the Ethiopian Empire under Italian domination, while the Amharic version did not. Menelik denounced it, and after negotiations failed, abrogated it, leading Italy to declare war and invade from Eritrea. After defeating the Italians at Amba-Alagi and Mekele, he inflicted an even greater defeat on them, in the battle of Adowa on March 1, 1896, forcing them to capitulate. A treaty was signed recognizing the absolute independence of Ethiopia.

Menelik II's French sympathies were shown in a reported official offer of treasure towards payment of the indemnity at the close of the Franco-Prussian War, and in February 1897 he concluded a commercial treaty with France on very favorable terms. He also gave assistance to French officers who sought to reach the upper Nile from Ethiopia, there to join forces with the Marchand Mission; and Ethiopian armies were sent towards the Nile, but withdrew when the Fashoda Crisis between France and the United Kingdom cooled off. A British mission under Sir Rennell Rodd in May 1897, however, was cordially received, and Menelik agreed to a settlement of the Somali boundaries, to keep open to British commerce the caravan route between Zaila and Harrar, and to prevent the transit of munitions of war to the Mahdists, whom he proclaimed enemies of Ethiopia.

In May 1909 the emperor.s grandson Lij Iyasu (or Lij Yasu) by his late daughter Shoaregga, then a lad of thirteen, was married to Romanework Mangasha (b. 1902), granddaughter of the Emperor Johannes IV by his natural son Ras Mangasha, and was also the niece of Empress Taytu. Two days later Yasu was publicly proclaimed at Addis Ababa as Menelek.s successor. At that time the emperor was seriously ill and as his ill-health continued, a council of regency . from which the empress was excluded . was formed in March 1910. Lij Iyasu's marriage to Romanework Mangasha was dissolved, and he married Seble Wongel Hailu, daughter of Ras Hailu, and granddaughter of King Tekle Haimanot of Gojjam. Emperor Menelik II died on December 12th, 1913, and is buried at the Baeta Le Mariam Monastery Church of Addis Ababa.