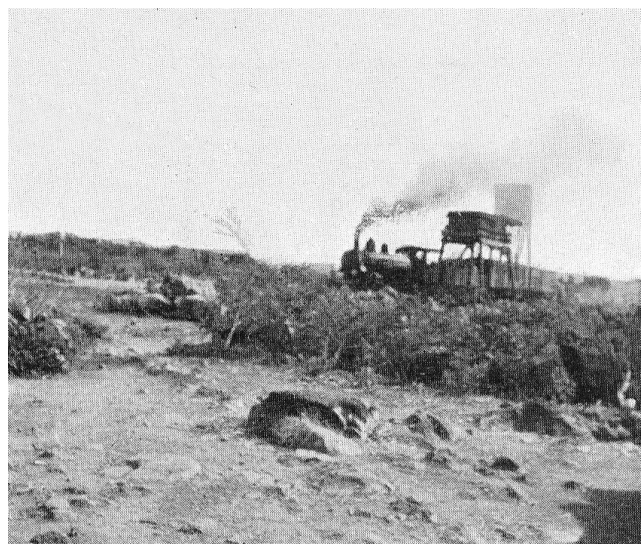


Illustrated from special photographs by the correspondent of “The Sphere” in Abyssinia.

Of the numerous railways which are at present converging from various points of the seaboard towards the interior of the African continent not the least important is that bearing, the title of Compagnie Impériale des Chemins de Fer Ethiopiens, the concession for which was granted by the Emperor Menelik in 1896 and the first section of which, running through French Somaliland from Djibouti on the Gulf of Aden to Adis Harrar, midway between the coast and Shoa (south Abyssinia), was opened for traffic in December, 1902.



On the Djibouti – Harar railway



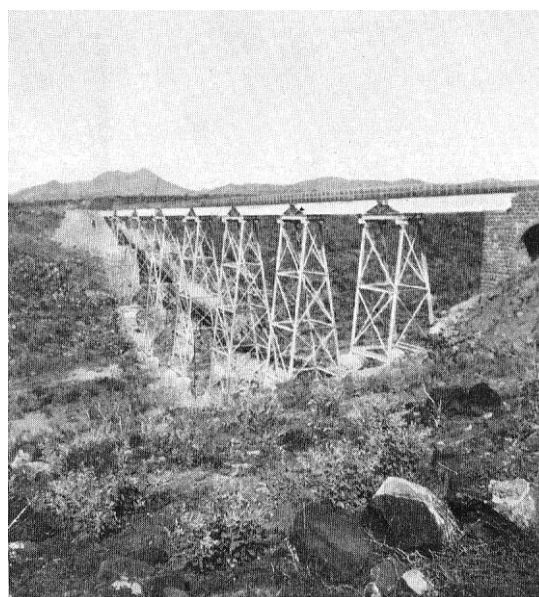
The “Imperial Ethiopian” Goods train

The somewhat magniloquent title of this association is explained by the extremely comprehensive character of the concession, which is not limited to the line now steadily advancing from the coast through Harrar to Addis Abeba, capital of Abyssinia, but extends to the whole of the Ethiopian Empire, securing to the concessionaires an absolute monopoly of all railway operations in that vast region of some 200,000 square miles for a period of ninety-nine years.

Thanks to a batch of photographs just received from its correspondent at Harrar, The Sphere is now in a position to place before its readers the first clear account of the completed section that has yet appeared in the English press. With an original capital of £7,500,000, afterwards raised to over £1,200,000, chiefly by advances from the London International Ethiopian Railway Trust and Construction Company, the first sod was cut — or to be more accurate the first shovel of sand was dug — in December, 1897, and the whole section of 186 miles completed within four years of that date.

This must be regarded as a creditable performance seeing that throughout its entire length the line traverses an arid, uninhabited track of very rough character with a continual rise from sea-level at Djibouti to nearly 4,000 ft. at present railhead, where one of our views shows the locomotive buried in the hush near Adis Harrar. “New Harrar” is still distant some thirty miles from Harrar proper.

Despite the rugged nature of the surface the engineers were enabled to avoid all tunneling and bridge work except at two points, where the steep ravines of long dried-up coast streams had to be crossed by the Shebeleh and Holl-Holl viaducts (see photo), respectively 510 ft. and 460 ft. long and 60 ft. and 90 ft. above the river-bed. For these works



One of the two viaducts on the railway

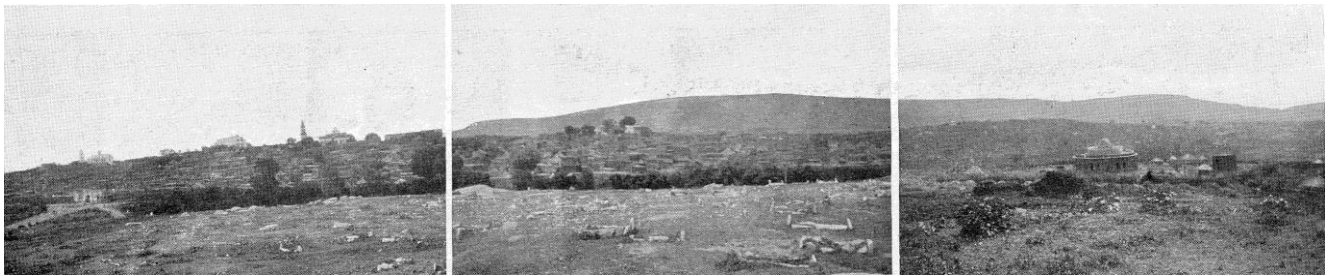
the lime and cement came from France, while the water required to mix the mortar had to be brought by camels in skins from distances of eight to twelve miles across the desert. There is a double line of rails which have a 40 in. gauge and rest on low “saddles” riveted to steel sleepers, a plan specially designed for this line to protect it from the ravages of ants.

A first result of the completion of this line has been to divert to the French port of Djibouti nearly the whole of the south Abyssinian and Gallaland trade which formerly passed chiefly through British Somaliland to the ports of Zuila, Bulhar, and Berbera opposite Aden.

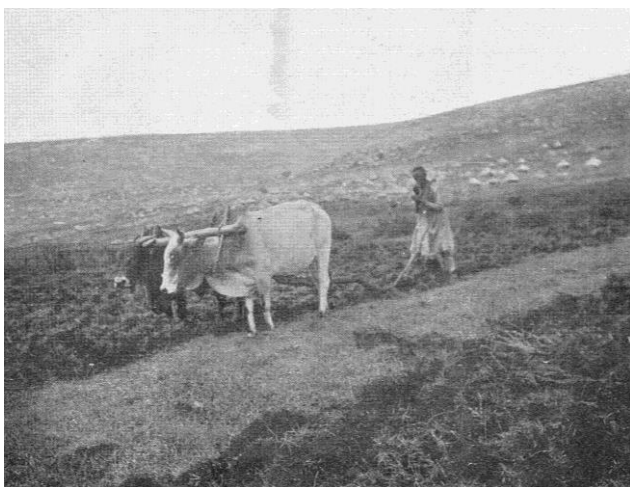
A second and more important result is the immense stimulus given to the local export trade in coffee, ivory, cotton, civet, wax, hides, and cattle by reducing the journey between Harrar and the coast from twenty-five or thirty days by caravan to fourteen or sixteen hours by rail with a corresponding reduction in transport charges. Before 1888, when it was created a port and made the capital of French Somaliland, Djibouti was a wind-buffeted headland; now it is a city of t 5,000 inhabitants with piers, lighthouse, and other harbour works, and a total yearly trade of £560,000.

The delightful, well-watered Harrar oasis grows, perhaps, the finest coffee in the world, much of which is sold in the European markets as “Mocha.”

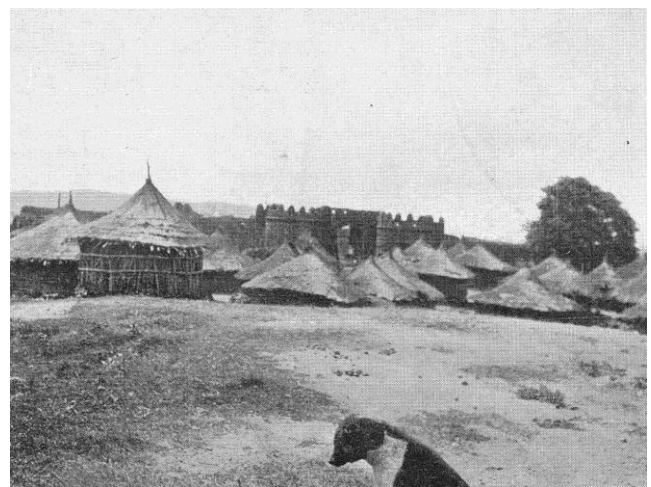
A. H. Keane.



A General View of Harrar, which is to be connected with the Main Line of the Imperial Ethiopian Railway System: The three views give a very nearly continuous panoramic picture of this the largest city of eastern Africa between Cairo and Zanzibar (population 45,000). Harrar stands about 6,000 ft. above sea-level and will be reached by a branch line over the Jallo Pass at 6,600 ft. The Moslem cemetery is seen in the foreground, the chief mosque to the right, and the new residence of Ras Makonnen to the left.



Harrari Ploughman with his Oxen: Evidence of the Christian period is still seen in the treatment the women, who go marketing freely while the men till the fields with their primitive ploughs.



The Bab-el-Fat'h, or “Gate of Victory,” at Harrar: Commemorating the triumph of the crescent of over the cross. Harrar was originally Christian, but was conquered by the Moslems.