CABINET.

THE ITALO-ABYSSINIAN DISPUTE.

(Note by the Secretary.)

The Prime Minister has instructed me to circulate for the information of the Cabinet the attached Conclusions of a Meeting he held with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for League of Nations Affairs on Tuesday, August 6th.

(Signed) M.P.A. HANKEY.
Secretary to the Cabinet.

Whitehall Gardens, S.W.1.,
6th August, 1935.
CONCLUSIONS OF A CONVERSATION AT NO. 10,
DOWNING STREET, ON TUESDAY, AUGUST 6,
1935, at 2.30 p.m.

PRESENT:
The Right Hon. Stanley Baldwin, M.P.,
Prime Minister.
The Right Hon. Sir Samuel Hoare, Bt.,
G.C.S.I., G.B.E., C.M.G., M.P.,
Secretary of State for Foreign
Affairs.
The Right Hon. Anthony Eden, M.C., M.P.,
Minister for League of Nations
Affairs.

Sir Robert Vansittart, G.C.M.G., K.C.V.O.,
Permanent Under-Secretary of State for
Foreign Affairs.
Colonel Sir M.P.A. Hankey, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O.,
Secretary to the Cabinet.

This Meeting was held in order to enable the
Minister for League of Nations Affairs to report
the results of the recent Meeting of the Council
of the League of Nations at Geneva to the Prime
Minister and the Secretary of State for Foreign
Affairs, and for the three Ministers to confer on
the line to be taken by the Minister for League of
Nations Affairs at the forthcoming Meetings of the
three Powers signatories to the Abyssinian Treaty
of 1906.
The Minister for League of Nations Affairs reported that at Geneva the French representatives had acted markedly in line with the British. This applied especially to M. Leger.

It was noted that this development was in conformity with the wishes of the Cabinet (Cabinet 40 (35), Conclusion 1).

Ministers were informed that the probable course of events next week would be Anglo-French Conversations for a day or two, after which the tripartite discussions would begin.

In the course of the discussion reference was made to an interim Memorandum by the Chiefs of Staff Subcommittee on the military implications of the application of Article XVI of the Covenant of the League of Nations (C.O.S.-388) which had been sent to the Ministers present pending the working out of details, which was still in progress.

The attitude to be adopted by the Minister for League of Nations Affairs at the forthcoming Meetings, and certain other matters arising consequentially, were discussed, and Conclusions were reached which may be summarised as follows:­

(a) That the Minister for League of Nations Affairs should do his utmost to maintain the close relations already established with the French Government on the Italo-Abyssinian dispute.

(b) That in the preliminary conversations with the French Government his aim should be to establish a programme for later discussion with the Italian representative. This programme would probably have to be drawn in such manner as to bring home to the Italian representative that the ultimate choice before Italy lay between the following alternatives:­

(i) Acceptance from Abyssinia of certain concessions on points in the Italian case which His Majesty’s Government have already told the British Ambassador in Rome (who did not have occasion to use them) that they could support, if the case was made out, viz.:­
(1) in so far as threats to, or violations of, the Italian frontiers are concerned:

(2) in respect of aggressions such as Walwal affray if proved against Abyssinia to our satisfaction and that of the League of Nations:

(3) in respect of breaches - if proven - of treaties between Italy and Abyssinia.

Further

(4) in a general way His Majesty's Government would be willing to support Italy in pressing Abyssinia to permit to Italians and other foreigners the usual and reasonable facilities for trade, habitation etc., with regard to which she has been obstructive in the past:

(5) as regards slavery His Majesty's Government could support insistence on Abyssinia putting into force such future measures as the League may think necessary and remedying past failures to carry out her obligations in this matter.

(telegram to Rome No.365, of July 19th.)

It was foreseen, however, that there was no prospect of so limited a programme sufficing to bring Italy to an accommodation. The indications were that the French Government would propose to apply joint suasion at Addis Ababa with a view to extracting a maximum offer from Abyssinia. It was also pointed out that the more attractive the offer to be induced, the better would be the prospects of the first course and the less the prospect of having to consider the alternative course below. Possibly the French Government might have other additions to suggest, and the Minister for League of Nations Affairs might, at his discretion, remind them that they had never made any concession to Italy comparable with the British cession of Jubaland.

OR

(ii) The carrying out by the League of Nations of the procedure laid down in the Covenant, including, in the last resort, consideration by the members of the League of their obligations thereunder.

In any reference to this latter aspect the Minister for League of Nations Affairs should be guided by the approval given by the Cabinet to the lines suggested by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs on Wednesday, July 24th, where he indicated that in discussions with the French

"the underlying assumption would be that both Powers realised their obligations and were jointly interested to find a way out of the difficulty".
The Minister for League of Nations Affairs would, of course, be on his guard against giving the French Government any opportunity to suggest to Italy that we were pressuring them to commit themselves to sanctions. Any detailed discussion of sanctions should be avoided, as this does not arise at present and, if it arises at all, belongs rather to discussions at a later stage.

(c) That the Minister for League of Nations Affairs who would be accompanied by the Permanent Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in Paris, should, as far as possible, keep in touch with the Prime Minister, who would be in France at the time of the Meetings, and in particular should arrange to report the position verbally to him after the conclusion of the Meetings, in order that he might decide whether, and when, to summon a Meeting of the Cabinet. It appeared probable to the Ministers present that if the Paris Meetings did not produce a satisfactory result, a Meeting of the Cabinet would be required before the end of August, when important decisions might be necessary.

Lake Tsana.

(d) That if the three-Power Conference should not achieve a satisfactory result, the question of Lake Tsana would become important, and the Minister for League of Nations Affairs should have discretion to warn the Italian representative that this was an important British interest. He might repeat the warning given by Sir Edward Grey (afterwards Earl Grey of Fallodon) in 1915:

(e) That in the meantime the Foreign Office should examine the question of Lake Tsana in its political and technical aspects, and consult the Defence Departments on any aspects of the question which might concern them: Defence Aspects.

(f) That the Secretary to the Cabinet and Committee of Imperial Defence should inform the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee that the Prime Minister would be glad if they would consider the following questions:

(1) At once to examine the question of what the position would be if Italy took the bit between her teeth:

(2) On the assumption that the contingency referred to in (1) might take place, are there any steps that ought to be taken at once to provide against it?

In this latter connection the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that the Foreign Office would have no objection to
any relatively quiet steps being taken, such as, for example, the raising of the anti-aircraft defences of Malta to the approved scale. They would not even object if the movement of anti-aircraft guns became public.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.1.

August 6, 1935.