"Am I not a king's son?" A Previously Unpublished Letter Sheds New Light on the Manner in which Prince Alämayähu faced the Dilemma of his Ambiguous Status as an Exile in Britain in 1879

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Contrary to popular assumptions, *Däjazmač* (or, as he was known internationally, Prince) Alämayähu, exiled son of Emperor Tewodros (r. 1855-1868), and heir to the Ethiopian throne, had no difficulty adjusting to the life of the British aristocracy. Despite the trauma of the siege of Mäqdäla, the death of his father, the loss of his birth-right as a result of inglorious British military plunder, and the untimely and tragic death of his mother on the unremittingly cold and damp trek to the coast shortly afterwards, Alämayähu's resilience was remarkable.[2] His capacity and determination to maintain his princely status was manifest just a few weeks later, when General Robert Napier, who had commanded the British troops at Mäqdäla, thought to amuse the young boy by throwing him a ball to catch while on the deck of troop carrier *HMS Urgent*, *en route* from Alexandria to Malta. Asked by Napier why he had not run for the ball, Alämayähu explained that it was below his dignity: "Am I not a king's son, why should I go and fetch it?"[3] And a few weeks later, at the suitably grand manor house on the Isle of Wight where he lived and rode to hounds,[4] the seven year-old reprimanded his adoptive grandparents for suggesting that they should drop the term 'Prince' when they addressed him. "A king's son is always a prince", he solemnly reminded them.[5]

Since he was a tiny baby, on the isolated summit of Mäqdäla, Alämayähu had lived a privileged but very sheltered life in a microcosm of highland Ethiopia's conservative, hierarchical and largely Orthodox Christian society. He was accustomed to being taken care of, and held aloof from the common people, who, in turn, held him in awe. That was the only life he had ever known, and it was in many respects a similar situation that greeted him the moment he

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[2] Empress (commonly referred to as Queen) Tïruwärq died on 15 May after several days of heavy rains that fell earlier than General Napier had expected.

[3] Pankhurst, R. (Ed. & Annot.), 2002, *Dairy of a Journey to Abyssinia, 1868 With the Expedition under Sir Robert Napier, K.C.S.I. The Diary and Observations of William Simpson of the Illustrated London News*, Hollywood: Tsehai Publishers and Distributors, pp. 138-139.

[4] Afton House was the residence of Benjamin Cotton, a prominent landowner at Freshwater, Isle of Wight, whose daughter, Cornelia, married Alämayähu's guardian, Captain Speedy.

[5] C.C. [Cornelia Cotton], 1870, *Anecdotes of Alamayu, the Late King Theodore's Son*, London: William Hunt and Company, pp. 51-52.

arrived in England at the naval base of Plymouth, where he was lionised by the press, regaled with state receptions, and protected and cossetted as a visiting royal celebrity. Furthermore, some of the most striking features of mid-Victorian society, such as its hierarchical nature based on class, a deeply-rooted superiority complex on the part of the upper classes, the role of the Church as a principal pillar of society, a low social position for those engaged in 'trade', and the presence of bevies of servants in the homes of the landed gentry, were also characteristic of highland Ethiopia.

Thus Alämayähu's problem was not that he could not adjust to British aristocracy; he actually had no difficulty adjusting to them, and indeed joining them. His problem was quite the opposite, and only began to surface four years after his first arrival in England, when his circumstances changed. Arriving in England in July, 1868, he spent a year on the Isle of Wight, then was taken by his adoptive parents, Captain Tristam Speedy and his wife Cornelia, to India, where he was privately tutored within a military enclave of the British *Raj* in Sitapur, Oudh, some 50 miles from the state capital, Lucknow. This was followed in April, 1871 by a move to Penang, in the Straits Settlements. While in Singapore, he stayed in the governor's mansion and attended the Raffles Institution. There he mixed with the other boys, but only for a short time, and he was in the illustrious company of Siamese princes.[6] The difficulties only began in 1872, after being unceremoniously sent back to England to attend Cheltenham College, which, like all the recently founded public schools, was designed for the sons of commoners: middle-class families aspiring to join the upper classes. This was very different from private tuition, and there were no other royal students at Cheltenham. The social-climbing parents of public school boys had generally drummed into their sons the need to work hard in order to prepare themselves for a salaried career – typically in the Church, military, or academia. And this work ethic was reinforced by a 'muscular Christianity' approach by the headmasters. However, the problem was that as a child in Ethiopia, Alämayähu had no experience of a cash economy, and had certainly never expected to have to work for a living. In Ethiopia there were Church schools, at which boys would typically aspire to become deacons or priests, but no schools to prepare children for salaried employment. In highland Ethiopia, trade was generally carried out by Muslims or foreigners, crafts were typically the domain of marginalised ethnic groups, and menial tasks were traditionally performed by servants, slaves or indentured labour.

[6] *Times of India*, 18 Oct., 1871, p. 3.

Thus, perhaps recalling his exchange with Napier on the Malta-bound paddle-steamer, Alämayähu's thinking as a public schoolboy was: Since I am royalty, why am I expected to work? Why am I being told what to do? As we shall see, his intelligent and modernising but distant father, as well as his estranged but devoted mother, had expected an overseas education to enable him to return to Ethiopia where he would then be sure to "not govern badly", while, no doubt, introducing the latest technologies. However, the British government had other ideas. Robert Lowe, whose opinions as Chancellor of the Exchequer (the most powerful man in Britain after Prime Minister Gladstone) largely determined government policy whenever it involved financial issues, seems to have decided, or assumed, that the objective of Alämayähu's education was to prepare him to become, in effect, a British citizen in salaried government employment – possibly in the Indian army. Certainly, as a hawkish senior government official, Lowe did not envisage the young Ethiopian prince being maintained at the tax-payers' expense indefinitely, but neither did he indicate when, or whether Alämayähu would be returned to Ethiopia.

It is often stated that Queen Victoria had Alämayähu sent to public school. However, this is incorrect. The sovereign was actually entirely opposed to Lowe's harsh decisions regarding Alämayähu's upbringing. In Victorian Britain, class typically trumped race, and the sovereign had a love for the 'exotic', She already had a reputation for welcoming young Africans into her palace circle, elevating them socially, and arranging for them to marry into elite society. In due course she would even befriend a young Muslim Indian palace servant, to the point where he came to enjoy immense privileges even above those of the royal household, and began assuming the airs and graces of aristocracy.[7] However, in the case of Alämayähu, of whom the Queen became very fond, the Chancellor's opinions prevailed; the young Ethiopian prince was apparently to be groomed by the government to work for a living, as a salary-earning commoner.

A High-Level Feud

How did this situation come about, in the face of the Queen's opposition? The shift in Britain's relationship with Alämayähu from welcoming him as visiting royalty, to regarding him as a potential – albeit exotic – working British citizen, did not take place overnight. It occurred almost imperceptibly, taking

[7]The most comprehensive account of the relationship between Queen Victoria and Abdul Karim is provided in Basu, S., 2017, *Victoria & Abdul: The Extraordinary True Story of the Queen's Closest Confidant*, Stroud: The History Press.

root during 1869, gaining currency in 1870, such that by the following year, when Alämayähu was living on the Malay peninsula, it became virtually irreversible. During this period there was an ongoing and acrimonious dispute over Alämayähu largely behind the scenes, between the state, represented by Queen Victoria and the royal household on the one hand, and the government, represented by parliament and specifically the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on the other. The Queen was forceful in her representations, including her insistence that Alämayähu be allowed to live in a warm climate, and that he should not be sent to a British public school. However, the inflexible Robert Lowe would not back down. He fought the Queen relentlessly, finally winning parliament over to his way of thinking. As a result, in 1871, the British government ordered Captain Speedy to bring Alämayähu back to England, which he did, most reluctantly.

The dispute that led to Alämayähu's anomalous position also reflected a remarkably different set of personal and social values on the part of the Queen and the Chancellor. Following her marriage to Prince Albert in 1840, which produced nine children, Victoria had created a model 'royal family' with close and affectionate ties, which became idealised by the middle classes during her reign. According to that ideal, the family, with the father at work and the mother at home, should be the centre of children's lives, providing the required morality, stability and comfort.[8] It is in that context that so much of the media commentary regarding Alämayähu as well as the remarks of several of his age-mates, expressed sorrow and sympathy that he was an orphan. However, Robert Lowe did not share that sentiment. He had previously made a name for himself as Vice-President of the Committee of the Council on Education. Concerned with the awarding of grants to schools, he had championed a hard-line "payment by results" policy, and stressed the importance of the physical sciences as opposed to the classics, making himself unpopular in the process. Thus, although now Chancellor of the Exchequer, he considered himself an authority on education, and came out in brazen opposition to the Queen's recommendations for Alämayähu in a furious minute penned in December, 1871, in which he complained, "I am tired of this cant, one would think that education consisted in coddling and petting instead of making *men*. … These people think that a boy's character is formed by

[8]See, for example, Mitchell, S., 1996, *Daily Life in Victorian England*, Westport: Greenwood Press, pp. 141-142,

those in whose house he lives and not by other boys and the general moral tone of the community."[9]

Early in 1872, after Alämayähu had returned to England, Speedy lobbied the Queen to get his guardianship extended, offering to stay in England for a year. The Queen, who heartily disliked Jex-Blake – Lowe's choice of guardian - again objected to Lowe's ideas, and made her views known in an appeal to Prime Minister Gladstone.[10] But Lowe's opinions won the day, and the issue was thrown into dramatic relief by an altercation in March, 1872, between Speedy and Alämayähu's new government-appointed guardian, the Reverend Thomas Jex-Blake, on the doorstep of the latter's stuccoed mansion on Cheltenham's Suffolk Square. Jex-Blake refused to allow the boy to leave the house to bid goodbye to Speedy over a last dinner together, and the outraged, bearded soldier-adventurer, who had been Alämayähu's adoptive father and mentor since their departure from Ethiopia, was stunned to realise that he was now out of the picture.[11]

This was not, as it might appear, simply a change of guardian. Speedy had been placed by in that role by the Queen, whereas Jex-Blake had been appointed by the Chancellor. It was the Queen – not the government – who had requested that Alämayähu be brought to England in the first place; However, by arranging to pay for his upkeep from a government budget, Lowe had transformed him from a royal guest of the sovereign, to a ward of the government. Had Alämayähu been allowed to remain a protégé of Queen Victoria, who at one point had offered to finance his upbringing, his life could well have taken a very different direction.

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[9]Amulree, Lord, 1970, "Prince Alamayou of Ethiopia", *Ethiopia Observer*, Vol. XIII (incorrectly printed as Vol. XIV), No. 1, Addis Ababa, p. 11.

[10] Thomas Biddulph, Keeper of the Privy Purse, wrote to Lowe in January 1872, expressing the Queen's displeasure with the manner in which she had been sidelined by Lowe, following which Lowe dismissed the Queen's concerns, stating that he had already made arrangements for the "disposal" of Alämayähu. Following a medical report on Alämayähu commissioned by the Queen, which recommended, *inter alia*, that he not be sent to a public school, Lowe managed to get Gladstone to forward him a copy of the report, which he then challenged, leading the Queen to reach a compromise reluctantly allowing Jex-Blake to become the new guardian. Amulree, Lord, 1970, pp. 11-12.

[11]*London Daily News*, 9 Mar., 1872, p.5; Amulree, Lord, 1970, p. 12. Under pressure from the Queen, Lowe had reluctantly agreed that while under Jex-Blake's guardianship, Alämayähu could continue to see Speedy if he remained in England for a year. However, with suspiciously convenient timing, the very next day (8 Feb.1872), the Colonial Office informed Lowe that Speedy's presence was urgently required in Penang, so his one-year leave was no longer possible. Amulree, Lord, 1970, p. 12.

Alämayähu's difficulties in adjusting to this change of position were compounded by a lack of clarity on the government's part as to what it actually envisaged for his future. The available evidence indicates that Emperor Téwodros wanted his son to be taken to Britain for education.[12] On the march back from Mäqdäla, Napier had changed the destination to India, in agreement with Alämayähu's mother, who decided to accompany Alämayähu there. Later, after the Empress tragically died *en route* to the coast, Napier received a request to bring Alämayähu to Britain to be presented to Queen Victoria. But there is no evidence that it was agreed, or even suggested, that Alämayähu should go into exile in Britain. Indeed, both Napier and Speedy were well aware that Alämayähu was to return to Ethiopia once his education was complete.

In the summer of 1871, the Chancellor had complained that Alämayähu's prospects "ought to depend on some fixed principle, and not on blind chance. Yet how comes he to be in India and now in the Colony of Penang: simply because he fell into the hands of an officer whose fate has blown him to those places". He was explicit that since the government was paying for Alämayähu's education, it must be provided in Britain, to a high standard; not in India.[13] He did not, however, say what the "fixed principle" was, or should be.

The upshot was that Alämayähu was left largely in the dark as to the government's intentions. In due course, during the reign of Yohannïs IV (r.

[12]Téwodros was aware that Britain was at that time the world's most militarily powerful nation, and his belief that Ethiopia should acquire and develop technologies to enable it to manufacture its own products, rather than rely on imports, had probably been encouraged by his British advisors, Walter Plowden and John Bell. Hormudz Rassam, sent by the British as an envoy to Téwodros in 1866, reported that the Emperor had expressed a wish that his eldest son, *Däjazmač* Mäshäsha, and *Däjazmač* Alämayähu should be "recommended to the [English] Queen, in order that, when I die, they may be looked after by the English and not be allowed to govern badly". Letter, Rassam to *Daily News*, 17 Nov. 1879; *Manchester Courier & Lancashire General Advertiser*, 20 Nov. 1879, p. 6. After the death of Téwodros, Napier wrote to Alämayähu's mother offering to protect Alämayähu from his father's enemies on the trek back to the north, and to "send him to England or Bombay to be educated", ending, "Your own wishes regarding his disposal shall, however, be followed by us". Pankhurst, R. (Ed. & Annot.), 2002, pp. 97-98, citing House of Commons, *Further Papers*, 9. The Empress reportedly told Colonel Merewether that as Téwodros "had made him over to the English", through Rassam, "she preferred abiding by his wishes, and was herself ready to follow him wherever he went". Rassam, H., 1869, *Narrative of the British Mission to Theodore, King of Abyssinia*, Vol. I, London: John Murray, pp. 342-343.

[13] Amulree, Lord, 1970, p. 11.

1872-1879), who, as *Däjazmach* Kassa Mïrcha of Tigray, had facilitated Napier's expedition to Mäqdäla, and was thus regarded by the British government as an ally, it would become clear that the Foreign Office mandarins had no desire to be seen to be preparing a pro-British pretender to the Ethiopian throne to make an appearance on the southern shore of the Red Sea. However, Lowe's perspective was by no means universally shared; for example, during 1876 and 1877, well into the reign of Yohannïs IV, there would be a great deal of speculation in the British Press over Alämayähu's position as the rightful heir to the Ethiopian throne. However, in 1871, the political situation in Ethiopia was still unsettled. The throne was not yet occupied by Yohannïs IV, who would follow the current sovereign, Täklä Giyorgis II (r. 1868-1872).

Problems of Adjustment

It was inevitable that Alämayähu's ambiguous and confusing status upon his return to England from the Malay peninsula at the end of 1871 would prove to be problematic, and indeed he soon began to run into problems at Cheltenham. Although he was popular at school, and was regarded as intelligent and friendly, and quickly made a name for himself at sports, he was generally viewed as a failure in terms of academic performance, and was reported by Jex-Blake to be idle and indolent.[14] He basically had little interest in academic studies. In other words, it might be said, his behaviour was princely. Normally mild-mannered, but used to having servants around him, he was known to throw his jacket on the floor for other boys to pick up, and once even pushed a smaller boy into the water "to see the splash it would make".[15] Years

[14]In July 1874, Jex-Blake decided to enrol Alämayähu at Rugby School, to which he was moving as headmaster. "If it were not for his indolence", Jex-Blake wrote, "I should wish to send him to Eton, but he would be very idle there and from indolence he would fall worse at 16 or 17". Bates, D., 1979, *The Abyssinian Difficulty; The Emperor Theodorus and the Magdala Campaign 1867-68*, Oxford University Press, p. 822. "Later, at Hillside preparatory school, headmaster Henry Draper would inform Jex-Blake, "He is, as you say, refined in manner and in personal habits, but his indolence in all subjects which do not fit in with his natural inclinations is the great obstacle to his progress". Letter. H.M. Draper to Dr T.W. Jex-Blake, 2 March 1876, RA VIC/ADDJ/1233, Royal Archives, Windsor Castle, p. 1.

[15] Douglas Sladen, a prefect at Cheltenham asked by Jex-Blake to "keep an eye" on Alämayähu, recalled that although the boys were "very indulgent" to Alämayähu, knowing that he was an orphan, "they soon let him know that bullying was not to be one of his privileges". Sladen, D.B.W., 1915, *Twenty Years of My Life*, New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., pp. 256-257.

afterwards, as we shall see, he would complain that no-one had ever explained to him why he should concentrate on school work.

Alämayähu's reluctance to take his academic studies seriously, such as would befit an aspiring middle-class British youth looking forward to a successful career in a competitive environment, would be his Achilles heel not only during his time at Cheltenham College, Hillside preparatory school and Rugby School, but also at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, where he failed his examinations, and where his fellow-cadets regarded the notoriously shy Alämayähu as "thin-skinned" and aloof.[16]

A Heart-to-Heart in Devon

Alämayähu's failure to gain his commission at Sandhurst embarrassed both the government and Jex-Blake, who had strongly recommended a military future for the young Ethiopia. However, the government was still of the opinion that he should eventually join the British Army in India. But Alämayähu's plight led the more sympathetic Sir Stafford Northcote, who in 1874 had replaced Lowe as Chancellor of the Exchequer (following a change of government from the Liberals to the Conservatives in February, 1874), to intervene. As Secretary of State for India, Northcote had taken a close interest in Alämayähu, and he now invited him to join him for several days in September, 1879, at Pynes, his residential estate in Devon, for recuperation and a heart-to-heart discussion about his future. This represented a radical change in approach. For the first time, Alämayähu was being consulted. At the age of 18 years, maturing rapidly, and old enough to realise that he was in the uncomfortable position of being royalty in exile with no assets of his own, and with no prospects of adequate income-generation, Alämayähu, who no doubt had the opportunity to inspect and mull over Northcote's personal collection of traditional Ethiopian artefacts from Mäqdäla,[17] suggested that he should

[16]Letter, C. Cooper King, Royal Military College Sandhurst to Ransome, 3 Jan. 1880, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, INDEX: INDEX/LETTER/10056.

[17] Sir Stafford Northcote's descendants gave Ethiopianist Richard Snailham items from his collection of Ethiopiana at Pynes House, which Snailham in turn donated to the Ethnological Museum at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University. Snailham, R., 2017, "Richard Pankhurst – AFROMET Campaigner", *The Anglo-Ethiopian Society News File*, Spring 2017, London: The Anglo-Ethiopian Society, pp. 13-14. Other items from Northcote's collection were later donated to the British Museum.

return to Ethiopia, "where, he said, he had two aunts and a half-brother living".[18]

However, the idea of returning to Ethiopia received short shrift from Northcote, who rejected the option outright. Familiar with Alämayähu's sensitive temperament, he had ruled out the possibility of a political career, and told him "that his going to Abyssinia was out of the question".[19] In any case, the royal exile had presumably forgotten much of the Amharic language and his highland Ethiopian culture. Northcote still clung to the idea that he might join the Indian army, but was aware that even that option would require a higher standard of education. The only realistic way forward would seem to be for Alämayähu - before it was too late – to acquire an education sufficient to enable him to support himself somehow in Britain or its dominions. He should thus re-embark on his studies, which the government would again finance.

So the hammer had fallen. For the first time, a senior government official had told Alämayähu – point blank – that he was not going to return to Ethiopia. This might not have come entirely as a surprise, but the finality of Northcote's words must have shaken Alämayähu.

Alämayähu Makes a Decision

Alämayähu's options had now been narrowed down, but he was sharp enough to think rapidly and make a positive response. He went along with Northcote's proposals, and named Professor Cyril Ransome as his prospective tutor.[20] Ransome had been hired by Jex-Blake as a private tutor for Alämayähu when he was struggling with his studies at Rugby School. He liked and respected the 28-year old Ransome, who had taken him the previous summer on vacation in England's West Country, followed by a trip to northern France that included a visit to the much vaunted Paris Exhibition. Alämayähu proposed that since "there was no-one in England who had ever done him so much good as Ransome", he "would like to go to him".[21]

[18] Letter, Northcote to Lady Biddulph, 20 Oct. 1879, cited in Amulree, Lord, 1970, p. 14. So far as the present author is aware, this was the first time that Alämayähu made such a request to a British government official.
[19] *Ibid*.
[20] Cyril Ransome was the father of the celebrated novelist, Arthur Ransome.
[21] Amulree, Lord, 1970, p. 14, citing letter from Northcote to Lady Biddulph, 20 Oct. 1879.

Northcote agreed with Alämayähu's proposal, and put it in a letter to Ransome on 7th September, 1879, explaining that Alämayähu "is destined, at present, for the Indian army, but he is very backward and he requires some attention".[22] The mail in England at that time was very fast, so they did not have to wait long for the reply; it had probably arrived by the 9th. However, they were disappointed to read that Ransome had turned down the opportunity to devote the next few years of his life to Alämayähu's upbringing. He was not married, he had taken up a professorial position at the Yorkshire College in Leeds the previous year,[23] and his future in academia looked bright. Furthermore, although they seem to have enjoyed a pleasant holiday together, Alämayähu was so popular with the press and the general public, that the rather judgemental Ransome had found that the constant attention that his companion attracted wherever he went – no doubt overshadowing Ransome himself – was irritating. Indeed, Ransome would later declare that he found had Alämayähu to be "a nuisance" to travel with,[24] and made it clear that he resented people being interested in making his acquaintance only because of his association with Alämayähu, who, as an impressive, six-feet tall and dignified young man, continued to be regarded by the media and the British public as a celebrity.[25]

Ransome's response was a blow to both Northcote and Alämayähu. The Chancellor suggested an alternative tutor, who was based in Gloucestershire, but Alämayähu insisted on Ransome. So Northcote agreed that they should try again. It was also agreed that this time, Alämayähu would write a personal letter of request to Ransome, accompanied and supported by a covering letter from Northcote. So that is what they did.

Alämayähu's letter (Fig. 1), written on either 9th or 10th September 1879 in handwriting of typical mid-Victorian style, was nonetheless more careless than the neat 'copper-plate' script he used to produce while at school, when his teachers were probably looking over his shoulder. It was written on the small, folded, paper popular at the time as a means of minimising the weight of

[22] Letter, Northcote to Ransome, 7 Sept. 1879, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, INDEX:INDEX/LETTERS/10192.
[23] The Yorkshire College is now the University of Leeds.
[24] Ransome, C., unpublished autobiography, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, Leeds.
[25] In 1882, Cyril Ransome would write to his sister, Edith, "...I was very annoyed this morning by a creature bringing a nephew of Capt. Speedy, Alamayu's first tutor, to the College for no purpose but to exhibit me. A certain class of people are disgusting toadys. I always judge people's position on whether they question me or not about Ally." Letter, Ransome to Edith, 28 June 1882, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, kindly brought to the present author's attention by Margaret Ratcliffe, 25 Oct. 2023.

letters for mailing purposes. He addressed his former tutor politely, but affectionately:

> My Dear Mr. Ransome,
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> I have been to Scotland since I last saw you, I managed to get a few days fishing in Scotland[26] but it was very disagreeable because of the rain, and I played lawntennis also.[27] I am now staying with Sir Stafford Northcote in devonshire, he has been asking me what I had better do – whether to go to India at once or go on studying a little longer, I thought that I had better study a little while longer and so I have written to you to ask you if you would act as my tutor for two or three years in some quiet place in Ireland.[28]
>
> I think [I] now understand the advantages of working a little more than I did before, it never having been explained to me.
>
> I remain yours Affectionately
>
> Alamayu[29]

[26] Alämayähu had spent part of the summer holidays of 1879 with Captain Speedy in Scotland, probably at Speedy's sister-in-law's house at St. Andrews. He may have chosen not to mention Speedy in the letter, since Jex-Blake, a close friend of Ransome, seems to have despised Speedy.

[27] The first report of Alämayähu going fishing was when he was staying at the Alum Bay Hotel, Isle of Wight, at the age of 7 years, with Captain Speedy, in July, 1868. *Hampshire Independent*, Wed. 29 Jul. 1868, p. 4; *Isle* of Wight *Observer*, Sat. 1 Aug. 1868, p. 3. At Cheltenham College, Alämayähu had access to the game of "rackets" (an indoor game similar to squash), and by the time he was at Sandhurst, he "was considered the most successful of all the cadets at rackets and boxing". *The Taylorian, A Journal devoted to the interests and amusement of the Boys of Merchant Taylors' School*, Vol. II (London), pp. 33-36 (no date; c. 1880). Thus Alämayähu's mentioning in his letter to Ransome of 10 Sept. 1879 that he had been fishing and playing tennis suggest that he had maintained an interest and a certain level of skill in these sports.

[28] It is not known why Alämayähu suggested moving to Ireland, since there is no record of his ever having been there. However, since Speedy's family on his father's side were Irish, it is possible that Speedy had talked to Alämayähu about Ireland as a place that would be to his liking, being largely rural. Neither Ransome nor Northcote had an Irish background.

[29]This letter, a copy of which was kindly shared with the present author by Margaret Ratcliffe (a leading authority on Cyril Ransome's son, Arthur), was given to her by a relative of Arthur Ransome. While in this paper the present author has transliterated Alämayähu's name from the Amharic, he actually always spelled his name, "Alamayu".

In requesting two or three years of tutoring, Alämayähu was, in effect, acknowledging that he would have to repeat more or less the equivalent of his entire Rugby curriculum if he was pass any institutional entrance examinations, and that he would have to continue to study until he was over 20 years old. In addition, he wanted to spend those years "in some quiet place in Ireland", for Alämayähu was shy, and disliked the fact that people in Britain tended to stare at him due to his colour. So he was not keen on towns; he much preferred activities such as horse-riding, and the flora and fauna of the countryside. Indeed, at one point, he had told Prime Minister Gladstone that he would like to be a gamekeeper in Scotland.[30]

But the most significant part of the letter is the second paragraph, which was disarmingly frank. Realising that he could not live forever as a ward of the British government, and that the Ethiopia option was off the table, so to speak, he now understood that he had no choice but to focus on his studies. Furthermore, he was well aware that Ransome had been frustrated with his lack of interest in his school work at Rugby, so he now explained why he had not really bothered with it: no-one had ever explained to him what the point of it was.

At first this might look like an unconvincing excuse for his poor academic performance. But he was probably telling the truth. To the upright, straight-laced Anglican, Jex-Blake, who was his headmaster throughout his years at Cheltenham and Rugby, it would have been obvious that hard work was both good for the soul and necessary for one's career. But as we have seen, Alämayähu had not been prepared either for the life of a British schoolboy, or the concept of a career. And despite his travelling, he was not worldly-wise. When he first arrived in England in 1868, he was treated the same way he was treated in Ethiopia: as royalty. The British press would refer to him as His Royal Highness, and he had rarely come into contact with ordinary, working people. Everything had been done for him. The fact that at the age of 18 years he expected a college professor to give up several years of his life for his personal benefit also indicates the extent to which Alämayähu had been

[30] Gladstone, who joined Alämayähu in Scotland during the summer holidays on more than one occasion, spoke to the Queen of Alämayähu's "great intelligence". He found him to be "a nice boy, of gentle manners", but "without much energy". Langton, J., no date (c.1989) "Alemayou, Prince of Abyssinia", *St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle: Report of the Friends of St. George's and Descendants of the Knights of the Garter*, Vol VI, No. 9, 1 Oct. 1987 - 30 Sept. 1988, pp. 388-389, citing RA Add. A36/610.

sheltered from the realities of life. Hence his difficulty in adjusting to the changed circumstances when he returned to England at the beginning of 1872.

Northcote's covering letter, dated 10 September 1879, was sympathetic and supportive. But it was also realistic. He knew that Alämayähu needed to come to terms with the reality of his situation. He had been severed from his Ethiopian roots, and the Foreign Office feared that his presence in Ethiopia would not be appreciated by Yohannïs IV. On the other hand, the government was not going to maintain him to the standard to which he was accustomed forever. Yet while his reputedly delicate temperament might rule out the military, he was insufficiently educated to take up an alternative professional career. Options were few; the situation was serious.

Not knowing Ransome as well as Alämayähu knew him, the Chancellor's letter, dated 10th September, 1879, was more formal than Alämayähu's, being addressed to "Professor Ransome":

> Dear Sir,
>
> I showed your kind note [of rejection] to Alamayu, who is anxious that I should repeat to you his earnest wish that you would again take him as your pupil. He has written the enclosed note [?], which I have promised to forward. Perhaps you will kindly write to him, as he retains a warm affection for you.
>
> It is difficult to say what he had better do. You will see by his letter how backward he is; and we find him very helpless in the ways of the world, though most amiable and even winning in his manners.
>
> He thinks you might perhaps be induced to take charge of him for four or five years.[31] I will tell him that this is hardly probable; but if you entertained the idea I would of course consider what could be done. I do not wish to make any permanent arrangement for him till I have had an opportunity of conferring with Lord Napier, who is now abroad.[32]

[31] In his letter, Alämayähu had suggested two or three years. Possibly Northcote had told him that it was unrealistic to ask for four or five years.

[32] So far as the present author is aware, the arrangement with Ransome for "at least six months" was agreed without conferring with Napier, who was in Gibraltar.

> Alamayu stays here till Monday [15th September], after which he must go back to Rugby,[33] unless anything is arranged for him meanwhile. I am at this moment corresponding with a Clergyman who takes pupils in Gloucestershire, and who may perhaps get on with him; but his own strong leaning is towards yourself.
>
> I remain
>
> Faithfully Yours
>
> Stafford H. Northcote

An Agreement is Reached

The combination of Alämayähu's personal letter, together with Northcote's covering letter, achieved its objective. Ransome agreed to look after, and tutor, Alämayähu. The arrangement was to begin with an initial period of "six months at least", for £250, with an additional £50 at Alämayähu's disposal.[34] Bearing in mind that Ransome would continue to receive his Yorkshire College professorial salary (with Alämayähu moving into his house, rather than Ransome having to move to Ireland), this was quite a generous package, since 250 pounds in 1879 is equivalent at present-day values to around £31,250, plus the equivalent of £6,250 personal spending money (ie. around £1,000 per month) for Alämayähu.[35] Accepting the terms, Ransome, probably aware that Alämayähu was not used to handling his own money, said that he did not intend to give him that money all at once.[36]

Now, at least Alämayähu had a say in his own future. He would also be free of Jex-Blake, whose strict guardianship, which he seems to have come to resent, would automatically come to an end.[37] He was approaching his 19th birthday,

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[33] Even though Alämayähu was no longer a pupil at Rugby School, at the time this letter was written, his guardian was still Jex-Blake, who continued as headmaster of the school, and was thus still resident at Rugby.

[34] Hall, D., 2000, *Far Headingley Weetwood and West Park*, Far Headingley, Leeds: Far Headingley Village Society, pp. 119-120, citing Treasury Papers.

[35] The purchasing power of the pound at the time of Prince Alämayähu in 2021 terms in this paper is based on the formula developed by statista (statista.com).

[36] Letter, Ransome to Northcote, 27 Sept, 1879, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, Special Collections, INDEX: INDEX/LETTER/10194.

[37] There were times when Alämayähu found life under Jex-Blake's guardianship difficult and restrictive. On vacation in France with Ransome in 1868, he annoyed Ransome by complaining about his friend Jex-Blake, leading Ransome to recall, "I told him plainly what I

and looked forward to continuing his education, if all went well, for a few more years.

A New Beginning

The new arrangements came into effect on 1st October, and Alämayähu wasted no time in moving to Ransome's house, high up above a wooded valley, in the ancient village of Far Headingley that was fast becoming a desirable leafy suburb of the nearby city of Leeds.[38] Despite being naturally introverted like his mother, his confidence was growing, and his command of English was quite good. He was very well connected, for despite having lived under the watchful eye of Jex-Blake throughout his schooldays, he had managed to maintain his connections with the royal family and several members of the aristocracy, often spending his holidays as a popular member of Queen Victoria's entourage at Balmoral, Osborne or Windsor.[39] He had also become an accomplished equestrian and a good shot – all necessary attributes in aristocratic British society. His longer-term future was still in the balance, but there was now a fully-financed plan in place that would stabilise and strengthen his situation, at least over the short-, if not medium-term. And the inflexible Lowe had been replaced as Chancellor by the far more approachable and understanding Northcote. Alämayähu was still a ward of the government rather than the Queen, but Northcote was open to reaching out to the Queen's 'allies', such as Captain Speedy and Lord Napier, to seek advice and help resolve difficulties in resolving Alämayähu's situation – something which Lowe would never have even contemplated.[40] Thus Northcote was now

thought of his ingratitude". Ransome, C., unpublished autobiography, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, Leeds.

[38] Since October 1878, when he took up the professorship at The Yorkshire College, Leeds, Ransome had been lodging with the Reverend Annesley Powys, at 1, Glebe Villas, Hollin Lane, Far Headingley. Built in 1874, the address was also known as 1, Hollin Lane, later becoming 2, Hollin Lane after another house was built adjacent to it. Ransome, C., unpublished autobiography, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, Leeds; Hall, D., 2000, p. 91.

[39] Apart from his relationship with the Northcote family, Alämayähu had also become very close to the family of Thomas Biddulph, Keeper of the Privy Purse. Sir Thomas and Lady Biddulph had become, in effect, Alämayähu's surrogate parents during his schooldays.

[40] As Secretary of State for India, Stafford Northcote had endeavoured to ensure that Alämayähu was well looked after; as early as July 1868, when Alämayähu first arrived in England, he expressed concern that the young Ethiopian was "in a nervous state", and passed on the Queen's suggestion "that a suitable residence be found for him on the Isle of Wight", which was at that time experiencing exceptionally warm weather. Moreover, two days later, he recommended to the Queen's personal secretary that a nurse or housekeeper be hired to

defusing the harsh differences of opinion between the sovereign and the government over Alämayähu.

Alämayähu's recognition of the anomalous position in which he had been left by a dilatory British government, and his realisation that returning to Ethiopia in the foreseeable future was unlikely, emerges for the first time in this previously unpublished letter. The letter also begins to reveal Alämayähu the man, making his own decisions, as distinct from the hapless child-victim with which his name is generally associated.

Epilogue

It is a tragedy that Alämayähu did not live to enjoy the fruits of the promising new phase of his life that was launched on 1st October, 1879.[41] Ransome's home at Number 1, Hollin Lane, Far Headingley,[42] was a well-built and comfortable 10-roomed middle-class house, but was nonetheless situated in quite an exposed location, and 1879 had seen some of the worst weather in England since records began. Furthermore, Alämayähu had probably not fully recovered from the stresses and strains of his Sandhurst experience, when he was additionally exposed to exceptionally cold and windy conditions on the parade ground.[43] Thus by the time he moved into Ransome's house on 6th October, his resistance to the cold and wet may already have been low. It is, then, not altogether surprising that he caught a chill, when on 11 October, during a bitterly cold night, he ventured out to the toilet at the end of the back

look after Alämayähu, and stated that he would not make proposals to the government regarding Alämayähu's maintenance "until Ï hear what Captain Speedy's ideas are". Southon, J. & Harper, R., 2004, *The Rise and Fall of Basha Felika*, Penzance, Cornwall: Jean Southon, pp. 120-122, citing RA (Royal Archives) P18/71, 17 July 1868, and RA P18/72, 19 July 1868.

[41] Ransome seemed to think that Alämayähu's newly-found commitment to his studies was genuine; he would later write that since Alämayähu "has awakened to the necessity of work, he would probably take advantage" of the new arrangements that Ransome was making for his tuition, which included bringing a "Bachelor of the University of Paris" to move to Leeds to teach him French. Letter, Ransome to Northcote, no date (c. 22 Oct. 1879), Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, Special Collections, INDEX: INDEX/LETTER/10194.

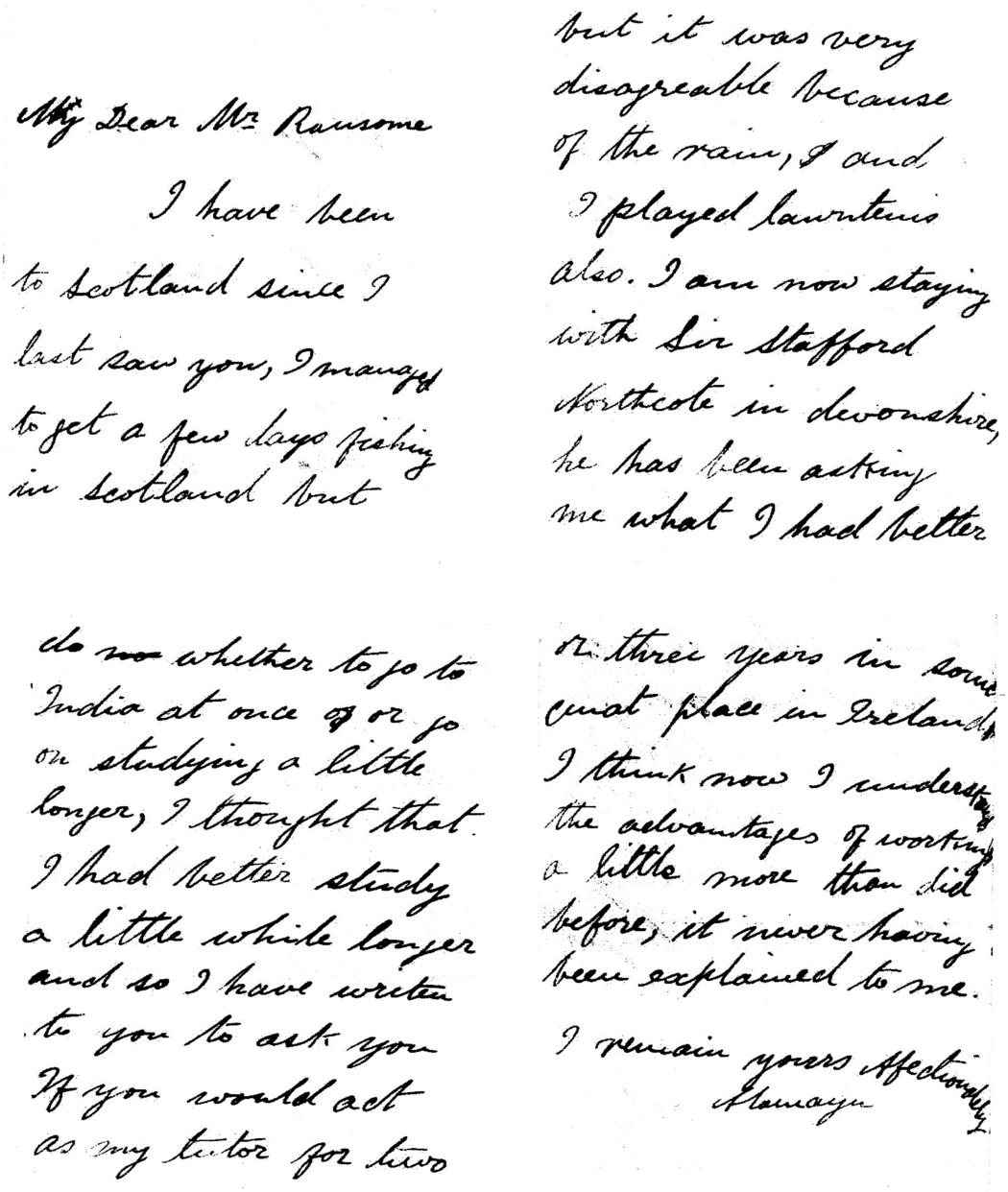
[42] Ransome was a tenant, or "lodger", of the house, not the owner.

[43] The second half of 1878 and the first half of 1879, while Alämayähu was at Sandhurst, was an unusually cold period. 1879 itself was the third coldest year on record, with an annual CET (Central English Temperature) of just 7.42°C. Furthermore, the summer of 1879 had been exceptionally wet, the second wettest on record for England and Wales, with rainfall of 409.2mm. https://community.netweather.tv.

garden, and inadvertently fell asleep there.[44] Unfortunately, the chill developed into pneumonia. Despite a rapid and intensive response by some of the most renowned doctors of the realm who operated on Alämayähu in his bedroom, a team of nurses working round-the-clock, and the ministrations of Queen Victoria herself, he died on Friday, 14th November 1879, of pleurisy - the same malady that had felled his mother eleven years earlier, during that cold, wet and windy trek from Mäqdäla. The world would never know Alämayähu the man.

[44] Ransome, C., unpublished autobiography, Special Collections, Brotherton Library, Leeds. At a time when houses in England were not connected to sewage systems, it was normal for toilets to be situated at the end of the back garden.

Figure 1: Letter from Prince Alämayähu to Cyril Ransome, 10th September 187



1

My Dear Mr Ransome

I have been to Scotland since I last saw you, I manage to get a few days fishing in Scotland but

2

but it was very disagreable because of the rain, I and I played lawntenis also. I am now staying with Sir Stafford Northcote in devonshire, he has been asking me what I had better

3

do ~~no~~ whether to go to India at once or go on studying a little longer, I thought that I had better study a little while longer and so I have written to you to ask you If you would act as my tutor for two

4

or three years in some quat place in Ireland I think now I unders the advantages of worki a little more than did before, it never having been explained to me.

I remain yours Affectionately Alamayu