

PREFACE

Dr. Waltenequs Dargie is by profession an engineer. He is also, however, an accomplished man of letters. His current work, the setting of which is influenced by his knowledge of the south of his country, is an exciting historical novel.

In his opening chapter he transports us into scenes of conflict and intrigue enveloping the nineteenth century south-western Ethiopian states, whose wealth was based on gold, ivory and slaves.

We find ourselves in the historic kingdom of Kaffa, whose neighbors are the kingdoms of Jimma, Kunto and Konta, Hadiya, Gimira and Magi. We are introduced to the proud but ineffectual King Gali Sherocho of Kaffa, his three rival wives, and his beautiful young daughter, Princess Mersabel (the heroine of the story). We also meet an unfortunate English scholar whom the king has purchased as a slave, and who is under pressure to manufacture the weapons required by his master. A no less important figure in the story is the noble eunuch Marebath, who is the head guard.

As the plot unravels, we see Kaffa at war with its neighbors. King Gali Sherocho and his advisers are, however, aware of the potentially greater challenge from the reforming Emperor Théodros. Théodros' kingdom, to their manifest relief, is, however, located too far away to the north to pose any immediate threat to the local status quo.

The King and his family have at the same time to take account of another potential source of trouble: the underlying struggle between adherents of the traditional gods and goddesses, and the believers in the Virgin Mary. Her creed has recently been introduced by Temari, a wily Christian monk from the north, whose ambition is to uproot Kaffa's sacred old Warka Tree.

The plot keeps the attention of the reader throughout, and leads on to a dramatic dénouement.

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