

Seventy members and friends attended the ANNUAL DINNER on 5th March 1981. Lord Merrivale remarked that it was especially appropriate that it was held on the House of Lords as it was twenty years ago that the Society was founded in a room in the Palace of Westminster. The Ambassador in Antananarivo, Mr R. Langridge and his staff sent greetings. Among those present were two former Ambassadors, namely Mr John Street and Sir Mervyn Brown, accompanied by Lady Brown; and Mme Jean Bemananjara, wife of the Malagasy Minister of Transport, Supply & Tourism. Two guests had been specially invited. M. Raharijaona, accompanied by Mme Raharijaona, came in his capacity as Ambassador at the Court of St. James (resident in Paris). In a brief speech he wondered whether it might some time be possible to organise an exhibition in the UK showing relations between Britain and Madagascar in the past and present and looking towards Madagascar's future. He also referred to the study of historical links being undertaken by researchers at the University of Madagascar. Sir Leonard Allinson, of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, said that his visit to Madagascar in November 1980 was the first for a long time by an official Government visitor from London, on account of the closure of the British Embassy in Antananarivo some years ago. He was glad to say that 'we are coming closer together and we must build on this'. Britain continued to give 'aid' or 'developmental cooperation', helping, for example, in improving Ivato airport.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The second meeting of the year was held, a little later than usual, on 18 June 1981 at the premises of Ove Arup and Partners. The first part of the evening was given over to the AGM. Lord Merrivale said that he would not recapitulate the activities of the Society which had already been reported, but he had other points to make. The Treaty of Friendship between Great Britain and Madagascar, ratified in 1866, showed that the friendship did not date merely from, say, the independent status newly recognised in 1960. The links indeed went much further back. It was interesting to note that the early missionaries of the London Missionary Society were equipped not simply with book-learning but also had ideas about, for example, agricultural and other development. The Society had recently been invited to help in finding suitable places for Malagasy trainees. A new project had been brought to the Society's notice by Mr Lee of the National Society for the Mentally Handicapped and by Mr K. Paginton (who, it may be noted, has been working in Madagascar for over 15 years and who attended a meeting at Shell House before setting out). At the moment it seemed best if individuals responded privately, if they so wished. Eight members of the Committee were re-elected. Two others did not stand; Mr P. Morris, who goes to a diplomatic post in Sierra Leone and Mr G. Woods, who will also be overseas. Mr John Davys, the only nominee, was elected in their place.

HISTORY IN STAMPS

But the evening did not consist of business alone - nor indeed only of business and an excellent supper. The last Newsletter carried a report of the 1980 exhibition of Malagasy stamps and philatelic and other related material belonging to Mr G. Fryer. The Society now had the pleasure of having him as its speaker. Mr Fryer said that his collection formed 'a slice of the country's history - mostly bits of paper'. The significance of such bits of paper was skilfully brought out. For example, one of the earliest maps of Madagascar reflected contacts with foreigners, with the varied implications of such contacts. Some letters related to the British and French at Tamatave 1810-11, reflecting national rivalry and the Napoleonic Wars. The British missionaries of the IMS were welcomed early in the 19th century and much correspondence of historical and philatelic interest survived. Letters from the time of Queen Ranavalona, at least 1836-61, when Madagascar was to a large degree a closed island, are much fewer. Further rivalry between Britain and France led to a sort of postal blockade and to circumvent it British mails had to be sent via Mauritius. Difficulties in communications led to various interesting special arrangements. The British 'Consular Mail' was a sort of ticket system and later there were the British Inland Mail stamps. The Norwegian Mission had stamps for a special service. Stamps were also issued by the French for Nossi-be, Diego and Mayotte. After the historical talk there was time to examine the scores of exhibits

of stamps, used covers and so on, which had been selected from the collection built up by Mr Fryer over ten years.

INCIDENTS IN ANTANARIVO

For at least the last century there has been a risk of the rumour about mpaka fo ('heart stealers') coming suddenly to the surface, often with serious results. In October 1980 a rumour which, though slightly different in content, was of the same psychological pattern spread in Antananarivo and led to two deaths. In December trouble followed a football match with a team from E. Africa; some young people pillaged a number of shops and 40 arrests were made. A strike of staff and students at the University lasted for several months and reached a climax when there was a 'confrontation' in the centre of the town between students and the military; there were some deaths and injured on both sides. An account of University matters is given by J.P. Langellier in Le Monde of 5 Feb. 1981. The same writer has two long articles on Madagascar in Le Monde of 4 & 6 April 1981.

PLANTS FOR MEDICINES

A Commission of the Organisation of African States met in Antananarivo to discuss the use of local plants for medical purposes. It recommended that Governments should accept the importance of such research and actively support it; should extend permission for the use of such medicines; and include information about usable plants in school programmes. In line with such proposals the Malagasy Government has reached an agreement with the Italian firm Gambogi to open a factory at Fianarantsoa to produce medicines from local resources. Two thirds of the capital is to be provided by the company and one third by the Malagasy National Bank for Industry and by the local insurance company Ny Havana.

PRIME MINISTER'S PALACE (ANDAFTAVARATRA)

With reference to the fire which seriously damaged the building a few years ago it had already been noted that the architect and builder was W. Pool of the London Missionary Society and that British firms supplied, for example, the glass for the dome - early examples, one could say, of the type of business which has become prominent today. There is now a Malagasy firm Entreprise Dinika which is already responsible for monitoring such engineering projects as bridge-building by foreign firms. It has now been made responsible for the repair of 'historical monuments' within a range of 50 kms of the capital. With a view to rebuilding the section destroyed by the fire an engineer from the firm M. Rekotobe Andrianarison visited London in June, hoping to obtain some relevant architectural information. It has been possible to provide him with a technical description by W. Pool himself and some photographs from last century, to show its earliest appearance. There is a new move in connection with the Town Hall in Antananarivo which was seriously damaged in the disturbances of May 1972 and has been deteriorating ever since. In this case a public appeal has been launched. The proposal is to re-design the interior, leaving the external appearance largely unchanged.

WONDERFUL MOTH/BUTTERFLY

One of the two most striking members of the butterflies-and moths world of Madagascar is to be found in a shop window in Victoria St. London (near the BR office), framed for sale at a few pounds. It is the andriandolo which can be translated as the 'aristocrat of butterflies', though it seems that according to the experts, and contrary to what the layman would think, it is a moth. Darwin's contemporary A.R. Wallace got that point right, but went further: he called it 'the most wonderful moth in the world'. Its 'seven tails' (another local name) and flashing green and orange and other colours are well reproduced on the 100fr stamp of 1960. It likes the high life and it is one of the rare sights of Madagascar if you happen to be there at the right time and see a cloud of andriandolo, which seem to have been born at the same moment, flying near the tops of the trees. The other striking moth is, of course, the faravoanemba (known as the Comet), with its very long double tail. One wonders whether a study of its 'fuselage' and delicate but effective tails might not provide some useful evidence for aerodynamics. For some years the Comet has been specially bred and sold (framed) in Antananarivo (though in some areas it is regarded as a harbinger of disaster). Perhaps before long the Comet will join its compatriot in Victoria Street.

MADAGASCAR CHILDHOOD

In 1887 Dr. Standing, a Quaker Missionary, published in London a book called 'The Children of Madagascar'. He was writing of Malagasy children. But many years later his daughter Margaret wrote down her memories as an English child in Madagascar, for the benefit of her grandchildren. These reminiscences of Margaret Silcock (which deal also with her life in China) have been used by her daughter Anne Coutts in a short biography entitled 'Meggie'. Obtainable from the Book Centre, Friends House, Euston Road, London for 94p post free. The Rev. Alfred Green who worked for several years in Madagascar, has also just published a book on his early life before he went to Madagascar. 'Growing up in Attercliffe' has been published as a valuable social document by New City, UTU, 210 Abbeyfield Rd, Sheffield (price £2.50). The author is hoping to re-visit Madagascar soon after an absence of 35 years.

FIRST HISTORIAN

In the 1820's a Malagasy boy and his twin brother spent several years at school in London and Manchester (some companions spent shorter periods). Going home at 19, Raombana became Private Secretary to Queen Ranavalona. He also wrote in English a manuscript 'History of Madagascar', several thousand pages in length. S. Ayache in his thesis published as 'Raombana l'historien' (Librairie Ambozontany, Fianaranysoa, 1976; over 500 pages) claims him as the first Malagasy historian in the modern critical sense, owing much to his training in Britain. In 1981 L. Mosca presents Raombana, including his time in Britain, to the Italian public in 'Il Madagascar nella vita di Raombana primo storico malagascio 1809-1855'. Published by Giannini, Naples.

PER GALLON

The price of ordinary petrol has recently been increased to just over £2.00 per gallon. A part of the increase is to be used to reduce the price of imported rice, of which 100,000 tons a year are needed.

PLASTIC SURGERY

M. Eugene Ralaingo, the young man from the north-west who had an accident which led to serious damage to his face (it is now found that it took place ten years ago and caused gangrene) arrived in January. He had had a series of operations at Oddstock Hospital, Salisbury. The surgeons have given their services free, but the other expenses involved have been running at about £1,800 a month. The surgery is not yet completed, as it is an unusually difficult case. He is accompanied by Rev. K. Benzies the Anglican missionary at Antsirnana (Diego). He has had visits from former missionaries and some compatriots.

MADAGASCAR MEETINGS

The Friends of Madagascar, bringing together those in Britain (and some Malagasy visitors) who are chiefly concerned with the work of the Church, education and other social matters, held their annual meeting in Birmingham in April. About 40 were present. Mr and Mrs Michael Hughes, who returned for two years after an absence of several years, spoke on their work teaching English, and other activities, at the Friends International Centre in Antananarivo: and Mr Stephen Wilkinson spoke about the Faratsiho area. The Madagascar Mission Association has supported Anglican work for the last century. Its annual public meeting was merged this year with that of the sister organisation concerned with Mauritius, as the two are to be united in 1982. The meeting was held in Hampstead, London, in June. Those linked with Madagascar included Rev. L. Andriamiharisoa, who is spending a few months in special study at Windsor. The speaker was Archbishop Trevor Huddleston, Archbishop of the Indian Ocean, who among other matters dealt with some of the problems caused by the differences in language, political systems etc in "Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles. A modern Centre in Antananarivo had been made possible by a gift of £26,000 from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (London). Also present were two other former Bishops of Mauritius, Archbishop E. Curtis and Bishop A. Rogers, both of whom have made official visits to Madagascar.

AID FROM ALL QUARTERS

Something of the variety of types of aid going to Madagascar from different sources is indicated by the following recent sample items. Croatia has agreed to

buy Malagasy uranium; is likely to give help to try to raise the production of the Ambacanic cement factory from 65,000 to 500,000 tons a year; and has provided two coaches (one man one woman) for those likely to represent Madagascar at swimming. Britain, as agreed at the time of the sale, has given further help in connection with the HS 748 planes; also 20 Land Rovers for the cattle-raising centre at Ampandriamby. Spain is interested in growing soya in Vakinankaratra and is to send several technicians. Japan has provided much agricultural machinery of different types. East Germany has provided much agricultural machinery of different types. East Germany has provided some of the promised 1000 lorries. Ten pilots provided by USSR to work with the military have just left after two years in the island. A series 'Mother of the World' on Japanese television led to a Christmas Charity Concert in Tokyo which raised 1500 US dollars to help provide water in the extreme south of Madagascar where mothers may still have to spend hours a day in obtaining water.

TILAPIA

What is now the Overseas Development Administration made a grant to Stirling for fish-farming. Production of tilapia fry which could be used here and in developing countries was envisaged. The name may not be well known in the UK. But in many parts of Madagascar 'everyone knows' it. The word is foreign, but is pronounced as though it were Malagasy with the accent on the letter 'i' at the beginning and the end. Incredible figures are given by experts about the estimated 'total weight' of the tilapia in some not necessarily very large expanse of water. They have furnished a great deal of cheap food and there has been a fish-meal project. But there have been darker corners in their history. For example, in Alaotra, the largest lake, a certain type of tilapia was introduced. Before long it was found that its greatest joy seemed to be to nip off the young rice plants in fields adjoining the lake. The growers were not satisfied with the statement that the loss of rice was only a very small proportion of the total production in the area. The tilapia also executed something like a takeover in the lake and the numbers of the previous resident fish of other kinds seemed to decrease considerably. In due course it was found that there was some other suitable type of tilapia which did not have such vandalising habits. If there are tilapia in Stirling, they would help to make any country visitor from Madagascar feel at home.

POSTCODE

The postcode system has now been adopted. There is a number for each of the 110 Fivondronana (main regional areas), with two for chief urban areas and three for the capital. For example, Antananarivo 'central', 101; 'south', 102; 'north', 103; Fianarantsoa I, 301, Fianarantsoa II, 302; Morondava, 619.

SOHO SQUARE

M. Pierre Simon, formerly a missionary in Madagascar, has been nominated as 'pasteur titulaire' of the French Protestant Church in Soho Square, London. Mme Simon is of Malagasy origin. Her brother was in the UK some time ago taking a course in English.

FLY TO MADAGASCAR

The Society hopes to arrange a tour on charter flight terms, probably about September 1982. To make this possible there must be at least six participants, but the more the better; if there are fifteen the Society will have one free ticket at its disposal. Those who want to have their appetite whetted should look at some of the tourist literature mentioned in the Newsletter of August 1980. If interested, please inform the Secretary, Mrs Grace Hunter.