

ANGLO - MALAGASY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER No. VIII - AUGUST 1980

To judge by the number of bookings - there were nearly 70 - the ANNUAL DINNER is becoming more popular than ever. It was held as usual at the House of Lords, on 27th February. It was good to see a number of new faces, including some friends of members who may have paid only one brief visit to Madagascar years ago but who were still eager to come. Lord Trefgarne had been invited as a guest of honour to represent H.M.G.'s Government on what was a special occasion: the first time that a Malagasy Ambassador had attended a Society meeting since the closure of the Embassies. That was possible because the previous day M. Raharijaone had presented his Letters of Credence as 'Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary'. The re-opening of a British Embassy in Antananarivo (reported in the last Newsletter) and the appointment of M. Raharijaona, who adds the post to his duties as Ambassador in Paris, are matters of great satisfaction to the Society. M. Raharijaona's father was Madagascar's first Malagasy radiologist, who later became the Secretary of the Academie Malgache, always ready to give a warm welcome to any visitor to his house who was concerned with some research. M. Raharijaona himself was trained as a lawyer and himself became Chancellor of the Academie. He has his own interests in research as shown for example by an article on the interesting and practical subject of 'withcraft' and the law in Madagascar, and a contribution to the Indian Ocean Historians' Congress in Antananarivo nearly 20 years ago which was clapped with unusual fervour by the international audience. He is no stranger to this country.

The official business of the Society was dealt with at the AGM, which was held on 21st May at the premises of Ove Arug & Partners (again 'as usual'). The Chairman, Lord Merrivale, gave his 'annual review and spoke also of a recent visit to Madagascar. He had been well received by several Ministers, including a visit to the Foreign Office where the last Malagasy Ambassador resident in London M. Razafintscheno, well known to the Society, is Secretary General. The Chairman brought a letter from M Andrianarahinjake, President of the Malagasy Parliament, expressing hope for widening contacts between the respective Parliaments.

Valuable illustrated talks have been given at recent meetings on the botany and the geology of Madagascar. This time it was the important subject of CONSERVATION. Dr. Alison Jolly, now of the University of Sussex, is the author of a substantial book 'Lemur Behaviour', based on her own researches and published in the USA. She touched on many themes, such as medicinal plants, the introduction of 'foreign' trees (e.g. pine and eucalyptus) for commercial purposes, the extraordinary variety of plant life to be found within one square yard of the Malagasy rain forest. It was amusing to hear that the babakoto (the large, tailless lemur) can leap about like a ballet dancer, but that it is a 'cheat' - for after 3 or 4 leaps it stops. The reason appears to be linked to its food supply: it has to conservation (which concerns plant life, lemurs and various other living creatures and even the earth itself) included the following. First, there can be a conflict of interest between the local people and conservationists who have a wider outlook. It is easier to plant rice in the forest than in the paddy field - but it will be at the cost of destroying the trees, with serious implications for, perhaps, the climate and for the surface soil. Second, even on a shorter time scale there can be a conflict between the immediate and the future interests of the people. For example, cattle are very important, so grass is burbed off the hills to 'improve' the next crop, but then there is nothing to prevent the water rushing away in a flood, which in these conditions soon dries up. Then both the cattle and their owners may have an inadequate supply. Third, 'education' in conservation is insufficient (though something is being attempted beyond the application of laws, even 'on site' notices may be virtually useless. Fourth, research into the ways of life of different lemurs seems likely to produce information useful for conservationists.

For the benefit of potential TOURISTS a newspaper advertisement had this to say a few months ago: 'Madagascar is where the tropics come to life. In vast untrammelled rain forest, secretive and peculiar creatures roan freely. Brilliant flora, flowering trees, this is a land of strange contrasts, with an even stranger natural history'. To visit this land 'where the tropics come to life', a special tour has been arranged by Twickenham Travel. It is sponsored by the Fauna Preservation Society and the Guest Lecturer is none other than Dr. Jolly. Mauritius and Reunion are also included in the tour which covers the period 17th November to 7th December. Arrive in Antananarivo on 18th November; visit Perinet and forest; to Fort Dauphin area; then to Nossi Be; and on to Reunion. Cost is £1,265.

Monthly package tours with, at any rate so far as Madagascar is concerned, a slightly different emphasis, are also organised by Martlet Holidays Limited of Brighton. There is a combined tour of Kenya, Madagascar (called 'Malagasy'), Reunion, Mauritius and Seychelles. On Day 8 the travellers fly from Nairobi to Nossi Be; visit Antananarivo; and fly on to Reunion on Day 12. Cost for round trip is £1,120.

There are not so many GUIDE BOOKS on Madagascar that anyone carrying the lot would run the risk of making his luggage overweight. The following are comparatively recent publications: the latest edition of 'Guide Bleu'; D. ALEXANDER Holiday in the Islands; Tom ANDRIAMANORO Soava Dia-Guide des 50 Escales' (places to visit are listed in alphabetical order; first half of book in English, second in French; available from Air Madagascar). The latest title (only just announced) is 'Ocean Indien: Comores, Madagascar, Maurice, La Reunion, Seychelles' (Guide poche voyage, No.37. Likely price in Britain seems to be about £2.00).

The new BRITISH AMBASSADOR, Mr. Richard Langridge, presented his credentials on 25th January 1980, along with two other Ambassadors. President Ratsiraka dealt in turn with each of the countries represented, as reported (in Malagasy) by a local paper. To Mr. E. Ride it was suggested that Madagascar and Australia should work together to help make the Indian Ocean 'an ocean of peace'. (This point the President again emphasised in a public speech in June when he said that Madagascar requested that an international conference should be held in the island to discuss the Indian Ocean). The President admitted to Mr. Kasuhiko Furusewa that Madagascar and Japan had different views about foreign affairs, but said that they could still have good relationships. After expressing pleasure that full normal abassadorial relations had been renewed between Madagascar and Great Britain, the President emphasised his country's 'non-aligned policy', its distinctive individuality, its clearly worked out policy and its struggles against racial discriminations. Turning to current affairs, he mentioned Madagascar's refusal to express an opinion at the United Nations about Afghanistan; and spoke also of the American base in Cuba and French military aid in Chad; and added that Madagascar did not enter into the affairs of other countries.

A SOVIET MALAGASY Society was formed in Moscow in 1979. Youri Romanenki, an astronaut, is described as being the 'Committee President'. About the same time a MADAGASCAR SOVIET Society was formed in Antananarivo. The source of the information does not refer to the names of any individuals who may have been specially active in founding each of the Societies. Antananarivo is familiar with French, German and American Cultural Centres (the 'Centre' for teaching English, provided by Britain, was on a different basis). There is likely to be a new Centre soon, provided by the USSR; it will include a library, a section for listening to recorded material; and a cinema.

In the results of the Heats at the OLYMPIC GAMES the names of a few Malagasy have been noted (there may have been some others). In Swimming, they cometed in the Men's 100m Breastroke and the Women's 100m Free Style; in Athletics, in the Women's 800m and the Men's 1,500m and 10,000m; and also in Boxing. Unfortunately, none seems to have gone beyond the first round. Perhaps the runners who used to carry the mail from Antananarivo to Tamatave last century (as represented on the British Inland Mail stamps) would have made good candidates for the long distance events.

June saw the celebration of three national events: the 5th anniversary of the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC, the 20th of INDEPENDENCE, and also the 20th of the MALAGASY MILITARY FORCES. The first major ceremony took place at Mahamasina (Antananarivo). The sky and the backdrop of the Ampamarinana cliff, topped by the Palaces, is likely to be colourful any day; but a report indicates that on this occasion there was more colour than usual for 'there was red everywhere as being the revolutionary colour'. The ceremony lasted five hours. Distinguished overseas visitors had been specially invited: the Heads of State of Tanzania, Mozambique and Seychelles, and highly-placed representatives from Ethiopia, Somalia, North Korea, Cuba and West Sahara. Members of the six recognised political parties which together form the 'United' or 'National Front' took part in a procession. Each party adopted a different form of demonstration. One, for example, marched very slowly and released a number of doves; another raised the clenched fist; another showed photographs of 'Socialist pioneers'. There were also floats illustrating the activities of different Ministries.

President Ratsiraka gave a long speech in which he dealt both with some of the difficulties faced by the nation and with some achievements. Five main areas of difficulty were picked out: the continuing shortage of rice, stated to be largely caused by the increase in population outstripping the growth in production; inadequate communications (ports and roads) delaying the transport of supplies; persons with 'evil minds', such as Black Marketeers, saboteurs of different kinds and cattle-thieves; the rise in world prices for many essential imported commodities, yet little rise in prices obtained for Madagascar's exports; and some weaknesses in social services such as education and health. Among the achievements listed were the following: the forces of public order and defence have greatly changed their attitude to the public and to the life of the nation, as compared with the past, so that, for example, the armed forces have taken an important part in agricultural schemes, in building bridges and schools and in the transport of goods (60,000 tons to date). The Home Office supervises all the new local and regional councils, providing grants and equipment. The Ministry of Population gives special attention to women and children, literacy, cooperatives and unemployment. In Education there are nearly 10,000 schools for 'basic education' and over 50 Lycees. In Higher Education the University is being decentralised and there are about 30,000 students. In Health, 79 doctors have now qualified from the University of Madagascar.

On INDEPENDENCE DAY (26th June) more emphasis was laid on resources for defence, Special attention was drawn to armoured cars and MIG planes (from USSR) and aerial defence guns (from North Korea). At a different level of military preparedness, the rate of 120 paces a minute said to be inherited from the French was recently changed to 90, with a distinctive style of throwing forward the hands and legs (obvious in photographs); but now the rate has been set at 100 paces.

Elizabeth Evans, the daughter of missionary parents (her father arrived in Antananarivo in 1899), has published a booklet of poems, illustrated by her own drawings. The title MUCH HEAVEN is derived from Madagascar. The Introduction explains that there is a lake (in fact in Imerina): 'Looking upwards one is gazing at the exterior of heaven; so the belief goes. Looking downwards into the mirror of a lake, one sees a copy of the overhead grandeur called 'sky'. Hence the name Belanitra, or Much Heaven. The booklet is produced by Swansea Booklets at 60p. (1979).

In the second half of her book OPERATION SADIE, Sadie Galvin tells the story of her son Barry and how she 'rescued' him, with the help of an ambulance, from the headquarters of the French Foreign Legion in Corsica. The story attracted the attention of the British Press in 1976. Barry Galvin was for some time in Madagascar (there are some photographs). In two chapters he gives his own account of life with the Legion in Mayotte - an island in which Madagascar takes a great interest, because of the dispute about sovereignty in the Comoro Islands, with its political and other implications not only for the islands themselves, but for that corner of the Indian Ocean.

By an agreement signed in November 1979 Madagascar has bought three HAWKER SIDDELEY 748 PLANES. One of these was 'christened' at a ceremony at Mahajanga (Majunga) on 25th January 1980, sharing the honours with a boat built in Spain. It was given the name KANDREHO (the main town of a sparsely-inhabited area on the west side). There have been planes from other sources also. For example, USSR gave one Yak-40 and one Antonov-26 and Madagascar then bought one of each; MiG's from the same source were in evidence at the Independence celebrations, as noted above. But it is a plane constructed in Madagascar with local equipment which seems to have aroused the greatest interest this year. It has been invented by the Institut Malgache d'Innovation. It is described as being 'built of wood', uses 'super' petrol, flies 14 kms to the litre, has a speed range of 70 kms. to 250 kms. an hour, and is capable of aerobatics (the non-technical reader can only hope that these details, taken from an article for the general public, contain no improbabilities or misprints). It is hoped to devise a plane to carry 30 persons. The new plane has been called the HITSIKITSIKA (Kestrel).

The Malagasy Merchant Fleet is small, but one of the ships, belonging to Petromad, was unlucky enough to make the headlines in March. The TANIO had taken on a cargo of 26,000 tons of heavy oil in Germany and was bound for Italy. But some miles north of the Breton island of Batz the ship broke in two in heavy seas. The name shows very clearly on a photograph of the bow as it was about to sink, sticking up vertically and looking like a huge shark. A group of rescued Malagasy sailors could be seen on T.V. The Tanio was insured in London and the British Oceanics Company was asked to join in salvage operations.

An ambiguous reference to 'Indian' cloves (as distinct, apparently, from any other type) offered to Prince Charles led to a passing mention in the Press of the CLOVES of Madagascar. The reference is a reminder of the fact that the island has been for many years a major producer in the world, though recently production seems to have decreased. The enterprising Poivre of Mauritius would nowadays probably be accused of 'industrial spying' or worse in view of the secret expedition he organised to acquire clove plants from the Moluccas, where the Dutch held a monopoly. Clove production started in Mauritius in 1770 and reached Madagascar (Ste-Marie) in 1820. It is still an important export crop. But there can be more local uses for any resident DIY amateur. For example, the traveller on foot who happens to be in a clove-growing area (on the east coast, say,) and whose palate needs to be tickled can chew a freshly-picked clove (though he may find his lips go numb), and in cases of toothache in the wilds, or in an institution, chewing a clove has often been tried as a more ready-to-hand remedy than special imported clove 'paste'.

British agricultural experts have been invited to start a new FARM PROJECT organised by the Malagasy Bible Society. The site of 250 hectares is at Faharetana, about 40 kms. west of Antananarivo. The name (meaning 'long-lasting' or 'enduring') has evidently been chosen to combine policy with hope. The aim is to teach agricultural skills and methods, and also to provide some religious instruction and community life. The first head is Mr. Colin Molyneux from Britain, who will be helped by Mr. R. Everard who has had 20 years farming experience in Kenya. Their services have been made available through the Africa Inland Mission, which is not, however, proposing to start any separate work on its own. There has been a delay in starting and they and their families are waiting in Nairobi, chiefly because 'Visas have not been easily forthcoming'.

It is expected that the Society will hold its next meeting in November. Details will be circulated later.