

SEPTEMBER 25, 1942.

## Mysteries of Madagascar

IT is not clear as we write whether the campaign in Madagascar is proceeding according to plan, has been suspended, or is already over. All we know is that it has been about as bloody, so far, as the German capture of Denmark. The French have neither the means nor the mood for resistance and the British no desire for conquest. But it might be reckless to suppose that the possibilities end with a reluctant advance on one side and a courteous withdrawal on the other. We direct the attention of our readers to a letter from Madagascar printed on Page 8. It is certainly an old letter (August 11, 1729), and in places a little difficult to follow, but it appeared in the *Edinburgh Courant*, and it was written by an Abbot from Madagascar itself. It is quite clear, too, that it was written carefully, and after considerable observation and thought, since the Abbot warns his Dear Friend in Paris that what he is sending is a correction of the falsehoods of those who represent things as "quite different from what they indeed are." Truth has always been stranger than fiction, but when we consider what terrors Madagascar held so recently as 1729, it is to be hoped that the General Commanding the British Forces will not be any more difficult about an armistice than he must be. For the French have come to terms with "those that live in the Woods and Mountains, and make no scruple of eating one another." They have pensioned off or exterminated the Jaribots who, though they are only eighteen inches high, "keep Kennels of Animals of the Shape and Size of the Weasel", and have reduced human life to "a Kind of Farce." They have subdued the native Sheep, "as big and as high as our Cows", and they have found a use for the White Elephants. But the French have been there (off and on) for many years, and our armies have just arrived. They do not know that the fruit of the Baricot Tree is as big as a football, and makes powerful cider; that sharpshooters in an upper branch would be out of range of anything but a modern gun; and that a soldier who goes to sleep on his post will probably be whisked away by a parrot much bigger than an ostrich, and be carried through the air at a mile a minute to a nest which is as big and strong as a house. If the Armistice has not already been signed we should pray that it soon will be.

## LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

### Correspondents Please Note

Letters sent to "The Listener" for publication should not exceed 200 words, and should deal with topics covered in "The Listener" itself. Correspondents must send in their names and addresses even when it is their wish that these should not be published. We cannot undertake to give reasons why all or any portion of a letter is rejected.

#### "HERITAGE."

Sir,—I was interested in your article on "Heritage" and its objects. Many months ago I read an account of some similar organisation in Australia that was started during the last Great War. There were pictures of boys being attended to by dentists and doctors, also others giving the sons of fallen soldiers advice and companionship. It was a most interesting account of what the Australians had done for the sons of their fallen comrades. I am speaking as a war widow with an only son, so I can speak with experience, when I say how helpful it would have been had an organisation like what is evidently being formed now been in operation during the last twenty-four years. My son had every help and kindness shown him by his relatives but outside advice would often have been appreciated. I don't want anyone to think that I am making any complaint about the kind of treatment that I have received during these long years. God's promise to be a father to the fatherless, and a husband to the widow has never once failed me, and I'm sure it never will. How I remember the benefits from the Trentham Scholarship fund which enabled my boy to keep on with his music, etc. But please pass on my congratulations to those who have started this movement to help these fatherless lads who are now in our midst.

A WAR WIDOW (Parnell).

#### THE SAVAGE SOLOMONS.

Sir,—I was very much interested in *The Listener* article about the Savage Solomons, as my father's brother, Tom Turnbull, was killed there. He left the schooner in a boat with his son and crew to trade with the natives, but when he got on the beach one of them got behind him and split his head open with a tomahawk. The rest of the crew escaped. That happened in 1873. I thought perhaps you would be interested.—OLD PIONEER (Wellington).

(We thank our correspondent for this confirmation of our title.—Ed.)

#### GOD IN NATURE

Sir,—Let me hasten to assure J. E. Hamill that when I point out the obvious evils and cruelties inherent in Nature I do not feel in the least degree romantic. Is there anything romantic or even "revealing or inspiring" in the spectacle of a cat slowly clawing a mouse to death; of a kea tearing the vitals from a lamb; of a school of killer whales ripping piece by piece the tongue from their larger relation; of a humanity tortured by disease and pain? If that is romanticism, then it is romanticism of a queer and perverted kind.

It is quite true that criticism cannot alter certain aspects of Nature that lie beyond man's control. But as regards

the evil of disease, science, fortunately for mankind, far from "doing nothing about it," has done, is doing, and will continue to do very much. I repeat, good and evil are inextricably interwoven throughout Nature; what is good for the kea is bad for the lamb; good for the microbe, evil for man; and so on up and down the scale.

"Rob's" accusation of gate-crashing, I think, is hardly relevant. The gate, I take it, is open to all.

LIONEL COONEY (Auckland).

#### WALTZING MATILDA

Sir,—Happening to be looking up back numbers of *The Listener* I came across some questions about "Waltzing Matilda." Here are my answers.

A billabong hole is a waterhole. In the clay country of Western Victoria the country is pitted with billabongs, like shell holes. Some are a good size with water in them, and when you are catching your horse, he may plunge into one, and you're done then. There are no stones to chuck at him, but you might find a piece of wood. I never heard of a billabong tree, but perhaps it is the tree alongside the billabong with a big eagle-hawk eyeing you from it.

A.A. (Raglan).

#### KIPLING TO TENNYSON?

Sir,—In "Things to Come" last week I read: "Saxon, Norman and Dane are we, as Kipling pointed out." Did he point it out to Tennyson?

C.F.H. (Auckland).

(What is time to a poet?—Ed.)

Sir,—"Saxon, Norman and Dane are we, as Kipling pointed out," says *The Listener* of September 11 at page 2. I have interested myself in collecting instances of Kipling's manifold plagiarisms but had not noted before that Tennyson was among his victims. Would you be so kind as to give me the Kipling reference?

INQUIRER (Wellington).

#### TOO MANY COMMENTARIES?

Sir,—I am tired of these BBC commentaries that the NBS puts over so frequently. The commentaries either parrot the news or else make wild guesses. Only last week I heard one of these "experts" refer to "General MacArthur's successful offensive in the Solomons." Tell that one to the Marines!

When ignorance speaks as the voice of authority, it is no wonder there is confusion in the ranks. I think most listeners would agree with a suggestion that the commentaries be either reduced in number or dropped altogether.

"DON'T TALK" (Hawera).

#### ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

"FAIR PLAY" (Otahuhu): Out of our hands.

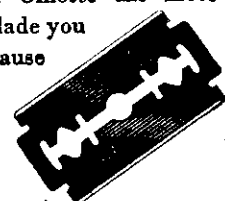
"ARDENT LISTENER" (Gisborne), and L.C. (Auckland). The page will return when times alter. (See last week's issue for BBC changes). But we no longer have the space for standing matter that remains the same issue after issue.

"W" (Tauranga): Referred to responsible authorities.



## Round the Empire

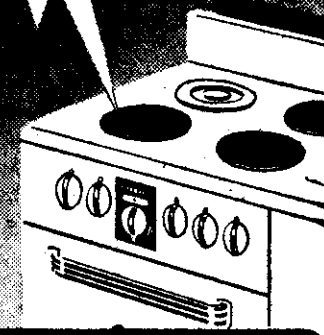
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