MADAGASCAR—PAWN OF THE GIANTS
By LOUIS-PHILIPPE DUBEL

When after three months of preparation the British forces opened their attack on Madagascar, the colony of their erstwhile brothers-in-arms, we did what countless people throughout the world were doing that day: we took a volume of the encyclopedia and looked under M. In general, probably no duller reading can be found than the terse lines of an encyclopedia. They are not meant for entertainment but for information. The greater is one's surprise to find under MADAGASCAR a legend of intrigue and romance, rise and fall of tribes and kings, and foreign plottings.

We have asked our author to revive the past of Madagascar at a moment when it is passing through its greatest crisis.—K.M.

O ALL intents and purposes, Madagascar, shaped like a geographical battleship and lying 230 miles off the southeast coast of Africa, has been a pawn in the chess game of Europe's giants ever since that August day 442 years ago when a Portuguese captain named Diego Diaz, blown off his course to India, discovered it. It is a big pawn, larger even than France, 980 miles long and 360 miles across at its greatest breadth, and embracing 240,000 square miles; but it is a pawn nevertheless. It is a pawn in the game where natives are only rooks, and a tribal ruler is a knight if he is important enough; when the tribal situation is boiled down to a fairly even balance of power between two leading factions, one European nation gets behind one of them and another European power behind the other, ceding a move above the table and trying to get it back with a knife beneath.

A TUMULTUOUS STORY
Money and treachery and whispers in a king's ear all have their place here, as well as a certain amount of heroism. Fidelity and treason and grandeur mix with equal portions of avarice and gratitude, barbarism and cupidity, to give us a tumultuous story of energy and, though sometimes misdirected, crusade spirit—if anyone dared to write it. It is not inconsistent with Madagascar's past that events of the last few weeks have again thrown it into the temporary glare of front pages.

The only way to appreciate the Madagascar picture as it now presents itself is to get a long way off and look
at it objectively. France has paid heavily for this colony. Disease and swamps and climate have attacked natives as well as white men, and have cost France more in men and money than the military conquest.

Madagascar has become truly French, but unfortunately that does not change the fact that Madagascar is an island so situated as to make it a help or a hindrance to Britain's trade with her colonies and the East. Its seizure today under the pretext of war necessity may presage other movements wherever French sovereignty has been a stumbling block to Britain.

ALLIGATORS AND DUG-OUTS

The best way to get to the bottom of present events is to go back to the island which Marco Polo called "Madagascar" and Diego Diaz discovered in 1500. It was a large island, Africa's biggest, discovered on the feast day of St. Lawrence and hence known as St. Lawrence Island for a hundred years thereafter. A low, level shoreline encircled it, with few natural harbors save in the northern portion. In the interior, a rough central plateau with a temperate climate, girted with ravines and mountainous gullies, rose to over 9,000 feet above sea level. Most famed of its peaks is Tsi-afajavona, "that which the mists cannot climb."

The lowlands were wooded, well watered, and fertile, but sultry. Malaria infested them and swamps dotted them. The months between November and April were hot and rainy, subject to thunder and hail, and at regular intervals a typhoon-size hurricane would arrive. There was no snow in Madagascar.

Alligators abounded in its waters along the coast of the Mozambique Channel. Dawn broke over rivers and valleys that were cloaked with a thick gray mist, and as the mist lifted a world of birds came to life, like enchantment leaving a sleeping wood. Waves rushed with tremendous force through narrow openings in coral reefs. Behind a coral belt, which nature seemed to have designed to keep the world out, lay Madagascar.

Natives fished in dug-out log canoes on gray rivers so alive with fish they did not use a line. They knocked bits of wood against the bottom of the canoe, and agitated fish jumped from the water. Those that fell in the canoe were their catch.

FRUITLESS EFFORTS

Local tribes under ambitious chiefs were usually waging war among themselves with little immediate result other than to keep them under arms, ready to unite against the peace-making intruder.

First the Portuguese tried to colonize the island, then the Dutch. During the reign of Charles I, the British attempted agricultural development, but soon gave it up. They were succeeded by the French, who founded a port and named it after their Dauphin. What souvenirs come back to a Frenchman when he sees Fort Dauphin today, or Port Dauphin, as it was often called, as it was practically without fortifications. Memories of hopes and sacrifices, maladies and privations and the sufferings of exile, not only of men but of wives and daughters and mothers who came here from France through the centuries and to whom France owes Madagascar! Fort Dauphin is now the most European city and the southernmost on the island.

NATIVE CONQUERORS

Old records and songs and legends handed down in the Antaimoro tribal language, but in beautiful polished Arabic script, have preserved the history of Madagascar better than the spoken records we have had to content ourselves with in the study of Pacific islands. According to these, the partial conquest of Madagascar by the Sakalava in the seventeenth century marks the first great tribal ascendancy on the island.
Lake Itasy, spreading like a limpid jewel among Madagascar’s mountains. There are many such lakes in the highlands.

Madagascar, Africa’s Largest Island

The modern airport of Tananarive

Typical old native storehouse
Radama I, Madagascar's greatest king. Though his uniform was French, he managed to checkmate France from 1810 to 1828.

Ranavalona III, the island's last reigning queen, under the starbedecked crown of the Hovas. She died in exile in 1917.

Rulers of Madagascar

Rasoherina, Queen of the Hovas from 1863 to 1868 after her husband Radama II had been strangled in his palace.

Rainilaiarivony, brilliant Prime Minister who remained in power by marrying three queens in succession.
Then the Hova tribe, in the central province of Imerina, rose under their king Andrianimpaira to challenge the Sakalava; and before the Hovas fell, removed by the French in 1895, they had conquered the entire northern and central provinces. The West was nominally under their authority and only the Southwest was free.

The word "conquered" has an abrupt way of covering and ending the sagas and songs and civilizations of a people. To look between the lines that precede the word "conquered" would take us through battles as numerous and, to the Madagasy, as important as the Napoleonic wars.

A romantic ruler known as Radama I ascended the throne of the Hovas in 1810, and throughout the next eighteen years his tall figure, head in air and swinging a saber, threw a dashing shadow across Madagascar's history.

A BRITISH ADVISER

He had the stride of a conqueror and, unfortunately for the sake of legend, his overstrong personality has drowned out the story of the connivings of the British adviser attached to him, a man named Hastie, who was the Lawrence of his time. Following a policy used by Britain at a later date in handling sheiks and princes elsewhere, intrigue flourished at the court of Radama. Hastie had the king's ear and, in consideration of various gifts of money, uniforms, arms, and military instructors, was able to consolidate Hova authority, outmaneuver the French, and still leave a loophole for Britain until Radama died and the Princess Ranavalona mounted the throne.

The story of Madagascar under Ranavalona has striking parallels elsewhere in history, when the death of a native ruler too much under foreign influence is followed by a wave of anti-foreignism. Missions were closed, native Christians killed, property confiscated, and foreigners so badly treated in general that in 1846 the French and British together bombarded Tamatave in reprisal.

QUEENS TAKE OVER

The mad king Radama II, next in succession, was killed in his palace in 1861 (rumor had it, through a weakness for European mistresses) and was succeeded by his ambitious wife, who proceeded to draw up treaties with France, Britain, and the United States during her five-year reign.

Gradually a Madagasy nation was forming. Consulates and embassies and recognition abroad were the ultimate goal of the Hovas, but they had forgotten the chess game of the giants. Up on the northeast coast, France was protecting a king of the Sakalava. True, France had a treaty with the Hovas, but this did not stipulate the recognition of the Hovas as rulers of all the island. It was the old story of the balance of power.
In 1868 Queen Ranavalona II mounted the throne, and in the aging records of dynasty and the dry leaves of encyclopedias we have almost lost sight of one of the most astute opportunists that ever ruled a people: Rainilaiarivony, her Prime Minister, who cinched his job by marrying the Queen, and ensured the Queen's position by making himself commander in chief of the army.

THREE ROYAL WIVES

The three Ranavalonas one by one all followed the policy of marrying the same Prime Minister (or was it that he married them?), and, as Voltaire said in his own observation on the Salic Law, it was a good idea. “With a man on the throne France was always ruled by a woman. If they could crown a woman the country might be ruled by a man.”

Though Rainilaiarivony had never traveled, he was surprisingly modern. With the aid of British advisers, he built up an army of around 35,000 men, the British idea being to use it to keep the French out, and Rainilaiarivony’s to keep himself in. He received any European who asked for an audience; he was not overly genial, but he was friendly, and, according to the profession or station of his guest, had no end of questions to ask. How European nations collected customs duties was the first. Increasing the state revenue seems to have been one of Rainilaiarivony’s worries; but that he did not care to do it through the rum trade is an outstanding point in his favor.

MISSIONARIES AND RUM

Following the anti-foreign wave under Ranavalona I, Madagascar had been thrown open to foreign trade and influence. The London Missionary Society reopened their missions, traders, mostly British, came in, and compulsory importation of rum came with them. The effect on the natives was catastrophic. As Rainilaiarivony put it: the same boats that came loaded with missionaries and Bibles above decks, were loaded with rum below; and while he was glad to welcome the foreigners, he would not have let in a single bottle of rum if he could have helped it. But he could not help it.

Ten years after the ascent of Ranavalona II to the throne, in 1878, when altercations arose with France over the estate of the deceased French consul, Monsieur Laborde, an era of colonial expansion, particularly in Africa, was sweeping Europe and the Third Republic. With it the movements in Madagascar gained momentum, culminating in 1883 in the delivery of a French ultimatum, which the Hovas rejected and which was followed by war with France.

A French army under General Duchesne partially subdued native resistance. The conquest of Madagascar for France was by no means a cheap one. Over half of the troops at Duchesne’s disposal were buried along the way of a four-hundred-mile advance, cut down by battle, fever, heat, and terrain. On the signing of a peace treaty with Ranavalona III, in 1885, Madagascar, though not specifically stated as such, became a French protectorate. Britain agreed to this in return for French recognition of British claims to Zanzibar.

SECRET SERVICE INTRIGUES

This was London’s official attitude of course; but there is a peculiar phase to French and British relations far from London and Paris that one must know in order to understand it. It is a policy of not letting the right hand know what the left hand does, that might be compared to the pre-war workings of the Communist Internationale. While a treaty might be signed or situation recognized between these two countries, the workings of British agents in the places concerned are subject to no discussion in the House of Commons. Neither England nor Englishmen know of them, and the government, when confronted with
Evidence concerning them, denies any responsibility.

Every French move of expansion, though agreed to in the diplomatic proceedings between the two nations at conference tables, has been the object of secret knife-work by unrecognized agents. To the colonial Frenchmen who had to watch and cope with these intrigues comes always the thought: that myth of the infallibility of the Secret Service, which fiction, press, and cinema have done their best to make seem almost papal—might it not be the Service itself which finances it in order to escape the open parliamentary discussion that legitimate moves are subject to?

The picture the colonial Frenchman has seen in Greece and Turkey, in Syria, Morocco, and Madagascar, was London and Paris shaking hands across the Channel, while Paris held a champagne glass in its left hand and London's left hand handed a roll of bills to an agent. And they know that victorious French armies opened the road to the British traders.

GALLIENI'S CAMPAIGN

Insurrections, anti-French plottings, and evidences of revolt backed by powerful foreign capital began to assert themselves in Madagascar towards the end of the last century, and General Gallieni was sent out from France to restore order. Hova rule was abolished when a plot was discovered to poison the foreigners on the island.

The story of General Gallieni, the military adventurer whom his biographer, Judith Cladel, called the artist-architect of colonization, is one of the richest in the annals of the French army. There is an old saying among French soldiers that the names of Caesar, Napoleon, and Gallieni rise straight and strong like a column, and that Gallieni's is a column without a fissure.

Every important village in Madagascar is situated in a hollow surrounded by a single, and sometimes a double, ring of protecting mountains, entered by narrow passes which Gallieni had to take and which France has since fortified. This is especially true of Tananarive, the capital. In spite of the lack of troops, Tananarive, surrounded by a protective double ring of hills, is probably at the present time a formidable fortress against anything but parachutists should the British attempt to push on to it.

THE COURT OF SILVER

The Tananarive of today as well as modern Madagascar is a monument to the untiring energy of Governor General Leon Cayla, who, in spite of great obstacles, has managed in a period of ten years to give rocky Madagascar a network of good roads. His object: to preserve the past and ensure its future.

From the summit of a hill above Tananarive, the old palace of the kings and queens of the Hovas still looks down. The Court of Silver, where Queen Ranavalona granted audiences and passed judgment, is little changed since she left it. A balcony passes
from the Palace to the Cour d'Argent over which the Queen was carried on her royal litter, for the foot of Ranavalona could not touch the soil.

As she held court in the Cour d'Argent, her eyes could look out over the vast plain between the cliff of her palace hill to a rim of mountains in the distance. Fashionable houses are built along this cliff now, but in the time of the queens of the Hovas it was an execution ground. The victim condemned in the court was led to the edge of the cliff and, without any circumlocution, gently pushed over. A guard waited at the base below to finish him off if the fall did not kill him.

Ranavalona III was the last native queen to reign over Madagascar, and her removal has striking similarities to that of Abd-el-Krim. Two years after the end of the Great War, this Moroccan leader led for four years a "foreign-financed" insurrection and disrupted the French development and colonization of Morocco. Ranavalona was first sent to Reunion Island, where Abd-el-Krim is now exiled, and from there she was transferred to Algeria, where she died in 1917.

A MURDER IS SOLVED

On the whole there has been an inclination on the part of the French, both civil and military, to listen to the natives.

A good example is found in a story still told over café tables; how a French juge d'instruction, baffled by an unsolved murder, called on an old friend one evening and asked to speak to his cook. The friend, thinking of fine recipes for sauce and roast chicken, complied.

The cook sat down, with a "bon soir, monsieur le juge," and the judge, with a singular softness, began to speak:

"My dear friend, you understand French well. Do not protest at what I am going to say to you. I know. I know that you have followed me many evenings, throwing pebbles in my path to make me lenient. I know that district chiefs have often given you money because they thought you could make me change my decisions, and sometimes, on deliberation, I have changed my decisions. In the night you visit the sick, and sometimes you cure them. You have magic to keep women from having twins, which you charge for also.

"I know all of these things, and there were laws that permitted me to prosecute you, but I have closed my eyes, because your father was a sorcerer and your grandfather was a sorcerer before you. Now I want you to do me a favor.

"You know that a teacher was assassinated in the North. Go. Get into some quiet place and make the sikidy call to the dead. Then come back and tell me what the sikidy says."

"Oui, monsieur le juge," said the cook, and meekly ambled off into the recesses of the kitchen.

A short time later the cook, having followed the custom of his ancestors, came back holding a stained paper and, sitting down at the feet of the judge, said: "He was killed by a woman, monsieur le juge. This, says the sikidy, was done by a club on a path near the river."

The widow of the deceased, when confronted by the report of the sikidy, confessed.
The plain of Mohamasina, lying like a huge saucer in its hollow of protecting mountains. Its rim is crossed by narrow, fortified passes.

**Tananarive**

The old palace and *Cour d’Argent* of the queens of Madagascar.

Great stone stairways descend the surrounding heights to the market place in the hollow.
A native of the east coast

A Hova woman

The noble features of a member of the ruling tribe, the Hovas

A woman from the interior of Madagascar
UNLUCKY DAYS
AND NATIVE JUSTICE

The customs and liberties of the native tribes, in whom the many mysteries, taboos, superstitions, and the power of the priests are still strong, have on the whole not been interfered with.

Ancestor worship plays a great part in the life of the people; certain days, mountains, rocks, rivers, lakes, and animals all have special significance. Wednesday, the androftsy miverina, or “day of no return,” is held to be a bad one to start a journey on, and Thursday is a day on which anything started is doomed to failure. Frenchmen treat them with due reverence.

The Governor General, appointed by France and assisted by a council of 24 Europeans and 24 natives, provides a government that is on the whole a liberal and a just one. Native civilian leaders placed over their own localities are allowed a free hand in adjusting their own affairs. Court cases involving Europeans and natives are tried in a French Court with Europeans and natives presiding. Cases involving native versus native are settled in the native court.

THE BOTHERSOME METEOR

There is an air of carefree laisze-faire evident in the relations between French officials and natives in the outposts. A local fonctionnaire in one of the stations in the interior, who had not had anything to report for a year, passed long hours fraternizing with native chieftains over a glass of liquid that turned milky when you put water in it.

One day a meteor fell in his district and, delighted to have something to report, he telegraphed Tananarive, which in turn cabled Paris.

Suddenly messages started pouring into Tananarive and from Tananarive to the outpost: How big was the meteor? Send specimens at once! Did it burst in the air or break on landing? Prepare complete description as to possible weight, color, formation, condition, and direction of fall, etc.

It was hot, and the résident and his native friends were tired. The meteor had long been exhausted as a topic of conversation, and they didn’t want to hear any more about it. And over a tall glass of absinthe they dispatched a reply: “Boîte reparti” (meteor gone back).

France has fortified the harbor of Diego Suarez in the North as a naval base and depot for her trade with the East. With the weaving of cotton and silk, the manufacture of soap, sugar, and tapioca, industries have sprung up. Iron, copper, lead, zinc, antimony, manganese, nickel, sulphur, graphite, and lignite coal are taken from Madagascar to feed the smelters and furnaces of France. Exports include gold dust, cattle, tanning-bark, hides, fiber, and wax, through the busy port of Tamatave.

The rainy season has just ended in Madagascar. Diego Suarez has been occupied by British forces. Tamatave, the only other good port of the island, may follow. It is with regret that one sees the lifework of two generations of Frenchmen hanging in the balance.

For some reason, out of all the stories, two pictures come back to my mind as I think of Madagascar today: The old native who had fought in the campaign of Gallieni, looking at the tricolor limply waving above Tananarive (called Antananarivo by the English) and saying: “Le voilà, fier comme il était à la veille d’Austerlitz.” It was his flag too.

And the story of the bitten lieutenant.

It was in 1901 or 1902, in Tananarive. The French used to gather in the evening in a little club in the Place d’Andohalo, where the Lycée Gallieni is now, to talk over the news of the town and the outposts.

One evening it was learned that a young lieutenant commanding a minor
post at Tsiombe had been bitten by a mad dog and was being rushed by litter to Tananarive. The message had come over the hills to the capital by signal, and from that night on, every evening, from all corners of the city the people—Frenchmen and natives alike—came for news of the sick lieutenant.

Tsiombe, to them, was on the other side of the world, and they did not think he could make it. The journey overland was a perilous, if not an impossible, one. But he made it after all, and the natives rejoiced as much as the whites. Now fine motor highways and an airline extend over the route the lieutenant crossed by litter, and Tananarive is only six days by air from Paris.

Telegraph systems, hotels, and telephones are spread out in a long line over a country that ten years ago was believed impassable. The energy and lives of Frenchmen have made it an integral part of the great empire of France, and no good can come from any attempt to change it now.

THE "FOUR LANDS"

Most Germans, unless they happen to be from Hamburg, would look at you in some bewilderment if you were to ask them about the Vierlande, the "Four Lands." But a native of Hamburg would wax enthusiastic and probably tell you that the finest fruit he ever tasted came from there.

Vierlande is a district consisting of four parishes in the delta of the River Elbe. Its fertile, marshy soil provides the great city of Hamburg with most of its fruit, vegetables, and flowers. On shallow arms of the Elbe, motor lighters move from farm to farm, collecting their produce by the basketful and carrying it down the river to the markets of Hamburg. There you can see rows of baskets along the banks, brimming with tomatoes, plums, apples, pears, horse-radishes, and flowers.

Although the Vierlande are scarcely more than ten miles upriver from the metropolis of Hamburg, they have retained much of their old-world atmosphere. The only modern note is the huge greenhouses, in which roses, lilies of the valley, and narcissi are grown. But otherwise the thatched houses with their carved wooden gates stand in the fields between the high dikes just as they have stood for generations. The scenery is not unlike the marshlands below Shanghai, where the roofs of the farmhouses also barely peep above the level of the dikes.

And when you enter one of the farmhouses of the Vierlande you feel even more transported into an age gone by. To keep out the damp, the inside walls are usually tiled like those of Dutch farmhouses. The ancient, heavy cupboards and chests, the chairs and tables, and the grandfather clocks—all are decorated with rich inlay work.

If you are lucky and happen to be there on a holiday, you will see the people in their ancient finery handed down from generation to generation: the men in top hats, jerkins, and breeches, with rows of heavy silver buttons, the women with gay embroidery and silver ornaments on their dresses.