

"Piltdown Man" are given three references, dated 1915, 1917 and 1927; Weiner, Oakley & Le Gros Clark's *The Solution of the Piltdown Problem* (1953) and all that followed might never have been printed. In both volumes the author gives the same "Selected List of Periodicals", just over 100 in all, and half from North America. This is presumably intended to be the minimum necessary for a new departmental library, but it excludes many learned journals which most modern mammalogists would consider essential, such as the publications of the Polish Academy of Sciences, while including a number of newspapers like the *Field* and *Illustrated London News* which, useful though they may be, few would put in the first hundred.

This is typical of both bibliographies. They are perhaps better than nothing at all for the beginner but the Classified Bibliography is only a snare and a delusion for anybody who expects it to be in any way comprehensive. It is moreover badly arranged, badly printed, difficult to read and certainly not worth £5.

MAKING A DESERT

THE following incident in the Semien Mountains in Ethiopia is described by Leslie Brown in his book *Ethiopian Episode*, reviewed on page 202, and quoted here by kind permission of author and publisher.

As we dropped off the Embaras ridge we came upon a man committing the act of a maniac. At 11,600 feet, just below a small crag, on a slope where effort was needed to keep one's feet, he was ploughing. With phrenetic energy he was goading a pair of oxen to drag a plough through the tussock grass that had grown there for centuries. Another man with a hoe relentlessly dug out any tussocks that escaped the plough. The oxen would stagger a few steps and stop, panting, to be flogged again into reluctant action. Yells of encouragement echoed about the valley, and nearly as much breath must have been spent in yelling as in positive accomplishment.

Never in twenty-three years in Africa, in the course of which time I have seen some pretty senseless acts, had I ever seen anything to equal this. The slope on which the plough was working was so steep that a man could not stand on the loose clods without pushing them downhill; stones and boulders dislodged by the plough rolled downhill of their own accord. To reach this little patch of virgin grassland the man must have carried his plough up the hill—for the oxen could not have dragged it there. The end result of his labours was certain. In a few years the soil would have gone from that slope and it would support neither tussock grass nor crops. In progress before my eyes was the process by which the hills of Tigre had been ravaged and reduced from once fair and forested mountains to barren slopes of scree and scrub.

This was only the first example of many such acts that we would see in the next few days. Yet I am sure that if I had remonstrated with that man, and pointed out the eventual effects of what he was doing he would have thought me insane. After all, he was only doing what everyone else did. The fact that the land at lower levels had become poor necessitated climbing to more inaccessible and steeper slopes, that was all. It was only too evident that any idea of conserving anything, even the soil on which he and his family were utterly dependent, would have been totally foreign to that ploughman.