

THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH IN THE MISSION FIELD

VII. THE FRENCH MISSION IN BASUTOLAND

THE COUNTRY AND ITS PEOPLE

BASUTOLAND lies in the centre of South Africa. It is a mountainous country, well watered, with good pastures in the highlands and fine arable ground in the lowlands, which makes it one of the granaries of South Africa. The climate is good. Surrounded by high chains of mountains on one side and protected on the other side by the Caledon River, its people have been able to resist the attacks and encroachments of European colonists. In fact, the whole country is, like part of Switzerland, one huge fortress.

The race of hardy mountaineers which inhabits Basutoland has preserved to the present day its national unity, and, subject to certain restrictions, a very large amount of independence. No other native tribe in South Africa enjoys such an advantageous position. This, however, is not due solely to the nature of the country. If the Basuto had not been able to turn to good account the natural resources of their land, these would have availed them little. Fortunately for them, a strong and wise ruler, Moshesh, began to reign about 1824. Moshesh is undoubtedly the most intelligent and best chief that the native races of South Africa have thus far produced. He succeeded in saving from utter destruction and in welding into a nation the scattered fragments of the old Basuto clans, which the Zulu invasions at the beginning of last century had well-nigh destroyed. So strong was his power, so clever his diplomacy, that he was able to resist

victoriously the aggressions of both Boers and Britons without remaining their enemy. On three different occasions at least, his tribe was on the verge of destruction, but it emerged from each crisis stronger and more secure than ever. In 1868, two years before his death, he accepted the protection of the British flag; he knew that this was the only way to secure to the Basuto their unity, their national existence, and a measure of political independence.

The French Protestant Mission entered Basutoland in 1833, when the power of Moshesh had just begun to be firmly established. The Basuto chief received the missionaries with open arms. He was clever enough to see in the Christian mission the only power which could help him and his people in the difficult and dangerous position in which they were then placed, surrounded on all sides by enemies. Seldom has a Christian mission been so warmly received by a heathen chief, and seldom too has a Christian mission identified itself so completely with the fortunes of the nation it came to evangelize. It can safely be said, and has been recognized by Dr. Theal in his *History of South Africa*, that the French missionaries have done as much perhaps as Moshesh himself to save the Basuto from ruin and to keep them a strong and united nation. For the first forty years of its existence the history of the mission is in fact the history of the tribe, and one cannot write the history of Basutoland without at the same time writing the history of the French mission. Though Moshesh and his successors have remained heathen, and the bulk of the population still clings to its old religion, the Basuto Church, under the guidance of the French mission, is to a large extent regarded by the whole tribe as a kind of national Church. In this way it occupies a peculiar and perhaps unique position among South African missions.

No change occurred in the position of the mission when Basutoland came under British protection in 1868. The British Government recognized without any difficulty the

special claims of the mission, and without interfering in any way in its religious activities, gave generous help to its educational work.

In 1871 the country was somewhat hurriedly handed over to Cape Colony, which governed it till 1880 with a fair measure of success. An unfortunate attempt was then made by Sir Bartle Frere and his ministers to disarm the Basuto without sufficient regard to their natural susceptibilities and to what they considered to be their lawful rights. This led to a 'rebellion.' The Colonial Government was unable to cope with it, and after a prolonged and inglorious struggle, followed by three years of anarchy, was obliged to retire from Basutoland. The country thus again became in 1884 a direct dependency of the Crown.

When the Union of South Africa took place in 1909, Basutoland, together with Bechuanaland and Swaziland, remained in the same position. It is still governed from Downing Street through the High Commissioner for South Africa, but in a Schedule attached to the Act of Union and approved by the Imperial Parliament, provision has been made for transferring the Government of the country to the South African Union, when this seems desirable.

This short historical survey has been necessary to show the exact position which Basutoland occupies at the present time in South Africa. Alone among all native tribes, the Basuto have kept their unity and their tribal independence. The country is administered jointly by the Imperial Government, represented locally by a resident commissioner, and by the Basuto themselves. The Resident has the control of such matters as the general policy, the finances, public works and the police; internal affairs are managed for the most part by the native chiefs, the great-grandson of Moshesh being the present paramount with a large amount of power and influence. A native council established a few years ago acts as a most useful advisory body, both to the Resident and to the chiefs.

Its influence is already great and is bound to increase. The political position of Basutoland is unique in South Africa, and represents a highly interesting experiment. If allowed to continue, it may furnish an object lesson of the capacity of the Bantu race for good and orderly government under the guidance of a wise and generous European administration.

In such surroundings the French mission has had an almost unique opportunity of forming a well-ordered and strongly constituted native Church. It has grown with the Basuto nation, and almost become incorporated with it. It enjoys the rare advantage of being able to develop without the difficulties which exist everywhere else in South Africa as the result of the presence of a number of different Christian bodies. With the exception of a comparatively small Anglican mission, with which the French missionaries live on excellent terms, no other Protestant Church is at work in Basutoland. There is, however, a somewhat strong Roman Catholic mission, with which the Church founded by the French Protestant mission will have more and more to reckon, but which is not likely ever to become a serious danger.

Throughout the whole territory and also in the neighbouring district of Griqualand East, which is also inhabited by Basuto, the natives belong to the same race and all speak the same dialect, a rare thing in South Africa. The field is as clearly defined as possible. There is a strong national feeling with which the mission has always been in accord, and which it has always fostered. The mission enjoys the goodwill of the people and of the Government. It is not hampered as in other parts of South Africa by the presence of European settlers and European towns, Basutoland being a purely native territory. All this constitutes an exceptionally favourable opportunity for the establishment of a genuine native Church, and it can justly be said that the mission has made every effort to make the best use of its opportunity.

Basutoland has an area of a little more than 10,000 square miles; i.e., it is about two-thirds of the size of Switzerland. The population is now about 450,000. Since the bulk of this population is found in a comparatively small tract of country at the foot of the mountains, Basutoland is far more densely populated than the figures might at first suggest. If to the inhabitants of Basutoland proper we add the 50,000 or 60,000 Basuto living in Griqualand East, where the mission is also at work, it may be said that the French mission holds itself directly responsible for about half a million people.

According to the latest available statistics, the Church has now 20,000 communicant members and about 8000 catechumens, making a total of 28,000 adult professing Christians. If we add the children and the many natives who are practically Christians without having made a personal profession of faith, we may say that probably from 65,000 to 75,000 Basuto are already Christian, or at any rate have been christianized. The Basuto who belong to the Roman Catholic and Anglican missions and to a few unimportant Ethiopian bodies, probably bring the total to about 90,000 or 95,000 Christians. These figures do not, however, represent the entire influence of Christianity in Basutoland, since Christian ideas and even to a certain extent Christian ways of living are more and more permeating the whole population. Nevertheless the larger part of the population still remains heathen, and the Basuto Church has still a great work to accomplish before the whole nation is won for Christianity.

THE BASUTO CHURCH AND ITS ORGANIZATION

During the first twenty-five years of its existence, the mission was naturally under the sole control of the European missionaries. This early period was a time of sowing, first in years of peace and wonderful blessing and afterwards amidst the turmoil of war and unceasing disturb-

ances. By 1860 more than 2000 Christians had been gathered, and a good start had been made with educational work. The New Testament had been translated, and a few religious books had been printed. Christianity had already taken firm root in the country and had become to some extent part of the national life. The early missionaries had carried on their work on sound principles, and had laid a strong foundation for the work of their successors. Though they identified themselves to a remarkable degree with the national life and had become true Basuto in order that they might win the Basuto to the Gospel, they had carried on an unrelenting war against all heathen customs. Polygamy, drunkenness, the purchase of wives, circumcision, and other heathen practices had to be absolutely renounced by converts, and a high ideal of Christian life had been held up before the nation. It may indeed be questioned whether, in some instances at any rate, the opposition to heathenism had not been carried too far, and whether a little more respect might not have been paid to certain native customs. On the whole, however, the discipline adopted by the early missionaries has continued to the present day, and has so completely vindicated itself to the native Christian conscience that to change it would hardly be possible. In the adoption of this high standard for the Christian life, and in the refusal to widen the narrow gate which leads into the kingdom of heaven, the missionaries of the first generation have rendered a service to the native Church which it is impossible to value too highly.

It is only after 1860 that, with the advent of a new band of missionaries (among whom the name of Adolphe Mabile, to whom the Basuto Church owes almost all that it is to-day, deserves special mention), the native element begins to play a part in the conduct of the mission, and that the native Church begins to be established.

Elders were then officially appointed in all mission stations and resident lay evangelists began to be placed

in charge of out-stations. The corporate life of the individual churches (rather than of the Church as a whole) began to become reality. In all stations church councils were constituted, consisting of the elders and the evangelists. These church councils, which we call 'consistories' in Basutoland, assist the missionaries in managing the affairs of the Church, both spiritual and temporal. At first the consistory was a purely advisory body, constituted on the same lines as the courts of the native chiefs, but its significance has increased, and it has now become one of the most important parts of the constitution of the Church. It is exceedingly well adapted to the native genius and to the requirements of the situation. Elders and evangelists freely discuss all questions relating to the local church, and thereafter the missionary or the native pastor gives a final decision based on the arguments which have been brought forward. This is exactly what takes place in the native court. The decision of the missionary or native pastor, which is generally in accordance with the views of the consistory, is accepted as final. In some cases a vote may take place, but this is seldom necessary, as a consensus of opinion is as a rule certain to be reached, provided due patience is exercised and sufficient time is allowed for the discussion of difficult questions.

For many years the consistories were the sole organs of the native Church. Every station or parish was to a large extent independent. The Church was at that time developing on what were practically congregational lines. Every parish had the full control and expenditure of the money which it raised, established the out-stations which were needed, and appointed its own evangelists without reference to any other body. The only body which had oversight of the general interests of the mission was the European missionary conference, and this was, in fact, the supreme governing body of the Church. All questions of Church discipline and of general policy were decided

by it. The natives were not represented in it, and could influence it only indirectly through the influence of each consistory on its own missionary.

As the Church grew in numbers and its members became better educated, it was felt that this was not sufficient. The Church was without any real unity. Different consistories frequently reached different decisions in regard to the same questions. If this arrangement had been allowed to continue for much longer, an intolerable situation would have been created. The natives themselves felt strongly the need for a more united policy. In order to meet a need which they themselves felt, though perhaps in a less degree than the natives, the missionaries decided in 1872 to establish a synod on more or less Presbyterian lines. As the missionaries all belonged to Churches having the synodical system, the creation of a synod naturally seemed to them the best means of securing a strong central governing body. They overlooked the fact, however, that the native Christians were not yet sufficiently educated for this form of church government. Government by representation is absolutely foreign to the native mind. Instead of educating the synod before entrusting it with full powers, they at once attempted through it to reach decisions regarding the most difficult and vexed questions of church discipline. The native element in the synod was in a large majority. The body was too unwieldy to discuss thoroughly questions which needed the most careful handling. It was difficult, moreover, for the individual churches to understand why laws made by the synod should be binding on them. They did not seem to think that their representatives had any right to decide finally for them. Each consistory regarded itself as entitled to revise the decisions of the synod. The latter became in consequence an exceedingly unpopular institution. It was obvious that the new departure had been a mistake. The churches were not ripe enough for this form of government. When Basutoland was convulsed

from 1880 to 1884 by a 'rebellion' and a long period of anarchy, which for a time interrupted the progress of the mission, the synod came to an untimely end. But no one regretted its loss. There was a complete absence of belief in its usefulness. The first attempt to establish a central governing body had thus utterly failed, and the reason for this failure was obvious. The attempt was made on purely European lines which were unsuited to the native genius and the requirements of the country. The lesson was clear that, to be really useful, an institution must be adapted to the needs of the people and must be framed on Basuto lines.

In the meantime the preparation of a native ordained ministry had been undertaken. The want of this had been very strongly felt. The evangelists, useful as they were, had not sufficient education to be entrusted with larger responsibility, or to take the place of the missionaries. In 1887 a school of theology was started with three native students. In 1890 two of these (the third being still too young) were accepted as probationers, and were ordained eighteen months later. They had been selected from the best teachers, and had been given a regular course of theology, adapted, of course, to the requirements of the country. The new native ministry soon proved itself a real success. A few years later a further group of five students finished their theological education, and in 1893 the mission had in its service eight ordained Basuto ministers.

At first it had seemed advisable to use the native ministers as assistants to the missionaries, but it soon became evident that in such a position they could not adequately develop their capacities, and it was difficult for them to acquire the independence and initiative which were needed if the native ministry was to render the service which the Church had the right to expect. Circumstances, too, helped to lead the mission to adopt another course. It was therefore decided to break up the old parishes, which

had become too large and unwieldy, and to form new parishes for the Basuto ministers. Eight new parishes were thus formed before 1900 and eight more by 1912. To-day we have at work in Basutoland sixteen native ministers in charge of their own parishes, while fourteen other parishes are under the control of European missionaries. There is no difference in status between the parishes under black and under white supervision.

The policy of the Basuto Church in this matter is somewhat different from that adopted in South Africa and other countries by some British and American missions. Whereas these missions consider the European missionary as standing more or less outside the Church, and place the bulk of the ecclesiastical work in the hands of the natives, we regard the European missionary as part and parcel of the native Church of which he is a pastor. It is true that as a missionary he enjoys certain special rights, and to this extent his position is perhaps not quite clear; as an envoy of the home Church he cannot be placed for all purposes under the native Church. This is obviously an anomaly. But while we recognize it as such, we do not regard it as in any sense harmful. We realize fully that the Church is still in a state of transition—*im Werden*, to use a German expression—and that as long as European missionaries remain and have to minister to it their position must necessarily be somewhat irregular and anomalous.

The formation of a native ministry rendered more necessary than ever the creation of a central governing body. The synod had failed to supply that need, and something else had to be found. In 1898 a most important forward step was taken. It was decided to establish a combined conference of the European missionaries and the Basuto ministers. That conference was called the Seboka (assembly). From that day, we may say, the Church of Basutoland, as it is officially called, began to exist. In the Seboka, European missionaries and native ministers sit on equal terms and discuss and decide all questions

relating to the Church and Christian life, and such matters as primary schools. The official language is Sesuto. The Seboka determines the ordination of the native ministers, appoints them to charges, and transfers or removes them. It has also the right to form new parishes or to change the boundaries of the old parishes. In short, it is the supreme governing body of the Basuto Church. The European missionaries have wisely decided to forgo any right of veto on the decisions of the Seboka. It seemed to some at the time that it was perhaps a little dangerous to place such unlimited power in the hands of a body in which natives would soon be in the majority, but it was held, on the other hand, that it was better and probably wiser to trust our native fellow ministers. Our confidence has been shown to be well founded. The Seboka has proved to be an admirable instrument for the government of the Church. The peaceful co-operation of blacks and whites on lines of perfect equality shows that difference of race and colour do not constitute any real hindrance in Christian work. The European missionaries have learned much from the Basuto ministers, and the latter are being trained in the art—so foreign to native ways—of public discussion. The Seboka is a splendid educative instrument, and has done much to form and to train the native leaders of the Church.

There is, however, an element of weakness in its constitution. Its membership is limited to ordained ministers ; the lay element is conspicuous by its absence. This is a want which will more and more make itself felt. The time will come sooner or later when means will have to be devised to supply it. If this is not done, the Seboka is in danger of becoming too clerical a body. For the present the synods, which were re-organized in 1894 though on a much more modest scale, provide the lay element in the Church with an opportunity of giving expression to its desires or grievances. But the synod is not properly a deliberative but merely an advisory body. Its powers

will, however, certainly be increased as soon as it shows that it can use them intelligently.

Such in its main outlines is the present constitution of the Church of Basutoland. It is not yet a rigid and firmly established constitution. It is still fluid in many of its parts, and has not yet taken the exact form which it will one day have. But we are not anxious to be too hasty. Experience has shown that it is desirable to wait till circumstances render further development necessary. If we have been thus far in some measure successful, it is due chiefly to the fact that we have tried to frame our constitution on lines suited to Basutoland and to the Basuto mind.

The Church of Basutoland is in the main formed on Presbyterian lines. The Seboka as its supreme body possesses the controlling influence. The local churches are but parts of the national Church, though they have also a large amount of local autonomy. At one time it seemed as if the Church would develop on purely congregational lines, but happily that tendency was checked in time. If the Church is to be strong enough to withstand heathenism and other adverse influences, and to be independent of the civil power, and especially of the native chiefs, it must be united and compact, and its central body must be strong enough to make its power felt everywhere.

The Church of Basutoland now consists of thirty parishes, into which the whole country is divided. New parishes will soon have to be created, and as these will be placed under native ministers, the influence of the native element will be increased. Each parish possesses a large number of out-stations under the charge of a salaried resident evangelist, and has a school conducted by a native teacher. The number of such out-stations is to-day over 230, so that there are altogether 260 organized churches where the Gospel is preached every Sunday, where regular church meetings are held every week, and where a class for catechumens prepares the converts for baptism. The out-stations are

increasing in number yearly, but they are not yet sufficient to supply the religious wants of the whole population.

The finances of the Church have been placed on as sound a basis as possible. The home committee is responsible for the salaries of the European missionaries and for the building of their houses, but it no longer contributes anything to the work of the Church. Last year the contribution of the home society amounted to about 20 per cent of the whole expenditure of the Church, including the educational work, the balance of 80 per cent being supplied by the Basuto themselves. This shows that financial self-government is already in sight. The salaries of the ministers and evangelists and the cost of the building of churches and schools are provided mainly by the contributions of the people themselves. Every communicant and catechumen has to make a yearly contribution, and the total is increased by the collections taken on certain Sundays. The local church which receives these contributions has to pay a fixed sum to the central sustentation fund, this sum being calculated according to the number of its communicants. The rest of the money which it raises remains at its own disposal. The sustentation fund pays the salaries of the ministers and of the lay evangelists placed in outstations recognized by the Seboka. The sustentation fund has proved one of the most useful agencies of our Church; it has done more perhaps than anything else to unite it and to spread the influence of Christianity throughout the whole country.

AUXILIARY AGENCIES

Lack of space prevents me from saying more than a few words about two of the most important auxiliary agencies of the Church in Basutoland—education and Christian literature. But this article would be incomplete without some reference to these important subjects.

Basutoland possesses a school organization well adapted

to the needs of the country. The Government makes a generous contribution to the educational work of the three missions—French, Anglican and Roman Catholic. Each mission receives a total grant calculated on the average attendance of pupils in its primary schools and institutions. This total grant is apportioned to different schools according to fixed rules. An advisory board, composed for the most part of representatives of the missions, co-operates with the Director of Education in framing the regulations and determining the syllabus. Everything is regulated in the interests of native education, and the whole syllabus is based on the native language and the requirements of the country. The schools have full recognition as mission schools, and religious instruction has an important place in the syllabus.

Our Church has now over 230 primary schools divided into three different classes. The full course of instruction goes as high as Standard VI, but few schools teach as far as this. The number of pupils in our schools is about 16,000. The two other missions have about 3500 children in 45 to 50 schools. These figures show that our Church is responsible for about four-fifths of the total education of the country.

For the training of teachers, artisans and others, our mission has founded a certain number of boarding-schools or institutions. We have at Morija a large normal school with 180 pupils, a normal school for girls at Thabana-Morena with 70 pupils, an industrial school at Quthing with 80 pupils. The Anglican and Roman Catholic missions have institutions of the same kind but on a smaller scale. There is a government industrial school with 60 boys at Maseru. In addition to these institutions which receive government help, our mission has founded two other boarding-schools on purely religious lines—a Bible school for training evangelists with 40 to 50 pupils and a theological school for the preparation of the native ministry. Both of these are situated at our headquarters in Morija.

The creation of a literature in the native language is one of the most necessary steps for the Christianization and civilization of any new country. The French mission has tried to do its duty in this special field of action. The whole Bible has been translated by it and published by the British and Foreign Bible Society. Numerous editions of the Bible and of the New Testament have been issued. A large hymn book, containing more than 430 hymns in the sol-fa notation, is already in its fourteenth edition. Religious books have been published, including popular commentaries on books in the New Testament, a Bible Dictionary and a Church History. There are handbooks for nearly all the subjects taught in the schools of the country. A new and important departure is the publication of books of imagination of a high literary value written by native authors; these are probably the first of their kind in the Bantu field. All these books sell well. Last year more than 100,000 volumes were sold at our book depot, the total value of which amounted to more than £4000. A weekly newspaper in Sesuto is now in its forty-fifth year, and has about 2000 subscribers.

All this shows that education has already taken a strong hold upon the nation, and that Christianization and civilization have become a growing power. Our mission has decided to increase as much as possible its literary production. In doing this it is working not for Basutoland alone, but for the numerous Sesuto-speaking populations of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.

E. JACOTTET