

The Crusader Magazine

Vol. 1

MARCH, 1919

No. 7

Basutoland The Hope of the Black Race

By CYRIL V. BRIGGS



HE hope of the Black race and the centre of all Negro inspiration, intrigue and activity is Basutoland."

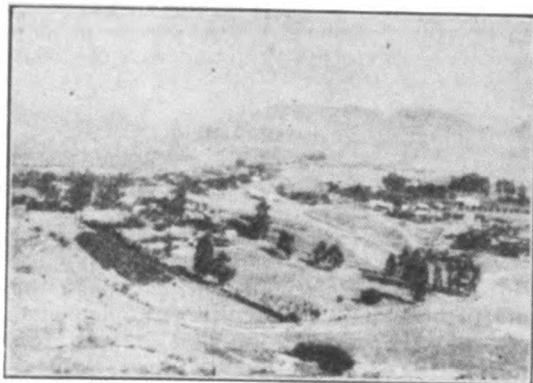
This concise statement by a Britisher represents the viewpoint and experience of the white "settlers" of South Africa concerning the 10,300 square miles of fertile plains and wild mountain country that comprise Basutoland, a nominally independent native state of South Africa, and its some 400,000 inhabitants.

Basutoland lies near the heart of the South African Union and comprises much of the best agricultural land in the sub continent, as the southern end of Africa is usually called. It is surrounded on every side by so-called 'white man's territory' where white men in varying minorities wantonly exercise the rule of force over large native populations; yet to all intents and purposes Basutoland is an independent Negro state. The country belongs exclusively to the Basutos. There are fewer than 1,000 whites in all the territory and these are denied the right to own land. No white man is allowed within the country except as a special act of grace and no white man can remain beyond a certain time except with the express permission of the chiefs. The Basutos acknowledge the suzerainty of Great Britain (King George is represented by an Imperial Commissioner, who re-

sides at Maseru, the capital), but the chiefs administer their own affairs and owe no allegiance to the South African Government. Save for the slender tie which binds them to Britain they are an absolutely independent and autonomous community. Basutoland is the one place in South Africa where the Black man's power is unquestioned and supreme. It is the one place in all Africa, with the conditional exception of Liberia, where native education is fostered and encouraged.

In shape and configuration Basutoland

is a fortress. The Drakensberg, the superior mountain range of South Africa, forms a semi-circle almost one-half of its frontier, extending from the source of the Caledon to that point of the Orange where the river frontier ends. Within them lie the subsidiary ranges com-



MASERU, THE CAPITAL

monly known as the Maluti, a term signifying in the native language simply "Chain of Mountains". They traverse a great deal of territory, so that the general elevation of the plateau upon which the bulk of the population resides varies between 5,000 and 7,000 feet. Rising like a gargantuan Gibraltar from the lower circumscribing levels, its top is a magnificently fertile table land. Its climate is one of the finest in the world. Pure atmosphere, invigorating breezes, a crisp winter and abundance of sunshine combine to make it exhilarating and at-



FIFTY THOUSAND BASUTOS IN CONFERENCE

222

tractive. As might be expected of a country so situated and with such surroundings it is picturesque in the extreme, and is prolific in springs and beautiful water falls—one of the glories of Basutoland—and well watered from end to end.

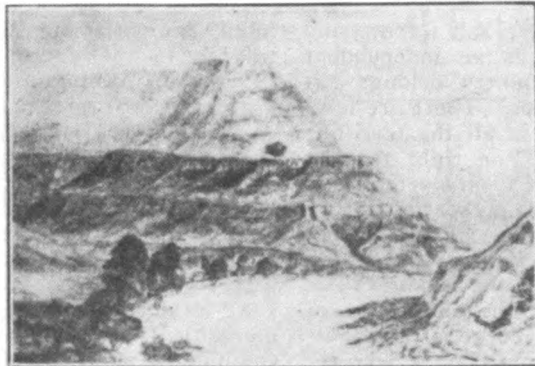
The Basuto system of government is an admixture of patriarchalism and socialism. Land is divided on the communal principle and is inalienable. Many of the chiefs are enormously rich; they are all wealthy and powerful men. The Chief Paramount is loyally revered by his subordinates and in his hands is focussed the entire strength of the nation.

The government is wise and liberal. The Chiefs do everything in their power to encourage industrial progress and the arts of civilization. There are three great industrial institutions in the country and about 260 public schools, subsidized by the Chiefs, which are daily attended by some 25,000 Negro children. Every

year a number of picked scholars are sent abroad to be educated at foreign universities at public cost. These scholars return to be local teachers.

Signs of progress are abundant in the country. The population is thrifty and industrious. Savings banks abound. Agriculture is the principal industry, but manufacture is steadily increasing. The foreign trade is expanding by leaps and bounds. The Basutos export horses, cattle, wool, wheat, mealies, hides, mohair, etc. In exchange they import iron, agricultural implements, and machinery of the latest types, groceries and large quantities of clothes. Their exports amount annually to over \$2,000,000.

The Basutos sense of nationality is strong and well-defined. They cherish their independence above wealth and life itself. They have an army, and above all a history, short perhaps, but not inglorious. This branch of the Bantu race took possession of the tableland in 1820,



A TYPICAL STRONGHOLD

under the leadership of a great chief named Moshesh, "a man of extraordinary bravery, talent and resource". Moshesh instantly recognised the wonderful natural strength and the climatic and agricultural advantages of the country, and he determined to keep it, and build there a stable, self-supporting nation. But he was not allowed to work in peace. Chaka, the famous Zulu King, had long coveted the table land, and the seizure of it by Moshesh threw him into a fury. He declared war upon the Basutos and marched against them with a powerful army. The war lasted for four years and was decided by the battle of Thaba Bosigo, in which Chaka was overwhelmingly defeated. From that time until about 1850, the Basutos were left comparatively undisturbed and were free to develop the arts of peace. They wisely took protective measures against the future and religiously strengthened the natural defences of Thaba Bosigo, an eminence of great strength having on its top an extensive flat plain with strong springs and fine grazing ground and

so impregnable indeed that, though resolutely attacked by powerful armies of Boers and English armed with modern weapons, it has never been wrested from the Basuto Chiefs whose future home and burial place it was to be.

From 1850 on, they came into collision successively with the Boers, the Zulus and the British. The military genius of Moshesh and the splendid courage of his subjects enabled him to defeat the Zulus and the Boers, and in 1852 he crushingly repulsed the attack of a huge British army under General Sir George Cathcart, who had boasted that "If I make war on Moshesh, it must be no small war".

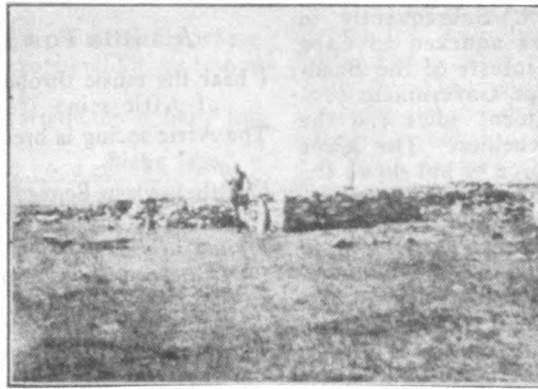
In 1858 the Boers declared war on Moshesh and invaded Basutoland. The

war lasted ten years. The Boers made war in the most barbarous manner, venting their hatred of the Negro upon his defenceless women and children, and destroying Christian mission and stations—in much the same manner, in fact, that their Hun relations destroyed the churches of France and Belgium in the recent World War. The Basutos, on the other hand, conformed in their warfare to all the civilized usages of war, and as Sir Godfrey Lagden testifies: "Scrupulously refrained from harming women and children." That the Basutos keenly felt and resented the barbarous acts of the Boers is demonstrated in a letter that Moshesh wrote to President Boshoff of the Orange Free State upon the latter suing for a cessation of hostilities. Said Moshesh in that letter:

"And now, if my heart could allow me to copy your children, I would be justified in carrying women and children into captivity, in killing old and sick people, and in sending into eternity all the blind people that I could find in the Free State."

During this period history made it self fast.

Though the Boers penetrated the country, burning and pillaging, not one of the important natural fortresses had fallen into their hands. And Moshesh who had been playing for British sympathy during the first stage of the war when he allowed the Boers to cross the border, now began to create diversions by well-organised raids on an extensive scale. In the South, Moinosi, one of his generals, crossed the Orange River and swept through the lower Free State almost down to Aliwal North burning farms and carrying off stock. In the North, mounted bodies of Basuto on the small but hardy ponies of the country scoured the Winberg district reducing many of the farms to ruins and clearing off such of the farmers' property as could be found. These expeditions were staged



THABA BOSIGO, GRAVES OF THE CHIEFS

simultaneously and greatly demoralized both the Boer forces in the field and their families at home.

In 1865 Moshesh defeated and killed General Wepener in a pitched battle at the famous hill of Thaba Bosigo—which, by the way, means "Mountain of"—driving the Boers over the border. The Boers, however, soon returned with augmented forces, many of the Transvaal Dutch and the Cape and Natal English who disliked the idea of Black men beating whites in battle, having come to the aid of the Free State. After three years more of desultory fighting Moshesh saw ruin facing his people and suddenly offered his country to Britain as a fief of the Imperial Crown. The offer was accepted, and the Boers were compelled to retire. Moshesh died soon after and was buried on the scene of his greatest victories. The Basutos worship his memory and always will. Subsequently in 1871, Basutoland was annexed to Cape Colony despite the protests of the Basutos. In 1879 the Cape Government promulgated a disarmament edict and the Basutos rose in rebellion. The Cape despatched a large force to put down the rebellion, but failed to make even an impression upon the sturdy Basutos who loved their liberty more than wealth or life itself and were determined not to give up their guns and assegais. The Basutos demanded that their allegiance to the British crown be only of a nominal nature and that they be ruled by their own Chiefs with the advice of a Resident Commissioner and the Cape Government in a frenzy of impotent rage begged the Imperial Government to take the Basuto beehive off their hands. This was done in 1863 but not before the Cape whites had been beaten severely and several times humbled by the plucky Basutos.

During the British-Boer war they remained strictly neutral, but they were ready to take arms at a moment's notice, and the Boers were extremely careful to refrain from giving them any excuse for intervention.

At the time of the formation of the South African Union the whites made an attempt to include the Basutos in that Union—an event that would have meant the surrender of their independence and the eventual exploitation and theft of their country by the whites. The Chiefs protested with energy to the Resident Commissioner, but with little success. They then made quiet preparations for

eventualities. Some three or four days before the Union was proclaimed every able-bodied Basuto and Zulu—for the former enemies are now allies in the face of the White Menace—working in Natal and the Orange River Colony suddenly disappeared. On the Basutoland Plateau, meanwhile, many thousands of natives stood to their ponies under arms, ready to present arms to the world in defence of their treasured independence, and only waiting the word of their Chiefs to pour down through the passes on the comparatively defenceless plains below. But war was averted. What protests and pleas had failed to win was achieved by a show of force.

Note: The writer acknowledges indebtedness for much of the information contained in the above article to Sir Godfrey Lagden's book "The Basutos" and Ambrose Pratt's "The Real South Africa".

A Little Town in Senegal

I hear the music throbbing down the lanes
of Afric rain:
The Afric spring is breaking, down in Senegal again.
O little town in Senegal, amid the clustered gums,
Where are your sturdy village lads who
one time danced to drums?
At Soissons, by a fountain wall, they sang
their melodies;
And some now lie in Flemish fields, beside
the northern seas;
And some tonight are camped and still
along the Marne and Aisne;
And some are dreaming of the palms that
bend in Afric rain.
The music of the barracks half awakes
them from their dream;
They smile and sink back sleepily along the
Flemish stream.
They dream the boabab's white buds have
opened overnight;
They dream they see the solemn cranes that
bask in morning light.
I hear the great drums beating in the
square across the plain.
Where are the tillers of the soil, the gal-
lants' loyal train?
O little town in Senegal, amid the white
bud trees,
At Soissons, in Picardy, went north the last
of these!—By WILL THOMPSON
in *The Omaha Monitor*.