

## ANOTHER WAY ROUND

IN the history of the Church there are many examples of the Faith 'persecuted in one city fleeing to another' and eventually finding its way back from the second to the first. The Faith may be sent by one country to another and lost in the sender and sent back by the receiver. A remarkable example of this is the history of the conversion of the British Isles and their subsequent sending of missionaries into Europe.

In South Africa it is heard that when the Apostolic Delegate visited the late Holy Father last year, the Supreme Pontiff, the undying Peter, of whom Newman wrote that 'in the history of the ages his words have been facts and his commands prophecies,' said to his representative that the foreign missions represented now his chief hope for Christendom in view of the present outlook in Europe.

And the Church has an inarticulate as well as an articulate voice. It is not without significance that the Foreign Missionary Orders are now overflowing with vocations. Both Voices represent the Infallible Spirit, which may well be stirring the Church to develop rapidly elsewhere before the work of the new vandals be done—if it is to be done. It may be that the trusteeship of the Kingdom of God will pass to other races than the white, at least in part.

Among the various Missions in South Africa at the moment there is one, recognised as one of the most prospering in the world, which suggests very strongly the hope of a new way round. While, to leave violence out of our calculations, it can be said at least that problems and prejudices in Europe are too mixed to allow of any very rapid evangelisation without quite extraordinary miracles, the Basuto people in South Africa are giving an example of mass conversion to the Faith recalling that of first evangelisation of Ireland, the most peaceful and triumphal in history. What is said of them applies in degree to various

other Missions to the natives in South Africa. But for various reasons, some quite accidental, the Basuto make the most striking example.

When the Oblates of Mary Immaculate came to Basutoland sixty-four years ago the people were being unified, after disastrous wars with neighbouring tribes and the Dutch Settlers in South Africa, by a national hero, Moshe-shue. He put his people under the protection of the British and Basutoland remains a Protectorate outside the Union of South Africa. The small mountain district, one hundred miles in length, is a sanctuary for the Basuto. In it they are governed by their own chiefs, with supervision, and, so far, the white man has not been allowed to exploit unduly. Wealth is still counted largely in cattle; distance in hours on a horse or on foot. There is a small agriculture. There is considerable mineral wealth, but the Government, wisely, has not allowed it to be exploited yet.

This position, from the Catholic point of view, is equivalent to having a whole people in retreat. It would be impossible not to believe in God in Basutoland. For the Atheism which grows in towns, with the contemplation by a man of his own works and thoughts, is impossible to a people in a mountain country continually in touch with the realities of the Divine handiwork, with the vitality of growth and irresistible laws of season manifestly planned and outside human control. The Basuto were monotheists before Christianity came. Beyond this the terror that is in nature and darkness and human passion unveneerred rightly made the Basuto recognise the existence of living principles of evil, Devils. Christianity comes naturally, as an illumination, as an explanation of the mystery of evil, as a liberation from superstition and barbaric cults common amongst the natives. God, and the God Who has been 'caused to understand pain' (so 'suffered' has to be translated into their language), is real to them. The Resurrection is really good news to them whose life does not contain a continuous success of makeshift thrills.

Five years ago 30,000 Basuto were baptised into the Catholic Church in one year: *i.e.* one-twentieth of the population of Basutoland. That was during a year of famine. Since then Baptisms have continued at a steady 10,000 to 12,000 a year. At present rate of progress, in five years one-third and in fifteen to twenty years one-half of the population will be Catholic. Baptisms are often performed in groups of two hundred, Confirmations in six and seven hundreds. And this is not because the Faith is made easy for the Basuto. There is a fixed period of two years of Catechumenate. Many of them have to walk two or three hours to get to their Mission, and will make such journeys not only to go to early Mass, but even to come to do days of penance at the Mission. For Public Pences are given, and heavy ones; weeks, sometimes months, of daily Mass and work at the Mission. Sometimes the culprit will fall again and have to start his penance over again, and will do so. It is, above all, these public penances that put the price, as it were, upon Faith, show what it means to the people. It suggests the first joy at the Gospel of the Early Church. Somehow it shows a very special attitude to the Faith when a man will allow himself to be publicly humiliated and given hard labour by the Church.

Irresistibly the progress of the Faith in Basutoland recalls one early Church in particular: St. Patrick's Ireland. There is a point in this comparison, the thought that the Basuto and such peoples may have a vocation similar to the Apostolic vocation of Ireland in the Dark Ages: to make a winter quarters for the Church, to give back the Faith some day to the race that brought it. The good points in the Basuto character resemble those in the Celtic, spontaneity, generosity, and a natural religiousness. They have even a characteristic similar to the lyricism which made such poetry of early Irish Christian legend in the musical capacity. They make a new thing of the songs the Church brings them. They have, as appears especially in

the growing caste of teachers and in an embryo native priesthood, the same insatiable thirst for learning as that which characterised the early Irish monks and stored and returned the learning, with the Faith, that was sent. They have, moreover, a natural power of eloquence. To hear a Basuto catechist give his instruction—with a prayer and a song—is to learn something of sacred oratory. May it not, one thinks, have some day a use like that sacred fire of the followers of Patrick and Columba which conquered so far? One can imagine the objection put immediately: it is false so to compare a white race with a brown. Is it not generally understood that these people are inferior? It is not yet proved. There is no proof produced yet that the human nature, the present and the future, of these peoples is any different from that of the people who enslaved the youthful Patrick or those who looked over the cliffs of 'England' at Caesar's approaching boats.

Whatever may or may not be the future there is something of an Early Church energy in Basutoland. The Missions seethe with the highly coloured crowds on Sundays and Feast Days; hundreds going to Communion at the late Masses after walking in many miles; hundreds living at the Mission in schoolrooms or stores for a three-days' retreat before Baptism or Confirmation. The Priest is taken naturally (another curious likeness to St. Patrick's Ireland) as another chief in spirituals. So he fits into the tribal society. He has his office, like the court of the chief, where the people come with 'Affairs,' quarrels for healing or arbitration; to pay their church dues, half-a-crown, or some coin, or perhaps a donkey (valued at 3/-); to bring their papers to have their days of penance, or work done in lieu of church dues, ticked off on them. They spend all day at the Mission and listen and pray with incredible endurance.

At these gatherings one sees the failings of the people with their virtues, the dangers that may lie ahead. The first failing, and the essential one, is lack of sense of re-

sponsibility. It has been known for a woman to be baptised and leave the feast, not with her husband but with another man, the same day. Murders have occurred at the end of big feast days when, in spite of the very heavy censures of the Church, strong beer had been circulating. Many of the people, catechumens and sincerely convinced, will wait till their death-bed, and then be careful to make sure that it is really dangerous, before being baptised. They are lazy and aimless in spite of their prodigious endurance. But the Church that has made the beauty and the form of true character is producing in them, especially in the teachers, the native Priesthood and the native nuns, a sense of responsibility and the fundamental understanding of work, in a way that surprises themselves. By calling incessantly upon the great positive characteristic of generosity this can be done.

Another rock ahead lies in the very position of influence given to the Priesthood. For the priests as white men necessarily have buildings, gardens, and fields out of all proportion to the natives. They necessarily obtain a large influence even in the social order as employers of labour, as the owners of mills for grinding corn, as arbitrators, as educators. And for all this apparatus of the Mission, building and the like, they demand dues. Such a position is dangerous to the Church, not because it is in any way wrong, but for a special reason to-day: because it gives occasion for communist propaganda, which is making its first attempts among the Basuto. In Basutoland life is too simple to create social problems. But most of the young men of the tribe go at one time or other to the gold-mining district in the Union of South Africa. Here there is all the appearance and sufficient of the concrete reality of social injustice, to make excellent friends for communism. So the Red emissaries are beginning to picket the route from the head of the mine-shaft, down which the native has been treated with scant courtesy, to the compound where he is railed off from the rest, the minority of society.

As the older enemies of the Faith—superstition, ignorance, irresponsibility, strong beer, and the like—disappear, this danger will grow.

But as probabilities appear the Basuto have a better chance than most peoples of escaping communism—red or black. They have no Paris or Moscow to make the revolt. At home they are not exploited. And above all, the memory of the first news of Faith is too recent for its blessings to be obscured by mere propaganda. As long as the Protectorate remains, the Church, with its people so in retreat, can be forging a Christian—perhaps an Apostolic—nation.

Basutoland is but one example of this 'other way round' in the Church. What has been said applies in degree even to the native peoples in the industrial areas of the Union: the same packed churches; the same energy wanting but to be loosed. There it is common for a man to come for an instruction without food after a 8—10 hour shift in a mine. In the hospitals, in the compounds and locations, there is man power waiting for the Kingdom of God. It may be that this will be the replacing of that man power of which the Church is being robbed in Europe.

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