

## THE MISSIONARY WORLD.

## THE MISSION IN BASUTO LAND.

(Concluded.)

One thing, however, did depress their spirits, and this was the long delay of communication from their far off home. There was, in this way, at times a painful sense of loneliness and exile. Alas, when a letter did come at last, after a lapse of more than twelve months, it was to announce the death of the venerable father of M. Casalis. It is easy to imagine the profound sorrow which the letter bearing such tidings would produce; but it brought with it rays of consolation also, for it mentioned that the last name which lingered on the lips of the dying old man, was that of his missionary son, when, with beaming eyes, he declared his confidence of meeting him again in the blessed world. The effect of the intelligence, when it became known among the poor people, was touchingly suggestive. "A lively sympathy," the sorrowing missionary tells us, "painted itself on their features as they saw him weep." Having only as yet a few words of their language at his command, he contented himself with saying to them: "God has done it;" "My father is in heaven." This was a surprise and a revelation to them. In their darkness and simplicity they had imagined that people when they died went down into the bowels of the earth. But how great was their astonishment when told by their teacher that when he died he expected to see his father again, and to dwell with him in a world into which no sorrow and suffering could ever come. They were shrewd enough, moreover, to notice that this hope of an eternal reunion with those whom they loved, calmed their grief, and that death had not the same terrors to those white men from the far-off land as to them. It was thus that those poor people were receiving new impressions and instructions from their missionaries' lives, which brought them nearer to the kingdom of God, and were as the first streaks in the sky before the sunrise.

In their earlier attempts to convey religious instruction to the natives, those good evangelists had been sorely tried and deceived by a man who had undertaken to be their interpreter. With the Basuto as his native language he had picked up some knowledge of Dutch while serving on the borders of the colony, and, with this scanty qualification, which he possessed in common with the missionaries, he had engaged to be their medium of communication with the people whom they had come to teach. It turned out, however, that he had no supply of words with which to convey religious ideas. Moreover, the levity of his manner, as seen in his looks and gestures, naturally produced the impression that he had no sympathy with the lessons which he professed to translate. They even found out at length that he often substituted his own inventions for their instructions and that he was, in fact, not only hindering but betraying them. It was a bitter disappointment to those patient workers, carrying with it one of the hard lessons of experience "written in dark print." Of course, the vassal was dismissed in the end with little ceremony.

But there was a way which Providence had in store for bringing these good men and their sacred lessons into direct contact with the native mind. It happened in this wise: From the time of their settlement at Moriah they had been accustomed to hold regular religious services in Dutch for the benefit of the ten or twelve Hottentot drivers who had come up with them from Philippolis. These men, having been brought up in the missionary stations of the colony, were familiar with Christian worship. They had Dutch Bibles in which they could follow the expositions of the missionary, and they knew many Dutch hymns which they sang with taste. The natives were attracted by the singing and were accustomed to squat in considerable numbers around the worshippers. They were also impressed by what they witnessed in the solemnity and seriousness with which the missionaries, looking upward, seemed to address an invisible Being. Those good men set themselves, with renewed earnestness, to qualify themselves for speaking to poor Basutos in their own tongue "of the wonderful works of God." How great was their delight when, after no very long interval, they began to find themselves understood. Their sphere of usefulness from that moment was almost indefinitely widened.

All time which those devoted men could spare from planting and building was now spent in the preparation, in the Basuto tongue, of short Bible stories, "word pictures," and little addresses. They even ventured to compose a few hymns, which, when sung by the natives, formed a new attraction to the services and a new link of connection between them and the missionaries. But by-and-by it was not so easy to induce them to join in the prayers. So long as they were addressed they were attentive. But, as in the prayer the missionaries were no longer addressing them, they could not see any reason for listening. Even this difficulty, however, was not long in being overcome, by inducing them to repeat, all together and word for word, the thanksgivings and petitions that were addressed to God. For one thing, they liked to hear their voices ringing and rising in unison, and, judging from the expression of their countenances, there was something deeper at work in those dark minds than this. It was another step forward. In that awakened interest they saw the fields ripening for the harvest.

In the midst of all these multiplying labours, and with the consciousness that in the power of addressing the people in their own Basuto tongue, a new weapon had been put into their hand, the thought began to arise in the minds of the missionaries that they should now begin religious services in the king's own city. It became the subject of repeated con-

ference and prayer, and, in no long time, ended in the conviction that the time for this new departure had fully come. They had been favoured with frequent visits from Moshesh, but was it not the fact that it was to him they owed their liberty of entrance into his country and for protection and help in many forms ever since; and should not the benefit of their teaching be brought more completely and continuously within his reach? Their proposal was at once received by the friendly monarch with approving welcome, his kindly looks expressing even more than his words. For a time the work was shared by the missionaries in rotation, but ere long it ended in the permanent location at Maba Bossiou, of M. Casalis, the acknowledged leader of the little band. Everything was done by the king to facilitate and encourage the man of God. The services were held in a grand courtyard, called the *khotla*, surrounded by an enclosure of bamboos and reeds, from an elevated platform the public crier, with stentorian voice, summoned the people to worship—"To prayer, to prayer! Everybody, everybody! Women and children as well!" The king himself was one of the most regular and attentive listeners, and strangers and messengers from other tribes were uniformly brought to listen to the astonishing words of the white man, and charged to tell what they had heard when they returned to their own land. The simple repast, of curdled milk and sorgho leaf preceded by more solid food, regularly provided for the preacher, expressed more than a common hospitality. The notes of conversations between the missionary and the monarch are among the most interesting things which M. Casalis has placed on record, and gives us a pleasing impression of the intellectual strength, penetration, simplicity and candour of this remarkable man. We quote two instances which remind us of Paul's description of some among the heathen in his days, as "feeling after God if haply they might find Him." "You believe then," said the king one evening to the missionary, pointing to the stars, "that in the midst of and beyond all these, there is an all-powerful Master, who has created all, and is our Father? Our ancestors used, in fact, to speak of a Lord of heaven, and we still call these great shining spots (the Milky Way) you see above, the way of the God; but it seemed to us that the world must have existed forever, except, however, men and animals, who, according to us, have had a beginning—animals having come first and men afterwards. But we did not know who gave them existence. We adored the spirits of our ancestors, and we asked of them rain, abundant harvests, good health and a good reception amongst them after death."

"You were in darkness," was the answer, "and we have brought you the light. All these visible things, and a multitude of others which we cannot see, have been created and are preserved by a Being, all-wise and all-good, who is the God of us all, and who has made us to be born of one blood."

Moshesh was greatly struck when he heard the missionaries enumerate the commandments of the decalogue. "That," said he, "is written in all our hearts. We did not know the God you announce to us, and we had no idea of the Sabbath; but in all the rest of your law we find nothing new. We knew it was very wicked to be ungrateful and disobedient to parents, to rob, to kill, to commit adultery, to covet the property of another, and to bear false witness."

It is also noted by M. Casalis that it was as Redeemer that the mission of Christ most appealed to the mind of this anxious enquirer and learner, and in which he was most interested—"a striking proof, surely, of the indestructibility of conscience in all lands."

Returning in thought to Moriah, we may imagine those devoted evangelists, now that they had become able to address the people in their own tongue, longing for instances of conversion among them, which should be the seat of heaven upon their ministry. This thirst for the Spirit's blessing became all the more intense when the colony of natives around them had increased to the number of between three and four hundred souls. They saw the wheat and other seeds which had been sown in the earth springing up into harvest, they had also tasted the luscious fruits of the peach and other trees which they had planted, but how had their hearts begun to weary for the first cry of repentance unto life which would make the angels rejoice. At length the happy day arrived, and M. Casalis, who was at Moriah at the time, was the first to hear the welcome notes of a genuine contrition. "On the 9th of January, 1836, we overheard one of our young men spontaneously offering a fervent prayer. It was towards nine o'clock in the evening, at a little distance from our house. Thinking we heard the accents of contrition, we approached in the darkness, without uttering a word. It was really so! Astonished, moved beyond expression, we fell on our knees and burst into tears. We were the witnesses of a very genuine conversion, for Sikhesa from that day to his death, in 1881, never ceased to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ."

The first fruits were soon followed by a harvest of conversions. The sacred fire which had been kindled not only continued to burn, but circulated from heart to heart. There was no suspension of the blessing. New stations were opened; churches were built; day and Sabbath schools were organized; new missionaries arrived from France and from the Cape. Native evangelists were trained and sent forth on the right hand and the left. Among those who at length cast in their lot with the early disciples was Moshesh, the king, who had long been held back from the decided step by the entanglements of polygamy, which was the last link in the chain from which he succeeded in shaking himself free. The missionaries well knew that a reformation in this matter could only be the natural and spontaneous fruit of a cordial adoption of the great Christian principles. And they waited for this before they could receive him into the fellowship of the believers. But the triumph came. He openly declared himself a Christian in a very touching way, after having proofs of profound repentance and a living faith. He died with this filial cry upon his lips: "Let me go to my Father, I am already very near to Him."

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