

**A CHAPTER ON THE
BASUTO
WAR: A LECTURE**

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A Chapter on the Basuto War: A Lecture by Charles Brownlee

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A LECTURE

BY

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A CHAPTER
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The events connected with the Basuto war are of such recent date, and so fresh in the memory of most of this audience, that I fear I have chosen an unattractive subject for this evening; but as I may be able to clothe with some experiences, to me at least interesting, the skeleton and disjointed information which from time to time reached us from the seat of war, I trust that my paper may not be altogether void of interest, and that I may not be deemed egotistical in narrating facts in which the first personal pronoun will of necessity be largely used.

Before entering upon my narration I must crave your indulgence whilst I take a brief review of the events which led up to the Basuto rebellion, and which may put a somewhat different construction on the action of Government from that which is held by many, and no doubt shared in even by some of my hearers.

EVENTS WHICH LED TO THE BASUTO WAR.

After the close of the war of 1877, the Government, as in duty bound, cast about for some measure to ensure the security of the Colony and to prevent war in the future, and the measure which suggested itself was the Peace Preservation or Disarmament Act of 1879. Had there

been any possibility of carrying out the provisions of this enactment, it would have proved for Natives as well as Colonists the best measure ever passed by the Colonial Legislature.

Many who were supposed to have experience in Native matters considered that the Act could be carried out, arguing that as the Natives had no use for their arms, there being no game to kill, they would willingly surrender them in consideration of a money compensation.

Others went farther, and argued that as there was no game to kill, the only use the Natives could apply their guns to was to shoot the white man, and therefore the guns must be taken from them whether they liked it or not, compensation of course to be made.

On the other side, while it was admitted that disarmament would be an effectual preventive of war, and would therefore ensure the best interests of Natives and Europeans alike, it was asserted that the measure could not be carried out, and that any attempt to enforce it would necessarily end in failure, and place us in a worse position than we were in before the attempt. It was said that the sole effect of the attempt would be to weaken ourselves, for the only arms that would be surrendered would be those that had never been, and would never be, used against us, and that those whom it was desirable to disarm would not surrender their arms. In answer to the opinion that the Kaffirs would willingly give up their arms on condition of compensation, it was replied that the bearing of arms was one of the most cherished customs of the Natives, and in fact formed part of their religion; for when lads were initiated into the privileges of manhood, a tribal gathering took place, the leading men and elders put arms into

the hands of their youths, informing them that they were a sign of their manhood, and with these arms they were to defend their chief and country and themselves, adding: "Hold to your arms." Orations were then delivered by the chief and most eloquent men of the tribe on the duties of the young men, the substance and text of the admonition being that having left the ranks and practices of boyhood, they were for the future to conduct themselves as men; and it may easily be imagined that an interference with the most interesting ceremony in a man's life would not be lightly estimated.

[; It was further pointed out that the Native policy then in operation was working well; that the bulk of the Natives were contented under our Government, and as a rule took their cases to the magistrates in preference to going to their own chiefs; that the chiefs no doubt would gladly make an attempt to regain their power and influence over the people in opposition to the magistrate, but were powerless for evil: whereas, if disarmament were enforced, each man would have a grievance, and we would thus be working into the hands of evil-disposed chiefs. However desirable disarmament was, it was asserted that it could not be accomplished, for we had neither men nor means for carrying it out; and in attempting it we would unite against us in one common grievance every man of every tribe from the Fish River to the Zambezi.

Nevertheless the opposite counsels prevailed. The enormous advantages to be gained by the measure were not to be lightly relinquished, at least not without a trial for its adoption, and it was fully believed that with the offer of compensation and a little judicious pressure, the measure could be carried out without any danger of resistance. But

we began at the wrong end. We disarmed Kama's tribe and the Fingoes, people who had in every war used their arms on our side. We disarmed Siwan's tribe, who in the late rebellion remained faithful to us, and we disarmed those Gaikas who in 1877 abandoned their own chiefs and stood by us. I believe that some of the Government officials, to whom the work was entrusted, found it easier than had been anticipated, and led the Government to believe that the people were not particularly dissatisfied; nevertheless a deep feeling of bitterness was engendered and remains to the present day. Compensation was made to the full value of the arms surrendered, but as a rule it was less than one half of what the purchasers had originally paid for the surrendered guns.

POSITION TAKEN BY THE BASUTOS.

The operation having thus to all appearance been satisfactory and successful, the Government thought it might be extended to the Basutos; but as they distinctly objected to surrender their arms, and as they had sent a deputation to Cape Town to protest against the application of the Act to them, the Premier proceeded to Basutoland to endeavour to induce the Basutos to yield. But as they proved inexorable further action was left in abeyance till the Basutos themselves should see it to be to their interest to yield and voluntarily surrender their arms.

Molapo, son of Mosheah, second to Letsie in rank and power, died shortly after the Premier's visit to Basutoland. His dying injunction to Jonathan, his son and successor, was, that he was to surrender his arms rather than resist Government, and in filial regard for his father's injunction Jonathan with a number of his clan surrendered their arms

and were followed by George and Sofonia, minor sons of Moshesh, and by the Hlubi chief, Tokonya, a cousin of Langalibalele, who with his clan had for many years been domiciled in Basutoland. This action having been in direct opposition to the expressed determination of the Basuto chiefs and bulk of the people, steps were at once taken by them to punish those who had yielded. Joel, the second in rank of Molapo's sons, sided with Letmie and Masupha against Jonathan—many of Molapo's clan adhering to Joel—while Masupha and Lerothodi, the chief son of Letsie, declared war against those who had surrendered their arms, attacking them and depriving them of their property and driving them from their homes. An appeal for protection was made to the Government by those who were suffering for a compliance with its wishes, and the Government sent off to Basutoland every available man of the Cape Mounted Rifles for their protection. As the succours entered Basutoland they were attacked by Lerothodi, and thus began the Basuto war. It will thus be seen that the force sent to Basutoland was not sent to enforce disarmament as many believe, but to protect those who in compliance with our wishes had surrendered their arms.

After the attack on the loyal Basutos, and the subsequent attack on our troops, Letsie, the paramount chief of the Basutos, informed Government that the attacks had been made against his orders, and that he personally was on the side of Government. At the same time he sent to inform the powerful Basuto clans located in East Griqualand under my jurisdiction, that the chief (Lerothodi) had got into conflict with the Government, and that they must support him; but that he as an old man could take no

active part in the war, and would sit quietly at home. This happened in September 1880. In the previous April, I had obtained information from a reliable source that Letsie had sent messengers to the Basutos in my Division in East Griqualand, urging them to make common cause with the Basutos in Basutoland to resist disarmament, asserting that this was not a question affecting only Basutoland, but that it was one affecting all the tribes in South Africa, and if they stood aloof while the Basutos were being disarmed, their turn would follow. This message was also sent to other tribes, and all intimated their adhesion to the Basuto cause, promising to stand by Letsie in case of need. This I reported at the time to Government, remarking that heretofore in our conflicts with the Natives we were enabled to localize the struggle and bring friendly tribes to our assistance; but that should a rising take place on the disarmament question, we should stand quite alone, and could not count on the assistance of a single tribe, and that even those who might be disposed to side with us would be swept away in the flood of general resistance, and would be compelled to purchase present safety by siding with our opponents.

MEETING AT MATATIELA.

Matters now had assumed a most serious aspect. I had held a meeting of the Basutos at Matatiela, intimating to them that the disarmament policy of the Government had been abandoned, and that disarming would simply be voluntary. This announcement had been received with acclamation by the meeting, and I was requested to permit the assembled multitude to celebrate the joyful announcement by a great war dance, but I objected to the perform-