

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE HIGH COMMISSION TERRITORIES

The White Paper on Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland.

*By* A. SILLERY

**E**MBEDDED in the sub-continent of South Africa—in the Union, yet not of it—lie the High Commission territories of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland. Basutoland, as it were the senior partner, because the oldest as a British dependency and the most populous, mountainous, “the African Switzerland”, an island surrounded on all sides by Union territory; huge, sprawling Bechuanaland, on its eastern side, typical Transvaal high veld, Rhodes’s “Suez Canal” to the interior, and running out to the west into the Kalahari steppe; Swaziland, on the whole a well watered land with good soil, once the prospective road of the Transvaal to a much desired but always elusive port on the Indian Ocean.

The people are as varied as their respective countries. The Basuto, descendants of the tribes and fragments of tribes broken and dispersed in the early 19th century by the wars of the Zulu Shaka and collected by the great Moshesh into the mountains east of the Orange Free State, are sturdy forthright mountaineers who have developed a strong sense of nationhood under a single paramount chief.

The people of Bechuanaland are originally of the same stock as the Basuto. They speak a kindred language, and to some extent share the same outlook and respect similar traditions. But politically they are divided into separate and independent chiefships and they have cultural peculiarities which result no doubt from their particular environment.

The Swazi are different. They are Nguni, the same group as the Zulu, and, unlike the Basuto and Bechuana, upon whom Christian influences were early brought to bear, they still wear traditional dress, closely follow ancient customs and zealously perform the rites associated with the old tribal religion.

The three Protectorates, as they are for convenience called (though Basutoland is, strictly speaking, a colony) had a chequered history, each in its different way. But they all have one historical feature in common: the people themselves, through their chiefs, asked to be taken under British protection, and the British Government, in assuming this responsibility, did so very reluctantly, and with a sense of strictly limited liability.

"Our obligations and interests in Bechuanaland", wrote the High Commissioner in 1885, "are limited to securing suitable locations for our allies Montsioa and Mankoroane (two chiefs), and to keeping open the trade road to the interior of the country." In practice, of course, the early European administrators found it impossible to remain aloof from the more intimate problems of the territories and soon found themselves drawn in to local politics as advisers and arbitrators and keepers of the peace. But the policy of remote control, and a certain reluctance to do more than was strictly necessary lasted for some time, and must be taken into account in any survey of the political or economic history of these territories.

Most colonial civil servants of the "bad old days" found cause to complain of shortage of money, but in the Protectorates the complaints seem to have been more bitter and better founded than elsewhere. The story is still told of the policeman whose house was so poor that he found comfort in exchanging quarters with his mule. It was not until the visits of Sir Alan Pim in the early 'thirties and the publication of his forceful reports that purposeful economic development really began; and the present White Paper, though it sketches what has been done since 1945 and outlines what it is proposed to do in the future, in fact marks the continuation of a process that began some 20 years ago.

In the case of Basutoland and Bechuanaland at least, it did not need much imagination to make a start. All that was needed was a sense of priorities. In Basutoland pressure of population and bad farming methods had led to acute soil erosion. Clearly this was the first thing to be tackled, and tackled it has been, with great success. So much so that the White Paper makes the definite claim that the whole territory will be fully protected against erosion in the next few years. Unhappily Africa springs unpleasant surprises and many will look upon this claim with caution. Nevertheless the Basutoland erosion campaign is recognized as a model of its kind and the results are indeed impressive.

The pressing need of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, with its dependence on cattle, is water—and the initial effort has been directed towards finding it, and storing it. Deep bores, dams in catchment areas and on streams are all being tried, also an ingenious method of accumulating and exploiting the moisture in the sand of dry river beds. But too many herds—and people—are still dependent on a muddy mixture scooped with gourds from a hole in the ground, and the scope for further work in this sphere is indefinite.

Their wealth, admittedly by no means negligible, is terribly vulnerable to disease and a whimsical climate. Their standard of health is mediocre and medical facilities are still limited. Their robust wit and practical commonsense need the stimulus and polish of education. It is to lessen these handicaps and to supply these deficiencies that the effort described in the White Paper is designed, and though the goal is still a long way off, progress has been made, and along the right road.

Those who know something about these territories, and have been privileged to share in the work that is being done, know how much this is due to hearty co-operation between the chiefs and people themselves and the European officials who are their advisers and their friends.

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## OVER SUCH ROCKS

*By E. F. GUY*

Over such rocks the water has come  
Beyond the scope of our cognition;  
In milleniums when God's rule of thumb  
Was planning beast's claw, conditioning  
Scales to skin; when mouth was dumb  
And tide ran roaringly, waves threw high  
The deep's upheaval—strange writhing things  
To creep or cling, to live or die.

Now whitening in the sun, something the land  
Threw back that Ocean would not keep,  
Shuttled here on a margin of sand,  
This destiny's bone seems strangely asleep  
Before the rocks, meeting no demand  
Of fins to feet, shuffled with the surge  
Or suck of water, in motion astride  
Both life and death and dumb to their urge.