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SOCIÉTÉ DES MISSIONS ÉVANGÉLIQUES
DES PARIS

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE

ON

THE LIFE, CONVERSION AND DEATH

OF MANOAH,

MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF THABA-BOSSIU,

AMONG THE BÉCHUANAS-BASSOUTOS

(South Africa)

1843

SOCIETY
OF THE
EVANGELICAL MISSIONS OF PARIS
TO THE NON-CHRISTIAN PEOPLES

Biographical notice on the life, conversion and death of Manoah, member of the Church of Thaba-Bossiu, among the Béchuanas-Bassoutos (South Africa)

Thaba-Bossiou, 18 July 1842

TO THE MESSIEURS THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE SOCIETY OF THE
EVANGELICAL MISSIONS

Messieurs and very honourable brothers,

The Church of Thaba-Bossiu has just lost one of her members, or else she has had the joy of witnessing him falling asleep in the arms of the Lord. Still few in numbers, and tightly bound one to the other, we could not avoid to suffer receiving the farewells of a brother whose cooperation we deemed so fundamental. This unhappiness, however, has been reduced by the belief that all that God orders is right above all, and by the feeling of spiritual good, that every one of ours developed from this unexpected loss. The members of my herd knew that the Bible proclaims fortunate those who die

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to God; they had often read with strong feelings these words of the Evangelist: *Even when I will traverse the valley of shadow and death, I will not fear no evil.* However, this subject had not offered itself to their observations in the form of an perceivable event. On my part, I felt that a special and indelible seal was pressed upon my missionary activity and I gratefully humbled myself in this new proof of love.

The friend who left us had received from his parents the name of Entouta, but baptism named him Manoah. He was brother of Daniel Entlaloè, the first born of the Church of Thaba-Bossiou. His career was short and very animated: only during the last eight years of his life, thanks to the Gospel, he tasted the rest he had always longed for. His childhood

was marked by the scenes of desolation that took place during the prolonged quarrels between the Matébélés and the Bassoutos. Not older than twelve, he lost his father and his family and had to expatriate to earn some bread among the cruel vassals of Dingân. During the journey, Entouta experienced the utmost hunger and exhaustion. These poor migrants under the guidance of Chéou, a grown up and experienced man, climbed with difficulty the White Mountains, these Pyrenées of Austral Africa that divide the Béchuanasie from the land of Natal. On the borders of the domains Zoulas, a chief, with a haughty look, blocked the travellers to seize Entouta, whom he intended to make his slave. He was already dragging him away when Chéou ran to help his young friend and, seizing his arm, attempted to pull him back. An obstinate fight ensued; the child, pulled violently, cried with pain and fear. The Zoula, feeling to be the weaker one, became furious; he raised his sagaie: ‘This child, he said,

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looking ferociously at Chéou, will not be neither yours nor mine; watch, I am going to smash his skull’. This move shook Entlaloé, who had remained with the women to protect them; he springs, stops the arms of the murdered, and cries: ‘Oh Chéou, my father, do not resist any longer; let Entouta be slave; it might be that one day he will come back to us’. Daniel’s expectations were fulfilled. After a few months, the poor captive joined his family. He found them settled at one day’s travel from Mokokotloufé, ordinary residence of Dingân. A considerable number of Bassoutos, gathered because of common sufferings, had obtained by the Zoula monarch permission to found a village, that quickly became flourishing. With the help of the relations they had with their compatriots in Lessouto, these migrants obtained ostrich feathers, crane wings and panther[[leopard]] skins, which they re-sold with profit to the Zoulas, among whom these objects were the main military ornament. The small community already possessed some herds, and waited for the day when these acquisitions would have let them return to their home country; but, hélas, the source of their prosperity became the cause of their ruin. The lure of a more advantageous deal attracted some friends of Entlaloé to offer their goods to the Barapoutsas, a neighbouring tribe, hostile to Dingân. This was enough to light up the wrath of the despot. During a dark night the Bassouto village was completely surrounded by some hundred warriors, deployed in three rows. The massacre was total; Entlaloé and his young wife severely wounded were left for dead under a heap of corpses. The hut of Entouta was

sacked and burnt. As to himself, thanks to the intervention of God, he had left for a journey the day before with Chéou his protector. When Entlaloé and his wife

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had recovered sufficiently from their wounds, they abandoned with their brother the inhospitable country of Natal. Once more in the utmost hunger, they had to join a band of hunters who lived of hippopotamous meat and wild boar, along the banks of the Calédon. During this adventurous life, Entouta exposed himself to great dangers. He was one day swiftly chased by a hippopotamous crazed for the many wounds. The young hunter, exhausted, was going to be inevitably tore apart, but God, who guarded over his days, led his run towards a deep ravine that the animal did not dare to cross. Some months later, Entouta and his friend Taële, hunting hyrax in a thicket, were taken by surprise by a leopard. They attacked him without hesitation and wounded him. Angered, the animal jumps on Taële, grounds him and is about to tear him in pieces, when Entouta renews the fight, free his friend, and with a blow of his mace kills the fierce beast. The skin of the leopard belonged to the victor, but on this occasion our friend showed a very praiseworthy generosity. After having led Taële to his family, he went looking for the precious trophy, and displaying it before his friend he said: 'My friend, it is you who suffered the greatest danger, this spoils of victory belongs to you'.

These events will suffice, Messieurs, to give you an idea of the scenes that peopled the youth of our brother. After many years of trouble and misery, the exiled family came back to Thaba-Bossiu, their homeland; they found here abundance, rest, and what is infinitely more worthy, *the words of eternal life*. Entouta, who I shall call now onwards Manoah, was converted just slightly more than two years ago. By nature serious and thoughtful, he had lent for a long time attention

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to the preaching of the Gospel, and the Christian principles had secretly developed in his heart, before than his close ones and perhaps even himself had noticed it. He belonged to the number of those privileged beings whom God, by a kind of predestination, seems to have particularly provided with defenses against the temptations of evil, and who, despite being *children of hatred like all others*, owe to a more docile temperament and to more

orderly passions a happy exemption from any disorder.¹ His family assured me, and I know him enough to give faith to their words, that they never found him in a quarrel.

‘I remember, Daniel told me recently, that when still children we were called by our father for our evening supper, Manoah generally sat behind his little companions. For this reason he quite often was forgotten by his father, and when the band well fed huddled under the large blanket, Manoah said in a sad tone, but without bitterness: ‘I am going to sleep with hunger’. We had fun of his misfortune, and our laughters, instead of irritating him, amused him too.’

Celibacy, so rare among these peoples, was dear to him; and this because it allowed to give himself to the care for his brother and mother. When they insisted with him to find a spouse, he answered to the former: ‘I have always seen that marriage tends to separate brothers’, and to the latter: ‘You are a widow,

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Daniel is a father with family, and work entirely for his children; I am your only support’. And then he added, smiling to them: ‘I am still just a child, let me grow up, my heart still has not found in women nothing more than sisters’. However, he was about twenty-five when he spoke thus, and the nice baskets that adorned the court of his mother² spoke for the strength of his arm, easily providing for the needs of his large family. His modesty, his selflessness and his readiness to obey made him cherished to Moshesh, who considered him a trusted messenger. This duty, by the by, brought to our friend but heavy toils, that he endured without complaining.

It is very common that such a orderly heathen is trapped by some doubtful one and delays his conversion. This was not the case of Manoah. Only, my long-time knowledge of his excellent character prevented me from forming a precise opinion on his spiritual state. I found difficult to distinguish in him what was truly the product of Grace. He opened completely his heart to me a few days after receiving a sermon on the words of Joshua: ‘For myself and my house we will serve the Eternal’. ‘I have understood, he told me then, that I will not be without sin in hiding any longer the change that God has produced in my soul. Jesus Christ wants to be served openly. My consciousness has been

¹ It is without doubts worth noting that at the heart of paganism and where the most execrable vices are publicly tolerated, God provides that some individuals exist whose moral conduct serves to preserve the ideal of virtue.

² The Bassoutos, not having barns nor granaries, keep grains in huge round baskets, which are rainproof and are placed in the court before the hut.

awakened for few months. When the Lord asked me, saying: 'Entouta, how do you think you will avoid my wrath?

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I first tried to confuse him and to confuse myself. I answered 'I am but a child, what sin could a child commit? My sagaie has never touched a man; I eat only what my hands cultivated'. But the Holy Book that I had open before me persuaded me I was lying. It said 'You will not covet'. Then I realised that the root of all sins was within my soul. It also said 'You will love the Lord your God wholeheartedly'; and also 'You will serve him only'. I convinced myself that for all my life I had only loved myself, and I had followed the law of my pride. I cried in the bitterness of my consciousness, and Jesus, the friend of the sinners, told me: 'Come to me you who are troubled and encumbered, and you will find the rest that you look for. Take my easy yoke and my light burden'. Oh my shepherd, place the yoke of Christ upon me, I desire to carry it publicly'. He carried it for two years, for the edificaton of the Church and the glory of its Saviour, this yoke that he desired.

The illness that has just deprived us of Manoah was very rapid in its development. As soon as we thought he was in danger, he found himself at the very end. From the beginning, he showed the most perfect resignation. A few days before his death, he sid to his brother: 'Perhaps I will remain with you, perhaps I will leave you; may the Lord choose for me' – 'Do you suffer much?' asked him Daniel – 'Yes, more than I could tell, but God helps me. When God took me in his service, he did not promise me I would have been without pain forever.' The brother Ramaséatsané, who was there, observed that Manoah was renown for his physical strength. 'It is true', answered the poor sick man, 'that I was strong and vigorous for many

[[p.10]] years; but, my friend, strength is a trap. The Lord did good in depriving me of such thing of which I was so proud'. The next morning, Daniel was so struck by the progress made by the disease that he fell on his knees and started to cry. 'Why do you cry?' asked Manoah emotionally. – 'The Lord chastises me, and how could I not cry, me, his poor child' – 'Daniel', answered the sick man, 'I do not deceive myself. I know that I am in great danger, but let us submit both to the will of God: all that he does is good. Maintain your faith, my brother, you converted before me, and it is largely your example and your exhortations that led me to renounce to the superstitions of our fathers and to search for the Lord. Do not ever turn your back to your Saviour.' Daniel read then Psalm

23. Manoah, once he had listened, said quietly and as if it was addressed to him: ‘I would like to know if, when David wrote this Psalm, he was where I am today: that is so comforting, so similar!’ During the following night, he woke her elderly mother up ‘When will you cook the bread for Sunday?’ he asked³ – ‘The day after tomorrow, my son; this night is the night of the fifth day’⁴. – ‘Sunday I will not be with you anymore, the Lord is searching for me.’ These words greatly alarmed his family; they called for me and I could only confirm the judgement that the sick man had given on his state.

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After having revived him a bit with a cordial, I begged him to share his feelings. ‘Oh!’ he shouted with great effort, ‘my dear shepherd, I would have a lot to say if my voice were not almost extinguished. Remember the day when I said to you that I wanted to serve the Eternal as Joshua. I have been fortunate since then. I believe in Jesus, I find in him forgiveness for my sins. He will not abandon me now that death is approaching.’ During that day, that was Friday, he got weaker and weaker: all spoke of a very imminent departure. Therefore, the day after I went to his bed. He was still entirely conscious, but he hardly spoke. When he saw me, he repeated twice with a broken voice: ‘I am happy in Jesus’ Immediately after he said to his brother, who was holding him in his arms: ‘*Kīa otséla*, I fall asleep’. Daniel laid him down on his leather bed, closed his eyes, and all the bystanders left crying.

I could not leave so quickly the remains of the first Christian Mossouto who I saw dying. I was absorbed in thinking about the infinite change that a brief moment had operated in that fortunate being. A reed hut was the only house ever possessed by Manoah; a few sheepskins, quite worn out, were the most precious coat he had ever wore; some heads of cattle, the only wealth he had ever knew. I recollected that, recently, when trying to portray to him the glories and blessings of Heaven, I complained that the even had a very imperfect idea of the terrestrial objects to which the Holy Ghost compared the prize to come. But a moment was enough to carry him among

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unspeakable splendour, of which the golden harp of the seraphin, the sea of crystal and the gates of pearls are without doubt only very rough representations. Oh, powerful faith,

³ In our missions stations the Bassoutos took by themselves the good habit of preparing on Saturday the food for Sunday, not because of a legalistic servility, but to be more free during the day of the Lord.

⁴ Our Bassoutos, like the Quakers, call the days of the week with numbers.

I exclaimed to myself in that solemn moment, through you Manoah seized the promises of an endless happiness, even if he understood so little its nature. But what do I say? he did understand this happiness; because he lived entirely following God! Ah, who needs allegorical descriptions? To see the Saviour, to adore him, to serve him, to tell him forever your love, it's enough for Manoah, it's enough for every body taken by the Saviour.

Je demeure, Messieurs, etc.

E.CASALIS, *missionnaire*