

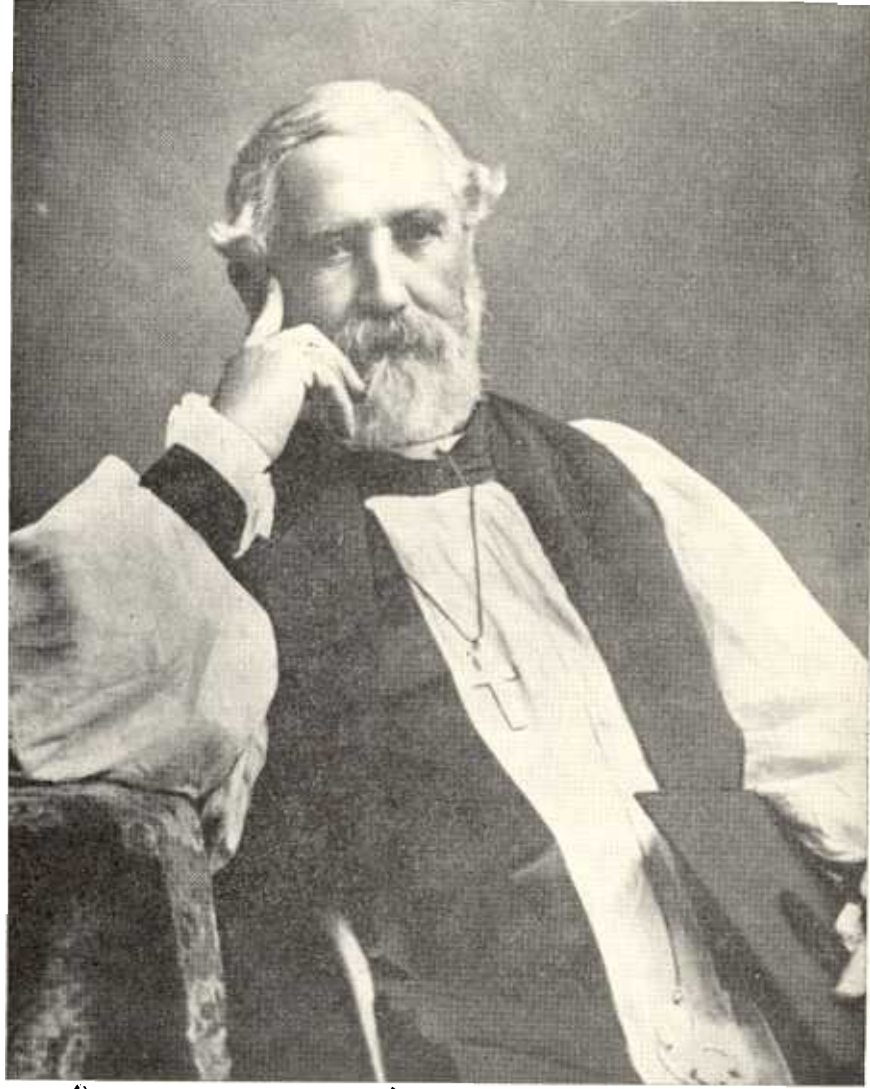
**THE RIGHT REV. DR. HENRY BROUGHAM BOUSFIELD, FIRST
(ANGLICAN) BISHOP OF PRETORIA : THE FIRST PHASE IN
THE TRANSVAAL (1879-1886)**

"Pretoria, thou art a City: I am within Thee." It was with these words, we are told, that Bishop Bousfield, first Bishop of Pretoria, crossed the "Aapjis" River and entered the centre of his See on the 7th January, 1879. This was the man whose untiring effort was to establish the Church of the Province of South Africa, in the Transvaal, a task which called for the greatest strength of will and who in later years was to be branded as "obstinate" and "autocratic" by some on account of these same characteristics, and who was to become one of the "characters" of the early Republican Transvaal.

The Bishop tells us that he was drawn to the missionary field from childhood and his entrance to Caius College, Cambridge, was almost thwarted by this impulse. He did not marry until foreign work seemed quite unlikely, but still feeling the missionary urge, stipulated that his bride must be willing "to go to the earth's ends if called". He once let it slip out that he was willing to go abroad. Mr. Bullock of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, came to hear of it, and so it was that after six happy years as Vicar of Andover, and a few more spent in other parishes, he was offered the newly created Pretoria Diocese in the middle of 1876. "I knew as little of Pretoria or the Transvaal as others", he wrote later, and he declined the appointment "since a distant village in a Dutch Republic seemed no home for my wife and children."

A year later, however, the political status of the Transvaal had changed substantially, with the annexation of the Republic by Sir Theophilus Shepstone. On the offer being renewed, the Bishop then accepted "if the insurance office did not so raise my premiums as to render it impossible." Thus it was that after his consecration at St. Paul's on the 2nd February, 1878, the "Beggar" Bishop sailed from Southampton on August 8th aboard the "Danube".

The party, consisting of the Bishop, Mrs. Bousfield, their two sons and their six daughters, as well as a few helpers and servant, landed at Durban on 14th September, 1878. A description of this journey and of the arrival, has been left by both the Bishop and his eldest daughter, Rebecca (future wife of Sir Godfrey Lagden, the distinguished Colonial Administrator and author). Drought caused a delay of nearly three months, since they could not start their journey until the grass had grown to provide grazing. During this time the Bishop's family was visited by Sir Bartle Frere, and experienced their first real African thunder and lightning storm, which left a clear impression on the Bishop, and also their first Zulu-war scare: "On Tuesday, December 10th we made our first trek", and reached Coldstream on the Natal border on Christmas Day. On St. Stephen's Day (December 26) the Bishop crossed the borders of his Diocese for the first time, and, a week or two later entered the "really pretty little rural city" of Pretoria via



The Right Reverend Dr. H. B. Bousfield.

Arcadia Street, and called at the Old Government House. Describing his new home "city" — "and very pretty does it look from several points of view" — he tells us that the English Church was "a small, ill-built, thatched, barn-like erection", and the Dutch Church on Church Square in 1879 was a "hideous erection". Six years later, however, "a really imposing building with many good points, on which we may congratulate . . . the little city generally" had replaced the latter. A new English Church, on the site of

the present Cathedral in Schoeman Street had been started, and the "Romanists" had a good "pile" of buildings. His description of the "city" as he first found it reveals a pre-occupation with its churches. The Bishop tells us that "Bishopscote", his new home in Proes Street was "as sweet a little home as a missionary Bishop could desire," with its arches of roses and passionfruit, its willow trees, its formal beds of flowers, and so on.

Despite this, however, his early years in the Transvaal were hard, "with all their sorrows and disappointments." He soon found he had "come to the most expensive place in the world", and it was not long before he realized that his annual income of £600 was hopelessly inadequate. Whereas he had expected to find conditions rough and to endure discomfort, he found Pretoria a gay little capital, "the Paris of South Africa", in which a bishop had to keep up his standing. Men of his rank were earning double his income and to make things worse, his travelling costs annually consumed over £300.

The Bishop soon made the acquaintance of all the joys and hardships of the veld. Thunder-storms, which he found so violent, waggons stuck in rivers, horses dying from mysterious diseases and the tremendous distances — all helped make his work a little more difficult. He acquired a sturdy and rather fine pony, and often, alone with his saddle bags, set out on his great journeys, or sometimes, as on his second "treck", he accompanied a judge on circuit. Very often however, Mrs. Bousfield travelled with her husband on his tours, and her fascinating diaries of these early days and tours, show the lively interest she took in all around her, and in the welfare of the country. "If only the River (referring to the Vaal) were irrigable", she writes, "what a difference it would make to the country." She tells, too "that strange things are done by some of the officers and men in these places, which make the Colonists justly vexed, not to say disgusted", and expresses the view that Dutch and English must agree to associate. "So we must strive to the utmost to work hard, without any undue rivalry." The Bishop's wife leaves us many lengthy and charming descriptions of the day to day events of her husband's trips — to Heidelberg, the Vaal banks, Potchefstroom, Zeerust, Rustenburg and Klerksdorp. There was also a visit to Standerton, where Sir Arthur Cunynghame had just established a cavalry station.

On their very first "treck" Mrs. Bousfield had discussed education and the difficulties involved, with Mrs. "van Varmelow", wife of the Dutch Minister at Heidelberg, and the Bishop expressed his alarm at the state of education in Klerksdorp, where the teacher was a young soldier. Even before this the Bishop had begun to attend to the Capital's need for schools. As he had approached Pretoria for the first time, he had heard many expressions of the desire for a school which would relieve parents of the necessity of sending their children to the Roman Catholic Convent. Only two weeks after his arrival he had established a girls school, "St. Etheldreda's" in his own home, "Bishopscote", his six daughters providing the nucleus of the school — the forerunner of the present St. Mary's D.S.C.

in Hillcrest. St. Birinus' was soon afterwards established as a school for boys, and the Good Shepherd — still running in Blood Street — was founded as an elementary school for poorer children. The Bishop's keen interest in education was further evidenced in the education of his younger son, Hugh. Although he accompanied his parents on a number of trips, his studies were to continue always "and his Latin, his sums, and his Egyptian history were never to lose their importance in the face of any mishap or excitement." (*Pretoria News*, 1948).

Dr. Bousfield was also keen to carry the Gospel to the heathen. In his writings he expresses the wish that the Church in England would send him more men "that we might teach them (the Africans) of Jesus Christ, and that I might be free to learn their language". Naturally without this help, he could at first do little more than serve the needs of the converted, and even that only with difficulty.

On Shrove Tuesday (February 25, 1879), news arrived in Pretoria that a Zulu impi of 8,000 was within thirty miles of the city. The Acting Governor, Osborn, confirmed the rumour for the Bishop, although this official still found it difficult to believe. The terror of these few days, as they prepared to go into laager, stood out in the Bishop's mind long afterwards, particularly that of his daughter Ruth (afterwards Mrs. Edward Mawby) "as she enquired if the news were really true." Eventually it came out that it was a false alarm. "Many have laughed since at the folly of supposing that the Zulus would come, but no-one laughed that night", he wrote in *Six Years in the Transvaal* — the memoirs of his early years in his Diocese. Shortly afterwards another scare arose — that the Boers were preparing to attack . . . but no attack. Mrs. Bousfield, however, stoutly stood her ground: "At Bishopscote she would be found whenever the Boers came." It was at times like these that the Bishop, in addition to his Diocesan troubles and doubts, felt a personal sense of responsibility and guilt for bringing his family into a strange land with strange terrors.

The Bishop's strength of will and determination were revealed clearly when the time came to move the services from the old Church to the new Cathedral Church. His plan to effect this change, met with the response that to get the new building ready in time would be impossible: "but that word not being in my own vocabulary", he pushed on, and wielding a spade himself to complete the floor, and helping to hang the bell, everything was ready in time.

Towards the end of 1880, when rumours of a Boer uprising were rife in the Transvaal, "and the feeling against the Imperial Government is running very high amongst the Boers," as Mrs. Bousfield writes, the Bishop left the Transvaal for a brief period to attend the Episcopal Synod in Cape Town. On his return journey via Natal, he was "courteously welcomed by Sir George and Lady Colley and most kindly entertained by them at Government House". At Newcastle he found "news indeed" — that the Boers had occupied Heidelberg and that passage through to Pretoria was impossible. Although stopped at Standerton by the British, the Bishop determined to

return to Pretoria, and eventually got permission to continue. On the road, he got news of "Bronkhaus Spruit", and at Heidelberg he was stopped by a Boer Commando. Seeing Dr. Jorissen in a crowd, he explained his desire to proceed to Pretoria for Christmas. Eventually, after being assured that the Bishop had no military information or aims or dispatches, General Joubert gave permission for him to continue his journey.

In Pretoria, he joined his wife and family in the "Laager", which latter he has described in an article he wrote for "Missionary Life". Mrs. Bousfield has also left a fascinating and very full account of their life in the camp. Her eldest son Harry, was A.D.C. to one of the senior officers, and helped guard the camp. More than once, Mrs. Bousfield expresses in her letters the confident hope of waiting "till Sir George Colley and the troops come", and on the news of Colley's death, writes that she and her husband "realize the loss the more" as they knew the Colleys well. When the "garilla" (sic) war and siege of 100 days ended, Mrs. Jorissen and Mrs. Bok, wife of the Secretary to the "Driemanskap", who had been staying in the Pretoria laager with the Bishop, the Chief Justice, the Colonial Secretary and various other families, and who had "shared all the care and protection which has been so carefully bestowed on all", went out to join their husbands.

At last came the news of peace, "and who can forget the howl of shame and sorrow as its details became known", wrote the Bishop. The camp was cleared and all returned home. After unsuccessful correspondence with the officer in command, the Bishop only managed to recover his horses, which had been commandeered, "through the kindness of Sir Evelyn Wood"

The Bishop had already found conditions hard enough. For a man with his family responsibilities, including a wife whose health was rapidly failing, and used as he was to the settled life of a country parish in England, the change to the vastly different circumstances of the Transvaal as it was when he arrived was great enough. Already he had run into financial difficulties, both personally, and, far more important, in his Diocese. Now, the British withdrawal from the Transvaal, on top of this, was almost the last straw. "Nothing could make up to me, who had brought my family to an English Colony and had now to live in a Dutch Republic, to which I had once refused to come." Far worse, however, was the general state of the Diocese. The greatest of the Bishop's trials was the desertion of his clergy during the war. "The exit of the inhabitants, and the loss of heart of the remainder (referring to his parishioners) cannot be described", wrote the Bishop. The Government officials left as a matter of course, and were followed by those whose interests were not too deeply pledged to the country. His own congregation dropped from 300 to 50-60.

It was at times like these that the Bishop derived comfort and cheer from "The Pretoria Cross". On his journey out to South Africa, he had noticed among the stars near "The Southern Cross", a far more perfect cross, a Latin cross, which seemed to lie parallel to the horizon. "The fancy took me to call it "The Pretoria Cross" and that my life's work was to set it up". Long after, looking through the rose-arch over the gate of



The wagonette used by Bishop Bousfield on the tours of his diocese.

“Bishopscote” he saw “The Pretoria Cross” *erect*. It was but a fancy but in time of trial “this Cross, erect in my sight, has cheered me on to the life’s work of raising it on earth”.

This period, “the time of the nadir of the fortunes of the English Church in the Transvaal” (Agar-Hamilton) was to be the supreme test of the Bishop. If he had bowed to the great pressure on him to withdraw and abandon his Diocese, the painstaking work of the previous few years would have been undone. Dr. Bousfield, however, “would not give in, nor leave, nor forsake my post”. It was only his tenacity and determination which kept his church alive during the following ten years. These characteristics, now a virtue, were later to become something of a weakness, once the Church was established more firmly. He sent for more clergy, prepared to continue his work, and called his first synod to set affairs in order. The Dioceses’ greatest problem was that of finance. Those priests who had deserted their Bishop, had left all their debts to fall on him. Furthermore all the expansion of the years prior to 1881 had not yet been paid for, and the Bishop’s future plans had to be drastically curtailed. He was even reduced to selling his personal wagonette to pay for the Church’s debts. Four new clergymen arrived to swell the depleted ranks of the Bishop’s clergy. Through all this, however, the Bishop kept up his travels, and, says Agar-Hamilton, “the Church was kept alive . . . largely by the Bishop’s ceaseless itinerating.”

In January 1885, the Bishop left Pretoria for England, where for fourteen months he was to attempt to raise money in order to pay off the Church’s debts and to enable him to continue his work. In this he succeeded, and he was at last able to ensure a more certain revenue for his diocese. His rather querulous complaints, and constant references to himself as the

“Beggar Bishop” were undoubtedly lacking in dignity; but the crushing debt and financial problems weighing on his Diocese, and so on himself must never be forgotten. No-one need underestimate the difficulties of the first six years of Dr. Bousfield’s work in the Transvaal, and it was during these years that the Bishop became more autocratic and obstinate, characteristics which were to cause unfortunate difficulties in the years which followed. Thus by the time of the discovery of gold and the influx of English population, the Bishop had already become set in his ways.

The Bishop’s return to his Diocese in 1886 marks the end of the first phase of his Episcopate. The Church had been established through the Bishop’s tenacity and determination. The second phase of his episcopate is concerned more with the internal development and disputes of the Church. The Bishop settled down to what promised to be years of steady if uneventful and uninspiring development. Although relations between the Government and the Bishop were hardly warm, he states that he was “almost universally treated with consideration and kindness and respect”. His signature from this time onwards was “H. B. Pretor”, in place of “H. B. Pretoria” to which the Republican authorities had objected. One great dispute did, however, ruffle the comparative calm of these years, and that was that between Pretoria and Johannesburg. Just as the Witwatersrand was acutely sensitive to control from Pretoria in the governmental sphere, so it was also in religious sphere. The clash between these two centres, and between the Bishop and the Rev. Dannagh of Johannesburg, was to prove one of the great tragedies of the early church history in the Transvaal. This, however, provides material enough for a completely different study of more particular interest to students of church history.

The Bishop died in his armchair in 1902 in the Cape, where he happened to be at the time, and today the following plaque stands in the Bousfield family plot in the Old Cemetery, Pretoria (which incidentally adjoins a Struben family plot, the family of the Bishop’s son-in-law, Arthur Struben) : “This tablet is erected in memory of HENRY BROUGHAM BOUSFIELD, First Bishop of Pretoria, died February 9th, 1902, Buried at Rondebosch, Cape Colony.”

The Bishop’s name is also borne by the Library of the Rosettenville Priory, Johannesburg, and is on a number of pieces of furniture in St. Albans Cathedral, Pretoria, which date from his time. The establishment of his Church in the Transvaal, however, provides a more lasting memorial to him — a tenacious and determined servant of his Master.

A. A. Mawby,

(Great-grandson of the Bishop).

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