

Free Schooling and Doctoring a Model

Swat Own Best Missionary

By PETER DESBARATS

(Fourth of a Series)

"I have noticed," I said to the Chief Secretary, "that there are no missionaries in Swat."

"The reason," said the Chief Secretary, "is that we don't allow them."

He was not being completely truthful. Four Roman Catholic sisters from Holland arrived in Swat this spring to open the first private school in the state. But the school is merely a sophisticated addition to an already well-developed system of education, and the sisters are not missionaries in the proper sense of the term. Regardless of Swat's official attitude toward Christianity, the fact is that missionaries in Swat would be about as useful as a mosque in Rimouski.

By its own efforts, the state has created a network of schools, hospitals and other government services which is probably unmatched in any other developing country. And it's all free. Even Canada has yet to provide free university education and free medical treatment — both standard items in Swat, where there is no income tax and the main revenue of the state is derived from timber, emeralds and opium poppies.

The schools and hospitals, in many respects, are inadequate by North American standards. But that they exist at all, in a land that only 40 years ago was a chaotic jumble of warring tribes, is miraculous.

Roads Replace Tracks

When the Chief Secretary himself arrived in 1923, as a young law graduate from Lahore in British India, he had to ride on horseback from the border of Swat to the capital city of Saidu Sharif. The only roads in the state were cattle tracks used by nomadic tribesmen. Today a good paved highway runs more than 60 miles from the border north to Bahrain, a village that looks almost as if it was plucked from Switzerland and re-located in the upper reaches of the Swat River about 4,500 feet above sea level. All told, there are 450 miles of paved and dirt road in Swat, some of them snaking through mountain passes 7,000 feet above sea level between 20,000-foot indescribably beautiful peaks of the Hindu Kush.

(This is as good a place as



Physician in charge of Swat hospital

any to state, dogmatically, that Swat is the most beautiful place on earth. It has been described as a "second Switzerland" but Switzerland is only a poor reflection of Swat. If I had to choose between Heaven and Swat after death, I would opt for Swat. End of commercial.)

When the present Wali's father, Radshah Sahib, founded the State of Swat in 1917, his first concern was to stop the incessant tribal warfare. He built a network of forts throughout the land and at one time there were as many as 80 forts in use, an average of one fort for every 50 square miles of territory. Many of these forts are now abandoned but new ones are still constructed from time to time, making Swat one of the few states in the world today where the defence budget includes items such as "one fort, stone construction, with turrets and bastions, all properly crenellated."

Telephone Installed

About 1925 the Wali installed the first telephone service in Swat, a private network, isolated from the outside world, linking up various forts and administrative centres. The first outside connection was made only 20 years ago and fast, reliable service to the world beyond the Malakand Pass has existed only since 1961 when new facilities were installed for journalists and officials accompanying

Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip on Swat's first Royal Visit.

Electricity is something of a new-fangled wonder in many parts of the State. For many years the Wali operated a small power plant serving palaces and government offices but electricity from the British-built hydro plant in Malakand Pass became widely available only about 12 years ago. Even today, the transmission lines don't penetrate the northern half of the state and many homes and shops, in the main towns, rely on kerosene lamps.

Almost every town has a school, the majority of them built within the past decade. Ten years ago, there was a single high school in Swat. Now there are 28 high schools providing education up to Grade 10, 23 middle schools up to Grade 8, 25 lower middle schools up to Grade 6, 75 primary schools up to Grade 4 and — just within the past year — 140 village kindergartens.

The total school population is now about 29,000 and growing rapidly, and about half the teachers are properly trained. Twelve years ago, there were practically no trained teachers.

500 College Students

The Jahan Zeb College in the capital city has 500 students studying for science and arts degrees. Like the lower schools, it accepts no fees

from Swatis students. Books, clothing and accommodation are provided for poor students. Even students studying at universities outside the state receive loans from the Wali which are written off if they return to Swat after graduation for at least three years.

Although there are some textbooks in Pushto, the language of Swat, instruction officially is in Urdu, one of the two official languages of Pakistan. Students commence the study of a third language, English, in the fifth grade.

There are 19 hospitals and 20 dispensaries in Swat where all treatment, accommodation and medicines are provided free. Doctors working in these hospitals also accept private patients in their own offices but all the cost of treatment is assumed by the state as soon as a patient moves into hospital. Many of the hospitals are somewhat primitive by North American standards. There are no nurses, for instance, except for a few casually trained male attendants. Relatives of patients sometimes camp on the hospital grounds, and mothers will act as nurses for their sick children. Official visiting hours are posted everywhere and ignored by everyone — creating a much friendlier if less antiseptic hospital than one finds in more advanced countries.

Medicine An Open Field

Swatis who distrust European-type medicine avail themselves of the services of more than 100 "doctors" practising a wide range of medical systems derived from ancient Greek and Hindu authorities. Anyone with a few bottles of patent medicine and a good bedside manner can hang out his shingle in Swat. If he has the money to purchase a foot-operated drill, small chisels and a pair of pliers, he can also compete with the only qualified dentist in the State who fills and pulls for free at the main hospital in the capital city.

"Before the dentist arrived last year, we had to use the amateurs in the bazaar," said the doctor in charge of the hospital, an Edinburgh graduate.

He ran a tongue tentatively over his fillings and admitted, "Some of them are pretty good."

Tomorrow: Words with the Wali.