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HISTORIC BUILDINGS
OF
BASUTOLAND



by

JAMES WALTON

1957



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JAMES WALTON



B S A

(Presidential Address to the Basutoland Scientific Association)

1957

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS
OF BASUTOLAND

MORIJA PRINTING WORKS
MORIJA - BASUTOLAND

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The cover illustration is of Thaba-Bosiu Mission House and is reproduced from E. Casalis, *Les Bassoutos*, Paris, 1859. The house depicted was built by Constant Gosselin in 1837. It was destroyed in 1865 and rebuilt two years later by Théophile Jousse. It was finally destroyed by a tornado in 1956.

HISTORIC BUI

The historic buildings
sited in three groups :

1. Mission houses and
2. Fortifications,
3. Government build

Of these three groups the
first buildings in Basuto
of the Paris Evangelical
Mission arrived in Basuto
in 1824. Constant Gosselin
arrived in Basuto in 1824
and subsequent development
of Basuto was due to
Gosselin was born in 1812
in 1832 he was in Paris



François Maudslowi (1811-1881)

Two Early Builders of

HISTORIC BUILDINGS OF BASUTOLAND

The historic buildings of Basutoland may be conveniently considered in three groups :

1. Mission houses and churches,
2. Fortifications,
3. Government buildings.

Of these three groups those of the missions are the earliest and the first buildings in Basutoland, other than Basotho huts, were those of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society. When Casalis and Arbousset arrived in Basutoland in 1833 they brought with them an artisan, Constant Gosselin, who was to play an important part in the subsequent development of the mission stations in the country. Gosselin was born in 1800 in the neighbourhood of Amiens but in 1832 he was in Paris where he read a letter in *Le Journal des*



François Maeder (1811-1888)



Constant Gosselin (1800-1872)

Two Early Builders of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society

Missions asking for Christian artisans to undertake work in the mission field. In the following year he set out for South Africa and until his death in 1872 he rendered invaluable service to the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society. Not only was he responsible for building most of the early churches and mission houses but his good humour and cheery optimism rallied his missionary friends, particularly the youthful Casalis, in times of sorrow and trouble. One evening when Casalis was feeling very despondent Gosselin announced his intention of digging a grave in the mountain side. On being asked the reason, he remarked, "My friend, by the time I have finished digging it I calculate that you will be ready to put in it. You are so young and yet I see that you are already dreaming of the end". The lesson went home and Casalis rallied his spirits (1).

Gosselin's first task was to erect a temporary shelter at Morija and a rectangular reed hut was constructed, having three rooms, one of which served as a reception room, the second as a bedroom and the third as a study. During the fine weather it was at least a suitable shelter but when the rains came it proved totally inadequate and the following year Gosselin commenced to erect a more permanent dwelling. This was a building, 60 feet by 16 feet, consisting of five rooms, with a kitchen behind, and the first stone was laid on the 28th January, 1834. The house was destroyed by the Boers when they attacked Morija on the 28th April, 1858. Arbousset's notes and vocabulary, which he had been collecting for twenty years, were destroyed and his furniture put up to auction. Two years later Adolphe Mabile "went to see the ruins of the old missionary house, built 26 years ago", but to-day only the foundations can be traced in the wooded glade behind the printing works.

Casalis determined to settle at Thaba-Bosiu and in March, 1837, Gosselin laid the foundation stone of the mission house. He was assisted in his work by a number of Basotho, two or three of whom he trained as artisans, and it is reported that after he had laid a course of bricks he wiped his brow and said a fervent prayer, so that courses of prayers alternated with courses of bricks. In June of the following year Casalis took up his abode with his new bride but when James Backhouse visited them in June, 1839, he described their house as "a long, plain, brick building, of five rooms, affording a moderate share of accommodation, but not at all more than was needful for health and reasonable comfort" (2).

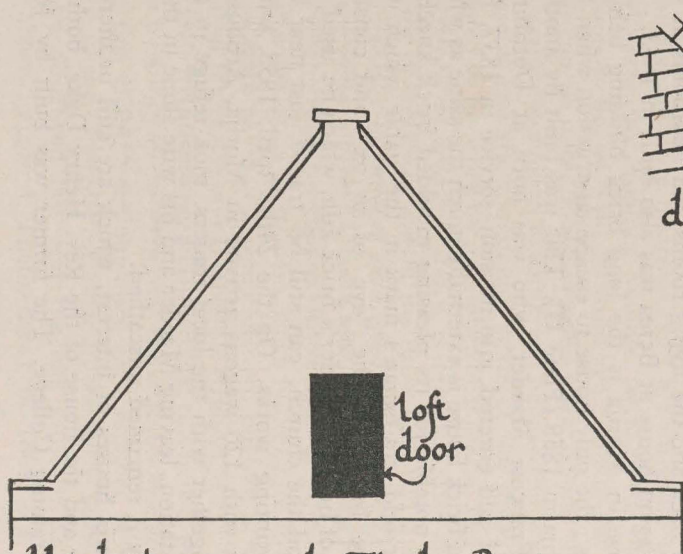
It has frequently been claimed that this house, prior to its destruction by a tornado in 1956, was the oldest house north of the Orange, but this claim was unjustified as a number of farm houses were built in the Orange Free State in the early 1820s (3). Nor was the house destroyed last year the one built by Gosselin, for, when the Boers attacked Thaba-Bosiu in 1865, the mission premises

were reduced to ruins. This was stated by John Burnet, Civil Commissioner of Aliwal North, when he wrote to the High Commissioner from Berea on the 6th November, 1865, "The whole of the Thaba-Bosigo mission premises are destroyed, a mass of ruin. The resident missionary Jousse, now in France, is despoiled of everything. Dr. Lautré nearly the same; all his furniture, medicines, surgery, etc., gone" (4). Smith also states that in September, 1866, when Mabile went to Thaba-Bosiu, "from Morija he conveyed some doors and windows in order to patch up two rooms in the ruins of Dr. Lautré's house, the only building which had a roof" (5). When Mr. Jousse returned from France in 1867 he brought with him several wagon loads of timber, doors and windows, with which to rebuild the ruined houses and church at Thaba-Bosiu (6). So the mission house at Thaba-Bosiu, which survived until last year, was largely built by Jousse in 1867 and was considerably altered later by Rev. E. Jacottet.

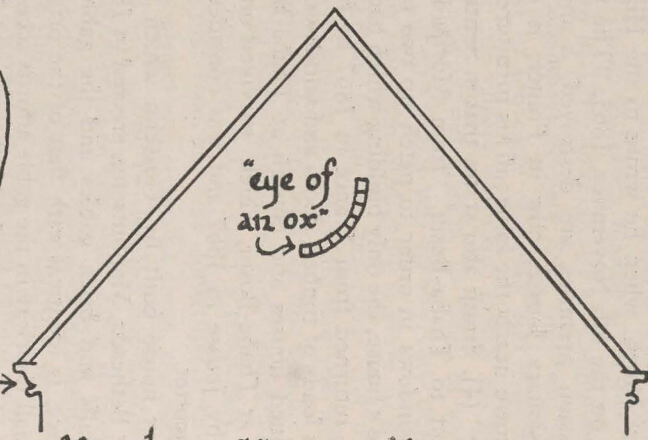
The one mission house built by Gosselin which still remains unaltered is that at Bethesda, Maphutseng, erected in 1843 (Plate I). This has stone walls and brick gables and the gable treatment, derived from France, is identical with that of the original Thaba-Bosiu house. A small doorway in the gable affords access to the loft above the ceiling which was covered with flat stone slabs to prevent the fire from spreading to the rooms below should the thatch catch alight. In plan the Bethesda house is of the T-type, having a projecting kitchen at the back and the living rooms and bedrooms at the front. The first mission house at Berea was also built in 1843.

The oldest house in Morija is the long brick building behind the printing works; the only house to escape destruction when the Boers sacked Morija in 1858 (Plate II). This was built by another mission artisan, François Maeder, who was born at Dornburg, in Saxony, in 1811 and entered into mission service in 1837. His long, low, thatched brick house is externally much the same as when it was built and is notable for its pleasing moulded brick kneelers and for the rather odd craftsman's mark in the gable which was referred to by the builder as the "eye of an ox" and consists of a quarter circle of bricks. Maeder's brick kiln, which he used for both the house and the church, can still be traced just near the entrance to the printing works. On the 24th April, 1858, when some 1,400 Boers with 120 wagons arrived in Morija, Arbousset and his family, together with the local traders, took refuge in the caves behind the station, leaving Maeder and his wife alone in their house. Fortunately it remained unscathed.

Two other Morija houses of interest, which are still unaltered, are La Chaumière and the house of the Rev. Henry Dyke, both at the Basutoland Training College. The former was built by Jean



Maphutseng and Thaba Bosiu
Constant Gosselin



Maeder's House, Morija
François Maeder

Gable Treatments

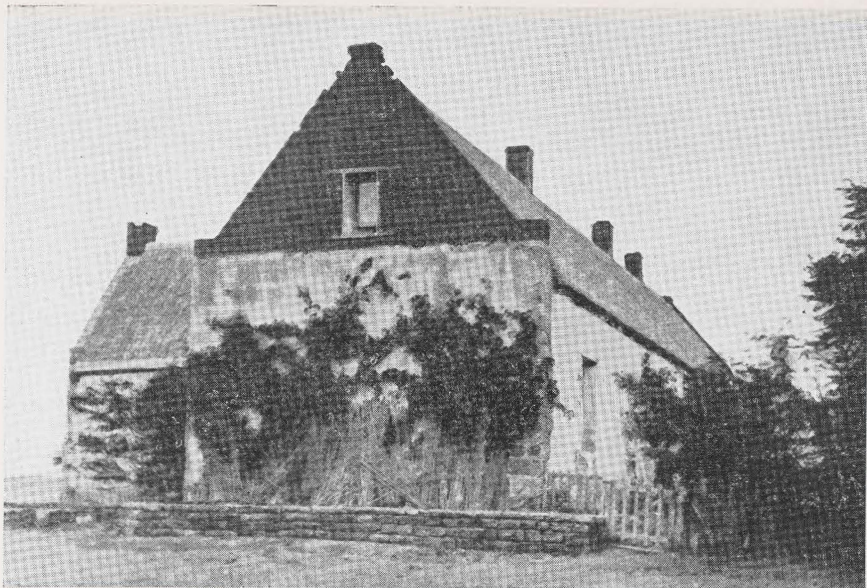


PLATE I

Maphutseng (Bethesda) Mission House. Built by Constant Gosselin, 1843.

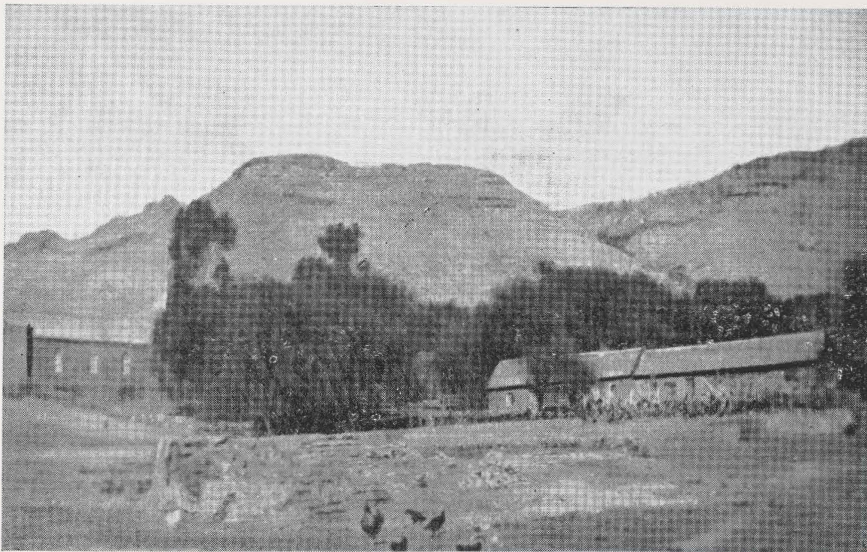


PLATE II

François Maeder's House, Morija. Morija Church on left.

Constant Gosselin
Gable Treatments
François Maeder

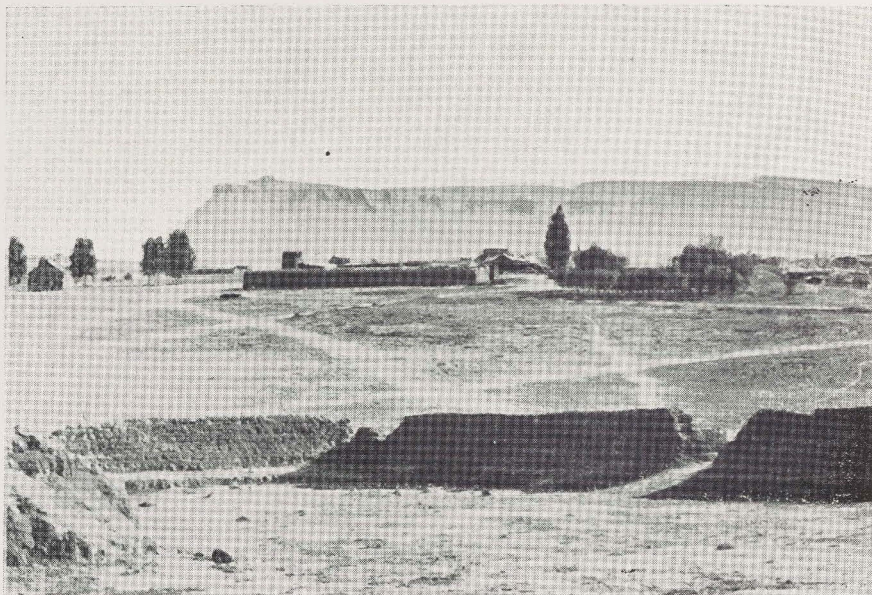


PLATE III


Leribe Fort, built 1879. Major Bell's first Court Room on left.



PLATE IV 1899

Maseru Fort, built 1889.

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Preen when he first arrived in the country in 1872 and after the death of Adolphe Mabile it was the cottage to which his wife, Adèle, retired. The other house was built in 1876 by Dr. Eugène Casalis.

The building of Moriija church and his house occupied Maeder for almost the whole of the ten years prior to 1857 for he had to do most of the brickwork with his own hands although in the carpentry he had the help of an Englishman named Webber. Unfortunately the flat roof of bricks, reeds and earth proved too heavy for the timbers and in 1861 it was on the point of collapse. Adolphe Mabile took a wagon to Aliwal North to fetch corrugated iron, pulled off the roof, strengthened the timbers and re-roofed it with corrugated iron and an outer cover of thatch to deaden the sound of rain and hail. Almost as soon as it was finished, however, a severe storm tore it off, carrying the heavy sheets of iron and timbers a considerable distance, and Mabile again had to set to work to build up his church. From the coast he obtained twelve stout octagonal teak columns, made from the masts of wrecked ships, which arrived at Moriija in May, 1864. For the remainder of that year he had to "practise all the trades of the world, enlarging the church, planting the great columns in two rows, reconstructing the roof, putting in benches of brick and a pulpit of the same material. The work was completed in December, 1864, and served for the next sixty years"(7).

The church at Thaba-Bosiu, outside which Moshesh sat on his seat of black dolerite, was, as we have seen, largely destroyed in 1865 and rebuilt by Jousse in 1867. The finest unaltered example of an early mission church in Basutoland is that of Hermon which was built in 1853. Two other churches were subsequently erected on the station and the first church was abandoned and thus survived as it was originally built.

One other building of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society is worthy of mention and that is the cave house at Masitise, near Quthing. In 1867 Rev. D. F. Ellenberger crossed the Orange into the district of the Baphuthi and took up his abode in a cave at Masitise. By building up the front of the cave with a brick wall and erecting a separate kitchen, Ellenberger converted it into a reasonably comfortable dwelling in which he and his family lived for a number of years.

The Roman Catholic mission did not extend their work to Basutoland until 1862, when Father Allard and Father Gerard were granted the site of Roma by Moshesh. Father Gerard's house was demolished only a few years ago. Three years later the missionaries were joined by some of the Sisters of the Sacred Family of Bordeaux and their tiny chapel, extended shortly afterwards, and the Sisters' quarters still surround the peaceful and shady quadrangle at St. Mary's.

The English Church was first established at Hlotse Heights in 1876, when John Widdicombe was granted a site by Major Bell, and by Christmas of that year he had erected six rondavels, comprising dining room, store room, kitchen and three bedrooms, for the princely sum of £60. "Before settling at Hlotse", Widdicombe wrote "I had engaged a mason, a white man, from Ficksburg, the nearest Free State village, to build us a temporary chapel, school, and mission-room of raw brick. I had only £150 at my disposal to start with, and this had been most generously provided by the congregation of St. Peter's, Eaton Square, London. Without their timely aid we should have been unable to build any place of worship at all. The building we erected was of necessity of the simplest kind, and the smallest possible dimensions. It was an oblong structure, plastered with mud, unceiled, and under a flat, galvanised-iron roof. It was fifty-four feet long, and twelve broad, and was divided into three compartments separated from each other by a thin partition wall. It gave us a chapel twenty feet by twelve, a mission-room twelve feet by twelve, in which I could converse with the numbers of heathen who still poured in daily to interview us, and a school-room the same size as the chapel. Except the cross on its gable, and possibly its small 'carpenter's Gothic' windows, there was little or nothing about the exterior of such a building which marked it off as one devoted to religious worship. An accomplished ecclesiologist who came to visit us sometime afterwards protested that I had 'put up a ginger beer shop', but as he did not offer to procure the funds wherewith to improve it, or still less to erect a more seemly and permanent church, his criticism did not distress me, true though it might be" (8).

Three years later the tiny church figured prominently in the defence of Hlotse during the Gun War and after the first attack Widdicombe wrote that the "windows were all chopped to pieces, the walls loopholed in every direction, and the unceiled iron roof riddled with shot". In July, 1881, the garrison vacated the church. "It was indeed in a sorry condition. Its walls were full of holes, its windows without a single pane of glass in them, and its roof still riddled with shot-holes. Every time it rained the water streamed down from these holes as from a shower bath; and besides this the earthen floor was furrowed all over, the walls besmeared and defiled with grease and filth, and the whole place alive with vermin. By the aid of friends in England, who had heard of our evil plight and who prayed daily for our deliverance, we were enabled to restore the building to some degree of decency and order. The walls were scraped and replastered both inside and out, new corrugated iron roofing was put up, the floor was relaid and resmeared, new windows replaced the old, the furniture that remained was repaired, tho-

roughly washed and cleaned, and in a few weeks we had the privilege and the joy of again being able to worship the Lord in His own House, and before His own Altar" (9). This tiny church, Widdicombe's "ginger beer shop", not only survived the years of war but it still stands to-day as one of Leribe's most historic buildings, in fact the first building.

Basutoland has had four defensive works designated by the name of "Fort": Fort Hartley, near Pokane in the Orange Valley; Fort Gordon at Maseru; Fort Cochrane at Mafeteng; and Leribe Fort at Hlotse. Of these, Fort Hartley, known originally as J. B. Thomas's Shop Camp, is the earliest and, as its name indicates it was actually a store in 1879 when the war against Chief Moorosi, began. A rectangular walled enclosure and a number of additional rooms were built to serve as a base and hospital. Repeated attacks were made on Moorosi's fortified mountain stronghold during 1879 and in that of June 5th Major Hartley, the medical officer attached to the Cape Mounted Rifles, was awarded the Victoria Cross. It was in his honour that J. B. Thomas's Shop Camp was given the more glorified title of Fort Hartley.

The other three forts owe their origin to the Gun War of 1880 when the camps of Leribe, Mafeteng, Mohale's Hoek and Maseru were besieged. Fort Cochrane at Mafeteng consisted mainly of three schantzes (temporary fortifications with high walls and a traverse) above the court-room, a stone-walled horse-kraal and an intrenchment, little evidence of which can be seen to-day.

The origin of the fort at Leribe is far from clear. Widdicombe states that in September, 1880, "the gaol, with its enclosed courtyard, was turned into a fort, the sod walls round the police camp were loopholed, and two large loopholes were made in the east wall of the Mission Chapel" (10). An interesting photograph of the fort and sod walls was published in Édouard Favre's *François Coillard, Missionnaire au Zambèze* (op. p. 16) (Plate III).

The picturesque little tower bears the date 1879 but Tylden states that Major Bell put up the tower during the Gun War and "from there worked his troops by signal round the perimeter of the place" (11). This is unlikely, however, for on the 11th October, 1880, before Leribe had been attacked, Bell applied to the Governor's Agent for money to repair the roof of the fort and on the 17th November he was informed that "Government approves of your spending the sum of £70 in erecting temporary shelters inside your fort, also the sum of £15 in repairing the roof of the tower of the said fort". It is unlikely that the roof would need repairing if the fort was only erected in 1880.

There was some kind of tower in 1878 for in that year Widdicombe reports magnificent meteoric displays in Basutoland, acco-

mpanied by falls of meteorites and one night in July he was awakened by a terrific crash nearby. He "rushed out of the hut just in time to witness a most beautiful sight. The heavens were ablaze with meteors, one of which had just fallen upon a huge crag. Almost every person in the place was roused by the concussion, and some of the women ran about outside their huts screaming with fright; when suddenly the voice of the native sentry rang out clear and full from the watch-tower in the distance 'All's Wool'" (12). Probably, then, the stone tower was built in 1878 or earlier and the upper courses of brick and the thatched roof were added in 1879. The date was then engraved on the stone in 1879 when the building was completed. Unfortunately the walls of Bell's fort were demolished in 1956 and only the tower now remains.

Fort Gordon, named after a Cape Mounted Rifles subaltern of that name who was responsible for its construction, was built in September, 1880 (13). It occupied an area between the present St. James's Church and the old tennis courts and the foundation stones are still discernible. According to a map prepared by the Intelligence Department of the Horse Guards in December, 1880, it was a square building with round towers at the north and south corners.

Soon after the outbreak of the South African War, at the end of 1899 a detachment of Free Staters attempted to kidnap a number of officials in Maseru and cut loose the pont across the Caledon. Sir Godfrey Lagden, the Resident Commissioner, decided to take precautions against any further such emergency. The Paramount Chief, Lerotholi, brought a force of Basotho to line the border, a town guard was raised and two stone forts were erected almost on the site of Fort Gordon. Only a single tower of these two forts now stands but, through the kindness of Mr. Cecil Damant, I have been able to reproduce a photograph of one of the forts before it was demolished (Plate IV).

Two other fortifications are worthy of mention; one being the system of defensive works on Mount Moorosi, in the Quthing district, erected by Chief Moorosi between 1868 and 1879, and described by Tylden (14). The other is the series of defensive walls and buildings on Thaba-Bosiu which I hope to describe fully in the near future.

Few of the original Government buildings now remain and those which are standing are of little historical or architectural interest. When Basutoland was first annexed in 1867 Sir Walter Currie, who was appointed Governor's Agent, established his headquarters at Mokema and when Commandant James Henry Bowker took over from Currie in April, 1868, he also settled at Mokema. On March 11th, 1869, at the request of Moshesh, Bowker moved to Maseru, putting up buildings on the site of the present Officer's Mess. So

far as I can ascertain none of the original buildings either at Mokema or Maseru is now standing, except the present stables and garage at the Officers' Mess, Maseru, which belong to the original "Camp".

In 1872 the country was divided into four magisterial districts with headquarters at Leribe, Advance Post, Maseru and Mohale's Hoek. Mafeteng was established in 1874 and Quthing in 1877. Major Bell's first headquarters were about two miles below Molapo's village at Leribe but only the ruined walls of what is variously described as a lock-up and a court-house still stand. Major Bell's court-room and offices at Hlotse, built in 1877, may still be seen, however (Plate III).

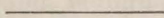
In his report for the year 1874, Emile Rolland stated that at Mafeteng, "Government buildings have been erected, which, although of the cheapest description, and most unpretending dimensions and appearance, are better than the sod-huts, in which the law has hitherto been administered. Much, however, remains to be done in this respect, to increase the prestige of the Government in the eyes of the people. The public buildings should, at least, be not too strikingly inferior to the erections of the ordinary run of Kafir traders. A mistaken economy in this direction will, it is to be feared, result in our being looked upon by the natives with much of the feeling with which the southern negro looks upon a 'poor white'", (15). Whether Rolland put his precepts into practice I cannot say but in 1880 the house was "a superior one for Basutoland, no less than eleven rooms, which constitute a mansion in this country (*mud* floors, however, as usual)" (16). Nothing now remains of either the house or the Government buildings.

Advance Post was abandoned during the Gun War and never re-occupied, the district headquarters being moved to Teyateyaneng. The first camp at Quthing was established in the beautiful valley of the Silver Spruit but the ruined buildings were abandoned after the Moorosi War and eventually employed for the Leloaleng Technical School when it was first established by Jean Preen in 1880.

No account of the historic buildings of Basutoland would be complete without reference to Gordon's rondavel in the medical officer's garden at Leribe. After the Gun War there followed a period of anarchy during which the Government was unable to enforce law and order, especially in the north, and eventually the Cape ministry accepted an offer made a year earlier by Colonel C. G. Gordon, "Chinese Gordon", to try and find a solution. He was offered the post of Commandant-General of the Cape forces and on the 16th September, 1882, he arrived at Morija. Eleven days later he resigned his post and shortly afterwards left South Africa. The value of his visit has been the subject of considerable controversy and is outside the scope of the present paper. During the three

days he spent in Leribe he was housed in the rondavel now standing in the medical officer's garden. The spring nearby, which to-day supplements the camp water supply, became known as "General Gordon's fountain".

As will be seen from this brief account of our historic buildings, very few now remain. Each year witnesses the demolition or destruction of one or more and it would appear that, unless steps are quickly taken to preserve those still standing, we shall very soon have no historical monuments left in the country.



- (1) SMITH, EDW. 1939, p. 29.
- (2) BACKHOUSE, *South Africa*.
- (3) WALTON JAMES, *Frystad* (Cape Town).
- (4) LAGDEN, SIR, p. 379.
- (5) SMITH, EDW.
- (6) SMITH, EDW.
- (7) SMITH, EDW.
- (8) WIDDICOMBE, 1895, pp. 89-90.
- (9) WIDDICOMBE.
- (10) WIDDICOMBE.
- (11) TYLDEN, G., p. 161.
- (12) WIDDICOMBE.
- (13) TYLDEN, G.:
- (14) TYLDEN, G.: Vol. IX, 1952.
- (15) *Blue Book G.* 2
- (16) BARKLY, F.:

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- (1) SMITH, EDWIN W. : *The Mabilles of Basutoland*, (London), 1939, p. 29.
- (2) BACKHOUSE, JAMES : *A Narrative of a Visit to Mauritius and South Africa*, (London), 1844, p. 366.
- (3) WALTON JAMES : *Vroë Plase en Nedersettings in die Oranje Vrystaat*. (Cape Town), 1953.
- (4) LAGDEN, SIR GODFREY : *The Basutos*, (London), 1909, Vol. II, p. 379.
- (5) SMITH, EDWIN W. : *op. cit.*, p. 163.
- (6) SMITH, EDWIN W. : *op. cit.*, p. 170.
- (7) SMITH, EDWIN W. : *op. cit.*, p. 103.
- (8) WIDDICOMBE, JOHN : *Fourteen Years in Basutoland*, (London), 1895, pp. 89-90.
- (9) WIDDICOMBE, JOHN : *op. cit.*, p. 199.
- (10) WIDDICOMBE, JOHN : *op. cit.*, p. 151.
- (11) TYLDEN, G. : *The Rise of the Basuto*, (Cape Town), 1950, p. 161.
- (12) WIDDICOMBE, JOHN : *op. cit.*, pp. 117-8.
- (13) TYLDEN, G. : *Early Days in Maseru*, (Maseru), 1944, p. 12.
- (14) TYLDEN, G. : "Three Mountains", *Africana Notes and News*, Vol. IX, 1952, p. 40.
- (15) *Blue Book G. 21-75*, 1875, p. 11.
- (16) BARKLY, F. : *Among Boers and Basutos*, (London), 1893, p. 107.

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