

## GENERAL GORDON IN BASUTOLAND

"History," it is said, "does not repeat itself; but historians repeat each other." This epigram is particularly relevant when applied to accounts of Major-General Charles Gordon's visit to Basutoland (Lesotho) in 1882. The inaccuracies went into print soon after Gordon's death when the hagiographies began to appear and have been repeated ever since. Wortham, for instance, includes a whole covey of errors in one sentence. "The sympathetic Merriman who had sent him, was succeeded by one Scanlan (sic) a man without sympathy either for the Basutos or for the mission . . . of reorganizing the Cape forces".<sup>1</sup> Elton is also confused as to the relationship between Merriman and Scanlan, and maintains, incorrectly, that all Gordon's memoranda were ignored by the Government.<sup>2</sup> It is, however, when referring to Gordon's crucial interview with the Basuto chief Masupha, that the worst inaccuracies and most subjective judgments intrude. The favourite interpretation is that J. W. Sauer, Secretary for Native Affairs in the Cape Ministry, deliberately waited until Gordon was alone with Masupha to launch an attack against the latter, thereby endangering Gordon's life.

Gordon's letters, many written some time after the events described, are a fundamental source of the inaccuracies. This article is therefore an attempt to find out "*wie es eigentlich gewesen*" by examining all available contemporary records of the meeting and the events which preceded it. Main sources comprise the communications between Sauer and Gordon, which were printed in a British Parliamentary Paper, C. 3493, and a Cape Blue Book, G6 of 1883 (condemned by the hagiographers as a Government apologia); these contain memoranda written *ex post facto* by the Herschel magistrate, Hook, and W. G. Bellairs, Sauer's private secretary, who were in Basutoland at the time, but kept no notes. The correspondence of Arthur Garcia, Paymaster and later Inspector-General of the Colonial Forces, is the most reliable evidence because he accompanied Gordon to Masupha as an "independent observer"<sup>3</sup> and kept notes.<sup>4</sup> As Garcia went into parliament on his retirement his private papers were never published. This fact, taken in conjunction with his friendship with Gordon which endured even after the Masupha affair, adds weight to the validity of his testimony. Finally use has been made of a manuscript<sup>5</sup> dealing with his administration in Basutoland, written some twenty years after the events it describes by Joseph M. Orpen, Acting Governor's Agent from August 1881 to March 1883, which includes an account of Gordon's visit, and was intended both as a defence of Orpen's policy and an attack on Gordon and Sauer.

1. H. L. Wortham, *Gordon: An Intimate Portrait* (Harrap, London, 1933), p. 263.
2. G. Elton, *General Gordon* (Collins, London, 1954).
2. Cape Archives, Accessions 250, Gordon to Garcia, Oct. 19, 1883.
4. G.6 — 1883, p. 27.
5. Cory Library, Rhodes University, MS 1248, J. M. Orpen, "Major General Charles Gordon's visit to Basutoland in 1882 and my administration of the Government of the territory from Aug. 1881 to March 1883."

By the end of the Gun War of 1880-81 between the Basuto and the Cape, the former were still undefeated in open combat, and the Governor, Sir Hercules Robinson, was called in to act as an arbitrator between the two contending parties, primarily in order that the form of "Indirect Rule" which had existed prior to the war, could be re-established. His "Award" dated 29 April 1881, comprised three major clauses: an arrangement concerning the possession of guns, which had been the *casus belli*; the question of compensation to those who had remained loyal to the Government; and the payment of a fine by the tribe for having rebelled.

In May 1881, following the defeat of the Sprigg Government, Thomas Scanlen formed a ministry whose main charge was the implementation of the Award. It soon became apparent that this was unenforceable, primarily because the framers had failed to appreciate that the former rebel chiefs were the most vigorous and influential in the tribe and that the restoration of the Cape's authority was therefore contingent upon their co-operation which in turn perpetuated the animosity between them and the Loyals.

Focus of post-Award disaffection was Masupha, brother of the paramount Letsie, who had established himself at Thaba Bosiu, and demanded a return to the original, simple form of control obtaining at the time Moshweshwe had agreed to Basutoland's annexation by the British; in effect this meant the retention by the chiefs of almost arbitrary power. Consequently Masupha refused to receive his magistrate, or pay hut tax, which was the administration's traditional test of tribal loyalty.

During April 1882 the Award was cancelled, and though all the magistrates except Masupha's were back in office at the end of that month, their effectiveness was minimal.

Thus by the end of April 1882, the Cape Government was faced with three alternative policies in Basutoland. The first two, disannexation or a renewal of war were wholly unacceptable; the former because of a fear of a subsequent general native uprising, and because of the obligations to the Orange Free State under the Convention of Aliwal North;<sup>6</sup> the latter, because though the Basuto were undefeated, the colonists felt no animosity towards them. The third and only reasonably feasible course, which was the one sanctioned by Parliament until the following session, was the retention of Basutoland under a policy of gradually aiming at the restoration of order through implementation of hut tax and magisterial control assisted by a Native Police Force, while investigating the possibility of entrusting the Basuto with limited forms of local government. Success depended on time, patience, and the absence according to Orpen of any "great exciting cause from without",<sup>7</sup> which could turn the existing inchoate opposition into an active force. Achievement of this policy was in the hands of Orpen, an experienced and

6. G. W. Eybers, *Select Documents Illustrating South African history 1795-1910* (London, 1918), pp. 336-7.

7. G 9 — 1883, p. 4, Jan. 12, 1883, Report for 1882.

sympathetic administrator but a muddled thinker, whose subordinates were almost wholly opposed to the policy.<sup>8</sup>

For Orpen the gradual re-establishment of the Government's writ meant the initial suppression of Masupha's opposition through "the old tribal legitimate authority which was in professed unity with Government".<sup>9</sup> Orpen did not envisage this as a direct confrontation using the paramount and his heir Lerothodi<sup>10</sup> but as a rallying of popular feeling around Letsie, thereby "circumventing Masupha by establishing protective authority round him, and using force only to support that and those willing to pay hut tax".<sup>11</sup>

Thus ultimately official policy rested on several misconceptions which made it ineffective; the fiction of Letsie's paramountcy which Orpen mistakenly believed combined "the old national and government legitimacy"<sup>12</sup> and could therefore be used to re-inforce government authority; the contradictory fiction that the tribe was totally disunited; and the further fiction that Basutoland could be restored to its pre-war tranquillity through the retention of a magisterial system and with the Loyals playing a positive rôle.

1882 was a year of "hard times in all South Africa".<sup>13</sup> The Gun War had cost the Colony over £2 million and the Government was anxious to attract British capital by assuaging the investors' "constant dread of a native war".<sup>14</sup> Opposition to the retention of Basutoland was growing at the Cape as indicated by the Legislative Council's resolution of May 1, 1882, that the Annexation Act be repealed;<sup>15</sup> but the Imperial Government resolutely refused to take over the burden.<sup>16</sup>

In the belief that "Diseases desperate grown/By desperate appliances are relieved", the Government cast around for any solution to its difficulties. Already in August 1879 Orpen had sounded out a cousin, Major-General Henry Schaw, at the War Office, on the possibility of Gordon becoming Commandant-General of the Cape forces, though no firm offer came from the Cape Government.<sup>17</sup> In early 1880, Hicks Beach, Secretary of State for Colonies, had suggested to the Governor Frere, that Gordon be offered the Cape Command.<sup>18</sup> This Gordon

8. Cape Archives, Native Affairs Dept. 282, Sept. 17, 1882, Rolland on the lack of agreement between officials.

9. G 8 — 1883, p. 296, Acting Gov's Agent to Sec. for Native Affairs, Sept. 13, 1882.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*, p. 299, AGA to S.N.A., Oct. 24, 1882.

12. He did not realise what Lugard also failed to perceive — that a chief lost much of his ascribed status once he was linked with an alien government.

13. E. Walker, *History of Southern Africa* (Longmans, London, 1957), p. 390.

14. *Gordon Correspondence* "Correspondence between Maj.-Gen. Gordon C.B. and Mr. Scanlen." (Cape Town, 1905), Scanlen to Gordon, Aug. 21, 1882. Also Acc. 250, M. T. Ommanney to Gordon, July 13, 1882.

15. A similar resolution was overwhelmingly rejected in the Assembly.

16. A 7 — 1883, Kimberley to Gov., May 7, 1882.

17. Cory Library, MS 1248, pp. 4-6.

18. C.O. 48/493, Beach to Frere, Feb. 20, 1880. (Information obtained from J. Benyon, "Basutoland and the High Commission 1868-1884", Unpublished thesis, Oxford B.Litt., 1967).

refused on the grounds that the Basuto were not being fairly treated. After the war in April 1881, Sprigg, whose Ministry was collapsing, had failed to reply to an offer from Gordon then serving in Mauritius, "to assist in terminating war and administering Basutoland".<sup>19</sup> This offer was found in the official files by the new Ministry who thought Gordon's celebrated "management of native peoples" could profitably be used in Basutoland. Probably at Merriman's prompting,<sup>20</sup> on February 23, 1882, Robinson informed the Colonial Secretary Lord Kimberley, that the Ministry wished Gordon to come to the Cape for consultation "as to the best measures to be adopted with reference to Basutoland in the event of parliament sanctioning their proposals as to that territory, and to engage his services should he be willing to renew the offer made to their predecessors in April 1881, to assist in terminating the war and administering Basutoland".<sup>21</sup> This proposition was sanctioned by H.M. Government on February 28 — with some relief possibly, as Gordon was already on half-pay and something of a problem. Gordon himself accepted after Scanlen had telegraphed on March 3: "Position of matters in Basutoland grave and of utmost importance that Colony secure services of someone of proved ability, firmness and energy".<sup>22</sup>

For technical reasons Gordon's receipt of this cable was delayed until April 2; he left Mauritius on April 4 arriving in Cape Town on May 3. According to Merriman, on finding Orpen was Resident with the Basuto he refused that post and after "some negotiations was induced to accept the office of Commandant-General".<sup>23</sup> H. W. Gordon's version of the appointment, based on Gordon's letters, is that Robinson and Merriman both wanted him to take charge of the Basuto problem, but were loath to remove Orpen, and that he finally accepted the military post (having first flatly refused it)<sup>24</sup> because no agreement could be reached as to how he should be brought into Basuto affairs. Orpen later quoted Scanlen as saying Gordon had never been offered any other post but the Commandant-Generalship, and "that at once".<sup>25</sup>

The cloud no bigger than a man's hand had appeared. While the General himself clearly was determined "not to abandon the conditions upon which he had agreed to give his services, namely that he should advise upon the administration of Basutoland",<sup>26</sup> the Cape Government preserved the fiction, officially, that his position was concerned with military reforms, rather than the affairs of Basutoland. When Scherm-

19. H. W. Gordon, *Events in the Life of Charles George Gordon* (Kegan Paul, London, 1886), p. 180.

20. P. Lewsen, *Selections from the correspondence of J. X. Merriman 1870-1890* (Van Riebeeck Soc., Cape Town, 1960), p. 94.

21. H. W. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

22. G 5 — 1883, p. 1.

23. *The Cape Times*, Nov. 26, 1896.

24. Gordon Correspondence, Gordon to Robinson, May 5, 1882.

25. Cory Library, MS 1248, p. 23.

26. H. W. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

brucker demanded in the Legislative Council<sup>27</sup> that the appointment correspondence be put on the table to allay rumours that Gordon had a political mission as well as a military post, the Government maintained its silence.

This confusion as to the exact nature of Gordon's employment was compounded from the time of his arrival by his ideas of a settlement which differed diametrically from those of the Government, as indicated by his letter to Robinson<sup>28</sup> "written in Table Bay".<sup>29</sup> In it he suggested that if the Governor "could spare time to go up and see the chiefs, your excellency would find them flock in and be reasonable: the officials they are now in contact with are men who have in their idea been mixed up hostilely towards them . . ." Thus Gordon's opposition to the magisterial system existed before he had ever examined that system; and in his paper "The Native Question" written on October 19 he was still blaming it for much of the unrest in the Transkei and Basutoland.

By employing Gordon the Cape Government was riding a tiger. Many of the qualities venerated by Richard Burton, Hake (the first hagiographer) or Elton, and conversely derogated by Strachey, did not make for easy co-operation with a realistic, if inexperienced colonial Ministry. The reckless courage stemming from a mystical fatalism and an overwhelming longing for martyrdom; the brilliant intuition and impulsive judgments coupled both with intransigence and bewildering changes in policy and about individuals (originating in his ambivalent belief that he was the instrument of Divine Will yet unworthy of this trust); the "mesmeric power"<sup>30</sup> over primitive peoples; his preference for "systems not *indispensable men*" (his italics);<sup>31</sup> they were qualities all too intense for the rather routine task to which they were brought to bear. What was needed was the very quality he lacked — the ability to soberly consider the facts and then come to a conclusion.

Consequently his service at the Cape was more littered with personal disagreements<sup>32</sup> than at any other time in his turbulent life, and Hake<sup>33</sup> condemned South Africa for being the only country not to value his genius. He intended to do his best for the colony; but his "natural impetuosity" and dislike of "the yoke" made failure inevitable under the circumstances.

Yet he made abiding friendships in South Africa, the most relevant

27. *The Cape Argus*, June 2, 1882. See also *The Cape Argus*, May 31, 1882, House of Assembly debate, and Cory Library MS 1248, in which Sprigg averred Gordon had told a member of the House he would say to Masupha "day or night I am going to take you" — which Gordon denied.
28. Gordon Correspondence, Gordon to Robinson, May 5, 1882.
29. G 9 — 1883 (contd.), Orpen's Report, Jan. 12, 1883.
30. G. Elton, *op. cit.*, p. 303. Acc. 250, Undated typescript "Personal Reminiscences of General Gordon" probably by Garcia and his wife.
31. P. Lewsen, *op. cit.*, p. 107, Gordon to Merriman, June 27, 1882.
32. With Sauer, Orpen, Bayly (C.O. of the Cape Mounted Rifles) and others.
33. A. E. Hake, *The Story of Chinese Gordon* (Remington, London, 1884).

to this study being that with the family of Arthur Garcia.<sup>34</sup> He relied heavily on Garcia to help him fulfil his official obligation to the Ministry "to break down the Imperial Red tape system" in the Colonial forces,<sup>35</sup> and on which he embarked soon after his arrival.

Orpen had been summoned to Cape Town to appear before a Select Committee of the Legislative Council appointed to enquire and report on Basuto affairs. He was however never called before the committee whose orders were discharged by the Council the day after Gordon arrived. Immediately he heard of Gordon's arrival Orpen called on him, taking with him all available material on Basutoland. They saw each other frequently in Cape Town. "The more I saw," wrote Orpen, "the more I liked him. I thought him very eccentric but transparent, honest, kind and loveable".<sup>36</sup> And the General in turn described Orpen as "a just, kind gentleman".<sup>37</sup>

Gordon was officially appointed Commandant-General, with his headquarters at King Williams Town, on May 18, and the following day Orpen accompanied him to Port Elizabeth; *en route* he questioned Orpen carefully and intelligently about Basutoland.<sup>38</sup> Arising from these conversations, on May 26 Gordon sent his second memorandum on Basutoland to the Cape Ministry. The British Government, he wrote, had continuously been at fault in its dealings with the Basuto, because it had always acted unilaterally. He therefore suggested that a Pitso be called immediately from which all officials were to be excluded so that the Ministry could gauge Basuto opinion exactly.

The idea of the Pitso, to which Orpen had introduced him, was the central feature of the whole arrangement.<sup>39</sup> At the same time he recommended that the Loyals should be paid immediate compensation as a sign of the Government's *bona fides*. Invited to comment, Orpen expressed the opinion that Government control was too weak at this stage to allow for negotiation with Masupha, and that the type of Pitso envisaged by Gordon pre-supposed a unity which Orpen did not believe existed.<sup>40</sup> Thus though Gordon maintained<sup>41</sup> that Orpen was in broad agreement with his ideas, the latter by the time he left King Williams Town on June 1, was aware that Gordon's views tended to run contrary to announced Government policy. Nevertheless they agreed that Gordon should shortly visit Basutoland as Orpen's personal and official guest, ostensibly to examine military affairs.

34. Cape Archives, Acc. 250, Letter from Jerusalem dated Sept. 14, 1883, in which he says they were "never forgotten by me day by day". "Personal Reminiscences" speaks of "his willingness to listen to other people's point of view . . . and his modesty about his own opinions".

35. Cape Archives, Acc. 250, Gordon to Garcia, June 27, 1882.

36. Cory Library, MS 1248, p. 27.

37. Cape Archives, G.H. 23/114, Letter to Governor, May 26, 1882. G. Lagden, *The Basutos* (Hutchinson, London, 1909), Vol. II, p. 534.

38. Cory Library, MS 1248, p. 32.

39. Gordon Correspondence, Gordon to Scanlen, May 28, 1882 he re-iterated this recommendation.

40. *Parliamentary Papers* 1883, Vol. XLIX (C 3717), A.G.A. to S.N.A., June 20.

41. Gordon Correspondence, Gordon to Scanlen, May 25, 1882.

Two days after despatching his memorandum Gordon wrote to Scanlen<sup>42</sup> suggesting he go "as it were, privately" to Basutoland and the Transkei, without interfering "in any way with Mr. Orpen or his duties. I would go," he added, "and see Masupha and other chiefs and hear what they had to say, without mentioning the Pitso . . . unless I had authority to do so." The Pitso proposal was also broached with Masupha's missionary, the Rev. Jousse, on May 31. In reply, his relief, the Rev. Keck, advised against holding a Pitso, which he said the chiefs disliked as going contrary to "national etiquette", and which in any case could only be useful if an alternative to Colonial rule were offered. He suggested that Basutoland's future government "could more conveniently be spoken about in private with the principal chiefs";<sup>43</sup> indeed Masupha would only be prepared to see Gordon if he came in a "private" capacity.

Gordon's wish to go to Basutoland was expressed to Merriman on June 27,<sup>44</sup> and to Scanlen on July 19, after he had returned from a tour of the Transkei which produced his plan for a separate administrative structure for the native dependencies. "You have mentioned indirectly," he wrote, "that you may request me to go up to Basutoland".<sup>45</sup> Publicly it should be made known that he was going with "the ostensible object of visiting the troops"; privately, however, he would have discussions with the three leading chiefs, (suggested, as we have seen above, by the Rev. Keck), on the basis of his enclosed Convention for Basutoland. Were an *entente* to result it could later be formally recognised by the Government representatives (Charles Griffith and Dr Matthews), on the one hand — which would "save the susceptibilities of Mr. Orpen between whom and Masupha any entente would seem impossible" — and Letsie and Masupha on the other.

The Convention, which thus excluded Orpen, was an explicit statement of Gordon's Basuto policy. Its terms derived from his initial premise that the Basuto tribe and the Cape Government would sign a treaty as equal high contracting parties. Externally the Colony was to guarantee the Basuto border and try to get the Orange Free State's co-operation. Internally, and flowing from his concept of the Basuto as an independent nation, there was to be minimal control by the Colony (a point he had fully discussed with his predecessor, Marshall Clarke).<sup>46</sup> Magisterial jurisdiction was to be removed, as were the Cape's military forces. To replace the magistrates there were to be a Resident and two sub-Residents, whose role would be primarily to advise the virtually independent chiefs on matters such as hut tax and passes. His recommendation for the establishment of two councils — a supreme and a minor one — was a departure from hitherto accepted practice.

42. *Ibid.*

43. G 5 — 1883, June 20.

44. P. Lewsen, *op. cit.*, p. 107, Gordon to Merriman.

45. G 5 — 1883, H. W. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 224; D. C. Boulger, *The Life of Gordon* (Fisher Unwin, London, 1896), Vol. II, p. 80, incorrectly states that on July 18 the Ministers actually requested him to go to Basutoland.

46. *Gordon Correspondence*, Gordon to Sauer, June 2, 1882.

Meanwhile the original of the May 26 Memorandum had been sent to Merriman, "brains carrier" of the Ministry, who discussed it and the Convention proposal with Gordon in Port Elizabeth at the end of July, "when the difficulties of carrying out the general's suggestions were pointed out",<sup>47</sup> particularly the fact that his Indian analogies were misleading and that there was no central authority with whom to place a Resident but a "collection of jarring clans".<sup>48</sup> Discouraged by official disregard of his communications and his failure to reach Basutoland, Gordon was beginning to lose interest in Cape affairs,<sup>49</sup> saying that as an outsider he was having no effect, and that the country should work out its own destiny.<sup>50</sup> He had already written the Premier that he intended to ask for his release as soon as possible, on the ostensible grounds of the War Office's refusal to grant him half-pay at the Cape,<sup>51</sup> but Merriman persuaded him to stay for a further year. He also agreed that Gordon should go up to Basutoland with Sauer, at the General's request as "a private individual", to implement the official policy of "*divide et impera*".<sup>52</sup>

For this fundamental error of judgment Merriman must bear the blame. In the light of Gordon's explicit written suggestions in his Convention he must have realised that the General's policy was not "divide and rule" but the complete reverse, immediate disengagement, which he envisaged as the middle course, lying between the irresponsibility of total abandonment and the existing ineffective occupation.

In Merriman's defence, however, one must remember Montaigne's maxim that "wherever there is man, there is human nature". He was misled by his personal liking for Gordon and the latter's apparent reasonableness. At the same time he was confused by "the little man's somewhat rambling discourse on Basutoland".<sup>53</sup> More important, Merriman accepted Gordon's now revised opinion that Orpen<sup>54</sup> and his policy<sup>55</sup> were actually impeding a settlement, without appreciating the ambiguities resulting from this acceptance. Merriman was in a panic, for the Ministry had only nine months before the ensuing parliamentary session and needed "something better than Orpen's telegrams to show at the end of that time";<sup>56</sup> consequently he ignored the fact that the Government was committed to Orpen's policy in the interim.

47. G 6 — 1883, Footnote to Scanlen to Gordon, Aug. 14.

48. P. Lewsen, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

49. *Letters of Genl. C. G. Gordon to his sister M. A. Gordon* (London, 1888) June 11, 1882; Aug. 1, 1882.

50. Cape Archives, Acc. 250, Gordon to Garcia, June 27, 1882.

51. *Parl. Papers* 1883. Vol. XLVIII (C.3493), July 28, 1882.

52. P. Lewsen, *op. cit.*, Merriman to Scanlen, July 30, 1882.

53. P. Lewsen, *op. cit.*, Merriman to Scanlen, July 30, 1882.

54. *Ibid.*, Second letter to Scanlen dated July 30. "*He is terribly down upon Orpen* (his italics) whom he has found straying from the strict paths of veracity which angers him much."

55. G 8 — 1883, Gordon to A.G.A., July 29, 1882 complaining of the cost of a situation which only Orpen believed "will end in anything but a fiasco".

56. P. Lewsen, *op. cit.*, Merriman to J. W. Sauer, July 30, 1882.



As a result, therefore, of Merriman's insistence, Sauer left Cape Town for Basutoland in early August, meeting Gordon in King Williams Town. Despite obvious incompatibilities in character<sup>57</sup> their early association was harmonious.<sup>58</sup> Gordon could not fault Sauer, a Cape liberal in the Solomon tradition, whom Scanlen rightly described<sup>59</sup> as "sincerely anxious to secure the just and legitimate rights of the natives". And Sauer's initial "feeling of admiration and almost veneration . . . for General Gordon's personal character and achievements"<sup>60</sup> came between him and an objective appraisal of the General's intentions.

Simultaneously with Sauer's arrival, Gordon received Scanlen's several communications<sup>61</sup> in reply to the May Memorandum and the July Convention. All bore the strong imprint of Merriman's opinions, particularly his theory that the Resident plan, which was the *point d'appui* of Gordon's disengagement policy, could not succeed in the absence of even one chief who could speak for the whole country. What Merriman and Scanlen failed to appreciate was how firmly Gordon believed there was such a chief — Masupha — with whom he was prepared to serve as magistrate "under even that bewitched individual Orpen",<sup>62</sup> and win him over by moral force alone.<sup>63</sup> The Ministry hoped Gordon would modify his views after he had "visited the country and come into contact with the people and those who from long residence among them have the means of forming an opinion as to their present condition and the probability of their being again made amenable to the settled government which was established prior to recent disturbances".<sup>64</sup> Instead Gordon went to Basutoland convinced the only *modus vivendi* was on the basis of his July Convention, and determined to see Masupha "as a private individual",<sup>65</sup> whereas his companion Sauer was committed — as much by the Imperial Government's refusal to relieve the Cape of Basutoland as by the undertaking to Parliament concerning the existing policy being implemented by Orpen. The latter for the first time began officially to suggest the forceful coercion of Masupha by Lerothodi<sup>66</sup> though Gordon

57. *The Cape Argus*, Oct. 24, 1882, quoting correspondent to *Queenstown Representative*.

58. G 5 — 1883, Gordon to Premier, Aug. 12, 1882. "I like working with him very much." Cape Archives, Acc. 6, Gordon to Sauer, Aug. 30. "I believe that by your skilful management . . . you will tide over this affair."

59. Gordon Correspondence, Scanlen to Gordon, Aug. 14, 1882.

60. *The Cape Times*, Nov. 26, 1896.

61. Gordon Correspondence, Scanlen to Gordon (confidential), Aug. 7, 1882; G 5 — 1883, Premier to General Gordon, Aug. 7; G 6 — 1883, Scanlen to Gordon, Aug. 14 (semi-official). The delay in replying was because the memorandum had been sent to Kimberley, who indicated H.M. Government would do nothing to relieve the Cape of Basutoland.

62. Gordon Correspondence, Gordon to Scanlen, Oct. 7.

63. *Ibid.*, Gordon to Scanlen, Sept. 2, 1882. He had refused Leopold II's offer of employment in the Congo because he felt "altogether bound to you in your hard task." (D. C. Boulger, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 97, in 1883 Leopold held him still bound by his promise to go to the Congo).

64. G 6 — 1883, Scanlen to Gordon, Aug. 14, 1882.

65. *Ibid.*, Garcia to Premier, Oct. 18. G 5 — 1883, Rev. Keck to Gordon, June 20. "Have also told him (Masupha) of your proposal to meet with him."

66. G 8 — 1183, A.G.A. to S.N.A., Sept. 13; c.f. Cory Library, MS 1248, p. 54.

maintained, probably correctly, that these plans were under way prior to his July 19 communication.<sup>67</sup>

*En route* to Basutoland Gordon assured Sauer that Orpen's removal from office was necessary;<sup>68</sup> by the time they arrived on September 13 the antagonism between the General and the Acting Governor's Agent was common knowledge.<sup>69</sup> Gordon was recommending that Orpen resign. "He cannot hope to do any good even were his policy best, considering the dead-set that his political and personal enemies make upon him".<sup>70</sup> Orpen in turn, was complaining<sup>71</sup> of the prevailing uneasiness caused by rumours of abandonment or war, which followed Gordon's pronouncements and which undermined the whole rationale of Government policy.<sup>72</sup> Rhodes, then serving in Basutoland on the Compensation Commission, had been told that Masupha was holding out in the hope that Gordon's visit would result in the scrapping of the Basutoland "constitution"; President Brand of the Orange Free State had heard Basutoland was to be reduced to a suzerainty.<sup>73</sup>

While Orpen's despatches are characterized by his customary hyperbole, the burden of his charges was substantially true. Gordon's opposition to the Orpen policy (and more specifically the magisterial system), and his sympathy for Masupha were well-known to that politically astute chief,<sup>74</sup> who realised that Gordon's support, combined with the ambivalence of Letsie's position, was a trump card in defying the Government.

At a meeting at Moriija on September 16 with several chiefs, the Colonial officials seemed to show some firmness of purpose. Sauer denied the abandonment rumour, and clearly enunciated the Government's requirements — country-wide hut-tax payment, obedience to the magistrates, the maintenance of law and order. Gordon's speech was interpreted as an encouragement to Letsie and Lerothodi in their proposed action against Masupha. In it he warned Masupha not to resist Letsie and followed this with a "stinging remark"<sup>75</sup> to Lerothodi that "his chance of being paramount chief is not worth one shilling unless Masupha's power is put down".<sup>76</sup> Immediately after the public meeting the Secretary for Native Affairs met Letsie and Lerothodi privately (even Orpen not attending), and the paramount promised to collect an armed force to subdue Masupha. Sauer assented to the proposal, which was later con-

67. G 6 — 1883, Gordon to Colonial Secretary, Oct. 8; c.f. Cory Library, MS 1248, p. 74.

68. *The Cape Mercury*, Oct. 11, 1882. Cory Library, MS 1248, Orpen avers this leader was a summary of a pamphlet written by Gordon and privately printed at the *Mercury* office, King Williams Town.

69. *Annexes to V and P*, G 9 — 1883 (contd.).

70. *The Cape Argus*, Oct. 23.

71. G 8 — 1883, to S.N.A., Aug. 31, 1882.

72. A 24 — 1883. A.G.A. to S.N.A., Aug. 20, 1882.

73. G 8 — 1883, A.G.A. to S.N.A., Sept. 13, 1882.

74. *Vide supra*, Keck's letter. G 8 — 1883, A.G.A. to S.N.A., Sept. 13.

75. Cape Archives, Native Affairs Dept., 282, Orpen to Sauer, Sept. 30.

76. G 6 — 1883, p. 5.

firmed in writing by Letsie's son Tsekelo;<sup>77</sup> he simply requested that he be informed before Letsie proceed against Masupha.

From Morija the party proceeded to the Leribe where since the war, Loyals and rebels had been in a state of continuous antagonism exacerbated according to Orpen, by European interference. Gordon, probably on the advice of Rhodes, who was in Leribe and warned him to remember that he was "the servant of Sauer",<sup>78</sup> reluctantly refrained from being drawn into the quarrel, though he read the Loyal chief, Jonathan, a homily on the duties of chieftainship. He handed to Sauer, unopened, two documents given him by the Loyals;<sup>79</sup> one contained a series of complaints against the magistrates. Orpen later averred, however, that Gordon suggested the rival claimants to the Leribe chieftainship get the help of Masupha in settling their affairs, thereby "recommending a tribunal at variance with Government and not trustworthy".<sup>80</sup>

Gordon's emphatic opposition to Orpen and his "crooked" measures<sup>81</sup> resulted in the production on September 19 of a further paper entitled "The Basuto Embroglio",<sup>82</sup> again recommending the self-government proposed in the July Convention. His prognosis of Letsie's attitude towards Masupha was intuitively brilliant, based as it was on the correct assumption that the Basuto chiefs were more united than Orpen or the Government believed. Letsie, he said, would promise to coerce his brother, and then play for time. He should not be pressurized, lest this cause a crisis in the tribe — a reversal of his exhortation to Letsie just one week earlier.

The "Basuto Embroglio" included several other suggestions consistent with the views Gordon had continually expressed: the removal of Orpen because of his association with the previous unsuccessful policy; a reduction in the number of magistracies; compensation of the Loyals to remove them as a potential *casus belli*; and the replacement of the Cape Mounted Rifles by a locally enlisted Basuto Police Force. This last was already an intention of Government-Orpen policy; unfortunately supplies for its implementation had not been voted in the Basutoland estimates during the previous parliamentary session.

In the Leribe Gordon had "exhibited more than his usual impatience"<sup>83</sup> in his determination to visit Masupha; finally once they were back in Maseru, on the night of September 24 Sauer gave his consent, reluctantly according to Bellairs. This evidence of his reluctance refutes Orpen's later accusation that Sauer got him out of the way by first deliberately arranging for him to go to Morija.<sup>84</sup> Gordon's version of

77. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

78. B. Williams, *Cecil Rhodes* (Constable, London, 2nd ed., 1938), p. 65.

79. *The Cape Argus* quoting *Grahamstown Journal*, Sept. 30.

80. G 9 — 1883 (contd.), p. 7, Orpen's Report, Jan. 12, 1883.

81. J. Widdicombe, *In the Lesuto* (Soc. for promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 1895), p. 223.

82. G 6 — 1883.

83. G 6 — 1883, Memo, W. G. Bellairs, Oct. 19, 1882.

84. Cory Library, MS 1248, pp. 66-68.

his visit to Masupha is that he would not have gone, though he felt this was the best course, "had not Mr. Sauer asked me to go".<sup>85</sup> Garcia's testimony however, shows unequivocally that Gordon had already decided in King Williams Town that a visit to Masupha "would give a solution to the Basuto question", that in view of Keck's letter he would have to go as "a private individual"<sup>86</sup> and that he worked on Sauer, primarily through Garcia, to get permission.<sup>87</sup>

Frequent discussions with Gordon on Government policy, must have made Sauer fully aware of the former's capricious and excessive enthusiasms,<sup>88</sup> of his fierce opposition to Orpen and all he represented, of his repeatedly expressed admiration for Basuto resistance. Yet just when Letsie had for a second time been induced to rally his forces to attack Thaba Bosiu, Sauer allowed Gordon to undertake a problematic peace mission.

Was this then a coolly calculated move by the Secretary for Native Affairs to keep all the options open lest Lerothodi's attack fail?<sup>89</sup> To accept this tempting explanation one would have to represent Merriman's role in sending Sauer and Gordon together originally as an accessory before the fact. One would have to impute to a man whom Merriman, an intimate friend, constantly referred to as "The Bumbler", a single-minded shrewdness no other evidence suggests he possessed. One would have to ignore the acknowledged change in Sauer's attitude to Gordon, which had shifted from the earlier *schwärmerei* to something possibly more dangerous — the plain man's goodhumoured toleration of a harmlessly eccentric individual.<sup>90</sup> Finally one would have to argue away as gross duplicity the letter Sauer made Gordon write as a prerequisite for allowing him to visit Masupha.<sup>91</sup> "I understand what you wish me to ascertain in the visit I propose making to the Chief Masupha (in a completely private capacity) is what he has to say in *re* the acceptance of a magistrate and consequent acknowledgment of the government and the payment of hut-tax, that I am to represent to him the impossibility the government is under in *re* the abandonment of Basutoland, and to endeavour to obtain from him an announcement of what he would be content to agree to in order that you may be able to consider whether his wishes are acceptable to the government. I understand I have no power to make any promises whatever to him."

This letter refutes Gordon's later accusation that Sauer gave him *no* instructions before he went to Masupha.<sup>92</sup> The accusation was ex-

85. Cape Archives, Acc. 250, Oct. 19, 1883.

86. G 6 — 1883, to Premier, Oct. 18, *Vide supra* Keck's letter.

87. G 6 — 1883, Sauer to Garcia, Oct. 16.

88. *Ibid.*, Garcia to Premier, Oct. 18, Sauer was uneasy because "he said General seemed so easily to alter his mind".

89. I am indebted to Mr. Benyon for this viewpoint persuasively argued in his unpublished thesis, pp. 542 ff.

90. G 6 — 1883, Hook's Memo, Oct. 16.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 7, Gordon to S.N.A., Sept. 24. Garcia was shown this the night before he and Gordon went to Masupha.

92. *Parl. Papers*, 1883. Vol. XLVIII (C.3493), Gordon to Scanlen, Oct. 8, 1882.

panded by Hake, H. W. Gordon and Boulger into a charge, based on a telegram Gordon sent to Scanlen on October 11, that Sauer had *asked* him to go and then given him no instructions because he had no policy. A prior letter to Scanlen however,<sup>93</sup> indicates he was fully aware that Sauer was committed to the existing policy which differed so radically from his own.

Why then did Sauer let Gordon go to Masupha? For the simple reason that where he was weak-willed, muddled and irresolute,<sup>94</sup> Gordon was determined and burning with a sense of divinely-ordained mission. Thus Sauer yielded to Gordon's constant importuning in the belief, expressed to his subordinates, that as a "private individual" the General could do "neither good nor harm"; at the same time Sauer allowed himself the luxury of secretly hoping that the celebrated Gordon magic might influence Masupha. Yet even this hope was tempered by scepticism; Masupha, he told Bellairs, would be polite to Gordon and "laugh at him in his sleeve".

Aware that a large force under Lerothodi's command was converging on Morija, Gordon, Garcia (his "watchdog") and Captain Nettleton set out on the morning of September 25 for Thaba Bosiu; while Sauer proceeded to Morija where he informed Letsie that Gordon had gone to Masupha as a private person trying to make him obey the Government's orders.<sup>95</sup> Gordon later maintained<sup>96</sup> he would not have continued with the peace mission had he suspected Sauer would use the force.

At 1 o'clock, two hours after their arrival, they were met by a party including Masupha's sons and his missionary Keck to whom Gordon handed a letter for Masupha.<sup>97</sup> It was in two parts; the first innocuously recapitulated Government policy in general terms, and on the specific issues of hut-tax and magistrates. The second part represented Gordon's personal opinion, and in view of his public disavowal of the official Orpen policy at the beginning of the meeting, was obviously intended as the starting point for any ensuing negotiations. He advised Masupha to ask for a magistrate of his own choice, who would treat him "with all proper respect as great chief" and consult him on essential issues such as the appropriation of hut-tax. This was political dynamite, given the dissatisfaction over the reduction in his chiefly powers which had inspired Masupha's defiance in the Gun War and after.

Substantially the same proposals, and the additional recommendation that the chief see Sauer, not Orpen, were expressed at a meeting with Masupha and about 200 tribesmen the following morning.<sup>98</sup> While

93. Gordon Correspondence, Oct. 7.

94. Cf. P. Lewsen, *Selections from the Correspondence of J. X. Merriman, op. cit.*; Vol. II, 1890-1898 (Van Riebeeck Soc., Cape Town, 1963); Vol. III, 1899-1905 (1966); Vol. IV, 1905-1924 (1969) *passim* for Merriman's opinion on Sauer who was a close personal friend and political ally.

95. Cory Library, MS 1248, p. 71.

96. H. W. Gordon, *op. cit.*, quoting letter written by Gordon on April 16, 1883.

97. G 6 — 1883, No. 7, Annexure A in Garcia to Sauer, Sept. 25.

98. *Ibid.*, No. 8, Garcia to Sauer, Sept. 26 (enclosing Nettleton's record of the meeting).

Gordon and Garcia were waiting for the outcome of Masupha's consultation with his advisers, Sauer sent a despatch informing them that Lerothodi's force was ready at Morija.<sup>99</sup> The successful dovetailing of the alternative strategies — negotiation or the use of force — to subdue Masupha, depended, Sauer wrote, on Gordon's timing. "I must therefore ask you not to stay longer than tomorrow morning at Thaba Bosigo . . . Should Masupha refuse the conditions of government as set forth in your note to me . . . and should the government also lose the chance of bringing pressure to bear through Letsie, the chances of a settlement will be further off than ever." In a letter written the following year<sup>100</sup> Gordon charged Sauer with changing his mind after he had received a copy of Gordon's letter to Masupha, and then writing this letter; that is, Gordon implied Sauer had previously sanctioned his presenting Masupha with an alternative set of conditions. In 1883 Gordon was writing from memory, having on September 27, 1882, sent back all correspondence between himself and Sauer. In fact, Sauer sent two letters on September 26, one (No. 4) quoted above, written to Gordon before, and the other (No. 10) to Garcia after, receipt of the Gordon letter to Masupha. The second affirmed Government responsibility for the Orpen policy, albeit in Sauer's customary weak and ambivalent fashion. Both however emphasised that Gordon should not prolong negotiations with Masupha and thereby jeopardize Lerothodi's expedition.

Both Hook and Bellairs testified to Sauer's anger and astonishment when he received the copy of Gordon's letter to Masupha. "The General," he complained to Hook,<sup>101</sup> "has made a mess of it by proposing or suggesting different terms to Masupha." Further, at a time when Lerothodi's forces were waiting for Sauer's signal to advance, the Commandant-General of the Cape forces had promised Masupha *he* would not fight the Basuto, whom he regarded as "a noble people who resist magistrates of no capacity".<sup>102</sup> Gordon's subsequent explanation of his behaviour was that he had told Sauer in Garcia's presence<sup>103</sup> that he would not "spy" on Masupha's position and then fight him; but even his *fidus* Achates could only remember Gordon telling *him* of this decision on the way to Thaba Bosiu.<sup>104</sup>

Sauer had already sent a note to Letsie exhorting him to carry out his plans without delay. His problem — and one essentially of his own making — was therefore to prevent Masupha from deliberately prolonging the negotiations with Gordon until the impetus of Lerothodi's move was spent; as a corollary he was obliged to get Gordon away from Thaba Bosiu quickly. Far from arranging for Lerothodi to act while Gordon

99. *Ibid.*, No. 4, Sauer to Gordon, Sept. 26.

100. H. W. Gordon, *op. cit.*, Letter from Jaffa, July 27, 1883.

101. *Ibid.*, Hook's memo., Oct. 31.

102. H. W. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 235, Gordon to Governor, Oct. 6. The writer was unable to find this communication in the Cape files.

103. G 6 — 1883, Gordon to Scanlen, Oct. 8. *Vide* G. Elton, *op. cit.*, p. 304; D. C. Boulger, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 84.

104. G 6 — 1883, Garcia to Sauer, Jan. 11, 1883.

was still with Masupha,<sup>105</sup> Sauer sent Hook to Thaba Bosiu to persuade Gordon to move,<sup>106</sup> before Lerothodi's attack which was timed for the 27th. The hagiographers have a case, however, insofar as Sauer's motives were prompted less by concern for Gordon's life than by fear that the Lerothodi movement would peter out, and he would "come to the ground between two stools". Further, having allowed Gordon to go to Masupha, Sauer was unjustified in maintaining that the sole responsibility as to whether the settlement would be negotiated or forced was the General's.<sup>107</sup>

Immediately he received Sauer's two letters on the afternoon of the 26th, Gordon dissociated himself from the Lerothodi action, advising Masupha not to answer the Government "until the hostile movements had ceased".<sup>108</sup> With messengers arriving throughout the night of September 26th bringing news of the proposed dawn attack, Masupha professed astonishment at Gordon's departure, declaring he had decided to accept the General's proposals, though two weeks later at a meeting with Hook he modified this assertion somewhat. Gordon left Thaba Bosiu early the following morning, convinced that but for the threat of force Masupha would have accepted a magistrate and hut-tax. His parting shot to the chief, however, was an ambiguous message adjuring him not to "allow any rumours to interfere with your decision as to what you will do",<sup>109</sup> which can hardly be construed as advice to accept the Government's terms.

Can the failure to act of Lerothodi's commando, which finally dispersed under the combined effects of incessant rain and dissension between the chiefs, be blamed on Gordon's visit to Masupha as Orpen claimed? Did Gordon "foster the idea that it (the Government) was a prey to divided counsels"?<sup>110</sup> Was he, as Boulger suggests, in "greater peril" than at any previous time of his life, and was he saved by his power "of inspiring savages with confidence in his complete uprightness"?<sup>111</sup>

While Masupha was impressed by Gordon<sup>112</sup> he had no intention of accepting the General's terms.<sup>113</sup> The answer to these questions depends therefore essentially on Letsie and Lerothodi's attitude towards Masupha. Lerothodi, as heir apparent, would undoubtedly have acted against Masupha because the latter seriously threatened his position; but Letsie shrank as he had done the previous January, from the thought of "handling" his brother's blood.<sup>114</sup> Whether the two sons of Moshwe-

105. As suggested by A. E. Hake, *op. cit.*, p. 396; D. C. Boulger, *op. cit.*, basing their opinions on Gordon's letters.

106. G 6 — 1883, Hook's memo., Oct. 16.

107. G 6 — 1883, No. 4.

108. H. W. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

109. G 6 — 1883, p. 17, Sept. 26.

110. *The Cape Argus*, Oct. 16, 1882.

111. A. E. Hake, *op. cit.*, p. 396.

112. G 6 — 1883, Notes of semi-private interview between Hook and Masupha at Thaba Bosiu, Oct. 12; *The Times*, Aug. 21, 1885, letter from A. Pattisson "The late General Gordon . . . was the only man Masupha had the slightest regard for."

113. G 6 — 1883, Garcia to Sauer, Sept. 26 (confidential).

114. *Ibid.*, Letsie to Sauer, Oct. 17; G. Lagden, *op. cit.*, p. 535.

shwe were in active collusion is problematic; but that Masupha's resistance was strengthened by Letsie's disinclination to subdue him, cannot be doubted. Thus Gordon's visit did not suggest to Masupha the irresolution of Cape policy; it simply confirmed what he knew.

Reaching Morija, Gordon refused to stay at Mabile's and left on foot the following morning, "without breakfast", for Mafeteng, so as to avoid Sauer who was eager to meet him personally.<sup>115</sup> He had already telegraphed both Scanlen and Merriman that as he was "in completely false position up here and can do more harm than good",<sup>116</sup> he was leaving for Cape Town to hand in his resignation. A request from Sauer<sup>117</sup> to reconsider this decision was ignored; he remained convinced, even after his departure from Basutoland, that Masupha was sincere, and would come to terms if Orpen and the magistrate were removed.<sup>118</sup>

When reminded by Garcia of his promise to Merriman, Gordon telegraphed on October 1<sup>119</sup> that he felt bound to remain if the Government so desired. By this time Scanlen had received Sauer's version of events. "The ill-feeling should all, I think, come from my side," he wrote,<sup>120</sup> "but then I don't always talk about Jesus."

Consequently Scanlen rejected Gordon's offer. "After the intimation that you would not fight the Basutos, and considering the tenor of your communications to Masupha, I regret to record my conviction that your continuance in the position you occupy would not be conducive to the public interests".<sup>121</sup>

And so one comes to the epilogue, with its repetitive justifications by both sides, (though Gordon professed he was unmoved by what had occurred).<sup>122</sup> His explanation to Merriman<sup>123</sup> ignored the Government's position *vis-à-vis* parliament and took the simplistic view that Sauer was now the creature of Orpen and his policy. In a telegram to Scanlen explaining his refusal to see the Premier, he did however, make the essential point that "Government were not ignorant of my antagonism to Orpen's policy yet they wished me to go up with Sauer therefore the sequel was only to be expected".<sup>124</sup>

Scanlen's answer was an inadequate attempt to explain away the anomaly of Gordon ever having entered Basutoland.<sup>125</sup> "I do not doubt that you sincerely believed that the proposals you suggested to Masupha were best in the circumstances, but they were such as this government could not accept and Parliament would not agree to if we did." Gordon's

115. Cape Archives, N.A.D. 282, Orpen to S.N.A., Sept. 30, 1882.

116. G 6 — 1883, undated, probably Sept. 27.

117. Cory Library, MS 1248, pp. 78-9.

118. H. W. Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 234-5, Gordon to Governor, Oct. 6.

119. *The Cape Mercury*, Oct. 11.

120. J. Benyon, *op. cit.*, C.O. 48/504, Robinson to Kimberley, confidential, Oct. 10, enclosure, Sauer to Scanlen, telegram 290, Oct. 2 (missing in Cape files).

121. G 6 — 1883, No. 21, Oct. 5.

122. *Letters of General Gordon to his Sister*, Oct. 6, 1882.

123. P. Lewsen, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

124. G 6 — 1883, No. 24, Oct. 6.

125. *Ibid.*, No. 25, Oct. 6.



reply<sup>126</sup> that "Mr. Sauer was conversant with what I was going to say to Masupha. As to terms why if Sauer had any definite ideas did he not give me them", is however, a distortion of the truth. Sauer had concurred in the September 24 communication; the subsequent letter to Masupha could not have been known to him in view of his consistent adherence to the Orpen line. Gordon himself might have profited from the advice he gave the Premier, who, he explained to Garcia,<sup>127</sup> had put himself in a false position "viz à viz (sic) country" by offering an explanation for Gordon's resignation other than the simple relevant fact that the Government had agreed to his request to leave. "*Never give reasons* (his italics) is a maxim," he told Scanlen, "which I am very sorry you did not follow."

The justifications had now become accusations. Both Sauer and Gordon regarded as obvious lies the *post facto* rationalisations each was offering to explain his earlier actions. Sauer insisted, and Garcia confirmed,<sup>128</sup> that Gordon had initiated the visit to Masupha, and that "the letter which Gordon wrote me contained what he had my sanction to communicate to Masupha".<sup>129</sup> Gordon insisted that Sauer had sent him to Masupha to make proposals which ran contrary to the existing policy and were to by-pass Orpen. "Is it possible," he asked Scanlen,<sup>130</sup> "for you to believe that I went to Masupha at my own request merely to propose hut tax, police, magistrate, pure and simple? What I state is that Sauer pressed me to go, and that he knew from previous conversations that these terms were to be modified and Masupha pressed to meet him without Orpen and that I was to speak as a private person. How came Sauer to write me he hoped I would reconsider my determination and not resign, if he disapproved of my action. For this he did after I left Basutoland." "All these explanations," he added, "demean me."

Two days out of Cape Town on his return to England, Gordon wrote a final letter to Scanlen,<sup>131</sup> which wholly contradicted the October 11 letter, and appears as a surprising *amende*. "I did not even attempt to follow the wishes of the Government or did I in the least weigh my words with a view to suit the Government. I acted entirely upon my own responsibility and was and am perfectly convinced that what I said was and is the best thing that could be done. Therefore instead of regretting I do not do so . . . I therefore take the entire responsibility of my action, merely remarking that my appearance on the stage was an act of government, for which they were responsible."

This letter only makes sense in terms of the dichotomy in Gordon's temperament which fluctuated between a puritan leaning towards the sublimation of fleshly appetites through the intensity of his religious

126. *Gordon Correspondence*, Gordon to Scanlen, Oct. 7.

127. Cape Archives, Acc. 250, Oct. 7.

128. G 6 — 1883, to Sauer, Oct. 18.

129. *Ibid.*, Sauer to Garcia, Oct. 16.

130. *Ibid.*, Oct. 11.

131. *Ibid.*, Oct. 16.

fervour, and what Elton<sup>132</sup> calls "a positive liking for worldly power and public applause." After the Basutoland episode he was probably in the "mortification" phase as suggested by a letter written at the time. "When I went to the Cape, I prayed for glory to God and the welfare of the people so I am glad I got no glory out of it".<sup>133</sup>

Though Folliott, his former secretary, sent him a copy of the 1883 Assembly debate on Basutoland, and though he kept in touch with the Garcias, Gordon retained little interest in the Cape after his departure. "It mattered little to me," he wrote to Garcia,<sup>134</sup> "what may have been said for I know I did my best for the Colony . . ." The "weak-kneed" Ministry, an "invertibrate formation"<sup>135</sup> was fully to blame for the Colony's difficulties. "I never saw a country," he wrote from Palestine,<sup>136</sup> reasserting the viewpoint in his memorandum on the Transkei, "which to my mind was easier governed than the Cape, if the Govt. would act decidedly in a firm line. The peoples are good. They do not trouble the Govt., the only thing they want is quiet."

The Scanlen Ministry's irresolution must be seen within the wider framework of the Cape's attempts to evolve a coherent and viable "native" policy, and also as the immediate consequence of the political situation in 1882. The report of the "Government Commission on Native Laws and Customs"<sup>137</sup> which appeared in the year following Gordon's departure was the first significant statement of the Colony's intentions, "for placing the government of the dependencies upon a more satisfactory footing".<sup>138</sup> Heavily influenced by Shepstone it rejected the Grey integration policy which had been the lodestar of the Native Affairs Department in the first few years of Responsible Government, and accepted the possibility that tribal organisation and law might, at that stage, have their valid place on the road towards ultimate amalgamation with an alien culture.

This premise and the failure to restore Basutoland to its pre-war quiescence through Sauer-Orpen gradualism, which led to an intensification of the Disannexation movement, resulted in the Scanlen Government's proposals for a new policy that would limit the Cape's involvement in Basutoland almost solely to the maintenance of its obligations to the Orange Free State. There was no room for Orpen in this new arrangement, and he was retired.

The similarity between this policy and Gordon's Convention was marked enough for *The Cape Times*<sup>139</sup> to describe it as "the Gordon policy without Gordon; the play of Hamlet without the Prince of Den-

132. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

133. *Letters of General Gordon to his Sister*, p. 277, Oct. 20, 1882.

134. Cape Archives, Acc. 250, Oct. 19, 1883.

135. D. C. Boulger, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 87.

136. Cape Archives, Acc. 250, Gordon to Garcia, June 6, 1883.

137. G 4 — 1883.

138. *Parliamentary Papers* 1883, Vol. XLIX (C.3717), Governor's speech at the opening of 5th session of 6th parliament, Jan. 19, 1883.

139. Dec. 27, 1882.

mark". The extent to which Gordon's visit hastened the change in direction is difficult to gauge; too many other factors such as the continued Leribe unrest, were involved. The system introduced (successfully, from their viewpoint) by the British after they took over, was even closer to the Gordon model, but was evolved in a different set of circumstances. In 1884 Basuto acceptance of alien rule was achieved through tribal unanimity and the positive rejection of Masupha, resulting from the real threat of abandonment as the clearly expressed intention of the Imperial Government.

Insofar as Gordon was concerned, the Basutoland episode was *mutatis mutandis* the prelude to Khartoum; both demonstrate the consequences which flow from the interaction between human fallibility and the improvisations that are an essential part of politics. The initial error in 1882 was the Ministry's in believing that a purely political problem could be solved by a soldier using his "mesmeric power over primitive peoples". Merriman's mistake (for which he later took full responsibility) was to allow the fascination of Gordon's reputation and personality to cloud his judgment when he suggested the General accompany Sauer to Basutoland. The Government was tied to Orpen's policy, until the following parliamentary session; Gordon was prepared to negotiate only on the basis of his Convention which postulated the diametric opposite of that policy. Thus to send Sauer and Gordon to Basutoland together was to attempt to implement two totally dissimilar policies simultaneously.

The third mistake was Sauer's. By September 16 Orpen's plans centred on the specific issue of reducing Thaba Bosiu; yet Sauer allowed Gordon to go to Masupha "as a private individual", fully knowing the General's capacity for changing his mind, but obviously misled by Gordon's September 24 letter. Even had Gordon been more stable, the fact that Masupha was to be subdued by force was inconsistent with this last-minute peace overture. Sauer's behaviour was muddled and ambivalent, but to say as Boulger did,<sup>140</sup> that he "deliberately resolved to destroy Gordon's reputation as a statesman, and to ensure the triumph of his own policy by an act of treachery that has never been surpassed" is not in accord with the facts.

On balance therefore, the calculable factors made it unwise to send Gordon to Basutoland; taken in conjunction with the unpredictable factor of his temperament, the end product was bound to be a fiasco. "A brilliant genius like Gordon," as Merriman later wrote,<sup>141</sup> "full of impulses often noble but often singularly bewildering, was quite unsuited for the service of a colony where the deeds of its rulers are subject to parliamentary criticism and the rules of constitutional government." Or as Gladstone observed: "Gordon was a hero, and a hero of heroes; but we ought to have known that a hero of heroes is not the proper person

140. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 83.

141. P. Lewsen, *op. cit.*, p. 117, Letter to *The Cape Times*, Nov. 24, 1896.

to give effect at a distant point, and in most difficult circumstances, to the views of ordinary men".<sup>142</sup>

Certain elements of the Basutoland episode bear a marked resemblance to the events at Khartoum. Sauer's irresolution and Gordon's impulsiveness resulted in the latter following a policy wholly inconsistent with that of the Government. While Sauer and Merriman behaved illogically, the charge that Sauer particularly, deliberately set out to destroy Gordon's reputation, is wholly unfounded.

Edna Bradlow.

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142. J. Morley, *Life of Gladstone* (Macmillan, London, 1903), Vol. III, p. 169.