

# MOSHESH, THE SCOURGE OF SOUTH AFRICA

Continued from Page One

struggle took place, the assegai, the battle-axe, and the rifle making frightful execution. Those who did not fall by those weapons were hurled to death on the awful crags below. At the same time, the British artillery supported by the Cape Mounted Rifles, and a large body of strengthened it. From this height he looked down on his neighbors like a great baron of the feudal ages.

Under him were a rich, healthy and natives were repulsed and forced to retreat in great confusion.

### A Master of Strategy

After this victory, Moshesh, who had been keeping the bulk of his warriors in check, now unleashed them and the farms and flocks of the Boers were harried with greater vigor than ever.

At last, General Sir George Cathcart, governor of Cape Colony, with an army of 3,000 picked white regulars with artillery, and a large body of natives started for Basutoland. The governor had also armed native tribes, hostile to Moshesh, among the number being Sikonyela, chief of the Batlokwas and bitterest foe of Moshesh.

Arriving on the border of Basutoland, General Cathcart sent a despatch to Moshesh, reproaching him for alleged lawlessness and thefts, and ordering the immediate handing over of 10,000 head of cattle. Moshesh, whose quarrel was rather with the Boers, sent a most pacific reply, and 3,000 head of cattle. As to the rest he asked for time to get them together.

General Cathcart, with an expensive and highly trained army in the field, would listen to no delay and marched on Thaba Bosigo. Arriving at Berea, he saw an enormous herd of cattle feeding on the mountain side, and dividing his force into three parts, he sent one to round them up, while he himself took the road that led to the heights. Little did he realize that the cattle there, tended by women and a few old men, was a trap that the shrewd Moshesh had set for him.

Indeed, the British soldiers in coming into Basutoland had regarded it as something of a lark. General Cathcart took no pains to learn their real strength. But Moshesh had 10,000 of the finest horsemen on earth.

It is of these same black horsemen

that Poultney Bigelow wrote a few years later: "The Basuto, before he enters the ranks, is a better fighting man than the average European soldier after three years of drilling. For, as a recruit, he is already an accomplished horseman, an excellent marksman, and familiar with the duties of a scout." (White Men's Africa).

### The British Trapped

General Cathcart, as was said, sent one of his divisions after the cattle on the hill. The soldiers rounded up 4,000 of them and were driving them down the mountain through the narrow pass when 800 Basuto cavalymen seeming to spring from nowhere threw themselves at the enemy. In the confusion that followed the British soldiers, inextricably

crossed the Caledon River between himself and the foe.

Moshesh, though flushed with victory, was cool-headed enough to weigh its results. He knew only too well that the Great White Queen bay only by discharges of canisters from the artillery.

At the height of the battle there was a terrific thunderstorm which caused a lull in the fighting, but no sooner was it over than the Basutos possessed enormously greater resources than he; that she would never rest until he had been beaten. It was then he did something that proved he was a master diplomat. He sent General Cathcart the strangest letter a victor has ever sent: beaten foe.

### Shrewd Move

This letter is worthy of reproduction here:

Midnight, Dec 30, 1852.

"Your Excellency: This day you have fought against my people and taken much cattle. As the object for which you have come is to have compensation for the Boers I beg you'll be satisfied with what you have taken. I entreat peace from you. You have chastised. Let it be enough I pray you, and let me no longer be considered an enemy of the Queen. I will try all I can to keep my people in order in the future.

"Your humble servant,  
Moshesh."

"As was to be expected, General Cathcart received this letter most gratefully. "It miraculously gave him a loop-hole of escape," says Sir Godfrey Lagden. "He, too, had been deceived in the strength of the enemy," says Theal in his "History of South Africa," and he dreaded a war with a tribe so highly organized and so well armed and with such strong natural fortresses. In his opinion, there was nothing to be gained by such a war that could outweigh its difficulties and its cost.



MOSHESH

returned to the attack and kept it up until after nightfall. General Cathcart, retreated, leaving Moshesh master of the field. He left his dead and wounded where they fell, and did not stop until he had put the mixed with the cattle, proved an easy mark for the Basuto spears.

Abandoning the cattle, the soldiers fled down the mountains until they caught up with General Cathcart, who was also being hard pressed. Clouds of Basuto calvary now swept down on the British, and were at

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