Folklore of the Basuto.

Minnie Cartwright

To cite this article: Minnie Cartwright (1904) Folklore of the Basuto., *Folklore*, 15:3, 244-263, DOI: [10.1080/0015587X.1904.9719410](https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.1904.9719410)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.1904.9719410>

Published online: 06 Feb 2012.

Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)

Article views: 1

View related articles [↗](#)

FOLKLOKE OF THE BASUTO.

BY MINNIE CARTWRIGHT (*née* MARTIN.)¹

(*Read at Meeting, 18th May, 1904.*)

IN olden days a certain portion of the Basuto were cannibals, but it is supposed they originally became so from starvation rather than from choice. Our groom's father had been a cannibal, and had "eaten of the white man's heart," but no persuasions of mine would induce the old man to tell me anything about it. He was evidently afraid to speak, and I only heard about it from his son, who seemed rather proud to possess such a father. When first we were stationed at Thlotsi Heights, in the north of Basutoland, an old woman lived there who in her girlhood had a wonderful escape from a small band of cannibals. In those days she was fat and young, a truly tempting object, and one day she was all alone, walking from her home to the "lands." The three cannibals seized and bound her, and carried her off to their lair. There they amputated both little finger top joints and removed her upper lip, then placing her in a pot of warm water they left her to bleed to death while they went to collect fuel; but she, happening to be a particularly robust, determined damsel, managed to free herself from her bonds and escaped to her home, where her wounds were attended to and she quickly recovered. Many years after, as she was preparing the porridge for breakfast, outside her hut, two old men came up and asked for food. She looked up, recognised them as two of her former captors, and gave them breakfast, afterwards pointing out the marks of their cruelty to her and telling them who she was.

¹ See vol. xiv., pp. 204, 415.

The spot where she was caught proved the death-trap of many a poor victim, and is now believed to be haunted. Very few Basuto are brave enough to pass there after dark. Strange tales have been told by those who have done so. Shadowy forms have been seen seated in a ring, and the sound of their voices chanting weird songs, has been heard, while from the centre of the ring smoke has been seen to arise, and even the cries and groans of the victims have been heard. A horseman, too, has been seen to ride up in haste, though no sound of hoofs has disturbed the night; but on his approach the ghostly company has dispersed. Soon after we went to Leribe, and long before I knew anything of this mysterious horseman, my husband and I were returning home after dark one evening on horseback through this identical pass. The moon shone fitfully through the hurrying clouds, and a damp mist was rising from the marshy ground. While our horses were walking through the soft ground at the bottom of the pass I looked up and saw what I took to be a native riding a grey horse. I asked my husband what a Mosuto was doing, riding in such a nasty part at that time of night; but as he saw no one, and we neither of us heard any sound, I concluded I had been mistaken, and thought no more of it until three years later, when for the first time I heard the story of the ghostly rider. I have been shown one or two other spots which are visited in a similar manner by "ghosts," and which are known to have been the haunts of cannibals. In the north of Basutoland there still live two old people, a man and a woman, between whom no connection or relationship exists, but each has been in youth a cannibal, and in the eyes of the Basuto they are each branded with the evidence of their crimes, for each has white spots on the skin which are gradually increasing in size—a sure sign in the eyes of the people of cannibalism, as these spots were not there in childhood nor yet in

middle age. Very few Basuto have been known to bear this "hall-mark." It is very peculiar, generally beginning as a small round white mark, not as big as a marble, which increases in size and is joined by others until it is supposed to resemble a white hand.

Some sort of belief in the transmigration of souls is evidently indulged in by the Basuto, for they will tell you that such and such a snake is inhabited by so and so's grandfather. Especially do they believe that the spirits of the departed take up for a time their abode in the bodies of cattle, which are called "the spirits (*melimo*) of the wet noses."

The efficacy of charms is firmly believed in. Certain portions of animals or human beings ward off the evil spirit or give courage or special strength, or again others endow with "second sight." The charms are worn on the body; the portions of flesh are burnt, then ground to a fine powder, mixed with some marvellous concoctions by the "Medicine Man," and drunk by those desirous of receiving the special quality it bestows. In the old days much wealth could be amassed by the medicine-men out of the heart of a white man, the people believing that to drink medicine made from it would endow them with the courage and mental abilities of *le khuoa* (the white man). The Basuto still believe in witchcraft, in throwing the bones, in ghosts, in evil water spirits, and in the "evil eye." Their traditions are handed down from generation to generation by men whose duty it is to learn all the folklore, history, superstitions, and customs of their race. They believe that their doctors can find out anything, and can call down the lightning god's wrath upon any individual who, unless he is able to propitiate the deity, will be struck by lightning ere many days pass.

Near Thlotsi Heights there lived an old 'Ngaka (doctor) who once did me a very real service. On several occasions we had been visited by thieves. First of all my husband's

hut was despoiled of a considerable amount of clothing one evening while we were at dinner. Then my store hut was invaded on two separate occasions. All our efforts to trace the thieves were unavailing, so, without consulting my husband, I sent for old 'Mputing, and asked him to find the thieves for me. He volunteered to "doctor" me so that no one should be able to steal from me again. I consented, and, calling the servants, went outside to the store hut. One or two individuals had followed the "doctor," and our assembly was augmented by a couple of neighbouring servants. I opened the store hut door and stood by the old "doctor" at the entrance. He called for a vessel full of clear water into which he threw several pebbles, making mystic signs over them. These he made me take out and place on the side of the vessel, after which he told me to place it as it was on a shelf in the store hut, and to leave it for three sunrises, after which I might throw away the water, but I must keep the pebbles always, as they were charms. He then drew a circle round me, bade me bare my left arm up to the shoulder, and with many signs and incantations he proceeded to scratch my arm just below the shoulder and round the wrist with a wonderful looking instrument which he dipped into a nasty sticky dark substance. This I was forbidden to wash until it had thoroughly dried, and it was some days ere it completely disappeared. The next item in the programme was "throwing the bones." I stood in the centre of the mystic ring with the old doctor kneeling or rather crouching in front of me, and facing our most interested and impressed audience. The bones were "thrown" inside the circle. I was then told that my treatment was completed, and that henceforth I should be under the protection of the lightning god. 'Mputing then solemnly warned the onlookers that they or anyone else would meet with a speedy death if they tried again to rob me; then picking up his bag he bade me *lumela* (good-day), and departed to the village to warn

others. From that day I have never been troubled by thieves.

One of the most picturesque scenes imaginable is the setting forth of a large herd of cattle every autumn from the villages in the valleys on their way to the fertile table lands of the mountains, where they are sent to winter. The herd boys pack up enough meal, salt, mealies, and Kaffir corn to last for their own use through the winter, and securely fasten these provisions on the backs of the "pack" oxen, which are kept separate from the rest of the herd, and are looked after by the younger boys of the party, who generally ride them, guiding them by hitting the horns. The older herds then take up their musical instruments which they play, leading the way and followed by the whole herd of cattle, and accompanied by several dogs. The pack oxen and boys bring up the rear. They never hurry, the cattle graze as they go, finding abundant pasture by the way.

At Butha-Buthe, in the north, there is a piece of swampy ground which, to the ordinary observer, seems merely a good place for ducks and frogs, yet to the native inhabitants of the country it is more or less sacred ground, for one spot in it is inhabited by a spirit. Some years ago, without any apparent reason, smoke was seen issuing from this *Khapong* as it is called. No one had set it alight, no sign of human interference could be found, nor did the ground consume away, yet, night and day, through rain and sunshine, for three whole months this streak of smoke was seen to ascend from the self-same spot with never even the smallest tongue of flame to be seen; consequently it came to be regarded as the abode of the Spirit¹ of Maternity,

¹ Sesuto, *Molimo*. "Molimo" is the singular, and is always used by Christian Basuto to represent God, and frequently by the heathen, when speaking of the Supreme Power whom they evidently believe in. *Molimo* is the plural, and is used with reference to supernatural spirits. I am extremely sorry that I cannot more fully explain the word *Molimo*, but I am trying to extort a definition from an old Mosuto, and sincerely hope I may be

and hither from time to time come old and young with offerings of bead-work, money, food, dolls, &c., hoping by these gifts to propitiate the spirit within and to receive a favourable answer to their prayers.

Once while we were stationed at Butha-Buthe there was great excitement amongst the people, for the streak of smoke was again seen slowly ascending from the *Khapong*. It was a pouring wet day, when one would have found it impossible to light a fire out of doors, yet the rain had no effect on this mysterious fire. My servants called me to look, and there most certainly, most unmistakably it was—a thin column of smoke steadily mounting towards the clouds; but on this occasion it only lasted a few hours, during which time it was far too wet for me to venture down to investigate. Afterwards I thoroughly searched the place with my husband, but beyond seeing a small strip of black peat-like soil on the edge of a small slit, and finding money, bangles, beads, and clay dolls laid underneath a projecting piece of the bank, I saw nothing. There was absolutely no trace of a fire. Some of the dolls had evidently been lying there for years. There are several similar spots in various other parts of the country.

The customs with regard to a woman's first child are decidedly quaint. The wife must leave her husband's house fully a month before the expected arrival of the child, as it must be born in the home of its maternal grandparents, otherwise it will not live to grow up. If the infant should be a boy the rejoicings are judiciously mixed with regret. The news-carriers start at once to carry the news to the father, who has remained at his own village. Upon arriving at their destination they attack the unsuspecting successful, though it is very difficult to get an ordinary Mosuto to understand the two English words "God" and "Spirit." Perhaps I should have been wiser had I used the term "God of Maternity," instead of "Spirit of Maternity," but in translating it for me the native made use of the word "Spirit," thus to my mind showing that he understood some difference existed, though he could not explain to me where the difference lay.

man and beat him vigorously with their sticks. No word is spoken, but the unlucky man at once understands he is the father of a male child instead of the eagerly-hoped-for daughter. Naturally he is disappointed, but after all a boy is better than no child, and the spirits may be kind and give him a daughter next time.

If, on the other hand, the infant is a girl, there is great rejoicing.¹ The news-carriers hurry off to inform the father. Great caution is observed as they approach the village lest he should see them coming. This time the messengers arm themselves with a pot of water, which they throw over the happy father, who immediately receives the congratulations of his friends. The water is supposed to act as a wholesome damper upon his joy, lest the good news might prove too great a shock.

It is not considered correct for the man to visit his wife and child, but when the latter is a month old the woman returns to her husband, bringing the baby with her. Basuto women often nurse their babies for eighteen months. When the first baby is weaned the mother takes it back to her parents, to whom it will belong in future; the actual parents no longer retain any claim upon it, nor, should it be a girl, do they receive the dowry upon her marriage; that also belongs to the maternal grandparents.²

Should a doctor be called in at the birth of a child, the mother can neither wean it nor shave its head until the doctor has given his consent. Usually the infant's head is shaved on the second day after birth.

When other children are born there is no need for the mother to leave her husband's house, as no evil is likely to

¹ Because she will on her marriage bring a dowry of so many head of cattle to the family, while a boy will correspondingly impoverish it.

² I do not know whether there is any antagonistic feeling between son-in-law and mother-in-law, or any etiquette which demands that such a feeling should exist, but I should imagine not. I have certainly seen great friendliness on both sides.

attend their birth such as threatened the birth of the first-born. In all cases where no doctor has attended the actual birth, the father, whether absent or present, has complete control over the child, and no step can be taken without first consulting him, consequently sometimes rather strange complications arise. For instance, numbers of Basuto leave the country every year to find work in the mines and on the railways. Many of them are married men with young children. Suppose a man left a wife and baby a few months old behind him, his wife must not wean the child until he returns. The result is that every now and then one comes across quite big children, able to run about and even to talk, who are still unweaned, and, when asked, the mother will reply, "My husband has not yet returned."

Should a woman die while her child is still too young to be fed with a spoon, a sheep or goat is killed, and the windpipe, thoroughly cleansed, is used as a feeding tube, down which the milk is slowly poured into the child's throat. Sometimes a female goat in milk is procured, and the child taught to drink from its udder. In these cases the goats become more attached to their foster-children than to their own offspring, and will return at regular intervals to the hut to suckle the child. It is a strange sight to watch a goat run bleating to the door of a hut out of which crawls a fat brown baby, over whom she rejoices as if it were her own, lying down contentedly to allow it to drink until, thoroughly satisfied, the child retires to sleep, when the goat trots off to graze near by, returning again to her charge in a few hours.¹

When a youth wishes to marry he does not go to his father and ask for a wife. Such a course of action would

¹ A woman whom I knew well very nearly died when her first baby was born. Her parents asked the English doctor to attend her, which he did until he found that native doctors were also in attendance, when he declined to have anything more to do with the case, as, had she died, *he* would have been

be most disrespectful. No; he gets up very early one morning and takes his father's cattle out to pasture without milking the cows, letting the calves run with their mothers and drink all the milk. No notice is taken of this, so he continues to act thus for thirty days. His boon companions desert him and nickname him "silly one." On the thirtieth day his father says, "Surely my son must want to get married." This remark is repeated to the son, and he ceases to deprive his family of milk, but on that day he must do all the milking unaided, and must convert the milk into butter, which his mother boils and puts into a new pot, and keeps to anoint the bridegroom's face. No questions are asked as to which dusky beauty the youth desires to marry. If the wife chosen by his father does not happen to be the lady of his heart, he is at liberty to choose a second wife for himself as soon as he is in a position to pay the dowry, or persuade his father to pay it for him, for when he is a married man he is on an equality with his father and can consult him as an equal.

After the episode of the cattle the youth's father will select a girl and go and talk over matters with her father. After they have agreed as to the number of cattle required for the dowry, a month is allowed to elapse at the end of which time the cattle are chosen, and the bridegroom's father prepares a small feast, the mother makes a large quantity of "leting" or mild beer, and all the friends and relations on *his* side regale themselves. The bridegroom then takes out the remaining cattle to pasture, while his father and male friends start off with the dowry. Before they come too near the bride's village they pick out two animals, a young bull and a heifer, to represent the bridegroom's

blamed for her death. In despair her parents came to me, and out of pity for the woman I did what I could to help her. After about three weeks she so far recovered as to be able to sit up. Then one night she was secretly removed to a cave, in order to break the evil spell which had been cast over her in the hut. The hut was then purified, and shortly after she was brought back.

parents; these are driven at a gallop through the village into the cattle kraal. This is supposed to represent the eagerness of the parents to welcome their new daughter.

The remaining cattle are driven slowly along, the herds lustily singing the Basuto wedding-song; a sort of chant, the words expressing the joy felt by all the family that the son should have obtained so charming a wife. These cattle on reaching the village are also driven into the kraal. All the relations and friends of the bride then seat themselves on one side of the entrance to the kraal while the bridegroom's procession arrange themselves on the opposite side. For a short time dead silence prevails, until the bride's father joins the party and greets the visitors, after which everyone is allowed to talk. The bull and heifer are then driven out and commented upon, very fulsome compliments being exchanged. No girls are allowed to be seen anywhere about, and the bride must be shut up in her father's hut, her mother being kept a prisoner in another hut by herself.

After a few pleasantries the bride's father goes to tell his wife his opinion of the cattle. He then calls for *Juala* (strong beer), the first potful being given to the two men who drove the bull and heifer. After they have drunk as much as they can, they say—

"We are coming to borrow a cup of water for our son."
"How many cattle have you brought?" asks the bride's father. They reply, "Thirty," or whatever the number may be. The cattle are then counted, and everyone drinks again. The bridegroom's friends then begin dancing, and all the girls of the village join the feast, with the exception of the bride and three chosen companions. Dancing continues more or less during the whole night. The next morning the bride's father chooses his fattest ox and has it killed, thus showing that the marriage contract is completed. The dewlap is cut off and divided into two strips, one of which is bound round the bride's wrist and the other sent

to adorn the bridegroom's wrist, thus signifying that they are now bound to each other. The bridegroom's father then kills an ox, the skin of which is given to the bride's mother. The feasting and merry-making continue yet another day, after which the bridegroom's procession returns home, and from then for a period of from one to three months the bridegroom continues to herd his father's cattle, and life goes on much as usual, except that the father and mother set about preparing their son's future home. At length the bride sets out for her new home, accompanied by two girl friends and two old women. On leaving home she must not say good-bye to her parents, nor must she speak or look back until she reaches her husband's village. To look back would show regret and be an insult to her lord. Silence is enjoined, because her first words must be her greeting to her husband. As a rule a number of girls accompany her part of the way, laughing and singing and doing all in their power to make her speak or look back.

When the party are well within sight of the bridegroom's home the old women seat themselves on the ground, and decline to proceed until some suitable gift has been presented to them. This generally takes the form of a sheep or goat. As soon as the sun sets the bride enters the village and is conducted to her mother-in-law's hut. She and her four companions must remain silent, nor must they accept any refreshment until the bridegroom's father has offered them a portion of roasted sheep. Numbers of wedding guests assemble, and feasting and singing continue all night. In the morning the bride's friends return home. Meanwhile the bridegroom endeavours by every means in his power to see and speak to his wife, but on no account must others see him near the hut during the month which follows, consequently he creeps round the *scherm*¹ when-

¹ *Scherm*, the fence bounding the enclosure round the hut. It is made of reeds strapped together with grass-rope, and is generally in the shape of a semicircle. A reed door in the middle admits into the interior.

ever he can get away from observation, and should he be fortunate enough to find his wife alone, he crawls in and talks to her in low tones, while she, seeing him enter in that manner, knows it is her husband, and immediately begins grinding grain, from which she must not cease while he is in the hut. During this month she is instructed in all household work by her mother-in-law, and carries water from the well for household use, but while going to and from the well she must neither speak nor turn her head, no matter who may accost her. All this time remarks are freely made in her presence as to her attractions, or lack of such, and very outspoken those remarks often are. When the month of probation is ended she is taken to her own hut and freed from all restrictions. Some little time after she has married and settled down she will take her pitcher early one morning to the well, break it, and leave the broken pieces where they will be seen. Then, instead of returning home, she will run away to her parents. Some of the women in her husband's village will inform him that his wife's pitcher lies broken at the well, and that she is nowhere to be found. He will feign great grief and tell all his friends. Meanwhile his wife's mother will make her a new pitcher, and when it is ready the woman will return to her husband.

Another item which may be of some interest is the fact that Basuto women possess property of their own. When a woman marries a hut is given to her, of which she is undisputed mistress. It may be only a very bare little apartment, but it is her own; no one can even enter it without her consent. Sometimes she is also given a number of goats or sheep; more frequently the pigs and fowls are her property, and women have even been known to possess one or two cows.

I hope no one will be shocked if I now describe the death practices. They are not nice, but they are a part of the nation. When it is seen that death is near, the sick person

is taken out of the hut, if it is at all possible to remove him without causing instant death, as the spirits obtain easier access to the *Scherm* than to the interior of the hut. A hole is cut in the *Scherm* to enable the spirits¹ to enter, as they cannot do so through the doorway of mortals. The friends of the dying man then take leave of him and seat themselves outside the *Scherm* to await the end. Two old women, blood-relations of the family, now take charge of the invalid. These heartless creatures resort to the most barbarous acts, which one really cannot fully describe. Suffice it to say that ere life is extinct they place their victim in the recognisedly correct posture, namely in an upright position with the knees drawn up towards the chin and the arms bent from the elbow, the hands resting under the chin. They then bind him securely so that he cannot move his limbs. In cases where the patient is becoming stiff before he is bound up, hot water is poured constantly over the joints to keep them supple. Where death has been unexpected and the limbs are too set to bend, the sinews are severed at the elbows, knees, and hips in order to be able to place the dead in the correct position for burial.²

As soon as death has occurred a skin is thrown over the corpse, and is not allowed to be lifted off it again. The old women then begin a dismal wailing cry which tells the watchers outside that all is over. They immediately throw ashes on their heads and join in the weeping, placing their hands on their bowed heads and prostrating themselves before the dead. All friends are then summoned, and each brings a present of grain for the departed, on his journey. They then kill an ox as a sacrifice, which is cooked after

¹ Sesuto, *Melimo*.

² An old heathen doctor talking to me on the subject of the resurrection said, "Yes, but you white people are stupid. You put your dead ones lying down in the grave, so when the great call comes you will all be late, but we put our dead ones sitting up ready for the call." They bury their dead facing the east.

dark. The mourners weep, and gird their loins with strips of hard hide. Very little talking is allowed, the only permissible subject being the good deeds and noble qualities of the deceased.

After dark a few of the nearest male relatives set off to dig the grave, which is a circular hole about four feet deep. The old men are buried near the cattle kraal, the women and children on a hill within sight of the kraal, but not too near. The doctor is called to pray for clouds that the night may become very dark. Shortly before midnight the corpse is carried, still wrapped in the skin, and placed at the entrance to the cattle kraal, which is left open all night, as he alone must guard the cattle on this his first night in the spirit world. Just before dawn he is placed in his grave with the grain, a small piece of meat, salt, and *leting*; and a large stone, as nearly the size of the grave as can be procured, is placed in the aperture. I forgot to mention that Basuto are buried into a sort of shelf, so the stone does not actually rest on the dead body. The grave is then filled up with earth and stones, on the top of this is placed the entrails of the sacrificial ox, and the mourners depart. They then return to the dead man's hut, when the sacrificial meat is divided between them, but before eating they wash themselves, and the near relations of the deceased fasten a piece of fat from the entrails round their neck as a symbol of mourning. In eating the meat great care is taken that no bones are thrown away or given to the dogs; they must be carefully collected and burnt, while the mourners stand round and cry, "*Molimo ea-roona* (our great spirit), hear us, oh! hear us we pray, and receive this dead brother in peace. There is a light to our grandfather's father. May the old *Molimo* pray to the new *Molimo* for us."¹

¹ While at Butha-Buthe I went to see a dying child, the daughter of a heathen policeman. The man had only just joined the force, and knew nothing of Christianity. As the end drew near I felt impelled to say something to the child (she was only four years old), so, bending over her, I said in Sesuto,

The poles of the dead man's hut are then pulled out, as no one must live there again. Should any one be so heartless as not to cry at the funeral, the spirits become enraged, and visit him with some terrible sickness as a punishment for his hardness of heart.

Amongst the older and less civilised Basuto there is a strong disinclination to mention the dead by name. Young people too, as a rule, give each other nicknames by which they are known to their companions. Also, when a woman becomes a mother, she is no longer known by her former name, but is called "Mother of so and so;" thus, if the child's name Thibello, the mother will be called Me-go-a-Thibello (pronounced Ma-Tibello), and no matter how many children she may have afterwards she is always known as Me-go-a Thibello. The man on the other hand, though he is known as "Ra-go Thibello," or father of Thibello, still retains and is called by his former name.

I must now tell you who and what "Thokolosi" is and how I came to see him. There is in Basutoland a little creature of whom all stand in awe. He is not much bigger than a baboon, but possesses no tail, and is perfectly black in colour, with a quantity of black hair on his body. He shuns the daylight and abhors clothing even in the coldest weather. Such is Thokolosi the poisoner, the evil one, whose deeds of cruelty are even now told all over the country. He has power to kill, to send mad, to injure, to

"Little one, are you better? You are not afraid, are you?" "Oh, no," she replied, while a little smile came to her lips; "I am not afraid. Molimo will take care of me." She died a couple of hours later. It is very difficult to get to the root of a Mosuto's belief. In the more civilised parts Christianity has become so mixed up with the heathen beliefs that there is no reliable information to be found there; but in the remoter regions the heathen are still untouched, and I have gathered my information as much as possible from the latter. Of course some are more ignorant of their own belief than others, just as in civilised countries knowledge of the religion and historical traditions of their race varies with the individual. This may account for seeming discrepancies in the statements of their belief.

torture, and to visit with unknown horrors, but to do good is beyond his power or inclination. He is generally employed by the witch-doctor. He hunts down his victim remorselessly until his object is accomplished. If by any unfortunate chance you meet him at night you must pass him silently and as though you saw him not. Some years ago, before I knew of the existence of this little creature, I was obliged to go down to our cow-shed at the bottom of the garden one night just before bedtime. The moon was nearly full and was shining brightly at the time. I was accompanied by our nurse-girl and our big black retriever. Nothing happened on the way down, and to my great relief I found the cows still quite well (rinderpest was raging through the country at the time), but as we were returning we suddenly heard what I thought was a dog running through the Residency garden towards us. There were a lot of dead leaves on the ground, and the creature's feet regularly rustled through them. I had barely said, "What's that?" when we heard the "ping" of the wire fence which divided the two gardens, and saw, crossing the path not a dozen yards in front of us, a little black creature about the size and shape of a boy of six. There was no mistaking the fact that it was a human form of some sort. It ran with a peculiar shuffle, moving its head from side to side. When my girl saw it she caught hold of me in terror, but uttered no word. The dog, on the contrary, gave vent to a sound, half bark, half howl, and tore off to the house, where we found him hiding under my little son's bed, thoroughly frightened. In this manner I made the acquaintance of Thokolosi. Of course my husband laughed at me and declared I had seen a baboon, but even he could not account for the dog's state of terror. The poor brute absolutely refused to come out from under the bed where he had taken refuge. Shortly afterwards the dogs in the Residency garden took to howling in the most terrible way every evening; the policeman who

was on guard, and who slept every night on the Residency verandah, came and implored my husband to let him sleep inside the house, as Thokolosi was always in the garden at night, and he really was too frightened to stay outside. After about a week all was quiet again. Thokolosi had evidently taken himself off. My own impression is that Thokolosi is in all probability a very small Bushman employed by the witch-doctors, and that the superstitions about him have been originated and kept alive by these doctors to enable them to carry on their magic. The body is no doubt stained black to disguise the little creature.

The following is one of the folktales which my nurse girl translated for me. I have chosen this one to relate here as it in some ways tells of doings contrary to the national ideas of etiquette, inasmuch as the hero *asks* his father for a wife, thus breaking the rule universally acknowledged by the Basuto, *i.e.*, that no youth must ever *ask*, save by signs, for a wife, nor must he so far forget the respect due to his father as to mention *which* maid he desires to marry. Both these rules are, as you will see, broken by Tsiu.

THE MAID AND HER SNAKE-LOVER.

When the fathers of our fathers were children, there lived in the valley of the rivers two chiefs; the name of the one was Mopeli and the name of the other was Khosi.

Now Mopeli had a son whom he loved as his own heart, a youth tall and brave and fearless as the lion. To him was given the name of Tsiu. When Tsiu was able to stand alone and to play on the mat in front of his father's dwelling, a daughter was born to the chief Khosi, to whom was given the name of Tebogo. The years passed and Tsiu and Tebogo grew and thrived. Often Tsiu drove his father's

cattle down towards the lands where Tebogo and her father's maidens worked, and many happy days were spent while the love of Tsiu and of Tebogo grew greater even as they themselves grew older.

When the time came for Tsiu to take a wife he went to his father and asked that Tebogo might be given him. Gladly the fathers consented, and preparations were made for the marriage.

Now Tebogo had another lover upon whom she looked with scorn, but who had sworn that never should she be the wife of Tsiu ; so he consulted a witch-doctor, who promised to help him. Imagine his joy when, before the marriage feast had begun, he heard that Tsiu had disappeared. "Now," thought he, "Tebogo shall be my wife," but the maiden turned from him with anger in her heart, nor would her parents listen to him. Meanwhile the spirit of desolation hung over the home of the Chief Mopeli. "My son, my son," cried the unhappy father ; but no voice replied, no son came back to gladden his father's heart.

When the moon had again grown great in the heavens an old man came to the village of Mopeli and called the chief to him. Long they talked and greatly the people wondered. At length they stood up and, saluting each other, parted at the door of the chief's dwelling. Mopeli then set out for the village of Chief Khosi, where he remained all night. The next day he returned to his own village and ordered his people to prepare a great feast.

In the village of Chief Khosi also much wonder filled the people, for they also were commanded to make ready a marriage feast for the chief's daughter ; the lovely Tebogo was to be married, but people knew not to whom. Chief Khosi called his daughter and said, "My child, your lover Tsiu has been taken away, so it is my wish that you should marry one who has pleased my eyes."

"Tell me, my father" replied Tebogo, "who is this man you have chosen for me? Only tell me his name."

"No, my child, that I cannot do," answered Khosi. Behold then her horror when she was brought forth to meet her bridegroom, to find, not a man, but a snake. All the people cried "shame" upon the parents who could be so cruel as to wed their child to a snake.

With cries and tears Tebogo implored her father to spare her; it did not matter. She was told to take her snake husband to the new hut which had been built for them near the large water where the cattle drank. Trembling she obeyed, followed by her maidens, the snake crawling by her side. When she entered the hut she tried to shut out the snake, but it pushed half its body through the door and so frightened her that she ran to the other end of the hut. The snake followed and began beating her with its tail till she ran away to the trees which grew by the water (pool). An old doctor was sitting there, and to him she told her trouble.

"My daughter," he said, "return to your hut. Do not let the snake see you. Close the door very softly and set fire to the hut. When it is all burnt you will find the ashes of the snake in a heap in the centre of the hut. Bring them here and throw them into the water."

Tebogo did as the old doctor told her. While the hut was burning people ran from the two villages to see; but Tebogo called to them to keep away for she was burning the snake. When all was destroyed, she took the ashes of the snake, put them into a pitcher, and ran and threw them into the pool. No sooner had she done so than from out of the water came, not a snake, but her lover Tsiu. With a glad cry she flung herself into his arms and a great shout came from all the people.

As the lightning darts across the heaven so the news of Tsiu's return spread from hut to hut. The story of how he had been made a snake and banished to the pool until

he could find a maiden whose father would give her to him in marriage, and of how the good old doctor 'Nto had revealed the secret to Mopeli, Tsiu told quickly. For many days there was feasting in the homes of Mopeli and Khosi, while in the hearts of Tsiu and Tebogo his bride dwelt a great content, but the wicked one ran to the mountains where he thought long of how he could revenge himself.

MINNIE CARTWRIGHT.