

## *Reviews and Book Notices*

### **TREKKING THE GREAT THIRST**

Travel and Sport in the Kalahari Desert.

By ARNOLD W. HODSON. Africana Reprint Library, Volume 12.  
(Africana Book Society, Johannesburg, 1977).

This book first appeared in 1912 and was based on popular articles written for newspapers and magazines. The author was then a man in his thirties but his hunting adventures took place in his early twenties. His occupation was that of a sub-inspector with the Bechuanaland Protectorate Police and his subsequent trips into the Kalahari Desert enabled him to acquire an extensive knowledge of the Great Thirst. In his accounts of his journeyings he refers only cursorily to his official tasks, the main interest of his writings being his hunting adventures. He shot hundreds of animals, including lion, and obviously derived great pleasure from his exploits. His world was then full of wealthy sportsmen who formed a considerable reading public for works about African game hunting, and his book went into a second edition. Today his Africa has changed out of all recognition politically and otherwise. His Bechuanaland Protectorate is the modern Botswana, an independent state, and the game that remains is now conserved against the organised poaching that is the curse of efforts to preserve Africa's wild life. There is, too, a complete change of public feeling about the mindless slaughter of wild creatures. Nevertheless, *Trekking the Great Thirst* is well-written, contains much information about life in the Kalahari, and is still readable. The author later held administrative posts in Somaliland, Ethiopia, the Falkland Islands, and West Africa. In 1932 he was knighted for his considerable services and retired from the Gold Coast in 1941. He died in New York in 1944 at the age of 63.

J.C.

### **VICTORIAN BUILDINGS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

By D. PICTON-SEYMOUR.

(Published by A. A. Balkema, Cape Town.)

At first sight it would seem that the author of this book has naught for our architectural comfort in the section dealing with Natal.

Of Maritzburg College, built by P. M. Dudgeon, 1885, and cherished by tens of thousands of Old Boys, she says: "These school buildings are by no means a good example of Dudgeon's work—although just on 90 years of weathering has given them a sort of Walter Scott Gothic charm."

Of the Natal Museum in Loop Street, she writes: 'This particularly hideous building in the Flemish style is yet another variation on the much-favoured red brick and ochre theme, used in stripes with sculptured friezes and a sculptured archway above the main entrance.'

The Legislative Council or old Colonial Office building, now the Deeds Office, Pietermaritzburg, circa 1898, has also to take its medicine:

‘The edifice, neither typical Victorian nor a forerunner of the Edwardian style, has none of the elegance of the earlier Parliamentary buildings.’

The reader has also to face a terminology that will send him back to the dictionary, as for example, the caption on the picture of the Dutch Reformed Church at Dundee, built about 1900:

‘Of strange proportions and a strange mixture of styles—at once Italianate and Dutch—yet the design as an entity is held together by marked quoinings and the deep recesses of the fenestration.’

‘Quoinings’ are simply dressed corner-stones and ‘fenestration’ the arrangement of a building’s windows.

But to be fair, the author has good things to say about many Natal buildings. ‘Pietermaritzburg,’ she says, ‘must be the most Victorian town in South Africa, except for the village of Matjiesfontein. . . .’ With a professional eye she recalls Warrington House, the old YMCA with its cast-iron facade, and the pantiled cottages that once lined the humbler streets of this quiet town. She has kind words, too, for the handsome GPO, the City Hall, the Railway Station, Macrorie House, Natal Training College, the Standard Bank, St Peter’s, St Mary’s, the Supreme Court building, and others.

She does not overlook the town’s monuments and its street furniture, especially the lamps, hitching posts, and water troughs. In this connection many old residents will remember the water trough that survived until recently in the market square. It looked like a bath and stood on four cast-iron legs which ended in hooves and fetlocks. One couldn’t help smiling at this touch of Victorian pop-art, but the trough served its purpose and stood at the right height for a thirsty horse to drink in comfort.

This trough, by the way, was a design advertised in the 1890 catalogue the Glasgow firm, MacFarlane’s Castings, which supplied all the British colonies with cast-iron verandahs, street drinking fountains, bathroom and toilet fittings, firegrates, spiral staircases, entire bandstands, etc. Although desperately sought after by architects, these priceless catalogues are almost non-existent. The author of this book, fortunate woman, obviously has one.

This is a very large book of over 400 pages which are equally large, the reason being that it has been planned in five sections: Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Natal, Transvaal, Orange Free State and North-West Cape, all with sub-divisions of large cities and small towns. Consequently it is impossible to cover the material in detail here but a few excerpts will show its quality:

Corrugated iron, invented in 1829 by an English engineer and galvanised by a process in the late 1830s, was exported to the Colonies, including Natal, about 1850.

The early lifts made possible the building of multi-storied premises since the limit of human endurance is reached by mounting the staircase of a five-storey building.

Jimmy Logan, the Scots railwayman who put Matjiesfontein on the map, installed a golf-course, cricket field, tennis court, and croquet lawns—the last, says the author, ‘that most spiteful of Victorian games. . . .’

Lastly, the illustrations must be mentioned, for they add enormously to

the value of the book. There are 600 in all—photographs, line drawings, linoprints, and catalogue sketches, all capturing the appearance of buildings which run the risk of being bulldozed to make way for enormous concrete structures which shrivel the souls of men and women.

For people interested in South African buildings, this book—a 10 years' labour of love—is their book.

J.C.

### **THE POSSIBLE INCORPORATION OF EAST GRIQUALAND INTO NATAL**

(Published by Natal Provincial Administration, 1977)

It is not very often that historical matter of special interest is to be found in official publications but a noteworthy exception is the report of the committee of enquiry into the possible incorporation of East Griqualand into Natal. The work of the committee under the chairmanship of Justice M. T. Steyn came about as a direct result of the granting of independence to the Transkei and the isolation from the rest of the Cape Province of East Griqualand.

The committee investigated in detail the legal and political background of the situation but seemed to base a lot of its conclusions upon the history of the area and this is why a substantial part of the report, which was published in May 1977, deals with this aspect of the problem.

The committee undertook a detailed investigation into the history of East Griqualand from very early days until its incorporation into the Cape Colony and thence up to modern times. Special attention was paid to the claims of various racial groups in East Griqualand since the beginning of the nineteenth century and particularly the reasons for the settlement of Adam Kok and his people there. Although the historical aspect of East Griqualand is dealt with from a legalistic point of view the summary of events over this long period is excellently presented and anyone interested in the area should not miss this exposition. The chairman and the members of the committee were not historians but they carried out a great deal of research in both the Cape and Natal archives. In addition there was obviously a great deal of consultation of other sources, both published and otherwise.

If East Griqualand becomes a portion of Natal, as seems likely at the date of publication, this printing will possess much value for Natal students.

B.J.T.L.

### **PIONEERS OF NATAL AND SOUTH-EASTERN AFRICA**

By E. C. TABLER (Balkema 1977).

This new addition to the growing number of interesting books on Natal is a successor to Tabler's *Pioneers of Rhodesia* and his *Pioneers of South West Africa and Ngamiland*. It comprises about two hundred and fifty potted biographies of Natal personalities who explored, hunted, traded and travelled south of the Limpopo river during the years 1552 to 1878. Each entry contains the full names of the person, parentage, year of birth, date of death and life's work. Some of the biographies are lengthy but others, where not much detail is known, are very sketchy. A random check of information

about some of the personalities reveals that Tabler's information is trustworthy and that his lives are fully covered and unbiased. It is noted with interest that Tabler has no date of death for St. Vincent Erskine ('Vinny') and this is in keeping with the information of the reviewer.

Tabler excludes a great number from this book. In his foreword he explains that no one is included who came to Natal after 1839, no Voortrekkers, no officers or crew of Owen's survey ships, no Norwegian missionaries and no later Natal settlers. This is a pity because the inclusion of Voortrekkers (such as Hans de Lange) would have added much to the value of the book for the researcher. It can only be hoped that these important gaps will later be closed by Tabler. He also excludes personalities dealt with in his previous books. This is understandable but he does not give a list of these people. This will inevitably lead to cross-references from publication to publication which will be upsetting for the researcher—an alphabetical list of those already dealt with would have quickly solved the problem.

The author's source material consists of periodicals, pamphlets and some manuscripts but apparently not South African archival sources, which is also a pity. Perhaps this can be remedied later?

Despite these drawbacks to the book the publication is very welcome as for the general reader there is a great accrual of information. For the serious researcher the book is a must.

B.J.T.L.

### **DICTIONARY OF SOUTH AFRICAN BIOGRAPHY. VOL. III.**

Editor-in-chief C. J. BEYERS.

(Published for the Human Sciences Research Council by Tafelberg Uitgewers Ltd.)

It is hard to believe that Vol. I of this dictionary appeared in 1968 and Vol. II in 1972, for its use has become so widespread that one imagines it has always been with us. But now in 1977 we have Vol. III of this indispensable work containing 1 164 biographical articles, some long, many brief, on people of historical importance in South Africa. A useful name index covers all the entries in the first three volumes.

The longest entry—running to eight double-column pages—is perhaps that on the late D. F. Malan, fourth Prime Minister of the Union. One of the shortest—though entirely adequate—is that on Thomas A. White, the English journalist who as editor assisted in the launching of *The Friend of the Sovereign and Bloem Fontein Gazette* in 1850.

Another brief but interesting biography concerns 'Richard Dehan', the nom-de-plume of Clothilda Graves (1863-1932), who wrote a best-seller entitled *The Dop Doctor* about the siege of Mafeking and the Anglo-Boer War. It appeared in 1910 and sold a quarter of a million copies. Yet she had never visited South Africa. A kind of Ethel M. Dell novelist, she knew a good formula for her love stories and, confined to a wheel chair most of her life, supplied to her women readers a cunning mixture of sentiment and passion.

Dr C. J. Beyers, the present editor-in-chief, feels that with a few exceptions most of the interesting figures from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have been dealt with. Volume III therefore contains a mass of distinguished names from the nineteenth century. It may be that the largest number of entries will be provided by the Victorian period, for there are many people of this era not yet mentioned whose entries will appear in later volumes.

Well bound and attractively printed, this new volume represents the work of many distinguished scholars and editors. To readers, students and writers it comes as a boon.

J.C.

### **THOUGHTS ON SOUTH AFRICA**

By OLIVE SCHREINER. (Africana Reprint Library, Vol. 10. Africana Book Society.) R18,45.

This collection of eight essays was edited by Olive Schreiner's husband after her death and appeared in 1923. It is now reprinted very handsomely by the Africana Book Society. The essays were written over a ten-year period, from 1890 to 1901, and are remarkable examples of her piercing vision into the heart of things. The first and longest essay, an in-depth study of South Africa in 1890, illustrates how this woman-genius could take a trite subject and bend on it the full power of her imagination. Her physical descriptions of the Karoo show this power:

Not less wonderful is the Karoo at night, when the Milky Way forms a white band across the sky; and you stand alone outside, and see the velvety, blue-black vault rising slowly on one side of the horizon and sinking on the other; and the silence is so intense you seem almost to hear the stars move. Nor is it less wonderful on moonlight nights, when you sit alone on a kopje; and the moon has arisen and the light is pouring over the plain; then even the stones are beautiful; and what you have believed of human love and friendship—and never grasped—seems all possible to you. . . .

The structure of the writing and the rich succession of images reveal at a glance her genius for selecting the natural truth of a scene, re-creating its atmosphere, and investing it with human feeling.

At the end of this essay she turns to the political problem of our racial divisions, the final problem for South Africa, 'so vast, so complex, and so beset with difficulty . . . that it may be truly said that no European nation has had during the last 800 years to face anything approaching it in complexity and difficulty . . .' It is a moving thing to read these thoughts of a woman penned more than 80 years ago.

In another essay she takes as her subject the Woman's Movement of her day and describes how she sat beside a Bantu woman grinding corn. She asked her if she believed there was a God. The woman shook her head—'there might be a God but if there was one, He was not good. When further we enquired why this was so, she replied that if God were good He would not have made women. There might be a God for the white woman, but there was certainly none for the black. . . .'

And in artless words the grinder of the corn went on to describe the

condition of a woman in a semi-barbarous society, beginning as a little girl at play, then maturing to marriage and her exchange for cattle, then household duties as wife to an uncaring husband, the bringing up of her children, and finally her relegation to the dung-heap and replacement by a younger woman.

It is a marvellous essay, marvellous propaganda, showing Olive Schreiner's passionate sympathy for her sex, as well as an unerring gift for seeing the great issues of the future.

A classic passage occurs in another essay entitled 'The Wanderings of the Boer'. It concerns the courtship and marriage of the young Boer and has established itself as a favourite piece in prose anthologies. Apart from the subject, itself full of interest, the author proves herself to be the possessor of a genuine and subtle sense of humour which derives not so much from incident as from brief asides about the young man and his visit to a Boer farmstead containing marriageable daughters:

If his visit be much approved of, his steed may be offered a feed of mealies or oats, an indication which he may accept as most favourable . . .

There are from time to time slight creakings of the doors of the bedroom in which the daughters are attiring themselves, as one or other attempts to peer through the crack in the boards . . .

The children keep their eyes fixed on the stranger as they eat, and the young man looks into his plate and eats silently, or answers questions from the house-father, but notes all that takes place . . .

Thus not only a way of life is captured but a human situation universalised with humour and delicacy.

*Thoughts on South Africa* will, we think, be one of the best-selling reprints of the Africana Book Society. Its appeal will not be lost on a new generation of readers.

J.C.

## NEW REPRINT SERIES

The University of Natal Press has announced the publication of the first volume in a new series. Issued jointly by the University Press and the Killie Campbell Africana Library, the series will make available in facsimile valuable out-of-print items of Nataliana and Africana.

The series is planned to cover works of interest to both the historical researcher and the general reader. Detailed notes, and an index are added to the original text.

Number 1 in the series is *Reminiscences of Kafir Life and History* by Charles Brownlee, first published in 1896 by the Lovedale Press. It is the second edition (1916), containing additional material and some outstanding photographs, which has been reproduced. The notes and introduction are by Dr Christopher Saunders, Senior Lecturer in the Department of History at the University of Cape Town.

Brownlee was a key figure in the making of African policy in the nineteenth century Cape Colony. He held a number of important administra-

tive posts and was the Cape's first Secretary for Native Affairs. He visited Natal in the 1830s and again in the 1870s when he helped Sir Bartle Frere negotiate with Cetshwayo.

The second volume in The Killie Campbell Africana Library Reprint Series will be *The Early Annals of Kokstad and Griqualand East* by William Dower. This will be published early in 1978 before the amalgamation of East Griqualand with Natal on April 1st.

### **JOURNAL OF NATAL AND ZULU HISTORY**

The first number of this new journal, to be published annually, will appear early in 1978. It will contain articles focusing on the societies of Natal and Zululand and will also include reviews of books of a wider relevance to South African history. It will be edited by members of the History Departments of the Universities of Natal and Durban/Westville.