

ZIMBABWE

By A. Y. M.

Zimbabwe—the elliptical temple, the valley of Ruins, the Acropolis—phrases so familiar that it is impossible to remember when one first heard them.

To appreciate Zimbabwe one must visit the ruins.

The Elliptical Temple.—A colossal open-air place of worship, 830 feet in circumference, enclosed by high and massive walls 30 feet high, 15 feet wide at the base and narrowed at the summit, built of small, trimmed granite blocks, with a chevron pattern (the most ancient of decorative patterns, the ancient hieroglyph for water, the Zodiac sign and the symbol of fertility) worked in granite blocks so as to appear in relief and extending along that portion of the wall which receives the rays of the rising sun. And within the circling wall, pierced by three gateways—the central area for the general body of worshippers, the long narrow passageway, 220 feet long, exclusively for the use of the priests, leading from the main entrance to the heavily guarded "Holy of Holies." Dominating the temple is the sacred symbol of a phallic worship, the *conical tower*, 31 feet high, 57 feet in circumference at the base, built of small granite blocks so beautifully fitted together that the blade of a pen knife cannot be inserted between them. Before the sacred enclosure, with its conical tower, stands the raised platform, a pulpit. It was from here that the priest addressed the assembled multitude.

The Valley of Ruins.—The crumbling city of a dead people, Rider Haggard's "Dead City," straggling across the valley from the temple to the foot of the Acropolis.

The Acropolis.—A walled fortress crowning the isolated hill of Zimbabwe. The hill, a natural fortress, capped with granite on which are poised, at the most amazing angles, granite boulders of immense size. The massive ramparts, traverses, screen walls, intricate entrances, narrow and labyrinthine passages

and sunken thoroughfares, all have been built to strengthen this natural stronghold. The steep, narrow, stone-stepped pathway leading to the fortress on the southern slope; the walled-in zig-zagging pathway on the northern slope leading down to the water; the look-out platform approached by a winding stairway and commanding a magnificent view of the surrounding country; all give but one explanation to the Acropolis—a *stronghold*.

It was already late afternoon when we climbed the steep ascent. The sun has now disappeared. As we pass through the narrow, deep and shadowy passageways at each turning we half expect to meet "She-who-is-to-be obeyed," that veiled and mysterious figure portrayed by Rider Haggard.

The atmosphere of Zimbabwe is that of mystery. It is intriguing, tantalising. Zimbabwe does not yield readily her secrets. One investigator dug deep and was rewarded with a piece of very ancient China. Another scientist, digging down deeper in the same pit found a ginger-beer bottle!

When and by whom were the structures built, which we call now the Zimbabwe Ruins? These two questions have been asked since the ruins were discovered in 1868. They have not as yet been answered satisfactorily, though many theories have been advanced. Of these three are worthy of consideration.

The Semitic school claims for these ruins a Phœnician origin, approximately 2000 B.C. They connect them with the ancient gold mines, with King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. This is the most romantic explanation, but behind the romance there is good scientific evidence. Whether or no it is the true explanation, it will never lack enthusiastic and able supporters.

Another school, led by Professor Randall-MacIver and Miss Caton Thompson, throws cold water on the ancient theory. It states

confidently that these ruins are only 600 or 800 years old and that they were built by the Bantu. While not wishing to enter into a discussion concerning the merits and demerits of this theory, it is necessary to point out that the arguments advanced in its favour are by no means convincing. From her exhaustive excavations Miss Caton-Thompson has obtained a wealth of evidence, yet it would seem that she has deliberately refused to follow this evidence to its logical conclusions. She has closed her eyes to all else except the Bantu.

The third theory, now gaining favour and for which evidence is slowly being accumulated, is the Arab theory. May hap it is the correct one. The Arabs have always been great traders. During the early days of the Christian era they came down the east coast of Africa, established trading depots there and then pushed inland. They brought with them gaily coloured beads, ornaments of polished brass, and silk and cotton cloths, the products of the East, carefully selected to attract the eye of the barbarous "Kafirs" of the "land of Zenj." They took back the most valuable products of the land, gold and ivory. Their profit was, so one of the first Europeans to watch their methods informs us, "one hundred for one."

Trading thus they would need strongholds well-fortified. Before the coming of Mohammed it is more than likely that they had a form of phallic worship and wherever they settled they would build for themselves places of worship, forcing into labour the primitive dwellers in the land, who, at that remote period, were probably a Bush Hottentot type. Thus were the structures at Zimbabwe built.

It is at night that the spirit of Zimbabwe, aloof, mysterious, impenetrable, grips the visitor.

We were sitting over the glowing logs of our camp fire, pangs of hunger satisfied and pipes drawing peacefully; we talked slowly, with long intervals of silence. Life was indeed good.

Involuntarily we both looked up at the Acropolis; the battlements were silhouetted against a newly-risen moon; we felt the grip of Zimbabwe.

For a while the present was forgotten and we lived in the past.

Up there some fellow-men of a bygone age had looked up at the same newly-risen moon, had wondered at the brilliancy of the stars, had discussed the events of the day, perhaps too had remarked on the queerness of life in general, of women in particular, even as we had been doing.

Who were these people? What manner of life was theirs? How did they dress and what language did they speak? These are but a few of the questions which came tumbling into one's thoughts.

Living in the spirit of the past, we did not calmly weigh up the evidence for and against the various theories—the value to be attached to a piece of Nankin China found by one investigator, or the significance of beads found by a later scientist. The imagination reigned supreme; it made to live again the ancient civilisation.

Sentries paced slowly back and forth on the battlements, lights twinkled in the valley, a burst of laughter from a feast in the fortress came faintly across the night air, or a low monotonous chanting from the temple.

The night grew chilly. With a slight shiver we awoke again to the present.

Still the atmosphere of mystery surrounds the builders of Zimbabwe.

"The pestilence, the desert spear,
Smote them; they passed, with none to
tell
The names of them who laboured here."

—Andrew Lang.

