

HENRY HARTLEY¹

AFRICAN HUNTER AND EXPLORER

CAPTAIN REGINALD HARTLEY THACKERAY

FOR nearly a century it has been accepted as a fact beyond dispute that David Livingstone was the first white man to view the Victoria Falls. So far as I know, his right to that distinction was never disputed until, within the last year or two, there has arisen some controversy on that point. That Livingstone told the world of their existence no one will deny. But that he was the first white man to witness the Falls is a fallacy which the following facts should go a long way to dispel.

As far back as I can remember, it has been a tradition in our family that my maternal grandfather, Henry Hartley, famous in his day as an intrepid big-game hunter and explorer, experienced the thrill of looking on that stupendous cataract and standing beneath its drenching spray, years before that historic moment when, having arrived by canoe from Sesheke, Livingstone "discovered" it and put it on the map.

In putting forward this claim, I should like to point out that I am actuated by the fact that, with the passing of my generation, there will be none to tell the story. For there will naturally be no one living who, like myself, will have been told of Hartley's exploits by men who were closely associated with him and actually accompanied him on some of his expeditions. Therefore, from the historical point of view, apart from any other consideration, I feel it incumbent on me to place on record a short account of his life and adventures.

It is a thousand pities that Henry Hartley, in those early days, attached so little importance to his exploits. Had he assessed them at their historic value instead of regarding them in the light of everyday occurrences that could be of no interest to anyone but himself and those immediately around him, he would have left other than verbal records of his adventures.

¹ Reference is made to this article in the Editorial Notes.

He was singularly devoid of vainglory. To him, the satisfaction derived from the actual accomplishment of his achievements and the adventures that attended them, was all-sufficient. Had he but chronicled his doings during those years—1845 to 1875—during which he made many expeditions to the far interior, much of entrancing interest would have been added to the annals embracing that period, and the libraries of adventure would have been the richer for an account of his exploits. His intimate friendship with Umzilikazi, and the trust reposed in him by the Matebele king, were all to his credit; for there are none so discerning or more able to detect the counterfeit article in man than the so-called savage.

It is generally supposed that those regions which were then described as “Darkest Africa,” and which, until the advent of David Livingstone, were shown merely as blank spaces on the map, had never been trodden by the foot of civilised man. Early in the sixteenth century, however, after the Portuguese navigator, Vasco da Gama, rounded the Cape, the more adventurous Portuguese pioneers from the settlements on the east coast of Africa, made their way inland to prospect for gold. Some of these succeeded in reaching the Mazoe district in Mashonaland, where they carried on extensive mining operations. Those goldfields—rediscovered by Hartley in 1865—were abandoned after a period of mining activity, and the country reverted to its primeval state—if the presence of a scattered mining community can be said to have ever changed it to anything else.

At about that interesting period of South African history which saw the disgruntled voortrekkers streaming northward over the Karroo in their great tented wagons drawn by long teams of oxen, (much as the Mormons did when they sallied forth in search of the Land of Utah) and about six years before Livingstone went to South Africa as a missionary to join Moffat at Kuruman, the Hartley family was living at Bathurst in the Albany district of the Cape Colony. They had arrived with the settlers in the sailing ship *Albury* in 1820. The family consisted of Thomas and Sarah Hartley, seven daughters

and one son. That son, then in his fifth year, was Henry Hartley, who was destined in after life to blaze the trail in the far north which was to prepare the way for many who won distinction in later years.

Hartley was a young man of twenty-two at the time of the great trek. As the lumbering wagons, to the accompaniment of the rifle-like clap of the long ox-whips and the vociferous urging on of the oxen by the drivers, wended their tortuous and bumpy way northward over the virgin veld, he became obsessed with an uncontrollable urge to follow in their wake. He was then living a life of comparative ease with his parents, turning his hand to such work as was required of the early pioneers. He had acquired a fair amount of doctoring skill, and could shape a wagon wheel that would bear comparison with the work of any wheelwright. He was also a first-rate shot and an expert horseman. He was a fine, well set up young man. Of fair complexion, he had the steady blue-grey eye so often found in men of marked ability. Owing to an injury sustained in early babyhood, which resulted in one foot being slightly clubbed, he walked with a limp. Despite this handicap, however, he was as active as any young man of his acquaintance.

At this time he was like a dog straining at the leash. His soul yearned for adventure—for active participation in the events that were taking place in the north. Stories filtered down from the new country beyond the Orange River, telling of the sweeping grass plains of the territory that was later to be known as the Orange Free State, and of the fertile region to the north of the Vaal River. There, the Boers, who had joined in the great trek, had been allowed to measure off considerable tracts of land for themselves. This was done by the crude method of riding at a canter for half an hour in each of four directions, thus forming a rough rectangle. Beacons were erected at each corner, and farms of three thousand morgen (roughly six thousand acres) were thus marked out and registered in the names of those who, by this simple method, acquired the right of ownership. The fly in the

ointment was the proximity of the war-like Zulus, whose impis were ever ready to set out on those predatory forays to which they had been accustomed, and which were responsible for the depletion of the indigenous population of the country. The advent of the Boers was regarded by them as providing fresh victims for plunder and the necessary opportunities for blooding the young warriors. History has proved, however, that in the newcomers they found their masters. The epic battles that took place between the Boer farmers and Dingaan's impis, sent out against them to effect their destruction ; the treacherous murder of a party of seventy Boers under Piet Retief who had gone, by Dingaan's invitation, to his kraal for the purpose of concluding a treaty that was in course of negotiation ; Dingaan's subsequent defeat as an act of reprisal for his perfidy ; the amazing battle between one hundred and thirty mounted Boer farmers and twelve thousand Matebele warriors on the Marico River near Mafeking, in which the blacks lost one-third of their number without loss to the Boers, are all matters of history.

These stirring events served to fan the flame of adventure that burned within the breast of young Henry Hartley. So, at last, unable longer to resist the beckoning call of the north, he set out to follow in the train of the voortrekkers.

Thus, in his early twenties, Hartley arrived in the Transvaal. He settled first at Marico, but moved later to a fertile valley in the Magaliesberg district, building a house and establishing the property of Thorndale, where, in addition to carrying on the usual branches of husbandry, he initiated the cultivation of the "Magaliesberg Tobacco," which later became famous throughout South Africa, and was the solace of many thousands of British soldiers during the South African war.

But the lure of big-game hunting held paramount sway over him. The regions to the north and north-east of the Transvaal were teeming with every description of game—from elephants down to the smallest of the antelopes. It is not surprising, therefore, that he soon equipped himself for extended hunting expeditions in those parts. That was in 1845

—the year that Gordon Cumming, newly arrived from England, entered that territory for the same purpose.

An ox-wagon for a home, a few trusty Native servants to attend to his needs, and his horse and gun for companionship, Hartley soon showed those qualities which raised him high in the esteem of the Natives, and which were to win the implicit trust of Umzilikazi, when later his wandering foot took him further north into the territory of that swarthy potentate.

So far as it is possible to ascertain, Hartley made his first expedition to the north of the Limpopo in 1846 or 1847. Stories told him by the Natives of vast herds of elephant, numerous lions, buffalo, rhinoceros, and the endless variety of fauna that go to make a hunter's paradise—not to mention the lure of gold and the mystery in which the country was shrouded—decided him to set off into the unknown to seek Umzilikazi with the object of securing from him the concession to shoot big-game in his country.

He went by way of the Bamangwato country, then ruled by the one-eyed Sekgoma, father of King Khama and grandfather of Tshekedi, who came under the displeasure of the Colonial Office a few years ago for having ordered the flogging of a white man. On this occasion and on several subsequent trips he took only one wagon. But, in later years, when it had become known throughout Matabeleland that he was the trusted friend of Umzilikazi, he travelled with a more imposing array of wagons and was accompanied by a retinue of servants and such friends as he chose to favour with invitations to join him.

My father, who was invited by Hartley to accompany him on one of his expeditions, says, in an account of the trip, which now lies before me: "I left Cradock on the 18th February, 1862, in a Cape cart drawn by four spanking horses. I took one elephant gun carrying a two-ounce ball, and a 30 bore Hayton rifle. Travelling by way of Colesberg, Phillipolis, Bethany, Bloemfontein, Cronstadt, and Potchefstroom, I arrived at Thorndale (520 miles) after ten days' hard travelling. As the wagons, which had been sent to Grahamstown (600

miles distant) for necessary supplies, had not returned, we set about casting bullets, making veld stools, and preparing the different impedimenta required on an extensive wagon trip. We made our bullets from a mixture of four parts lead and one part tin, which was found most effective for stopping big game. The party consisted of the "Ou Baas" (Henry Hartley), his three sons—Fred, Tom, and Willie—who were then mere boys, Tom Molony—a stepson—and myself. There were also three Hottentots—Cresjan, Dienaar, and Jasper."

I have quoted the above merely to show how different were the facilities for travel and the marvellous stamina of the horses of those days. As a matter of fact, my father performed the return journey a year later in eight days—65 miles per day—riding two horses alternately.

The Hottentot, Cresjan, mentioned above, who was Hartley's wagon driver throughout the period of his hunting career, used to tell when I was a child, of his old master's exploits. One of the stories I remember, was that of Hartley's first visit to the Falls. He told how, hunting farther north than usual, they were puzzled by a persistent thunderous noise, and that Hartley decided to follow it up and investigate its cause. He told with what awe they stood and gazed on the great cataract and the wonderful rainbow that hung over the Falls, and the drenching rain that fell from a cloudless sky. According to Cresjan, Hartley's eldest son, Fred, was a toddler at the time he set out on that expedition. By that reckoning the year can be definitely fixed at 1849—five years before Livingstone arrived upon the scene.

There lives at present at Johannesburg, Mr. Henry Hartley, Junr., the youngest son of the old hunter by a second marriage, who, in an interview which was published in the *Sunday Times* of Johannesburg in November, 1936, definitely asserts that his father discovered the Victoria Falls before the year 1850.

Speaking of his father's early life in the Cape Colony, he says: "The lure of ivory and adventure was too strong. . . . He went and saw Umzilikazi, the Matebele Chief, to obtain a

hunting concession from him. My father gave him a double-barrel shot gun, and he was granted the concession. Needless to say, he was the first white man seen in what is now Rhodesia. He was the first white man to see the Victoria Falls, and he often told me when I was a boy of this great discovery he had made.

"My father always brought his ivory, horns, and hides to Forsman's store in Potchefstroom, where he sold them. . . . When people from the Colony came up north to hunt, Mr. Forsman introduced them to my father, who took them up country with him. In 1852 Mr. Forsman asked my father to come to Potchefstroom, as a gentleman wished to accompany him to the interior. The stranger was none other than David Livingstone. He accompanied my father on that trip, and my father pointed out the Falls to him. My father took me twice to the Falls when I was a boy. It was not only from him, but from many other people that I heard about his trip to the Falls with Livingstone."

The following extract from a letter I received from Lord Baden Powell a few months ago appears to bear out the above assertion that Hartley and Livingstone travelled north together in 1852.

"I was greatly interested," he says, "in the cutting from the Johannesburg newspaper telling of your grandfather's doings in the early days of South Africa, and I was more particularly interested because my uncle, Cotton Oswell, was also an early pioneer there, and accompanied Livingstone to within sight of the spray of the Falls in 1852, when both were bowled over by fever and had to come away again before actually seeing the river."

It is significant that Henry Hartley, Junr., says: "My father *pointed* out the Falls to him." Had they actually arrived at the Falls on that occasion, there would have been no necessity to "point" them out. Their presence would have been obvious enough. But, reaching only within sight of the spray, it requires no great effort of imagination to visualise the earlier pioneer stretching out his arm, and, pointing to

the smoke-like spray, saying to the fever-stricken man, "There, beneath that cloud of mist, there are the Falls."

That Oswell's name is not mentioned by Henry Hartley, Junr., in connection with this expedition is of small moment. So far as the world was concerned it was Livingstone's expedition, although I have reason to know that Oswell defrayed the cost. Livingstone, as the outstanding personality, whose travels and adventures have placed him supreme among the world's explorers, would naturally be mentioned, to the exclusion of such companions who may have accompanied him. I would stress the fact that the year 1852, named by Henry Hartley, Junr., as the year in which the expedition he mentioned took place, is thus circumstantially corroborated in Lord Baden Powell's letter, and cannot be lightly ignored. To my mind, it proves conclusively that Livingstone and Hartley did travel in company to the north on that occasion.

Thus, from several sources, we have evidence which points to Hartley's earlier discovery of the Falls. There is the evidence of Cresjan, his wagon driver, who, by saying that his master's eldest son, Fred, was a child of three when he started on the expedition which resulted in his discovery of the Falls, definitely fixes 1849 as the year in which that event took place, which bears out the assertion made by Henry Hartley, Junr. that his father discovered the Victoria Falls before 1850. There are also those others, now dead, including my father, who were intimately associated with Hartley during his lifetime, who heard from his own lips of his early discovery of the Falls.

With the facilities at his disposal, and the unique position he held by reason of his known friendship with Umzilikazi, which made him *persona grata* wherever he chose to go within the sphere of the Matebele king's influence, it would be strange indeed were a man of Hartley's adventurous spirit to confine his travels to the southern part of Matebeleland.

Hartley was about thirty years of age when he made his first expedition into Matebeleland. He wore a full square beard which reached to his chest. This had the effect of

making him look much older than his years, and his servants in consequence always addressed him "Ou Baas" (old master), the general term by which the Natives address their masters of mature age. Hence, throughout Matebeleland, and by the swarthy king himself, he became known as "Ou Baas." Forty years later, I happened one day to come upon a group of old grizzled indunas squatting outside the Native Commissioner's office in Bulawayo awaiting an audience. I asked them if they remembered the "Ou Baas." It was a joy to see the smile that lit up their faces at mention of his name. The effusion with which they welcomed me when I told them that I was his grandson was almost embarrassing. It was a tribute to him, and proof of the regard with which they had held him and still cherished his memory. By them, and by all the Matebele of his day, Hartley was regarded as an outstanding man. His many fine qualities, chief among which were his courage and resourcefulness, were appreciated by them, and he bore himself on all occasions with a dignity which commended itself, especially to Umzilikazi, and was to a great extent responsible for evoking from him the implicit trust that invested those early days spent in his country with the most pleasant and romantic associations.

On one occasion Umzilikazi, who was no horseman, was thrown from one of Hartley's shooting ponies, sustaining a fractured arm. With his usual resourcefulness, the "Ou Baas" set the bone and bound the injured limb in splints, with the result that in a few weeks the royal arm was as sound as ever.

Much to Hartley's consternation, Umzilikazi insisted on his remaining at the royal kraal as his personal companion, and refused to allow him to return to his home in the Transvaal. At length, however, after pointing out with more than usual insistence the necessity for his return to his family and the anxiety that was bound to have been created by his long absence, the king very reluctantly consented to his going.

"Very well," he said, with a gesture of resignation, "you may go to-morrow."

On the following morning, when he was about to start on his long trek south, a pleasant surprise was in store for him. As a token of friendship and gratitude from the king for mending his arm, three wagon loads of ivory were handed over to him as a present. This commodity was then worth three rix dollars (4s. 6d.) per lb. Computing the loads at 4,000 lbs. each, which was considered to be the normal wagon-load carried on those long treks, the value approximated thirteen hundred pounds sterling.

Hartley was, without doubt, one of the most modest of men. He, the lone English hunter, leonine of appearance, and, as has already been pointed out, noted for his courage and possessing the gift for inspiring trust among the black people, did more than any single man—I think I am not expressing myself extravagantly if I go even farther and claim that he did more than all the early pioneers put together—to instil in the breasts of the Matebele that high regard for the British people which, in later days, swayed Lobengula in favour of granting concessions to Englishmen when others wooed him in vain. To him is due that recognition for the part he played so unostentatiously in the early history of the country, which is accorded to all who, by their achievements, whether done under the selfless inspiration which actuated him, or from motives of patriotism, or personal ambition, have added to the honour and prestige of the flag under which they serve.

The following episode, told by my father, is an instance of Hartley's coolness in moments of danger. It happened when he was trekking from Umzilikazi's country to Shoshong, on his homeward journey. His wagons were outspanned near a kraal whose headman, Chukuru, an impudent rascal with a pock-marked face, had learned that they carried guns and ammunition. His cupidity aroused, he, at the head of a number of armed warriors, demanded of the "Ou Baas" that the guns be handed over to him. This was naturally refused. Hartley's three sons, the oldest of whom was only sixteen, were of the party, in addition to my father. Chukuru's demands became more insistent as the number of warriors

behind him, reinforced from the kraal, were momentarily being added to. Hartley turned to my father. "They mean mischief," he said. "You keep the boys behind the wagon while I deal with them. Hold yourselves in readiness with your rifles in case they attack us."

The situation was, to say the least, critical; for they were hundreds of miles from the nearest white settlement. Climbing on to the wagon, Hartley deliberately sat astride the wagon-box which contained the coveted rifles. Then, with his gun resting across his knees, he addressed Chukuru, who was holding excited consultation with his followers a short distance away. That the forcible seizure of his guns was contemplated he had no doubt.

"Chukuru," he called out. "Hear what I have to say before you do anything rash. You have heard of me—how that the lion—yes, and the rhinoceros, after which you are named—never again see the setting sun after my gun has spoken. Be warned then; for my hand is never steadier than when I am provoked. Now listen to me. Those who know me are aware that I make no vain threats. The first attempt that is made to take any single thing that belongs to me will be the signal for brain sauce to flow. And the brain that will fill the first bowl will be that of Chukuru."

My father, in telling me of this incident, said that for superb cheek he could conceive of nothing to equal it, and that his father-in-law's characteristic courage thus displayed was most inspiring. Seated there, his long beard parted by the breeze and blowing over his shoulders, his eyes flashing fire, and his face grimly set in his determination to resist to the death any violation of his property, he behaved with a calm assurance which might have led one to suppose that he had a regiment of soldiers at his call.

Chukuru was well aware that he made no vain boast. The white man's pluck and daring were too well known, and his reputation as a shot, which was a byword in Umzilikazi's country, was not diminished by repetition further afield. The bold front thus exhibited, coupled with the threat that he,

himself, should be singled out to stop the first bullet, did not quite fit in with his ideas. He was obviously taken aback—a fact the old hunter was quick to perceive and to act upon. He thundered out a peremptory command. “Send your warriors back to the kraal, or, by thunder, I shall carry out my threat.” He raised his gun to his shoulder as he spoke.

Chukuru turned as though he himself would go. But Hartley was up to his game. With him gone there would be no one that he could use as a hostage, and to whom he would be able to issue a similar ultimatum as that which had had so deterrent an effect on Chukuru. A sudden rush by the horde of warriors, and although a few might fall to his and my father’s and the boys’ guns, there could be no doubt as to the result.

“Send your men away first,” Hartley demanded. “You shall stay till the last one has gone.”

A coward at heart, Chukuru, with a bad grace, ordered his men to disperse. But he did it with a prompt obedience which bore eloquent testimony to the respect engendered in him by the menacing attitude adopted by my grandfather and the courage he displayed in a situation fraught with considerable danger.

I must here tell of an incident which my grandfather was fond of telling as a joke against himself. This was vouched for by Robert Jewell, Hartley’s secretary in later years, and by my uncle, the late F. H. Hartley, both of whom witnessed the occurrence.

They were camped one day on a stretch of open ground verging on a belt of Mopani scrub whence several lions suddenly emerged and started besporting themselves a few hundred yards away. At sight of them Hartley’s eyes lighted up. Seizing his gun, he said to the others, “Just watch me bekrui¹ the old male and bowl him over.”

Selecting the largest of a number of anthills that lay midway between himself and the lions, he placed himself directly in line so that his approach should be effectually screened. Then,

¹ *Bekruip*, Afrikaans for ‘stalk.’

crouching low, he proceeded to stalk them in true hunter's style.

Those watching from the wagon were permitted that day to witness one of the most astonishing dramas of the veld. The lion, on observing the wagon, prompted no doubt by a natural curiosity to get a nearer view of the strange contraption, also selected the same anthill to screen his approach from the opposite direction. Thus, the hunter, bending low, his gun carried at the trail, and the lion advancing leisurely, were both making for the same objective. The distance that divided them was momentarily growing less. To shout a warning must almost certainly result in the lion turning and again plunging into the Mopani bush. On the other hand, the watchers knew that Hartley was well able to take care of himself. One of them did actually call out, but the hunter either did not hear or disregarded the warning. The lion, too, took no notice.

They drew nearer and nearer each other—the lion moving with that sinuous motion characteristic of its species, the hunter with the crouching, half-crawling movement of the experienced stalker. They reached the anthill simultaneously, still unconscious of each other's proximity. Then, together they raised their heads, to find themselves only a few feet apart, gazing into each other's eyes. It was a tense moment for the onlookers. What would happen now, they wondered. There they stood facing each other, for all the world like the Lion and Unicorn; the lion rampant, as it were, with his fore-paws resting on one side of the anthill, the hunter with his disengaged hand resting on the other side. It was a wonderful tableau, one that remained engrained on the memories of those who witnessed it for as long as they lived—the lion in all its majestic bearing, the hunter, rifle in hand, his flowing beard imparting to him an appearance scarcely less lion-like than "Leo" himself.

What the lion read in those blue-grey eyes that gazed into his own, none can tell. But it is on record that it turned and fled, throwing up spurts of dust as it sped in its haste towards the Mopani scrub whence he and his companions had emerged.

As for Hartley, for once in his life he was taken completely off his guard. He simply stood and watched the animal in its headlong flight—making no attempt to shoot it. His sense of humour getting the better of him, he sat on the anthill and gave vent to a paroxysm of laughter that must have startled every living creature within a mile radius.

Towards the end of his hunting career Hartley sustained an injury inflicted by a charging rhinoceros which, in his book of reminiscences, is described by Mr. Acutt, a pioneer of Natal, who went north on a hunting expedition in the early 'seventies. He tells how he came upon my grandfather lying in his wagon tent, suffering from several broken ribs which had resulted from the encounter. It seems that he wounded the animal, and the infuriated brute charged him before he could reload. There was no alternative but flight. Unfortunately he tripped and fell prone on the ground, to be crushed a moment later by the weight of the brute as it fell expiring on him. Hartley's comparatively early death at the age of sixty was attributable to the injury then sustained.

The foregoing are just a few incidents in a life that was rich with adventure. I have endeavoured in this short and incomplete biography to portray something of the character of this earliest of British pioneers to penetrate the unexplored interior. Many came later to follow the trail opened up by him—such men as William and Henry Driver, and Henry Francis, who were all hunters of repute in their day, but whose names have passed into oblivion. Then, later still, there came such men as Van Rooyen, Johan Colenbrander, "Matebele" Thompson, and a number of others whose names are linked with the country immediately prior to the advent of Cecil Rhodes. It is hardly necessary to mention F. C. Selous, foremost among all the later hunters, who won world-wide fame not only as a hunter, but as a writer about Rhodesia in its early, romantic days. But there is no name more worthy than that of Henry Hartley for inclusion in the archives of the country which was for so many years his hunting ground—years during which he gained a unique reputation among the

Matebele people, and was honoured and loved by their king.

It was characteristic of Hartley to hide his light in a bushel. He accomplished without shouting about his achievements, and regarded incidents that might well have been accorded large-type headlines in the press, as part of his everyday work. Had it not been for the melancholy fact that his son, Willie, died at the age of seventeen and was buried at the foot of the hill now known as Hartley Hill, which gives its name to the Hartley District in Southern Rhodesia, the name of Henry Hartley would have faded into oblivion, as did those others of lesser repute who were his contemporaries in the 'sixties and 'seventies.

Who that has lived in Rhodesia has not heard of the "Old Hunters Road"? And how many are there who know the story of its origin? Few are aware that that road was the line of trek chosen by Hartley when, in 1865, he embarked on an expedition to the Mazoe and rediscovered the old Portuguese workings, to which a year later, he took Carl Mauch, the German geologist, to give his expert report on them.

The mind conjures up a picture of this pioneer hunter, clad in thorn-proof leather shooting jacket, astride his salted pony, his gun resting on his thigh, his breast-long beard parted by the breeze, riding ahead of his lumbering wagons to select with expert judgment the initial route that should be taken—the route that was destined to become the recognised track of those hunters who came after him. Thus, the reason of its nomenclature—"The Old Hunters Road."

There is romance in the name which, in itself, should ensure that it be not allowed to go off the map. Although less than a century has passed since the wheels of Hartley's wagons made their delineated tracks on the virgin veld, the event is already enveloped in the haze of antiquity; for the darkness that lay as a mantle over the north was just merging into the twilight of dawn that was to herald the full daylight that now floods the great continent.