

24

GILSON, C. H.

Conversation with C. H. Gilson in Washington

GILSON, C.H.

A. 71/231-2

Conversation with C. H. Gilson on Mashonas etc.

8-12-1901

file 71, pp. 231-2.

The Mashonas are called Maswini or Amaswini. The hut tax is £48,000 ^{at 10s} of a hut, ^(there are) therefore 96,000 huts which, at rather over 3 persons a hut, gives about 300,000 natives in the country. The natives are nothing like the Zulus; they have none of the natural dignity ^{and}. They are polygamists, pay (lobola) as far as they are able in cattle. The hoe plays an important part. A girl whom a man marries is given a hoe; if she has previously been deflowered the husband returns the hoe with a hole made in it by him, which hole has to be filled up by a beast (present or compensation). In ~~our~~ unsettled times the sending of a hoe is 'peace' and an assegai 'war'. The Amaswini make better & more intelligent native servants than Zulus. The word 'Amaswini' means 'dirty' or 'unwashed'. They do not wear the headring. They live in small villages; a kraal would have ~~200~~ 200 huts in it. Huts are built somewhat after the fashion of Tonga huts. The witch-doctors have great power in the country. The people are great thieves. A man from whom anything is stolen is justified in helping himself to things belonging to a neighbour. The language is very different from Zulu but on close study is found to be ^{have} some kind of resemblance in structure ^{etc.} &c. Gilson's district lies chiefly north-east of Salisbury. ^{He} has been to ^{Mount} Mt. Wedza where, natives dig iron. ^{The} Natives are very clever in working with iron, can repair guns to the extent of turning a breech-loader into a muzzle-loader with nipple or hammer ^{and make} or making metal beads.

In Mashonaland, ^{almost} due east of Salisbury & near the border, is a ruin of some town with terraces ^{of houses} miles in length. There is a legend among the natives that in the past they drove out a civilized people, and there is current a belief that they will yet do so again. At the residence of some well-known native was found an idol which, it is believed, she worshipped.

Mashonaland is well-watered, ^{and} sandy in parts. The journey from Beira to Salisbury is very pretty through dense jungle &

up granite hills on to high table-land. The administration of Matabeleland is carried on from Salisbury, although the two countries stand far more apart than Zululand & Natal. The Amaswini are treacherous people, when out on duty (G's) police would sleep round about him on all sides.

There is plenty of bush & trees in Mashonaland.

G. has never been able to find out if the Amaswini ever had a King. G. went to the Country in or about June 1897 and has just returned from a 6 months trip from England.

The Angonis.

(Conversation with George R. (Russell?) Deare. (Major). 16.7.02)

17.7.02

Yesterday inside the Post Office Durban about 4.15 P.M. I met Deare and had the following conversation. He was formerly a Sub-Drop of Police, Zululand, about 1889 & 1890. I knew him there. He said he had occasion in 1896 to go with on an expedition to the land of the Angoni people which lies to the West of the lower portion of Lake Nyasa. He went straight to the King an old man of about 80 named Impezeni. With or very near this man he lived about 18 months. He got very fond of the man as the King did of him and this was largely due to the fact that Deare had formerly lived among the Mtetwa people (viz: when, in Zululand, he was stationed at Dondotwa, Lower Umfolozi District). He ~~was~~ very frequently had long talks with the King on Zulu affairs. He learnt the Angoni were an off-shoot of the Mzilikazi people who fled from Tshakani in the early part of the century. He cannot account for the origin of their name. The King declared he was himself born in Zululand and had left there with his parents when a little boy ~~just~~ able to walk a little. Impezeni had not tungu'd though the ^{pulling up of the} heading was a custom of the people. The Angoni allowed the hair to grow high and it was on top of that when done up high that the ring was seen. Impezeni evidently buta'd regiments. The principal or one of the principal kraals numbered over 1200 huts dotted about, not after the manner of the Zulus, but like a little village. The Angoni would number say 250,000. Deare had to walk from Tete (where the boat from Chinde left him) to Impezeni's through very hilly broken, swampy country a distance of over 200 miles. He was assisted