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Six Great Archaeologists

Belzoni • Layard • Schliemann • Evans • Carter • Thompson

by

Frances Wilkins

Hamish Hamilton
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ARCHAEOLOGY today is a scientific study necessitating many years of academic preparation. Indeed, no one but an expert in this particular field would be permitted to take charge of a modern excavation. In the past things were different. There was no recognised training, and men with very varied backgrounds became excavators. Yet even for those days one man stands out, for the unusual set of circumstances which led him to archaeology.

This man was Giovanni Battista Belzoni, born in Padua on November 5th, 1778. Little is known about his childhood, apart from the fact that he was the second of four sons of an impoverished barber. It seems probable that he never left Padua as a child, except for one occasion at the age of thirteen. Then, in company with his nine-year-old brother, Antonio, he decided to run away to Rome. The driver of a cart offered the two boys a lift, but after fifty miles the man suddenly became unpleasant. He demanded money for the ride, and, as the brothers could not pay, insisted that they gave him their coats and their shoes. Antonio began to cry, and before very long the two boys were making their way home on foot.

Three years were to pass before young Giovanni finally realised his ambition to go to Rome. He had spent several years stropping his father’s razors, and lathering the customers who came to be shaved. Now he hoped to find
a more exciting means of livelihood in the bustling city of which he had heard so much.

He was already a giant—not merely tall (about 7 ft.), but broad-shouldered, deep-chested and magnificently proportioned. Sir Walter Scott later described him as ‘the handsomest man (for a giant) I ever saw’. Yet his manner was mild and unassuming. He was kindly, good-natured and even-tempered.

In Rome Belzoni probably took a job maintaining the pipes that supplied the city’s numerous fountains. But it is certain that by February, 1798, he had entered a Capuchin monastery as a postulant. Napoleon’s army had just taken Rome, and he may well have hoped to avoid military service. On the other hand, he may merely have wished to make good the many gaps in his brief and haphazard education. One way or another, it was not long before he had left the monastery and taken to the road. With a colporteur’s pack of rosaries and relics, he trudged north over the Alps, and eventually reached Paris.

Finding life little better in France than in Italy, he went to Holland, where he was joined by his brother, Francesco. Together they made a living buying and selling small articles in and around the busy port of Amsterdam.

After two years in Holland, early in 1803, Giovanni and Francesco arrived in England. They had decided to try their luck in the world of entertainment, and offered their services to the manager of Sadler’s Wells. This ‘Musick House’ had been founded over a hundred years previously, by a Mr. Sadler, beside a small medicinal spring. At this time it was the principal home of pantomime in England, and was also known for presenting spectacular novelties.

The manager was impressed by Giovanni’s physique,
and engaged him as the giant in 'Jack the Giant Killer'. This was, in fact, little more than a 'strong-man' act, in which Belzoni lifted progressively heavier weights. The climax came when, having donned a specially constructed harness, he walked around the stage carrying twelve fellow-actors. Belzoni does not appear to have had many 'lines', apart from an occasional 'Fee, fi, fo, fum', but his act nevertheless was an instant success. Dressed in leopard-skin tunic and high scarlet boots, he must indeed have cut a magnificent figure.

For the whole of the summer Belzoni played at Sadler's Wells, billed as the 'Incredible Patagonian Samson'. He also did various tasks behind the scenes, helping Francesco, who was employed as an apprentice stage-hand. One of these jobs was connected with a display of coloured fountains, which increased the knowledge of hydraulics he had acquired in Rome.

In September Belzoni took an engagement elsewhere, this time at the two-week Bartholomew Fair. This fair had been founded in the early twelfth century for the sale of Flemish cloth, but by Belzoni's time consisted chiefly of stalls selling haberdashery and toys. The fair also attracted a great many entertainers, who erected tent-like booths in which to perform their acts.

It was in one of these booths that Belzoni appeared. After he had performed various exhibitions of strength, he used to offer to lift five members of the audience, for sixpence a head. Then 'Young Hercules', as he was called, would walk around the booth with the five clinging on to him in any way they could.

Meanwhile Belzoni had married. His wife's name was Sarah (her maiden name is unknown), and Charles Dickens describes her as 'delicate-looking' and 'pretty'. She took part, Dickens tells us, in her husband's feats of strength,
by perching on the apex of a human pyramid. Whether this is so or not, she must soon have resigned herself to living the life of a homeless wanderer. For after his appearance at Bartholomew Fair, Belzoni embarked on the career of an itinerant performer. He and Sarah followed the fairs all over the country, with an occasional one-night stand in a public hall. Indeed, there were probably few towns in Britain where Belzoni did not appear in the following ten years.

On most occasions he performed his ‘Herculean Exercises’, but from time to time he presented an act he much preferred. This was ‘A Most Curious Exhibition of Hydraulicks’, consisting of leaping tongues of fire and jets of water. Belzoni preferred it not because it was less exacting, but because it was scientific, and therefore respectable. At one performance the hydraulic machinery went berserk, and the musicians who were accompanying the spectacle were soaked. But Belzoni was no doubt very quickly forgiven, for everyone liked the gentle, handsome giant.

As time went on it was not only novelty hydraulics, but every aspect of the showman’s art that fascinated Belzoni. It became his ambition to master as many acts as possible, and he certainly displayed a remarkable versatility. He performed on musical glasses, devised optical illusions, and presented what was known as a ‘Phantasmagoria’. He even played the title-role in Shakespeare’s ‘Macbeth’, despite the fact that his English was still very halting. He probably took greatest pride in his conjuring, however, and in what he described as ‘Feats of Legerdemain’. As one of his handbills tells us, ‘Signor Belzoni acquaints the Public . . . he will Cut a Man’s Head Off!! And put it on Again!!’

Early in 1813, accompanied by Sarah, Belzoni left
England to perform in Spain. From there he went to Sicily, and, across the narrow strait, caught his first glimpse of Italy for more than twelve years. He was homesick, but he knew it would be foolish to return, for the country was impoverished by many years of war. Instead he decided to visit Constantinople, in the hope of finding work at the Sultan’s court. But after a brief stay on the island of Malta, all thoughts of Constantinople were completely forgotten.

The reason for this sudden change of plan was a meeting with a man nicknamed ‘Ismail Gibraltar’. He was the agent for the Pasha of Egypt, Muhammad Ali, and he was looking for technicians for his country’s new industries. In particular he was hoping to find Western engineers who could modernise Egypt’s ancient system of irrigation.

To Belzoni this seemed like the answer to a prayer, and he began talking eagerly of his knowledge of hydraulics. He could build a water-wheel, he boldly declared, which would entirely revolutionise Egypt’s economy. What ‘Ismail Gibraltar’ thought of this we cannot tell, but there was certainly no holding the excited Belzoni. On May 19th, 1815, he set sail for Alexandria, with his wife and an odd-job boy called James.

The journey took three weeks, and at the end of it they found that the plague was sweeping rapidly through Egypt. They were told that they must all stay in quarantine in a khan (a kind of hostel), and not on any account leave it. This was crowded and uncomfortable, but at least it was a sanctuary until news came at last that the epidemic had abated. Then, on July 1st, they hired a one-masted boat, and sailed slowly up the Nile in the direction of Cairo.

On arriving at his destination five days later, Belzoni’s first concern was to secure an interview with the Pasha.
This could not be arranged for several days, however, and in the meantime he was invited to pay a visit to the Pyramids. It was his first contact with Egyptology, but as far as is known nothing indicated at this time what the future held in store for him. He scrambled up the steps of the famous Great Pyramid, and showed the ordinary interest of an intelligent tourist. Later the same day he ventured inside the pyramid, and unfortunately became stuck in a narrow, twisting corridor. Despite all the Arabs' efforts—some were pulling and some pushing—it was two or three minutes before the giant could be released.

The following Saturday Belzoni set off on a donkey to lay his plans for a wheel before the Pasha. But as he rode along, his legs trailing in the dust, he was kicked in the thigh by a soldier on horseback. It was clearly done deliberately, because the Egyptians at that time were intolerant of the 'Franks' as they called the Europeans. The soldier's stirrup had an edge as sharp as a knife, and blood poured from the two-inch triangular gash. Belzoni was taken to a convent for treatment, and his visit to the Pasha was delayed for a month.

When the meeting did take place, he was received very civilly, and asked to make a full-scale prototype of his wheel. In the meantime the Pasha would pay him £25 per month, as a subsistence allowance for himself and his wife.

Despite this apparent encouragement, however, there were still endless difficulties ahead of Belzoni. The natives were unco-operative, as they feared unemployment might result from introducing a more efficient wheel. They were reluctant to supply Belzoni with materials, and when these did at last arrive he was appalled at their quality. There was trouble over permits, and even Muhammad Ali appeared to have lost all interest in the project.
But at last the wheel was finished, and ‘several connoisseurs in hydraulicks’ were invited by the Pasha to inspect the new invention. An ox was goaded into the drum, and then, slowly and jerkily, the huge wooden wheel began its creaking revolutions. There was certainly no denying the machine’s efficiency. It was more effective than six of the traditional treadmills. Yet the Pasha was in a quandary. He appreciated its value, but he was also aware of the prejudice against it.

Fortunately, from his point of view, however, his problem was solved by a sudden, piercing shriek. Belzoni’s boy, James, with a crowd of young Arabs, had been indulging in horse-play inside the great drum. An accident had happened, and now the boy lay groaning. It was easy to see that he had broken his leg. The natives smiled. Muhammad Ali would never dare to install a wheel that had clearly attempted to take a man’s life.

Belzoni was now in a desperate position. He had no money, and may even have been in debt, since the Pasha had not paid him for the previous five months. He had the responsibility of a wife and crippled servant, and very little chance of obtaining work in Egypt.

It is difficult indeed to know what he would have done, if he had not suddenly remembered a colossal granite bust. This lay half buried in the sand near Thebes, and was known to travellers as the head of Young Memnon. It had been described as being of ‘extraordinary delicacy’ and ‘the most beautiful and perfect piece’ of sculpture in Egypt.

Belzoni had first heard of Young Memnon from Burckhardt, a Swiss explorer, with whom he had formed a warm friendship. Burckhardt had told him that several attempts had been made to move the head, but that so far no one had succeeded in shifting it. Even the French,
who had drilled a hole through its breasts for a hawser, had had to abandon the task in the end.

It would undoubtedly be a difficult operation, Belzoni realised, to transport an eight ton colossus over the sand. A high degree of mechanical skill would be required, and complicated tackle for lifting and hauling. On the other hand, he knew there was a considerable reward awaiting anyone who could transport it intact to Europe.

Belzoni, of course, had no money to finance such an expensive undertaking, but he knew someone who had. This was a man named Henry Salt, the newly appointed British Consul-General in Egypt. Before he left England Salt had been instructed to take advantage of his office to collect as many Egyptian antiquities as he could. As a Foreign Office memorandum of 1815 expressed it, ‘whatever might be the expense’ of his activities in this direction, ‘it would be most cheerfully supported by an enlightened nation’.

Salt was impressed by Belzoni’s confident manner, and on June 28th gave him instructions to move the head to the river. He agreed to meet the expenses for the following three months, and also gave Belzoni £25 to buy other antiquities.

Two days later Belzoni left Cairo with his wife, and on July 22nd they reached the ruins at Thebes.

‘It appeared to me like entering a city of giants,’ he wrote, ‘who, after a long conflict, were all destroyed, leaving the ruins of their various temples as the only proofs of their former existence.’

There was, he said, a ‘forest-like assemblage of ruined temples, columns, obelisks, colossi, sphinxes, portals’ and endless other objects, completely beyond description.

Belzoni’s first thought, naturally, was to locate the head. It was one of the three statues that had once stood
in the mortuary temple belonging to Pharaoh Ramses II. Two of these were badly mutilated, but the one Belzoni sought had miraculously escaped any serious damage. He found it, he relates, ‘near the remains of its body and chair, with its face upwards, and apparently smiling on me at the thought of being taken to England’. The head represented the Pharaoh, and had been mistakenly identified by the Greeks with the Homeric hero, Memnon.

Belzoni had to work fast. The Nile was already rising, and the flood-water would not take a boat of suitable draught. If he delayed now it would be a year before Young Memnon could be moved, and he clearly could not afford to wait so long.

His first problem was to secure the necessary labour. He applied to the local governor, who welcomed him, he tells us, with the ‘politeness which is peculiar to the Turks, even when they do not mean in the slightest degree to comply with your wishes’. The governor assured him he would do everything he could to obtain workmen, but in fact he raised innumerable difficulties. Eventually, however, in return for some gunpowder and 2lb. of coffee he became more co-operative.

As soon as the Arabs found that the work was permitted by the governor they lost no time in offering Belzoni their services. They privately thought the whole project was ludicrous, but were not averse to accepting the mad foreigner’s money. It was not for them to explain that the head could not be moved. And if it could, who would want such a great hunk of stone? Unless, whispered some of them, it was filled with gold. Perhaps Belzoni knew a charm that would make the gold appear.

Belzoni’s method was simple. A carpenter had made him a crude sledge out of several great baulks of timber. The first step was to lever up the head with poles, and
introduce the sledge as far as possible beneath it. Then, with further levering on the opposite side, the colossus was squarely positioned in the centre. When this was done the head was secured with ropes, and the sledge raised to admit four timber rollers. Finally four drag-ropes were attached to the frame, and the colossus was ready to be hauled to the river.

By the evening of the day on which work commenced, the head was advancing slowly across the sand. It was difficult to manoeuvre it between the other pieces of masonry, but inch by inch it was steadily moving forward. As one gang of Arabs strained at each of the ropes, another hastily placed the rollers in position. Arabs were also engaged in constructing a rough road, to prevent the sledge from becoming embedded in the sand.

For two days all went well. Then Belzoni became ill. He had heat-stroke caused by working in the blazing August sun. When he recovered he was faced by yet another tiresome setback. The Arabs had been told not to work for Christian dogs. Almost certainly it was someone in the pay of a French excavator, called Drouetti, who had incited the workmen to down tools.

The position was desperate. In a few days' time the rising water of the Nile would have reached the head. Belzoni sought out the man whom he believed to be responsible, and a heated exchange of words developed into a brawl. Belzoni, not unnaturally, got the better of this, and shook the insolent schemer until he cried for mercy.

Although the following day was the fast of Ramadan, the sweating, singing Arabs worked from dawn to dusk. They did so the next day, and the next, until at last, on August 12th, the colossus reached the Nile. Belzoni had accomplished what was said to be impossible, and to celebrate he gave each of his labourers sixpence.
It took seventeen months for the head to reach England, and during that time Belzoni became a national figure. A statue of such great antiquity as Young Memnon (it was 3,000 years old) and of such huge proportions naturally aroused considerable speculation. When it arrived people flocked to the British Museum to see it, and it inspired Shelley to write his finest sonnet, *Ozymandias*.

It had taken Belzoni only six weeks to move the head, but Salt had instructed him to collect further antiquities. He therefore decided to take a boat up the Nile, and make a reconnaissance of places which seemed to be of interest.

Among the many ancient ruins which the Belzonis visited on this journey were the enchanting remains on the island of Philae. (The construction of the Aswan dam at the turn of this century unfortunately doomed this island to disappear for ever.)

Here Belzoni found twelve finely sculptured blocks of stone, which had once formed part of a temple wall. Each slab was approximately three feet square, and when pieced together they showed figures making offerings to a god. Sad to relate, these blocks were wantonly mutilated some time later, almost certainly by the agents of the Frenchman, Drouet. Belzoni also noticed, lying in front of a temple, a red granite obelisk about 22 feet long. Much to his regret, he decided that, owing to its size, this object had to be left there until the following season. But he promised a local official a large reward if he would guard it until he could return and remove it. Unlike the slabs, the obelisk did eventually reach London, but only after Drouet’s henchmen had made an attempt on Belzoni’s life.

After leaving Philae, the Belonzis sailed further into Nubia, an almost unknown country in the nineteenth
century. In fact, Sarah Belzoni was, in all probability, the first European woman to penetrate so far for several centuries.

The following day the Belzonis had an alarming experience. While the crew of their boat had gone ashore for provisions, a band of Nubian warriors tried to commandeer the vessel. With their shields of crocodile leather and gleaming spears, they must have presented a terrifying sight. Fortunately, Belzoni was carrying a pistol, and was finally able to drive them off.

This was not the only time the travellers were threatened. But Belzoni had enquired beforehand about the tastes of the Nubians, and was well prepared with goods with which to purchase their friendship. Coffee, soap, and tobacco were all popular gifts, but the most valued present of all was a mirror. The Nubians were never tired of admiring their ‘chocolate beauty’, and were delighted, Belzoni tells us, with the cheapest piece of glass. Sometimes he was even able to barter the articles for small sculptured slabs or other minor antiquities.

At last, on September 8th, 1816, Belzoni reached his secret goal—Abu Simbel. His desire to see this place had been kindled by Burckhardt, the same adventurer who had told him about Young Memnon.

The most conspicuous feature of Abu Simbel was a temple hewn out of the cliff beside the river. Six colossal figures, flanked by smaller ones, stood between the limestone buttresses, and in the centre was a doorway leading to the sanctuary itself.

Belzoni wasted no time on this structure, however. His objective was a hundred yards or so to the south. Here Burckhardt had noticed the tips of four further statues, which appeared to be even larger than those outside the temple. The head and shoulders of one were
clear of the sand, and its ear alone was three and a half feet long. Burckhardt also commented on the statue’s beauty, and spoke of its ‘expressive, youthful countenance’.

But it was neither the size nor the beauty of the statues which excited Belzoni. It was the thought of what might lay concealed. For these figures, like the six a little further along the bank, were probably part of a temple façade. Belzoni had only to move a mountain of sand to find a sanctuary that had been lost for almost three millenniums.

Belzoni reckoned that the entrance to the temple must be about thirty-five feet below the surface of the sand. That was to say, about fifteen feet from the base of a carving of the hawk-headed Sun God in the centre of the façade. This did not seem an impossible depth to excavate until Belzoni considered the nature of the sand. At each step he took his foot sank in almost to the ankle, and yet within a few seconds his footprint had disappeared. To excavate in sand like this, reflected Belzoni, would be like trying to make a hole in water.

Nothing daunted, he set about finding some labourers. To do this he needed a permit from the sheikh. The sheikh, however, had twenty wives in different parts of the country, and it was difficult to know exactly where to locate him. When Belzoni did eventually track him down, he smiled tolerantly at the excavator’s exuberant confidence. It would be all but impossible to find the entrance, he maintained, but he agreed to grant Belzoni the necessary permit. In return Belzoni was to give him a half-share of any gold which was found in the tomb, but not a share of the antiquities.

Obtaining the permit was by no means Belzoni’s only problem. Work had hardly begun when the natives became obstructive. They held him to ransom for more pay, and
then refused to carry on unless Belzoni employed three
times more men.

With all these setbacks it was not surprising that the
work progressed slowly. At the end of a week only one
spot had been cleared to any depth. The task was obviously
too big to be completed that season, and Belzoni was
also now in urgent need of money. There was nothing
to be done but to return to Cairo, and hope that Salt
would finance an expedition the next year.

On his way back he paid a short visit to Karnak, where,
despite protests from the French, he set twenty men
digging. At that time it was hardly possible to dig at
Karnak without finding an incredible number of antiquities.
There were indeed so many that there should have been
no need for any rivalry or jealousy among the various
collectors. Lack of money soon halted Belzoni’s work,
however, but not before he had exhumed a group of
twenty statues. These were buried together, presumably
in haste, and were mostly granite effigies of the lion-
headed Fire Goddess. On a later visit to Karnak, Belzoni
unearthed a limestone colossus nearly thirty feet high,
and another enormous head of finely polished red granite.

Belzoni reached Cairo on December 15th, after an
absence of approximately five and a half months. His
only thought, however, was to return to Abu Simbel,
before some other excavator uncovered the temple.

With the payment he had received from Salt for his
services (and a small sum from Burckhardt), he set sail
up the Nile. By now he had a beard, and was wearing
Eastern dress, which was cool but tended to be
encumbering.

Despite his eagerness to return to Abu Simbel, Belzoni
could not resist pausing on his way at Thebes. The chief
purpose of his visit was to search for mummies in the
countless burial places in the rocks. Many of these tombs had been rifled in the Middle Ages, when powdered mummies had been the basis of various medical preparations. Many remained, however, and in their wrappings or beside them were usually rolls of ancient papyrus. These frequently contained beautiful coloured illustrations, and Belzoni knew that they commanded high prices among travellers.

Belzoni also found a profusion of funeral furniture, for the most part objects which the owner had used during life.

‘It would be impossible,’ he wrote, ‘to describe the numerous little articles . . . which are well adapted to show the domestic habits of the ancient Egyptians.’

Belzoni eventually reached the site at Abu Simbel on July 4th, 1817. Work began a week later, but progressed very slowly, and it was not long before the natives lost interest. They preferred to rob passing Moorish caravans rather than dig for a crazy foreign excavator. Belzoni had no option but to shift the sand himself, but fortunately he had several stalwart friends to assist him. Using a kind of toothless rake, which one pulled and one pushed, they had soon reached a depth of twenty feet in some places. The Nubians were amazed at the white man’s progress, and some of them decided to return and help.

After a fortnight Belzoni realised that the colossi were seated, which meant that he would not have so far to dig. Then on July 31st, a few moments before sunset, a small hole became visible in the centre of the rock. Belzoni peered at it excitedly in the failing light. It appeared to be the broken upper corner of a doorway. A few hours later there was an aperture large enough to admit a man, but Belzoni decided not to enter before daybreak.

As soon as it was light he squeezed his vast frame
through the hole, and slid down a slope of sand inside. A few moments afterwards he was joined by his friends, and together they gazed around in wonder.

They were standing in a lofty, pillared hall, in the centre of which were eight colossal figures. These they quickly recognised as representing a king (they were, in fact, Ramses II), as each held the crook and flail of sovereignty. The square pillars at the back were brilliantly decorated with reliefs of the Pharaoh in the presence of the gods. The walls were covered with scenes from his heroic exploits, and vultures with outspread wings kept guard on the ceiling.

Beyond the hall was a small chamber with four square pillars, again showing the king being welcomed by the gods. Further still, through an ante-chamber, lay the sanctuary itself, with four great figures seated beside the west wall. One was the Pharaoh, his earthly life ended, taking his rightful place among his fellow-deities.

It was now that Belzoni's little party showed themselves several generations ahead of their time. For, although Belzoni was disappointed at the lack of portable antiquities, he appreciated the importance of his remarkable find. He had opened the largest and finest rock-cut shrine in Nubia, and he intended to put the entire scene on paper. While his companions drew a plan of the temple to scale, he himself made copies of the reliefs and inscriptions. It was one of the earliest attempts ever made to record an archaeological discovery scientifically. Belzoni worked until his drawing book was soaked in perspiration, for it was hotter than a Turkish bath inside the temple.

After leaving Abu Simbel, Belzoni turned his attention to the famous Valley of the Tombs of the Kings. This was a cleft in the Theban hills, where the Pharaohs of the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties were buried. They
were the rulers of Egypt at the height of her power, and each tomb had originally contained fabulous treasures. Indeed, it was for this reason that the Pharaohs had chosen to be secretly buried in these rock-hewn graves. But the loneliness of the Valley had encouraged robbers, and within a few generations most of the tombs had been rifled.

Belzoni found several coffins in their original positions, although in each case the treasure had been removed in ancient times. The most notable tomb he found almost by accident, after a torrential rainstorm had revealed a slight fissure in the rock.

The workmen were convinced that there was nothing to be found, but Belzoni kept them digging in the rain-soaked earth. By the second day a cutting could be clearly distinguished, and at noon on the third they reached the entrance to a tomb. It was about eighteen feet below the surface of the ground, and was choked with the rubble which the rain had washed down.

As soon as a gap had been made beneath the lintel, Belzoni heaved his great bulk through the doorway. He found himself on the top of a mound of earth and rubbish, with his head almost touching the sloping ceiling. By the light of a candle he peered around him, and saw that the whole corridor was covered with reliefs. The walls were clearly dedicated to the all-powerful Sun God, and the roof depicted vultures against a background of stars.

About twelve yards further on was a long flight of steps, leading down to another highly decorated corridor. This in turn led to the edge of a square pit, some thirty feet deep and with sides twelve feet long. Belzoni naturally thought he could now go no further. Then his candle suddenly lit up the opposite wall. He gazed at it in astonishment. For in the wall was a hole, about two foot square, and dangling beneath it was a palm-fibre rope.
The pit was to deceive, or at least impede, intending tomb-robbers, but the rope was evidence that the plan had failed. Some time in antiquity an audacious gang had climbed down one side and scrambled up the other.

The following day Belzoni bridged the gap with two beams, and found himself in a beautiful hall. The roof was supported by four magnificent pillars, covered with paintings of the Pharaoh with the gods. The walls were also adorned with highly-coloured reliefs, the most interesting representing men of four different nations. Black men, white men, bearded men, painted men—they appeared to be taking part in some mysterious procession.

Down three steps there was another room with decorated walls, but in this case the pictures were nothing more than outlines. It was a second ruse to foil the tomb-robbers, for it was hoped they might think the tomb was unfinished and had never been used. But thieves in ancient times had heard a wall ring hollow, and had found their way into the corridor beyond.

The further Belzoni penetrated the finer were the decorations, until at last he reached an exquisite ante-chamber. The reliefs again depicted the Pharaoh with the gods, and were so lovely that Belzoni called the room 'The Room of Beauties'.

Only one chamber remained—the high vaulted hall where the Pharaoh had been laid to rest three thousand years before. When Belzoni first saw it he was lost in wonder, for the colours of the reliefs seemed to shine like jewels. But a few moments later when he saw the sarcophagus even the reliefs appeared to fade into insignificance. For nothing like it had ever been seen before. Egyptian coffins were normally fashioned from granite, or some equally dull, unattractive material. But this was of alabaster, like a translucent shell.
Unfortunately it was empty and the lid was missing, but inside and out it was inlaid with small blue plaster figures. It was the tomb of Seti I (the father of Ramses II), who died about 1300 B.C. He was a fighter, and obviously much honoured by his people, for his tomb was by far the most splendid in the Valley.

Belzoni had good cause to feel pleased with himself. To have found such a tomb was a major achievement. But his delight was soon mingled with bitterness and frustration, for once again his work was being hindered by lack of funds. He had been unwilling to accept any further sums from Salt, since the latter had described him as 'a man in my employ'. This had infuriated Belzoni who had always regarded Salt as merely an agent for the British Museum. Nevertheless his need for money was urgent, not only for his work but for the necessities of life.

Luckily he was offered £175 for two statues by the Royal Museums of France. This was only a quarter of what he considered they were worth, but at least it was sufficient for his immediate requirements. Later, however, he made an agreement with Salt to receive financial assistance without being an 'employee'.

Early in the summer of 1818, Belzoni made another unexpected discovery. The previous winter he had visited Giza again, and this time the Pyramids had fired his imagination. He was particularly fascinated by the one called the Second, which was generally believed to have no entrance. In fact, many travellers had come to the conclusion that it was solid, and did not contain any interior chambers. But according to strong local Arab tradition, the pyramid had at one time been entered and explored. Perhaps it was this that encouraged Belzoni to defy the experts, although, as he tells us, 'I was confident
that a failure . . . would have drawn on me the laughter of all the world for my presumption'.

He succeeded in enrolling about eighty Arab labourers, and a small gang of children to cart away the earth. He set them to work in the middle of the north side of the pyramid, where he hoped that they might strike a tunnel leading inwards. But the frail Arab hoes were not equal to the task, and the workmen soon began to murmur, ‘Madman! Madman!’

After days of fruitless effort they had found only a passage which had probably been forced by a twelfth century excavator. Belzoni penetrated about 100 feet into this burrow, but falling stones made him beat a hasty retreat.

‘The danger was not only from what might fall on us,’ he wrote, ‘but also from what might fall in our way, close up the passage, and thus bury us alive.’

Belzoni dismissed the workmen and made a closer examination of the four stony flanks of the colossal structure. Then he compared it with its neighbour, the famous Great Pyramid, and suddenly he made a remarkable discovery. The entrance to the Great Pyramid was not in the centre of the north face, as had always been presumed, but several feet to one side.

‘Having made this clear and simple observation, I found that if there were any chamber at all in the Second Pyramid the entrance could not be on the spot where I had excavated, which was in the centre, but . . . nearly thirty feet to the east.’

The next day he summoned the labourers again, and still muttering ‘Madman!’ they began work afresh. At first it seemed as if this excavation would prove as unrewarding as the other, but on March 1st Belzoni’s spirits suddenly soared. For the workmen unearthed
three large blocks of granite, two of them supporting the third as a lintel. This could mean only one thing—that Belzoni's theory was correct, and that there was an entrance to the tomb at this spot. It had taken him less than three weeks to find the answer to a puzzle which had baffled the scholars of the world for centuries.

When the true entrance was laid bare on March 2nd, it was seen to be a passage lined with rough-dressed granite blocks. It was about four feet high, three feet six inches wide, and descended towards the centre for a hundred and four feet. Unfortunately it was blocked by rubble for the whole of its length, and it took Belzoni and his workmen over two days to clear it.

When this was finally accomplished, Belzoni found, at the point where the passage levelled out, a solid granite slab. It fitted into vertical grooves in the walls, and appeared to block the way completely. Clearing away further rubbish on the ground, however, revealed that there was a six inch gap at the bottom. Then Belzoni discovered, by poking a straw between the stone and the roof, that there was a cavity in the ceiling above it. It was, in fact, a portcullis which, by means of a lever inserted beneath it, could be forced up the grooves. The problem, however, as Belzoni quickly realised, was how to exert any leverage within the confines of the tunnel.

'When two men are abreast of each other they cannot move, but it requires several men to raise a piece of granite not less than six feet high.'

The only method was to raise it an inch at a time, and pack stones into the grooves at the side to support it. It was a laborious task, but at last the gap was large enough to admit a thin Arab, and, later still, Belzoni.

Beyond the portcullis the passage was level for a few yards, and then the floor dropped away about fifteen
feet. Belzoni used a rope to negotiate the drop, and then walked up a slope towards the centre of the pyramid. Finally, about 130 feet further, he found himself in the burial chamber itself.

Belzoni entered it with awe. Then he looked towards the west end, hoping to see a great sarcophagus. He was disappointed, for the chamber seemed to contain only stones, but as he walked forward he received a surprise. For there was a sarcophagus, sunk into the floor and surrounded by several large blocks of granite. It was easy to see it was empty, however, apart from some rubble, for the lid was broken off on one side.

The tomb had almost certainly been robbed in ancient times, and there was nothing for Belzoni to send to the museums. But his careful measurements and descriptions of the halls and corridors have proved of considerable value to Egyptologists.

After opening the pyramid, Belzoni was uncertain where it would be most profitable to excavate next. The French had laid claim to the majority of sites, and there was, as usual, the question of expense. Finally he set men to work on either side of the Nile, and soon made a number of interesting discoveries.

Most notable was a fine seated statue in black granite, nearly ten feet high, of Amenhetep III. Belzoni found this while working on behalf of Salt, and knew, to his chagrin, that he must hand it over to the Consul. Before he did so, however, he could not resist carving his name in large letters on the base of the statue. Here it may still be seen, in the British Museum, a reminder of Belzoni’s regret and annoyance.

The remainder of the summer Belzoni spent taking wax impressions of the reliefs and hieroglyphs in the tomb of Seti I. His object was to make a miniature replica
of the tomb, which he could ‘erect . . . in any part of Europe’. It was a formidable task, for there were nearly two hundred life-size figures, not less than eight hundred smaller ones, and about five hundred inscriptions. Belzoni was fortunate, however, in meeting a young doctor, who was a skilful draughtsman and interested in antiquities. He made many copies of the decorations of the tomb, reproducing them in all their brilliant colours.

When at last the work was finished (towards the end of September), another scheme was taking shape in Belzoni’s mind. He would make an expedition to the ruins in the desert, and, in particular, try to find the forgotten town of Berenice. This was a port on the shores of the Red Sea, built by Ptolemy II in the third century B.C. He set off with sixteen camels, twelve men and two boys, a small pocket telescope and one very old map. But long before he reached the accepted site of Berenice, he came to his amazement upon a large group of mounds.

This was clearly an ancient settlement of some kind, and Belzoni was puzzled to know what it could be. Most interesting of all was a small Egyptian temple, built of limestone, the top of which protruded above the sandy earth. It was the first to be discovered so far from the Nile, and had probably been attended largely by Egyptian sailors. By an oversight Belzoni had not brought a spade, but he scooped away the sand around the temple with a shell. In this manner he uncovered some interesting bas-reliefs, part of an inscription and several figures.

When Belzoni resumed his journey across the desert, he found no more ruins in that direction. He then realised that the mounds had indeed been Berenice, and that the cartographers had been mistaken about its position.

This was Belzoni’s final expedition as an excavator, except for a few sorties into the Eastern Desert. The
following year (September, 1819), he and Sarah 'embarked, thank God! for Europe'. According to Belzoni's own account, the immediate cause of his departure was the intolerable behaviour of the French. He alleged that there was hardly a site they did not claim, and that their conduct was 'a disgrace to human nature'.

The Belzonis arrived in Padua a few days before Christmas, to find an ecstatic welcome awaiting them. It was almost twenty years since the barber's son had left, and now he had returned to his birthplace as a celebrity. There was a civic reception, and the mayor of the city ordered a commemorative medal to be struck.

By the end of March Belzoni had arrived in London, where his first concern was the publication of his book. This was a delightful, naïve account of his adventures, based largely on his day-to-day diary. Although the English in some places could hardly have been worse, the book was well received by the serious periodicals. The critics appreciated that Belzoni had uncovered a mass of new evidence about the ancient Egyptians. They also respected his accurate observations, and his obvious love and enthusiasm for his subject. His conclusions and theories were often wildly absurd, but that was hardly surprising since he was not an expert. As The Quarterly Review expressed it, 'Though no scholar himself... he points out the road, and makes it easy for others to travel over.'

While his book was in preparation, Belzoni was occupied with an exhibition he was staging in Piccadilly. The central attraction was to be the model of the tomb of Seti I, made in plaster of paris from his wax impressions. Also on view would be numerous miscellaneous antiquities, which Belzoni had brought home from his various excavations.

The exhibition duly opened, and was such a startling
success that plans were soon afoot to have it shown on
the Continent. Belzoni himself visited Russia the following
spring to make arrangements for its presentation in St.
Petersburg (Leningrad). During his visit he had the
honour of being received by the Tsar, who gave him a
magnificent oriental ring.

Back in Regency London society Belzoni found himself
a ‘lion’—a much sought after guest for all fashionable
functions. But he never forgot his humble origins, and
his love and concern for his family are evident in his
letters. Indeed the profits from both his exhibition and
his book were spent largely on providing for his numerous
relations.

Towards the end of 1822, Belzoni became restless and
decided to go on his travels once again. This time his
intention was to trace the source of the River Niger, and
visit the mysterious town of Timbuktu.

He left Paris in February, and five weeks later was in
Gibraltar, from where he crossed to Tangier. Trouble in
the Arab world hindered his progress in this direction,
however, and by June he was back once more in Gibraltar.
From there he travelled via Madiera to the Canary Islands,
where he was given a passage on a naval vessel to Benin.
Then, first by brig and later by canoe, he made his way
to the small town of Gwato.

But the day after his arrival (on October 24th), Belzoni
became violently ill with dysentry. He seemed to sense
that he was dying, and wrote to some friends, ‘I am fully
resigned to my fate’, and asked to be remembered in their
prayers.

He quickly grew weaker and more and more exhausted,
until his life came to an end on December 3rd. He was
buried in the silence of an African night, under the
spreading branches of an arasma tree.
It is easy to be critical of nineteenth century excavators, and Belzoni has sometimes been described as a 'tomb-robber'. It must be remembered, however, that the aim in his time was not (as it is today) to throw light on the past. It was to amass as many portable antiquities as possible to grace the galleries of the nation that financed the expeditions. At this Belzoni was astonishingly successful, as the Egyptian Rooms at the British Museum abundantly testify.

Yet even by modern standards Belzoni deserves to be called great. For he awoke an interest in the past, in this country in particular, without which modern archaeology could never have been born.

Giovanni Belzoni, 'the once starving mountebank became one of the most illustrious men in Europe!' wrote Dickens, 'an encouraging example to those who have, not only sound heads to project, but also stout hearts to execute'.

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AUSTEN HENRY LAYARD
(1817-1894)

AMONG all the treasures in the British Museum there is nothing more impressive than the great winged beasts which once guarded the palaces of the kings of Nimrud. There can also be few more exciting stories than the account of how they were discovered and brought back to England over a hundred years ago by Austen Henry Layard.

Born in Paris on March 5th, 1817, the son of a retired member of the Ceylon Civil Service, Layard spent most of his childhood in France, Italy and Switzerland. He was a voracious reader, and by the age of twelve had read every novel by Sir Walter Scott then published.

‘But the work in which I took most delight,’ he wrote later, ‘was The Arabian Nights. I was accustomed to spend hours stretched upon the floor, under the great gilded Florentine table, poring over this enchanting volume.’

Layard’s formal education was haphazard, and when he did go to school he was impatient of authority and sometimes openly rebellious. On one occasion he even threw an inkstand at a master whom he believed to be treating the boys unjustly.

He finally left school at the age of sixteen, and was sent to London to study law. But he was obsessed with the East, and after six years he ‘determined for various reasons to
leave England and to seek a career elsewhere'. It was then that fortune smiled on him, for a relative offered him employment in Ceylon as a tea-planter. Another young man of his own age, called Mitford, received a similar offer, and when Layard heard of this he immediately approached Mitford with a proposition. This was that they should travel to Ceylon together by land.

Even today this would be considered an enterprising idea, but in Layard's time it must have seemed preposterous. Arabian Asia, which they would have to cross, had been unexplored by Europeans since the end of the last Crusade, six hundred years before. Nevertheless, Layard persuaded Mitford to accompany him, and the two of them began to make their plans.

The first stage of the journey was to take them across Central Europe to Constantinople (Istanbul), and from there they were to cross Asia Minor and the Mesopotamian Desert to Baghdad.

'From Baghdad,' wrote Layard, 'we believed that we should be able to reach India, through Persia and Afghanistan, and ultimately Colombo.'

A British diplomat who had recently returned from Persia gave the two adventurers some sound advice.

'You must,' he said, 'either travel as important personages, with a retinue of servants and an adequate escort, or alone, as poor men, with nothing to excite the cupidity of the people with whom you will have to mix.'

Since Layard's total wealth amounted to a mere £200, and Mitford possessed even less, there was no doubt in their minds as to which of the two courses they should adopt.

To prepare himself for the journey Layard acquired a smattering of Arabic and Persian. He also learnt the rudi-
ments of medicine and navigation. Thus equipped the two young men left England on July 8th, 1839.

It is hardly surprising that all did not go according to plan. The first setback occurred in Bulgaria, when Layard fell ill with gastritis, and had to receive treatment from an Armenian doctor.

'He bled me twice copiously,' recalled Layard later, 'and, moreover, made a large circle with a pen and ink on my stomach, which he ordered to be filled with leeches.'

This drastic treatment so enfeebled Layard that it was several weeks before he was able to continue the journey.

Mitford, meanwhile, had gone ahead to Asia Minor. Layard rejoined him as soon as he had regained sufficient strength, and together they reached Jerusalem in January, 1840. They were soon to part company once more, however, as Layard was determined to visit the famous ruins at Petra. This, in Mitford's opinion, was a foolhardy project, as even the British Consul at Jerusalem had warned Layard that he would be lucky if he arrived at his destination alive. It was less than thirty years since the first modern European (Belzoni's friend Burckhardt) had gazed on the lost city, and the surrounding countryside was still infested with brigands, who would not hesitate to shoot a stranger on sight.

Nonetheless, with only a single Arab as a guide, Layard set off across the burning wilderness. Eventually he reached El Sik, a long, narrow gorge, which even today Arabs themselves fear to enter after dark. Layard, however, had no such qualms, and winding his way between the towering sides of the cleft, he arrived at Petra without mishap. Unlike the average modern visitor, he was not overawed by the sight of temples, tombs and houses carved like cameos from the very face of the pink sandstone cliffs. Unmoved by the obvious glamour of their
setting he viewed them dispassionately as examples of architecture, and declared them to be 'debased and wanting both in elegance and grandeur'.

Having made a reasonably leisurely study of the ruins, in spite of being harried by cut-throat Bedouins the whole time, he set off northwards to rejoin Mitford. Near Kerak he was set upon by bandits and robbed of his clothes and all his possessions except his double-barrelled gun. Later, by sheer force of personality, he persuaded the local sheikh to insist that the assailants restored his property. This they did, and he continued on his way to Amman. But not far from Damascus he was robbed again, and he arrived at the British Consulate there in the pouring rain, half-naked, penniless, and, of course, on foot. Thirty-eight years later, when he entered Damascus as the British Ambassador, he recalled this earlier visit with amusement.

Layard next crossed the Lebanon to Beirut, and from there continued north, pausing on the way to visit the ruins of the colossal Roman temples at Baalbec. At Aleppo he found Mitford fuming at the delay. Indeed, so impatient was he that he had almost decided to continue the journey alone. But he consented, Layard tells us, 'to remain there a few days more, to give me and my mare a little rest, of which we were very much in need'. On March 18th they left Aleppo, and on May 2nd arrived in Mosul.

Together with two archaeologists who happened to be staying in Mosul at the time, the two young travellers then paid a visit to the mounds at Ashur (near the modern town of Sharquat), beneath which were buried the first two capitals of Assyria. It was an uneventful trip, and would hardly merit a place in this story, but for one fact. On the way they camped near the sulphur springs at Hammam Alil, and the next day climbed an ancient mound just outside the village. And it was from the
summit of this mound, as he looked far away down the valley of the Tigris, that Layard had his first glimpse of the great mound called Nimrud—the mound whose buried treasures were to make his name a household word in Victorian England.

‘A stern, shapeless mound, rising like a hill from the scorched plain,’ was his description at the time. But he also recorded that the huge mounds of Assyria, beneath which so many great cities of the past lay hidden, made a deep impression on him, and gave rise to ‘earnest reflection’.

After a fairly lengthy visit to Ashur, Layard and his companions returned to Mosul, where Layard made a cursory examination of the mounds on the opposite side of the Tigris. He would have liked to have lingered several weeks, but Mitford was once more becoming impatient. They therefore boarded a creaking raft, and began to make their way south along the river. But as they tossed on the fast flowing currents near Nimrud, Layard felt a pang of regret. The great mound, with its conical peak, was already exerting its influence over him. He wrote,

‘The spring rains had clothed the mound with the richest verdure, and the fertile meadows, which stretched around it, were covered with flowers of every hue. Amidst the luxuriant vegetation were partly concealed a few fragments of bricks, pottery and alabaster.’

Indeed, so fascinated was Layard that shortly afterwards he wrote to a wealthy merchant friend in England suggesting that the latter should devote some part of his fortune to financing the excavation of the site, and adding that the antiquities discovered ‘would amply repay the expense’. The friend obviously did not share Layard’s enthusiasm, as there is no record that he even replied.
Despite Layard’s sorrow at having to bid farewell to Nimrud, he was looking forward with eager anticipation to his first sight of Babylon.

‘We continued to float through endless groves of palm trees,’ he wrote, ‘the air laden with the delicious odour of the orange and citron trees, until, sweeping round a bend of the river, we came in sight of the city rising majestically on its banks—with innumerable painted domes and minarets, its lofty walls and towers, its palaces and painted kiosks.’

For a moment it appeared as if the city that provided the setting for *The Arabian Nights*, the city of Layard’s boyish dreams, was as fabulous in reality as in imagination.

‘It seemed to be all that I had pictured to myself of the city of the Caliphs, and the sojourn of Haroun-al-Raschid.’

But after disembarking Layard discovered to his regret that his first impressions had been misleading.

‘I found that, instead of the magnificent capital whose distant views had enchanted me, I was in the midst of an assemblage of mean, mud-built dwellings under a heap of ruins.’

Despite this disappointment Layard and Mitford enjoyed the ‘agreeable and intelligent society of the small English colony’ in Baghdad, and Layard in particular was delighted to find that several of its members were amateur archaeologists.

The two young men next joined a caravan bound for Persia. Layard had by this time taken to wearing Persian costume. He had also had the crown of his head shaved ‘leaving a ringlet on either side’, and had had his hair and beard ‘dyed a deep shining black’. At Hamadan the party found the Shah encamped, with the whole of his court and a disreputable looking army. He had been
contemplating an attack on Baghdad, but had decided against it, and was now returning home to Teheran. This gave Layard and Mitford the opportunity to apply personally for the necessary permits to continue towards Ceylon. These they received in little more than a month—an incredibly short space of time for any official business to be transacted in the East.

To prevent this month of enforced inactivity seeming irksome, Layard decided to study the wedge-shaped characters that formed the cuneiform script of ancient Assyria. His interest had already been aroused by the inscriptions he had seen on the fragments of pottery and bricks at Nimrud, and it was not long before he was utterly absorbed. It was probably this new-found interest, combined with an ever-increasing urge to study the Assyrian mounds more closely, which finally determined him not to continue his journey to Ceylon. Instead, he bade farewell to Mitford when the permits at last arrived, and began to make his way towards the Persian Gulf.

His intention was to visit the ruins at Susa, but his curiosity led him further and further afield. Still dressed in native costume, and accompanied only by a local commissar, which his permit to travel in Persia demanded, he wandered far and wide across the wild Persian highlands. Not even recurrent bouts of fever deterred him. Nor did attacks by turbulent tribesmen. Indeed, before he became known among the brigands who lurked in every hill, he was stripped and robbed almost every few days. Yet so compelling was his personality that more times than not he was able to persuade the local sheikh to order his property to be returned. On one particular occasion, when he was mistaken for a Turk, he was robbed and beaten, and would have been killed but for the intervention of an Arab who heard him speaking English. He eventually
reached his destination almost dying from exhaustion and privation. When news of this incident reached the paramount sheikh he at once ordered that all Layard's possessions should be restored. What was more, the sheikh made a promise that in future Layard could travel through the whole of his territory, 'with a tray of gold on his head' if he wished, and that none of the tribesmen would molest him.

After many months and innumerable adventures, Layard returned once more to Baghdad. He still had to support himself on the £200 with which he had originally left England two years before, and so, for economy's sake, he rented a tiny mud hut. He spent much of his day sitting on a thread-bare carpet, reading, and at night he slept on a mattress on the roof. From time to time he paid visits with friends to the many mounds around the Tigris, and came to know the country almost as well as the natives themselves did. Writing later of these early years, he said,

'I look back with feelings of grateful delight to those happy days when, free and unheeded, we left at dawn the humble cottage or cheerful tent, and, lingering as we listed, unconscious of distance and the hour, found ourselves, as the sun went down, under some hoary ruin... or in some crumbling village bearing a well-known name.'

But these 'happy days' were brought to an abrupt end early in 1842, when it became clear that the Sultan of Turkey was about to declare war on Persia. The cause of the dispute was an alleged infringement by the Persians of Turkish territorial rights. Layard, moreover, had been an eye-witness of much of what had occurred, and he was therefore asked to give a first-hand account of the incidents to the British Ambassador at Constantinople. It was hoped that the British and the Russians might be able to act as mediators. Layard, somewhat reluctantly, agreed
to the proposal, and left Baghdad in June to travel northwards. Thus it was that Layard saw Nimrud again, and all his old enthusiasm was once more aroused. If only he had the money to excavate it!

While in Mosul Layard made the acquaintance of the newly appointed French consul, by name Paul-Emile Botta, who was already being recognised as an archaeologist of distinction. He had just commenced digging on one of the two mounds on the other side of the Tigris from Mosul, but nothing of significance had been found at that time.

These mounds had always been regarded by the Jews and Arabs as the traditional site of Nineveh, the third capital of Assyria. This ancient city is described in Genesis (chapter x, verses 8-11) as being built by ‘Nimrod, the mighty hunter before the Lord’. Very little was known about its history, except that it was believed to have been a rich and powerful city right up to the time of its destruction (about 600 B.C.). Even the manner of its destruction was unknown. According to the most romantic, but least trustworthy, legend, it was besieged for three years by the Babylonians and the Medes, but did not fall until the Tigris rose so high that it washed away its walls.

Layard was naturally excited about Botta’s work, and Botta promised to keep him informed of the progress of the excavations.

After resting for a few days in Mosul, Layard had to press on to Constantinople, but on his arrival there he had some difficulty in obtaining an audience with the Ambassador. This was perhaps not altogether surprising, in view of the fact that he was still dressed like a wild Persian tribesman. To quote his own words,

‘A fashionably-dressed young gentleman appeared, asked me roughly for the dispatches of which I was the
bearer, informed me that the Ambassador was much too occupied to see anyone, and, turning on his heel, left the room.'

Layard, who had been in the saddle for many days and nights for the special purpose of speaking to the Ambassador personally, was not unnaturally extremely angry. He declared his intention of leaving immediately for Vienna, and was in fact on the quayside when a messenger arrived bearing a letter for him.

It was from the Ambassador, Sir Stratford Canning, and said that the official who had treated Layard so brusquely had been reprimanded. It apologised for the unfortunate incident, and ended with the request that Layard should 'instead of going away, come and dine here tomorrow'.

Layard hesitated. Although he could hardly have known it at the time, this decision was to decide the whole pattern of his future. He read the letter again, and then he strode off the quay. The next day he met Sir Stratford Canning.

This was the beginning of one of the most fruitful friendships in the history of archaeology. Canning at once recognised Layard's intimate knowledge of Turkish and Persian affairs, and invited him to become one of his personal counsellors, at least until the preliminary negotiations for a settlement of the border trouble had been reached. These took many months, and during this time such a strong friendship grew up between Canning and Layard that the young explorer eventually spent two years in the service of the Embassy. They must have been two years of great happiness, for Canning was almost as enthusiastic about the past as Layard was himself, and was always willing to listen and to offer constructive criticism when Layard described his plans for excavating Nimrud.

During all this time news constantly reached Layard
of the progress of Botta’s work near Mosul. Early in 1843 a special dispatch told him that Botta had given up work on this mound as he had heard of some sculptured stones being found fourteen miles to the north, and he believed that this new site might be ancient Nineveh. Within a week Botta’s judgement appeared to have been proved right. The remains of a huge Assyrian palace had been found, containing large slabs of gypsum, covered with pictures cut in relief and cuneiform inscriptions. Overjoyed, Botta at once sent a message to Paris, declaring ‘Ninève est retrouvé!’

This naturally aroused the envy of both Layard and Canning, but Layard was not as convinced as Botta that the palace was the remains of Nineveh. He believed that there were the ruins of many Assyrian palaces hidden beneath mounds all over the country, and the thought repeatedly came into his mind that it might be the mound at Nimrud that concealed ancient Nineveh.

Meanwhile, Canning had been making representations to the Foreign Office that Layard’s appointment at the Embassy should be officially recognised. By early 1845, however, when Canning was due to return home on leave, no answer had been received and he realised that his request had been rejected. This placed Canning in a quandary, as, not unnaturally, he hesitated to leave Constantinople knowing his young protégé had no means of livelihood. As a result he began to contemplate providing sufficient funds to allow Layard to put his theories about Nimrud to the test.

It was in the autumn of the same year that Canning finally made up his mind, and informed Layard that he would temporarily incur the expense of the excavations. He could not afford to finance them indefinitely, he pointed out, but if the results appeared to justify it some public body might offer a subsidy later. Layard, it is hardly
necessary to add, accepted the offer with alacrity, and within twelve days of receiving the authority to dig ('as fast as post-horses could carry me') he was back once more in Mosul.

On reaching his destination, Layard presented his credentials to the Turkish Governor, a man named Mohammed Pasha, whose character was as unsavoury as his appearance. He was short and fat, badly pitted with smallpox scars, and possessed only one ear and one eye. He was a thoroughly unscrupulous governor, who extorted money from the inhabitants of Mosul and the surrounding villages in a completely merciless manner. One of his habits was to pay calls on the villagers (who by custom were forced to provide a banquet for him), and then to demand 'tooth-money', that is compensation 'for the wear and tear on his teeth in masticating the food he had condescended to receive from the inhabitants'.

Layar at once recognised the Pasha for the kind of man he was, and decided not to tell him the true reason for his visit to Mosul. He feared that the Pasha might incite the local authorities, who were fanatical Moslems and therefore opposed to excavations, to place obstacles in the way of his work at Nimrud. Instead, he enlisted the help of a well-known English sportsman who happened to be staying in Mosul at the time. Together they loaded a large raft with horses, greyhounds and guns, and announced that they intended to shoot wild boar. Surreptitiously, however, Layard hid a number of excavating tools among the hunting equipment.

On November 8th they set off, drifting down the Tigris in the direction of Nimrud. The countryside presented a very different picture now from its appearance in the spring five years before. In place of the 'luxuriant vegetation' which Layard had seen on his previous visit, he now
found the land parched by the heat of the recent summer. The villages, too, presented a depressed air, because of the predatory raids of the Pasha. Indeed, at Nimrud, which they reached on the evening of the same day, they found the surrounding hamlets in ruins, the inhabitants having resumed a nomadic way of life.

With his companion Layard spent the first night in a hovel, with a sheikh who was hiding from the Pasha's officers, but he could not sleep for wondering what the future held in store for him. As he tossed and turned there floated into his mind 'visions of palaces underground, of gigantic monsters, of sculptured figures and endless inscriptions'.

Next morning the sheikh visited the nearest settlement, and returned with six Arabs who were willing to be hired. But most of the day Layard spent wandering over the mound, looking for a promising point at which to commence digging. By the following morning he had chosen two separate spots, at both of which the tops of alabaster slabs could be seen. He gave orders for the workmen to divide into two gangs, so that work could begin at once at both points. The six of them laboured for the whole of the day, and when at last night fell each gang had partially cleared a square of slabs. Incredible as it may seem, in a single day, with only six labourers, Layard had discovered two of the greatest palaces in Assyria.

The next day five additional workmen were hired, and Layard proceeded to clear the chambers further. The only finds of any value that were made, however, were some delicately carved ivory figures, covered with fragments of gold leaf, but they fell to pieces on exposure to the air.

Layard also cut a trench into the conical point at the north-west corner of the mound, which, much to his surprise, proved to be made of solid mud-brick. It was in
fact a ziggurat, a tower similar in shape to a pyramid, but with each successive storey smaller than the one beneath. Botta had unearthed a structure of the same kind a short while previously, but, like Layard, was baffled as to what it could be.

At this point Layard decided to visit the Pasha again, and offer some explanation of why he was not on a boar-hunt. Instinct told him that rumours of his excavations would probably have reached the Pasha’s ears by this time.

He arrived in Mosul to find the city in a state of great excitement. Everyone was saying that the Pasha was dead. This was in fact nothing but a cunning ruse on the Pasha’s part, for as soon as the news of his ‘death’ reached the bazaars, spies were sent to listen to the remarks that were passed. Then anyone who had been rash enough to be uncomplimentary about the Pasha was immediately arrested, and heavily fined.

As Layard expected, the Pasha had heard about the diggings, but believed Layard was looking for treasure. To prove that his information was well founded, he produced a grubby piece of paper containing a minute fragment of the gold leaf that had fallen off one of the ivory figures. He did not voice any objections to the excavations, however, and agreed to Layard’s suggestion that on his return to Nimrud Layard should be accompanied by an agent of the Pasha, who would take charge of any treasure which was found. Layard was, of course, grateful that he was to be allowed to continue his work in peace for the present, but he was not naïve enough to suppose that he would not meet with further opposition.

Layard’s visit to the Pasha was followed by several disappointing days in Nimrud, when nothing of any value was found. The winter rains had begun, and it was
already turning cold. Soon the conditions would be so bad that work would have to be suspended until the spring. Layard, usually high-spirited, began to feel depressed. He was still living in a hovel with a leaking roof, and his nights were spent, as he himself described, ‘crouched up in a corner under a rude table, surrounded by trenches to carry off the accumulating water’.

Then, on November 28th, during a violent storm, Layard made his first major discovery. Out of the sodden earth appeared the tops of two slabs. Despite the teeming rain the excited labourers dug deeper, and slowly the slabs were brought to the surface. Immediately it was clear that they were of considerable interest, for on each of them were reliefs depicting battle-scenes.

On one the siege of a castle was portrayed. From the turrets the defenders rained arrows on the attackers, while one of their number attempted to set fire to a siege-engine. The attackers in their turn were trying to burn the castle gate, and force the foundations of the walls with a crowbar. From one of the castle windows a woman with long hair was apparently begging the attackers for mercy. All the brutality and savage strength of the ancient Assyrians was clearly shown in this amazing relief.

That very evening, however, while Layard was still congratulating himself on his finds, a Persian officer of his acquaintance came to visit him. He informed Layard that the Pasha intended to stop the excavations, and among other things had threatened to punish any Arab who agreed to work on the site.

Layard at once set out for Mosul, but when he taxed the Pasha the crafty governor pretended to be surprised, and promised to see that Layard received every assistance in the future.

Layard returned to Nimrud wondering what the Pasha’s
next move would be. He did not have to wonder long. The following morning orders came that work was to cease completely.

Once more Layard went to see the Pasha. This time the Pasha was profusely apologetic, but said that the matter was out of his hands. There had been a complaint, he explained, that the excavations were disturbing a Moslem burial ground, and that this would cause trouble among the Mohammedans. Returning disconsolately to Nimrud Layard encountered his friend the officer, who admitted that there were few, if any, graves on the mound, and added that the Pasha had ordered him to ‘make’ some. Indeed, he and his men had spent two very exhausting nights, removing gravestones from a neighbouring cemetery and setting them up at Nimrud. As the officer himself remarked, he had ‘destroyed more real tombs of True Believers in making sham ones’ than Layard could possibly have defiled.

Despite the order to cease digging, Layard did not abandon the site. He was able to persuade the Pasha’s agent that it was necessary for him to remain at Nimrud with a few workmen to clean and record the slabs already found. Moreover, since the agent did not consider it part of his duty to ride the three miles between his home and the site in working hours, Layard was able to do a certain amount of surreptitious digging before the agent arrived and after he had left.

In this way Layard unearthed several valuable sculptures, including a crouching lion, a human figure nine feet high, and a pair of winged bulls (the last mentioned unfortunately damaged). These, he decided, established beyond dispute the importance of the mound, and justified him in asking Sir Stratford Canning for official protection against the petty persecution he had been enduring. But he had
hardly dispatched his request when one of the chief obstacles in his path was in any case removed. Mohammed Pasha was relieved of his duties as governor, and a more enlightened official sent in his place.

The weather was by this time unsuitable for further digging, and so Layard buried his finds and spent Christmas in Baghdad. When he returned to Nimrud in January he found that several changes had taken place. The winter rains were almost over, and grass and flowers had sprung up everywhere. In addition, now that Mohammed Pasha had been deposed, the Arab tribes had returned to the villages, and there would no longer be difficulty in obtaining labour.

In February Layard engaged thirty men, and recommenced digging. He did not, however, continue to excavate the two palaces he had found the previous summer, as these, he now realised, had been destroyed by fire, and as a consequence the sculptures had suffered considerably. Instead, he sank a test-shaft in the side of a deep gulley, which ran far into the mound on the western side. Here he found another, much older, palace with many sculptures in an excellent state of preservation.

The morning after these latest finds were made, Layard went to the tent of one of the sheikhs. As he rode back across the fields, now bright with spring flowers, he was surprised to see two figures riding quickly towards him.

‘Hasten, O Bey!’ cried one of them excitedly. ‘Hasten to the diggers, for they have found Nimrod himself!’

Nimrod, the hunter, the founder of Nineveh! What could the man mean? Layard asked himself.

‘It is wonderful, but it’s true!’ the horseman continued. ‘We have seen him with both our eyes! Praise be to God!’

Layard wasted no time in obeying the summons, and galloped as fast as he could towards the ruins. There he
entered the trench, to find the workmen standing in a nervous group around a heap of baskets and clothes. As he approached they pulled aside this screen, and he saw protruding from the earth a huge alabaster head. The features were still in pristine condition, and seemed to wear an almost supercilious expression. Layard at once recognised it as the head of a human-headed winged bull or lion, its body being still beneath the ground. It was a masterpiece of Assyrian art, and one of the first undamaged figures of this kind to be found.

The Arabs were both astonished and terrified by the discovery, for the head appeared to be rising straight out of some nether regions. Indeed, one man was so aghast that he flung down his basket, and made off to Mosul at breakneck speed. Even the sheikh whom Layard had been visiting that morning could only with difficulty be persuaded to enter the trench. He did at last reluctantly agree to have a closer look, however, to assure himself that the head was only made of stone.

Layard knew that two figures of this kind were sometimes placed on either side of an entrance in ancient times. He therefore conjectured that if he excavated about fifteen feet away—the approximate width of a gateway from the head—he might possibly find a pair to it. He set workmen to dig at what he believed to be the right spot, and before nightfall his reasoning was proved correct.

Meanwhile, the Arab who had fled to Mosul had caused consternation in the city. Everyone by now knew that Nimrod had appeared, but whether it was his bones which had come to light or merely a statue of him no one was in a position to say. But even this information, scant as it was, had been sufficient to send the officials of the mosque to see the new Pasha. They complained that Layard was contravening the laws of the Koran, and demanded that
the excavations should cease immediately. The Pasha had little option but to agree, and informed Layard that no further digging might take place until the excitement had died down.

It would in any case have been difficult for Layard to have continued the work much longer, because his resources were almost exhausted. Harried by financial worries, as well as the obstructionist attitude of the Moslems, Layard wrote to Sir Stratford Canning. In reply, Canning was able to assure him that there would be no further interference from the Arab leaders, as the Sultan had given Canning an undertaking to that effect. The problem of lack of capital was not so easily solved, however, and Canning could only suggest approaching the British Museum again.

It had already been pointed out to the Trustees more than once that Layard’s discoveries were of such inestimable value to archaeology that his work should be subsidised by a public body. But each time the Trustees had received the suggestion coldly, even when the whole of the finds so far were offered in exchange for financial assistance.

It was only when Layard’s own reports of his excavations reached London that the Trustees began to waver. It was then clear that his work was far too important to be left to the support of private individuals. Even so, the Trustees felt that all they could afford to offer Layard was the totally inadequate sum of £2,000.

In consequence, Layard was driven to methods of excavation which offended his conscience and left him feeling dissatisfied. In his own words, from then onwards he had to devote himself to obtaining ‘the largest possible number of well-preserved objects of art with the least possible outlay of time and money’. To do this he dug trenches along the sides of the chambers, to expose the
slabs, but did not remove the earth from the centre. Thus, as Layard explained later, 'few of the chambers were fully explored, and many small objects of great interest must have been left undiscovered'. Moreover, to avoid expense the chambers had to be buried again after they had been explored.

While Layard awaited the decision from the Trustees of the Museum he passed the warm spring days making enjoyable excursions into the surrounding countryside. Tiring of this, he decided to make some soundings in one of the mounds across the river from Mosul, one of the mounds which were traditionally believed to cover Nineveh. Here he came upon the largest pair of winged figures which had ever been seen up to that time, but he could not afford to remove them. Until recently it was believed that they had been destroyed, but in 1941 heavy winter rains revealed them, and they are now on exhibition on the site.

As summer approached Layard returned to Nimrud, anticipating a favourable answer from the Trustees. He commenced work with a fairly large gang of men, and within a very short time an amazing array of beautiful sculptures were found. In his account of these excavations, Layard recalls with amusement the attitude of the workmen towards the figures.

'If it were a bearded man,' he tells us, 'they concluded at once that it was an idol or a djinn, and cursed or spat upon it.' But if it had no beard they declared it was a woman, and 'kissed or patted the cheek'.

With the summer, however, came the usual intense heat, and Layard was forced to suspend operations until the autumn. It was not, in fact, until November, when the grant was received from the museum, that the workmen once more drove their picks and spades into the mound.
But the weeks that followed proved to be the most rewarding in the whole of Layard’s archaeological career. Indeed, during the winter of 1846-7, more finds were made at Nimrud than have ever been found in so short a time in Assyria. ‘Scarcely a day passed without some new and important discovery.’ Palaces which had lain in darkness for three thousand years were being brought once again into the light of day.

In one chamber over one hundred exquisitely sculptured slabs were found. They were packed together in groups according to the subject they portrayed, possibly in readiness for use in some other room. In other chambers there were walls adorned with brightly coloured frescoes, and several reception rooms were surrounded with delightful reliefs. Whenever a chamber was uncovered innumerable small objects were revealed. Among them were carved sphinxes, carved lions which had clearly been used as pedestals, vessels of glass or alabaster, various copper articles, and many gilded ivories of the kind which Layard had found during his first season. Among the major finds were thirteen pairs of gigantic winged figures, with the smallest details of their decorations and inscriptions intact. Unfortunately, after they had been located Layard was obliged to rebury them for lack of money.

One of the most astonishing finds was one of the last to be unearthed. A few feet from where the hundred slabs had been found, the workmen saw the corner of a polished black stone. It was quite unlike anything previously unearthed, and, puzzled and excited, Layard and his men prised it gently from the soil. It proved to be what Layard himself called an ‘obelisk’, and what is now known as the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser. It was a pillar, sculptured on all four sides with twenty small reliefs, illustrating for the most part the victorious campaigns of the Assyrian
king Shalmaneser III, who reigned from about 860 to about 824 B.C. There were also scenes of conquered princes bearing tribute to the Assyrian ruler, one of the princes being Jehu, the son of the King of Israel. It is this Jehu who is mentioned in the Bible as slaying his mother, Jezebel, at the bidding of the prophet Elisha (II Kings, chapter ix). The obelisk is now in the British Museum.

Even the Arabs, opposed though they were to excavations, could not conceal their admiration for Layard’s discoveries. As one of them said,

‘For 2,000 years have the True Believers been settled in this country, and none of them ever heard of a palace underground. Neither did they who went before them. But lo! here comes a stranger from many days’ journey off, and he walks up to the very place, and takes a stick and makes a line here, and makes a line there. Here, says he, is the palace; there, says he, is the gate; and he shows us what has been all our lives beneath our feet, without our having known anything about it.’

Regrettably, Layard had to record time and time again that his finds crumbled to dust as soon as they were touched. His equipment was so poor by modern standards that only antiquities in first-rate condition, which were easily portable, were successfully removed from the site and preserved. If he had only had some paraffin wax or plaster of paris, how much richer our museums might be today!

The problem now uppermost in Layard’s mind was how to transport his finds home to England. The first consignment he had sent had taken a year to arrive, owing to the difficulty of steering a boat across the rapids near Nimrud. Two further consignments, including the Black Obelisk, had left on rafts and had been transferred to ships at Baghdad. But the greatest problem was posed, of course,
by the colossi. Even the smallest was cut from a slab eighteen inches thick, and was about ten feet square and weighed at least ten tons. It would have been difficult to find any contractor willing to undertake the work of removing them, certainly at a price within Layard’s means.

Finally, after much thought, Layard decided he would supervise the transport of two figures to the sea himself. He selected two of the smallest and best preserved sculptures, one a winged bull and the other a winged lion.

Layard then began the prodigious task of constructing a cart to carry the figures from the site to the Tigris. This was made from enormous beams of mulberry wood, with iron axles which had once belonged to Botta. The ropes to drag it were specially sent from Aleppo, as the local palm-fibre rope would not take the strain.

Layard watched the construction of the cart with apprehension. He remembered a similar vehicle dragged by six hundred men, with which Botta had attempted unsuccessfully to move a colossus.

But before the cart could be put to the test there was the question of how the figures were to be lowered on to it. As a first step the bull was wrapped in felt and matting, in case it fell or received any blows during the operation. It was then propped up with wooden wedges, and secured with ropes twisted round projecting masonry. This having been done the earth was carefully removed from beneath it. As more and more of the colossus was revealed the half-naked Arab workmen strained at the ropes to stop the great figure toppling over unexpectedly. Others poured water on the ropes to tauten them and to prevent the friction setting them alight, while yet others, in danger of being crushed at any moment, skilfully eased the wedges away. At first nothing appeared to be happening. Then gently the figure tilted, and the workmen took the extra weight on
the ropes. Slowly and steadily the angle of the figure increased, until there was only another five or six feet to go. By this time all the wedges had been removed, and the ropes were stretched almost to their limit.

On the high bank of earth above the colossus the crowd of onlookers were becoming hysterical. There were Bedouins riding round on their horses and camels, some shouting war-cries and others singing weird chants. There were Arabs beating drums and playing reed-pipes, there were yelling women and screaming children. And in front of them all stood Layard himself, his long hair and beard being blown in the wind. He was trying in vain to make himself heard, and throwing lumps of mud at the workmen to attract their attention.

Suddenly there was a rumble, and then a mighty crash. The ropes had broken and the sculpture had fallen to the ground. The Arabs who had been pulling on the ropes had been thrown onto their backs. There was silence for a moment. Then Layard leapt into the trench, expecting to find the figure in pieces. But when the dust cleared he saw that all was well. The bull had fallen squarely onto the wooden platform which had been prepared for it, and no damage of any kind had been sustained.

By evening the figure had been dragged on rollers through a kind of cutting to the edge of the mound. This was an exact repetition in reverse of the manner in which the Assyrians had brought it to the palace approximately 2,500 years before. Arriving at the edge of the mound the figure was coaxed onto the cart, and Layard heaved a sigh of relief.

The workmen spent the night in feasting and merriment, and the sound of shouting filled the air. The following morning they went to the cutting and hauled the cart to where the oxen were waiting. But, either because they
were unused to such a great load or else alarmed by the uproar, the oxen refused to pull. So three hundred Arabs took their place at the ropes, and a triumphal procession set off for the river.

Good speed was made as far as the village of Nimrud, but a short distance further on two wheels of the cart sank in a concealed corn-pit. The Arabs strained and tugged until the ropes gave way, but nothing would induce the cart to move. At last Layard was reluctantly forced to leave the figure where it was until the morning, but he posted a guard to protect it from any marauding Bedouins who might look covetously on the felt or the matting.

His fears proved well founded, because he had scarcely got into bed when he heard the firing of muskets, and shouts from the Arabs. He hurriedly dressed and raced to the corn-pit, where he found some Bedouins had indeed attacked but been beaten off. Unfortunately the figure had received a direct hit, and the mark of the musket ball can still be seen on the bull today in the British Museum.

Next morning the wheels were dug out, with the aid of planks placed underneath the cart. It was not long before the procession was once more on the move, and the figure was safely resting on a platform by the river.

After a rest Layard and his workmen returned with the cart to the site at Nimrud, and by the same method the winged lion was brought to the edge of the Tigris.

The only suitable means of transport to the sea was rafts, supported on goat-skins filled with air, but the raftmen from Mosul did not ply beyond Baghdad, and none was willing to break with tradition. But at last, after much difficulty, Layard prevailed upon a raftman from Baghdad to undertake the journey to the Persian Gulf. The man arrived with a dirty, half-naked assistant, and two donkeys laden with empty goat-skins. Layard was
not satisfied with the rafts the man built, however. He was convinced that unless some method was devised of reaching the mouths of the skins so that they could be re-inflated periodically the rafts would sink under the tremendous weight of the figures. The raftman was hotly opposed to Layard’s suggestion, as he would have been to any innovation, but in the end Layard got his own way.

A few days later Layard stood on the bank and watched the two great figures slide from the platforms on to the rafts. Then, as the shouts of the Arabs reached a crescendo, the figures were securely fastened and pushed out into the stream.

But even as they cheered, many of the Arabs were puzzled. Why, they asked themselves, did the Englishman want the figures? As one of the sheikhs said to Layard,

‘In the name of the Most High, tell me, O Bey, what are you going to do with these stones? So many thousands of purses spent upon such things! Can it be, as you say, that your people learn wisdom from them? Or is it, as the elders of the temple declare, that they are to go to the Palace of your Queen, who, with the rest of the unbelievers, worships these idols? As for wisdom, these figures will not teach you to make any better knives or scissors or chintzes, and it is in the making of these things that the English show their wisdom.’

It was shortly after this that Layard decided that the time had come to return home. In two years he had discovered the remains of eight Assyrian palaces and sent several hundred tons of sculpture to the British Museum. He might well have congratulated himself as, on June 24th, 1847, he said farewell to his friends in Mosul and set off for London.

But on reaching England there was an exasperating disappointment awaiting him. When he visited the British
Museum to see his smaller antiquities unpacked he was mortified to discover that the cases contained nothing but 'a mere jumble of fragments'. All the contents were disarranged, the cataloguing ruined, and a number of objects were broken or even missing altogether. When he lodged a protest with the shipping company, it eventually came to light that the British community at Bombay had been so overcome with curiosity, when they had seen the cases on the quay, that they had forced them open and examined the contents. Indeed, a clergyman had even had the audacity to give a lecture on certain of the objects.

Wherever Layard went during his stay in England he was greeted with wild enthusiasm. Although the academic world granted him little recognition he was the hero of the hour to the general public. His book, *Nineveh and Its Remains* was an instantaneous best-seller, the first 'popular' book to be written on archaeology.

Layard's book undoubtedly deserved its success, for few writers have ever written with more zest, or had a more exciting story to tell. Its title, however, was misleading. Nimrud was not Nineveh, and neither incidentally was the site excavated by Botta. As is so often the case, tradition was right, and Nineveh was buried beneath the two mounds across the river from Mosul. Nimrud was the city called Calah in the Bible, and the palaces mostly belonged to the ninth century B.C. These facts were proved only a year after the publication of Layard's book, when the language barrier was broken and cuneiform inscriptions could be deciphered.

Layard made only one further expedition to Assyria, from 1849 to 1851. He dug at Nineveh, Nimrud, Babylon and elsewhere, and made an incredible number of finds. In one of the mounds at Nineveh alone he found 'by a rough calculation, about 9,880 feet, or nearly two miles, of
bas-reliefs, with twenty-seven portals, formed by colossal winged bulls and lion-sphinxes'.

In 1851 he made his way home again. Not yet thirty-five years old, and with only five and a half years excavating behind him, he had decided to turn his back on archaeology, and embark on a career in politics.

In some ways this career was almost as remarkable as the story of his Assyrian adventures. Despite the fact that he was not a Member of Parliament, such was his personal prestige that in 1852 he was appointed Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. When the government fell a few months later he was elected Liberal M.P. for Aylesbury, and continued to serve in Parliament for the next seventeen years. He might indeed have had a brilliant future in politics but for the fact that he was so vehement on behalf of the causes he espoused that he alarmed even his own supporters.

After withdrawing from politics he held several diplomatic posts abroad, and was knighted for his services in 1878. Two years later he retired from public life, and spent the rest of his days in Venice, collecting pictures of the Venetian School and writing on Italian Art. He died on July 5th, 1894, at the age of seventy-seven, during a visit to London.

Layard became an archaeologist almost by accident. He had had no training, and his equipment by modern standards was crude. He measured the success of his excavations (as Belzoni had done) by the number of portable antiquities he could amass. Moreover, in his eagerness to find objects of this kind he undoubtedly destroyed much historical evidence. Yet when all this is admitted, there is still a great deal to be entered on the credit side in an assessment of his work.

First and foremost, Layard presented to Victorian
England a vivid picture of an almost forgotten race. For up to that time the Assyrians had been a shadowy people known mainly through some references by Old Testament writers. In addition, had Layard not removed the sculptures that he did it is unlikely that they would now be in the British Museum. For once their existence was known they would probably have been smashed by fanatical Arabs, to whom a 'graven image' was an abomination. Alternatively, they would have found their way to the museums of Paris, Berlin, or some other European capital.

Taking a broad view, lovers of the past should be grateful to Henry Layard. His mistakes, however regrettable, were only the mistakes of his time.

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III

HEINRICH SCHLIEHMANN
(1822-1890)

‘ALTHOUGH once believed to be literally true, in the eyes of modern enquiry the Trojan War is essentially a legend.’ Thus wrote the distinguished historian Grote in 1846. Homer’s epic poem about Paris, the Prince of Troy, whose love for Helen led to the siege of his city, was, declared Grote, a myth and nothing more. It was interesting as literature, but as history, worthless.

The scholars of the day nodded their heads in agreement. There was not one shred of material evidence—not one stone, one weapon or one piece of pottery—to confirm that the Trojan War had ever taken place, or even that Troy itself had existed. Yet in the very year that Grote expressed this opinion there was a young man working as a book-keeper in Amsterdam who was to prove beyond doubt that the historian was wrong.

The young man’s name was Heinrich Schliemann. He had been born on June 6th, 1822, in the village of Ankershagen, in Prussia, the son of a Protestant clergyman. His father was an enthusiastic student of ancient history, and from an early age little Heinrich liked nothing better than to listen while his father told him stories of the past.

It is easy, therefore, to imagine the boy’s delight when one Christmas he found among his presents a copy of Jerrr’s Universal History. It was a large volume, almost as heavy as the seven-year-old lad himself, but Heinrich
was undeterred by its size, and it quickly became one of his most cherished possessions.

One illustration in particular fascinated him. It was an engraving showing Troy in flames.

‘Father, is anything left of Troy?’ he asked.

‘No, no. I’ve told you before,’ replied his father wearily, ‘Troy has completely disappeared. Now be quiet. I’m trying to rest.’

‘But how did Jerrer draw it if he’d never seen it?’ persisted the boy.

His father gave a sigh. Why were children always asking questions?

‘Jerrer just drew it as he imagined it might have been. No one really knows what Troy was like,’ he answered.

‘Then I’m going to dig it up when I’m a man, and find out what it was like,’ said Heinrich eagerly.

His father nodded, but whether it was in agreement or in sleep it was difficult to tell.

This incident is recalled by Schliemann himself in his book Ilios. It gives us a glimpse of an imaginative but determined child, already absorbed in the subject that was to make him famous.

Heinrich confided his ambitions to the children of the village, but only two of them, both little girls, would listen. With one of them, named Minna Meincke, he fell in love, and they solemnly vowed that one day they would marry and excavate Troy together.

Meanwhile, Heinrich and Minna decided to undertake some historical research in the village where they lived. They visited the mediaeval castle of Ankershagen, where a robber baron was said to have buried his treasure, and even tried to track down the ghost of a clergyman that was supposed to haunt the Schliemann’s own garden! Delightful as these pastimes were, however, Heinrich
remained obsessed with Ancient Greece, and when he was ten he gave his father as a Christmas present a long, indifferently written essay on the Trojan War.

Heinrich left school at the age of fourteen. His mother had died, and his father who, although a man of some academic distinction, was a drunkard and a reprobate, had neither time nor money to spare for his six children. Heinrich became apprenticed to a grocer in the nearby town of Furstenburg, and for the next five years he worked from five in the morning until eleven at night.

'I had not a moment's leisure for study,' he wrote later. 'Moreover, I rapidly forgot the little I had learnt in childhood; but I did not lose the love of learning; indeed I never lost it, and, as long as I live, I shall never forget the evening when a drunken miller came into the shop....'

The miller was a man who had once been respected for his education, but had fallen on evil times. He recited a hundred lines of Homer, and Schliemann tells us,

'Although I did not understand a syllable, the melodious sound of the words made a deep impression on me. ... From that moment I never ceased to pray to God that by His grace I might yet have the happiness of learning Greek.'

He made the miller repeat the lines three times over, and then spent a whole week's wages on whisky to give the drunken orator as a reward.

Schliemann's next job was as a grocer's assistant in Hamburg, at a salary of £9 per annum, but he was physically unequal to the work. He injured his chest trying to shift a heavy cask, and had to seek employment elsewhere.

A short while afterwards he became a cabin-boy on a small sailing-brig, the Dorothea, plying between Hamburg and Venezuela. His career as a seaman was short-lived, however, for on his first voyage the ship was wrecked off the coast of Holland. Schliemann and the rest of the crew
took to an open boat, and tossed for nine hours in mountainous seas. At the end of that time a wave suddenly lifted them and flung them down on a sandy beach.

Instead of being downcast by this incident, Schliemann was convinced that his miraculous escape from drowning must have meant that Fate had some special favours in store for him. He was confirmed in this view when his own small chest of belongings, alone of all the crew’s, was saved from the wreckage of the unfortunate *Dorothea*.

Schliemann also believed that Fate must have had a reason for choosing Holland as the place where he should be washed ashore. He therefore decided it would be imprudent to leave at once, and enlisted as a soldier in the Netherlands Army. But he soon found that army life was not to his taste, and pretended to be ill to gain his discharge. He was taken to hospital, and from there he wrote to a shipbroker friend in Hamburg, explaining his predicament. The letter arrived while the friend was holding a dinner party, and a subscription was immediately raised among the guests. The result was that shortly afterwards the delighted Schliemann received the sum of 240 florins (about £20).

This was the turning point in his fortunes. With the help of the Prussian Consul-General he found work as a messenger-boy in an Amsterdam shipping office. His salary was £32 per annum. Better still, much of his day was spent waiting to take letters to and from the post office. This meant that for the first time since he left school Schliemann had the opportunity to indulge his love of learning. While he was waiting for the letters he could be reading a textbook. He therefore spent half his salary on books and lessons, living on the remaining half in a ‘garret without a fire, where I shivered with cold in winter and was scorched by the heat in summer’.
As a first step he studied handwriting, having decided that it was essential if he were to progress at other subjects to be able to write legibly. Then he turned his attention to modern languages. He began with English. He read aloud a great deal, learnt long passages by heart, and went to the English church twice each Sunday to improve his accent. English was followed by French, French by Spanish, and by the time he was twenty-two Schliemann had command of seven foreign languages. The seven did not, however, include Greek, for Schliemann feared that he might become so engrossed in its study that he would be diverted from his immediate goal of making money. And money he must have, if he were to achieve his twin ambitions of marrying Minna and excavating Troy.

Schliemann was now equipped for a better position than that of messenger-boy, and so he became a book-keeper with an old-established firm of Amsterdam merchants. The head of this firm recognised Schliemann’s outstanding ability, and wisely resolved to use his talents to the full. He received rapid promotion, and by the age of twenty-four was the firm’s representative in St. Petersburg (Leningrad). Later he was sent as representative to Moscow.

Schliemann had already mastered Russian before leaving Amsterdam. Unable to find anyone to give him lessons, he had picked up the language as best he could, with the aid of a grammar book and a dictionary. He had also found a few second-hand books in Russian, which he learnt by heart. These he recited to an old Jew, who, for four francs a week, was willing to listen to him, although he did not understand a word that Schliemann said.

In Russia Schliemann rapidly amassed a fortune. Within two years of his arrival in Moscow he was registered as a merchant, trading in indigo, in his own right, with a
considerable balance to his credit at the bank. During the Crimean War he was a military contractor, and this helped to increase his wealth even further. Now at last he was in a position to propose to Minna.

‘But to my sorrow,’ wrote Schliemann, ‘I received a month later a heartrending answer. She was just married. I considered this disappointment at the time the greatest disaster which could have befallen me.’

It was fourteen years since he had last seen her, and what girl, however loving, would consider herself bound by a childhood promise to marry a man she had not seen since their school-days? But Schliemann, so single-minded in the pursuit of his objectives, found it difficult to understand that others should not be as dedicated as himself. Through all his fantastic adventures he had been looking forward to the day when Minna would be his bride, and he considered her marriage to someone else a breach of faith. He took to his bed, ‘utterly unfit for any occupation’.

It was work, however, that eventually brought him solace. He threw himself heart and mind into the task which he had set himself, of obtaining greater, and even greater, wealth. He travelled from one European capital to another, fascinated by the industrial revolution which he saw taking place on every side.

Riches were, of course, not an end in themselves for Schliemann. He viewed them only as a means of attaining his ambition to be an archaeologist. But for this he needed not only wealth but scholarship, and he sought knowledge with the same zeal that he pursued success in business. Yet he never considered himself a well-educated man.

‘I am lacking in the grounding and fundamentals of learning,’ he wrote sadly.

Schliemann’s studies still embraced languages, and by the age of thirty-three he was master of no less than
fifteen different tongues. These including both modern and ancient Greek. The prayer that he had first uttered when he had heard the drunken miller reciting Homer, was answered at last. He could now speak Homer’s own language. So delighted was he with his latest accomplishment that he spent every spare moment reading classical writers, and translating them into modern Greek.

In 1851 Schliemann paid his first visit to America, and, happening to be in California when this state became part of the Federal Republic, he became (and remained) an American citizen. He opened a bank in California during the gold rush, and, almost by accident, acquired another fortune.

Seven years later he made an extensive tour of the Middle East. He crossed the desert from Cairo to Jerusalem, and visited Petra. He also travelled in India, China, Japan and Tunisia. While in Arabia he learnt yet another language (Arabic), and, disguised as an Arab, is said to have visited Mecca, the holy city of the Moslems. He then returned to America, but it was not long before he was on his way to Europe again.

This time Schliemann’s destination was Greece. For the first time in his life, at the age of forty-six, he was visiting the country of his childhood dreams. Although it was the height of summer ‘I forgot heat and thirst’, so overjoyed was he to be at last in the land of Homer.

Within a very short time he had hired workmen and was excavating on the rocky island of Ithaca. He dug up vases, a knife and a few clay idols. He was as pleased as a child with these relics of the past. From Ithaca he sailed to the Peloponnese, then crossed to the Dardanelles and rode to the legendary site of Troy.

Schliemann paid only a brief visit to Greece, but it was long enough to whet his appetite. He began to make plans
to retire from business and devote the rest of his life to archaeology. The first part of his dream, to marry Minna, had been frustrated, but the second part, to find Troy, was about to be realised.

Here it is necessary to pause and consider why it was that Schliemann, a romantic it is true, but also a man of exceptional acumen, was so certain that Troy had actually existed. Apart from a childhood belief that Homer's poems were history, what was it that convinced him that Troy was not legendary, as almost every scholar of the day asserted? Schliemann had studied archaeology in Paris a few years earlier, and he must have given great thought to the subject.

Probably the most persuasive argument in favour of Homer's epics being factual was that certain descriptions, particularly of armour, did not correspond with what was known of Homer's own day (about 900 B.C.). For example, Homer refers to a shield made with 'the hides of seven big bulls, which was overlaid with an eighth layer of bronze'. In another passage he says of a soldier that 'as he walked the dark leather rim of his bossed shield tapped him above and below, on the ankles and on the back of the neck'. This huge, cumbersome shield is clearly unlike the small, round shield used in Homer's period. Similarly, the weapons in Homer's poems, whether swords or spears, are (with one or two notable exceptions) always described as being bronze, whereas in the time in which he lived they were usually iron. Again, the Homeric heroes drove chariots, which were not often employed in the days of Homer himself. The question that arises is inescapable. Unless Homer was drawing an historical picture, why did he not describe the fighting equipment in use when he was alive?

Moreover, Homer displays a detailed knowledge not
only of the Greek islands but also of Asia Minor. His heroes follow the exact sea-routes across the Aegean which any experienced traveller of the time would have taken. Capes, bays and harbours are faithfully portrayed. Yet when Homer’s poems enter the obvious realms of fantasy (as when gods appear in various disguises), the location might be anywhere in or out of fairyland. The implication of this is that Homer was differentiating between what was history and what was myth.

To this must be added Homer’s remarkable gift for detail. His descriptions of everyday life—of husbandry, seamanship, domestic occupations, clothes, and, not least, dwelling places (from palace to hovel)—are so convincing that even the sceptical scholars of the mid-nineteenth century must have found it difficult to believe that they were merely figments of a poet’s imagination.

Certainly the Greeks of classical times regarded Homer’s epics as being at least substantially true. Indeed, the events he recounted were in some cases retold at greater length by later writers, who, because of the additional facts which they included, could not have used Homer as their source of information. Both he and they must have based their writings on the same traditional stories which had been accepted for generations as being true.

Even from an archaeological standpoint in the mid-nineteenth century, there was a possibility that Homer’s poems embodied some truth. As early as 1826 some tools and statuettes had been found in the Cyclades (in the centre of the Greek archipelago) which clearly did not belong to the classical times (about 600-300 B.C.). The archaeologists of the day admitted them to be ‘unplaceable’. Then in 1862 a Frenchman had unearthed some painted pottery and a fresco-covered wall, on another island in the same group. These had been buried beneath
twenty-six feet of pumice stone in a volcanic eruption that had occurred, so the geologists said, about 2,000 B.C. Thus it had been established that Greece had been inhabited at least two millenniums before the birth of Our Lord. But few scholars would have agreed that the civilisation of which these traces had been found could be identified with the cities of the Homeric poems.

Whatever the reasons, however, which determined Schliemann to excavate at Troy, he began making his final plans in 1870. He had the wealth, the leisure and the opportunity. Only one thing was lacking—the love and encouragement of a woman who shared his interests. To set about realising his life's ambition with only the memory of Minna for company would have been intolerable. Schliemann therefore decided to find a wife.

Unfortunately he believed he was unattractive to women, on account of his thick spectacles and sallow complexion. He also feared, with reason, that being a millionaire he might become the victim of a fortune-hunter. Then he remembered an old friend, a Greek Orthodox priest, who had taught him Greek long ago in St. Petersburg. He would write to this friend, now Archbishop of Athens, and ask if he could find him a bride.

'I swear to you by the bones of my mother,' wrote Schliemann, 'that I will direct my whole mind and energies to making my future wife happy. . . . She should be poor, but well educated; she must be enthusiastic about Homer and about the rebirth of my beloved Greece. . . . She should be of the Greek type, with black hair, and, if possible, beautiful. But my main requirement is a good and loving heart.'

Early in the following year Schliemann received a photograph of a beautiful Greek girl, named Sophia. He was entranced, and lost no time in setting sail for Athens.
There he found Sophia was even lovelier than her photograph, besides being of a gentle, affectionate disposition. He needed to assure himself, however, that she would be able to take an intelligent interest in his work, and for this purpose he drew up a searching questionnaire. ‘In which year did the Emperor Hadrian visit Athens?’ ‘Recite a passage from Homer.’ ‘Who was Diomedes?’ Sophia passed with flying colours, and they were married.

‘Sophia is a splendid wife,’ wrote Schliemann. ‘She could make any man happy.’

There was now nothing to delay Schliemann’s departure for Troy, and in September, 1871 he set sail for the Dardanelles.

The first problem when he arrived there was where to dig. Homer had described Troy (in the *Iliad*) as being beside two springs.

‘In one of these the water comes up hot; steam rises from it and hangs about like smoke above a blazing fire. But the other, even in summer, gushes up cold as hail, or freezing snow, or water that has turned to ice.’

For well over a century the people who lived on the Plain of Troy had been accustomed to seeing learned gentlemen plunging thermometers into every spring they could find, in the hope of discovering the two Homer mentioned, but the results were certainly not conclusive. The only place at which two springs of different temperatures could be found was a village called Bounarbashi, but even there the difference was only a few degrees. Nevertheless, as ‘hot and cold’ springs had been found nowhere else, many scholars were of the opinion that Bounarbashi was the site of Homer’s Troy. This belief was strengthened by the fact that the village stood at the extreme southern end of the Plain of Troy, with rocky
heights behind it, which would make it a natural choice for a citadel.

There was another possibility. This was the hill of Hissarlik, a mound about 162 feet high, and much closer than Bounarbash to the Dardanelles. It was, indeed, its proximity to the sea that was the principal reason why it was regarded by some scholars as the site of ancient Troy. Homer seemed to imply in the *Iliad* that Troy was not more than three miles from the Dardanelles, whereas Bounarbash was at least eight miles away. Another point in favour of Hissarlik was that Homer wrote of Achilles that he chased Hector three times round the walls of Troy, an impossibility even for a goat, said Schliemann, if the city were perched on the side of a craggy mountain (as Bounarbash was), but clearly feasible at Hissarlik. Probably the most convincing argument, though, for Hissarlik being the site was that nearby were the ruins of the town of New Troy, built by the classical Greeks (and rebuilt by the Romans) on what was traditionally said to have been the ancient site.

Schliemann decided in favour of Hissarlik, despite the absence of ‘hot and cold’ springs. This latter fact seemed of less significance, it should be added, after Schliemann himself had visited Bounarbash and found, not merely two springs, but no less than thirty-four, ‘all of a uniform temperature of 62° Fahrenheit’.

From September to November, 1871, eighty workmen, under Schliemann’s direction, drove a deep trench into the steep northern face of the hills of Hissarlik, and dug down to a depth of thirty-three feet. The onset of winter compelled Schliemann to suspend the operations, but in March he returned, with his wife, and a labour force of one hundred and fifty men. On the top of the hill Schliemann built a small wooden house, with three rooms and a kitchen
for himself and Sophia, and they prepared to dig in earnest. It must have brought back memories for Schliemann that the wheelbarrows, spades and pickaxes were supplied by the firm for which he had worked as a book-keeper, long before in Amsterdam.

The workmen toiled in the trench from dawn to dusk, but the results were not as rewarding as Schliemann had hoped. He had undoubtedly chosen the correct site. Here, unquestionably, were the remains of Troy. Indeed, there were the remains of several cities, one beneath another, although it was only slowly that Schliemann came to appreciate this fact. Unfortunately, the ruins hardly corresponded with Schliemann's vision of magnificence and splendour. Instead of mighty buildings and glittering treasure, Schliemann found a bewildering heap of debris, intermingled with fragments of pottery, weapons and tools, and a few broken idols.

It must be remembered, of course, that Schliemann had had no previous experience of excavating prehistoric sites. Nor could he rely to any great extent on the experience of other field archaeologists (archaeologists who personally conduct excavations). No excavation on such a large scale of a tell (a site with no remains above ground as a guide) had been attempted by any archaeologist before. Had he not been a pioneer he would have known better what to expect, and not been so perplexed by what he found.

One of the most puzzling aspects of the excavation to Schliemann was the fact that there were several successive strata in the mound. The further down he dug the more layers he discovered, although they were not clearly defined and often overlapped. By the end of 1872, after several huge cuttings had been made in the hill, and thousands of tons of earth removed, it became apparent that
there were at least seven ancient cities. Which was the Troy of the Homeric epics?

Schliemann was of the opinion that it must be the lowest, or possibly the one from lowest, layer. He based this assumption on the fact that the traditional date of the Trojan War was 1180 B.C., and he argued that it was unlikely that there would have been cities on the site before that date, and therefore beneath the one he sought. In the days of Schliemann, it must be pointed out, there was no recognised method of dating remains by the pottery that was unearthed, as there is today. Schliemann would, of course, have been able to distinguish prehistoric pottery from that with which historians were familiar, but the date of the prehistoric pottery he could only guess. Thus it followed that he had no guide to the date of the layers.

Believing Homeric Troy to be one of the lowest strata, Schliemann took little interest in the remains in the higher layers. He regarded them as mere hindrances to achieving his objective, and he cut right through them, rather as if cutting a slice out of a layer cake. He did not photograph or record, as a modern archaeologist would do, what he unearthed on the higher levels, but demolished it impatiently. He would not have had time, it must be admitted, to have examined the whole of each city thoroughly before digging down to the next, but nevertheless his ruthless methods have frequently been criticised.

It was not only the hired labourers who toiled from dawn to dusk. Schliemann himself, with Sophia beside him, spent every daylight hour in the trench, sorting and attempting to classify the tangle of broken remains which they found in the soil. It was tiring work, requiring the utmost patience. The climate, moreover, made the task more difficult. With summer came dust, flies and sultry heat. There were snakes which had to be killed, and
malaria-carrying mosquitoes—the first summer he was there Schliemann himself caught malaria. Winter, on the other hand, was hardly any better. The north wind, wrote Schliemann later, ‘blew with such bitter violence through the chinks in our house-walls... that we were not even able to light our lamps in the evening, and although we had a fire on the hearth, yet the thermometer showed seven degrees of frost’. Not even spring pleased Schliemann. ‘For the last fortnight we have been hearing the croaking of millions of frogs,’ he wrote, and he also complained of ‘the hideous screeching of the innumerable owls that nest in the holes of my trenches. There is something weird and horrible about their screeching, particularly at night.’

Despite all their patient digging and sifting nothing had come to light by early spring, 1873, which Schliemann could recognise as belonging to the great city of which Homer had written. Indeed, the lower levels of the mound appeared to consist mainly of primitively-constructed walls, and mean dwellings containing stone implements and roughly-made pottery. How could these miserable ruins, Schliemann asked himself, ‘have been identical with the great Homeric Troy of immortal renown, which withstood for ten long years the heroic efforts of the united Greek army of 11,000 men?’ The upper strata seemed a little more promising. At a depth of only twenty feet there were ‘the ruins of a prehistoric building ten feet high, the walls of which consisted of hewn blocks of limestone, perfectly smooth and cemented with clay’. Also near the surface was ‘a pretty bastion, composed of large blocks of limestone’. But Schliemann had little time for these finds. They were not sufficiently deep, he thought, to be of interest to him.

Then, in March, 1873, came the discovery which made
Schliemann think he had reached his goal. Digging down through a layer of debris the workmen uncovered what appeared to be a paved street, seventeen feet wide, running in a south-westerly direction towards the plain. This street, reasoned Schliemann, must at one time have led from the plain to some important building in the city.

'I therefore immediately set 100 men to dig through the ground lying in front of it in that direction. I found the street covered to a height of from seven to ten feet with yellow, red or black wood-ashes. . . . Above this thick layer of debris I came upon the ruins of a large building composed of stones cemented with earth.'

Nearby Schliemann also found two great arches, about twenty feet apart, which might have formed a massive gateway.

Without pausing to verify his deductions or to seek expert opinion Schliemann announced that he had made a great discovery. He had found, he claimed, the Palace of Priam and the Scaean Gate, the two most famous buildings of Homeric Troy.

'We have attained our goal and realised the great ideal of our life,' he wrote.

As might have been expected, Schliemann's impetuous announcement was greeted with scorn by the academic world. That this audacious merchant, with no professional qualifications, who ruthlessly tore down classical remains in an insane desire to find a probably mythical city, should pretend to have made such discoveries was preposterous! The Palace of Priam and the Scaean Gate indeed! There was not a vestige of proof that these had ever existed outside a poet's imagination! The scholars sat back in their chairs and scoffed at the amateur who made such fantastic claims. Admittedly, they had not dug at Hissarlik themselves, but had they not studied the subject within their
college walls for the whole of their lives, and were they not experts? Schliemann, they declared contemptuously, was nothing but an upstart sensationalist.

Schliemann, for the first, and probably only time in his life, lost faith in himself. In May he wrote to his brother, "We have been digging here for three years, with 150 workmen . . . we have dragged away 250,000 cubic metres of debris and have collected . . . very remarkable antiquities. Now, however, we are weary, and . . . we shall finally cease our efforts in Troy on June 15th.'

June 15th. That was the day on which Schliemann would pay off his workmen, and bring to an end his Trojan expedition. Slowly the days passed. The bitter attacks of the professional archaeologists, particularly the Germans, had taken away much of his zest for the excavations. Finally it was June 14th, only one day before he was due to pack up. Schliemann, accompanied by a few of the labourers, was standing not far from the ruins which he believed to have been the Palace of Priam. Suddenly something attracted his attention. It was a small copper object, half embedded in debris near a fortified wall. Looking more closely, Schliemann's sharp eyes noticed something else beside it, something bright and gleaming. It looked like gold.

Doing his best to appear nonchalant, he called to Sophia, and told her quietly to dismiss the workmen.

'Tell them it's my birthday,' he whispered, 'and that they will get their wages for the rest of the day without working! And give them some money to drink a toast to me!'

When the workmen had gone, Sophia returned, and stood beside her husband as he began to delve into the sun-baked earth. It was no easy task.

'This required great exertion,' wrote Schliemann later,
'and involved great risk, since the fortification beneath which I had to dig threatened every moment to fall down upon me.'

But, as he himself admitted, he never gave a thought to the danger at the time. He was far too engrossed in what he was doing. For with trembling fingers he was taking from the soil object after object of shining gold. Apart from their obvious intrinsic value, every one of them, wrote Schliemann, was of 'inestimable value to archaeology'.

As Schliemann brought the priceless treasure to the surface, Sophia concealed each item in her shawl. Then, like two conspirators, they walked up to their house, locked the door and spread out their finds.

The loveliest item, without a doubt, was a magnificent diadem. It consisted of a fine gold chain, intended to be worn round the crown of the head, from which hung many shorter chains to form a fringe on the brow. There were also two long chains, with small gold figures at the end of each of them, which hung down on either side to the shoulder. Thus the wearer's face was in a frame of gold. In this diadem alone were 16,353 separate gold pieces, most of them either tiny gold rings or delicately wrought lancet-shaped gold leaves. Schliemann placed the diadem on Sophia's brow. Had it once adorned the beautiful Helen herself? Schliemann was convinced that it had.

There was another diadem among the treasure, hardly less exquisite than the first. There were also six gold bracelets, sixty gold ear-rings, 8,700 small gold rings, a gold bottle, a gold goblet and a number of gold bars. As well as these, there were a great many gold trinkets of various kinds, and a quantity of articles of silver and other metals.

Schliemann's delight knew no bounds. Let the scholars mock as much as they wished, he was convinced he had found the treasure of Priam.
‘Since I found all the objects together or packed into one another . . . it seems certain,’ he wrote, ‘that they lay in a wooden chest, of the kind mentioned in the *Iliad* as having been in Priam’s Palace. It seems all the more certain, since I found close to them a copper key, about four inches long, the head of which, about two inches in length and breadth, bears a very marked resemblance to the big key of an iron safe.’ (This was the copper object that had first caught Schliemann’s eye. It was later identified as a chisel.) ‘Some member of Priam’s family packed the treasure in the chest in great haste, and carried it away without having the time to withdraw the key, but was overtaken on the wall by an enemy or a fire, and had to leave the chest behind.’

Shortly afterwards Schliemann and Sophia smuggled the treasure out of Turkey to Athens. Had they declared their finds they would have had to hand half of them over to the Turkish Government, according to the agreement Schliemann had signed when he was granted permission to excavate at Hissarlik. Once he had held the treasure in his hands, however, Schliemann could not bring himself to hand even half of it over to a people he believed would not appreciate its value, but merely melt it down for gold.

Having smuggled the treasure to Greece, another problem arose. How was he to tell the world of his discoveries, as his vanity required, without the Turks also learning of it, and demanding their share? After much thought Schliemann decided to announce his finds, and invite a number of responsible people to examine them and confirm that he was speaking the truth. Later, however, when a search party, sent by the Turkish ambassador in Athens, arrived at his house there was nothing to be found. The treasure was safely hidden in stables and out-houses,
baskets and chests, in the homes of Sophia’s many relations. In this way Schliemann outwitted the Turkish Government, and preserved for posterity one of the most valuable collections of prehistoric articles ever unearthed.

But was it Priam’s treasure? Did Helen in fact once wear the diadem? The answer, sad to relate, is No. The hill of Hissarlik was indeed the site of ancient Troy, even though some scholars continued to reject Schliemann’s claim for many years. Schliemann’s mistake, however, was to search for Homer’s Troy in the lowest layers of the mound. The remains at Hissarlik were very much older than Schliemann realised, and, although the city he sought had been destroyed about 1200 B.C., there had been several earlier cities on the site. Indeed, the second city from the bottom, where the treasure was found, was built about a thousand years before Homeric Troy. This explains why the ruins in the upper strata appeared to bear the greatest resemblance to the city in the poems. Schliemann, in fact, cut right through the city he was seeking. It was probably the second city from the top.

Despite the fact that he had tricked the Turks out of their share of the treasure, Schliemann hoped to get permission to resume digging at Troy. Therefore, when he was ordered by a court of justice to pay 10,000 francs to the Turks as compensation, he sent five times the amount, in the hope of re-establishing good relations. Eventually, through the intercession of influential friends, he did receive a permit to recommence his excavations, but the governor of the district in which Troy was situated put endless difficulties in the way of the expedition. After a few months Schliemann refused to carry on, and wrote an indignant article in The Times, accusing the Turks of being the enemies of culture. This naturally caused embarrassment to the Turkish Government, and in October,
1876, Schliemann was informed that the obstructive governor had been sent to another province. But Schliemann by this time was no longer interested. He was already excavating at Mycenae.

Mycenae. That name was soon to ring round the world. Situated in the north-eastern corner of the Peloponnese, it was, according to legend, founded by the hero Perseus. After Perseus died, a succession of evil-living monarchs followed, until in the fifth generation Agamemnon, the ‘King of Men’, became king. His brother was Menelaus, the King of Sparta, and the brothers had chosen two sisters as their queens. Agamemnon was married to Clytemnestra, and Menelaus to Helen, who was renowned throughout Greece for her beauty. It was the abduction of Helen by Paris, the Prince of Troy, which was traditionally believed to have caused the Trojan War. Menelaus was determined to recover his wife, and to avenge what he considered an insult to his honour, so he called on Agamemnon to gather together an army. Agamemnon was the acknowledged leader of the Greeks, although every city had its own king. His position was similar to that of a feudal overlord in mediaeval times. Agamemnon, in turn, called Greeks from far and near, and they set sail under his leadership to win back Helen.

When Homer’s Iliad opens the Greeks are encamped on the edge of the Trojan Plain, facing the city they have been besieging for nine years. Agamemnon was, according to Homer, ‘a noble figure, as he took his stand with his people, armed in gleaming bronze, the captain of all’. Nevertheless, it was not by force of arms but by the stratagem of the wooden horse that Troy was at last taken in the following year. After the city had been sacked and burned to the ground, Menelaus took Helen back to Sparta, where it seems she became a model housewife!
Agamemnon was less fortunate than his brother. When he returned to Mycenae he was slain by his wife and a man named Aegisthos, with whom she had fallen in love during his absence. Agamemnon’s friends who returned home with him were also killed, on the instructions of either his wife or her lover.

This was Homer’s account of the Trojan War, and if any reliance could be placed on it, it was clear that Mycenae had been a great and powerful citadel in the twelfth century before the birth of Our Lord. Despite this, most nineteenth century scholars were of the opinion that Mycenae had never been ‘the great stronghold’ that Homer described, because in Homer’s own day it was a city of little importance, and by classical times had fallen into ruins. This view obviously fitted in well with the theory that the Trojan War was mythical, and that Troy had existed only in Homer’s imagination.

Schliemann, of course, believed that whatever Homer had written must be literally true. He had proved, to his own satisfaction at least, that the poet’s account of Troy was accurate, and it was with confidence as well as enthusiasm that he turned his thoughts to Mycenae.

At first the Greek Government refused his application to excavate. It was barely half a century since the Greeks had ceased to be ruled by the Turks, and, not unnaturally, they did not wish to offend their powerful neighbour. The Director of the University Library in Athens declared that Schliemann was a smuggler, or, alternatively, that he had obtained the Trojan treasure from antique dealers! In either case, the Greeks would not allow him to dig. Even when Schliemann offered to bequeath all his discoveries (including his finds at Troy) to the Greek nation after his death, the authorities were still adamant in their refusal. Then, in 1874, he went as far as to offer not only
to leave his discoveries to Greece when he died, but even to give part of them to Greece while he lived.

Confident that the Greek Government would accept these terms, Schliemann and his wife paid a two-day visit to Mycenae. But, so alarmed were the authorities because the man who had outwitted the Turks had arrived there, that they sent an official to examine his baggage. They feared that he might already have made some finds, although how he could have done so without digging was not explained! Schliemann was furious, and threatened to leave Greece, but Sophia prevailed upon him to stay.

A little later he reached an agreement with the government which allowed him to excavate, at his own expense, under the supervision of the Greek Archaeological Society, on the condition that he handed over everything he found. The only concession was that he had the right to publish his findings (in other words, report on his excavations) for a period not exceeding three years.

It was a hard bargain, but Schliemann had no alternative but to accept. He arrived at Mycenae in August, 1876, recruited sixty-three workmen and began to dig.

Unlike Troy, Mycenae was easily identifiable. Although in ruins, its massive walls were still extant, ten feet thick and up to thirty-six feet high. The unhewn stones, some of them ten tons in weight, unbound by mortar, were still in place. The walls encircled the brow of the hill on which the ancient city stood, and formed what is known as an acropolis. The classical Greeks thought that they must have been built by giants called Cyclops, and they therefore gave them the name Cyclopean.

Yet while there could be no two opinions as to the site of Mycenae, there could be, and were, several differing opinions as to where it would be most profitable to dig.

Homer described Mycenae as ‘rich in gold’, and to
support this view there was the account by Pausanias, the Greek historian who lived in the second century A.D., of a visit he paid to Mycenae. He wrote,

‘In the ruins of Mycenae there are... the underground buildings of Atreus and his sons, where their treasures were.’

In fact, these ‘underground buildings’ were not treasuries, as Pausanias thought, but tombs, dating back long before the days of Atreus and his sons, Agamemnon and Menelaus. The passage did, however, indicate the tradition that Mycenae had been opulent about the time of the Trojan War.

Schliemann knew that it was sometimes the custom in ancient days for a person’s treasure to be buried with him when he died, in the belief that he might need it in another life. He therefore believed that there might be some of the treasure which Pausanias mentioned in the graves of the prehistoric kings, particularly in the grave of the great Agamemnon. Schliemann was not the first archaeologist to hold this opinion, but earlier excavators had had little success. This could only be, decided Schliemann, because they had dug in the wrong places. According to Pausanias,

‘Clytemnestra and Aegisthos’ (who murdered Agamemnon) ‘were buried a little outside the wall, for they were not deemed worthy of burial within it, where Agamemnon lies, and those who were murdered with him.’

This would seem to indicate clearly that Agamemnon himself was buried inside the Cyclopean walls. Most scholars, on the contrary, were not of this view. They pointed out that the walls enclosed only a comparatively small area, most of it bare rock and steeply sloping, which would have been unsuitable for a burial ground. There had been, declared the scholars, a second, much longer
wall, which had since disappeared, around the lower slopes of the hill. It was inside this longer wall, although outside the Cyclopean walls, they said, that Agamemnon and his followers were buried. The archaeologists who had in the past tried to find Agamemnon’s grave had therefore dug outside the walls that still crowned the hill.

Schliemann, literally minded as always, did not accept this explanation. There could not be any doubt, he wrote, that Pausanias was referring to ‘the huge Cyclopean walls which he saw, and not to walls which he could not see. . . . He could not have seen the walls of the lower city, because they had been originally only very thin, and had been demolished 638 years before his time.’

When Schliemann announced his intention to dig inside the Cyclopean walls, the Greek Archaeological Society heaved a sigh of relief. The crazy foreign excavator would find nothing there, they thought, to enhance even further his extraordinary reputation and put themselves even more in the shade. Nevertheless, they sent a representative (called an ephor) to make sure that he handed over to the government anything that he did happen to discover.

Schliemann began his excavations just inside the Lion Gate. This is the massive entrance to the Cyclopean walls, consisting of a great stone resting on two rectangular columns. The gate is crowned by two headless lions rampant, also made of stone, an astonishingly advanced piece of heraldry for a prehistoric people. (The heads of the lions, according to Schliemann, had probably been made of bronze or gold and been stolen.) Schliemann chose this area because test-shafts had shown that the soil was deeper there than elsewhere.

He had difficulty in getting through the Lion Gate, as it was obstructed by heavy stones, but once inside he soon unearthed his first find. This was a small chamber, hardly
larger than a sentry box, and only four and a half feet high. Schliemann said it was ‘undoubtedly the ancient doorkeeper’s habitation . . . it would not be to the taste of our present doorkeepers, but in the heroic age comfort was unknown, particularly to slaves, and being unknown it was unmissed’.

Schliemann had by now sunk thirty-four shafts, all within the walls, and trouble had already arisen with the ephor. Some walls had been disclosed of comparatively late date, and Schliemann, naturally, had wanted to demolish them. The ephor forbade him. Schliemann argued, but to no effect. The following morning, however, when the ephor arrived at the site, he found that the walls had been pulled down in the night. And that was not all. Schliemann had taken on more than the original sixty-three labourers, against the terms of his agreement with the government, and the ephor was almost driven to distraction trying to keep an eye on them all.

Despite the protests of the agitated ephor, Schliemann continued to dig, and it was not long before he made another discovery. Forty feet from the Lion Gate, and not far from part of the Cyclopean walls, Schliemann uncovered a double circle of upright slabs, eighty-seven feet in diameter. The ground within the circle had obviously been levelled in ancient times, and Schliemann at once proclaimed his find to be an agora, the place where the people of the city held their meetings. It was of interest, but not what Schliemann was seeking. He would dig elsewhere.

Then he changed his mind, and decided to see what he could find within the double ring of slabs. This decision to carry on must entitle him to be called the luckiest of all archaeologists. For almost immediately he found an upright slab, about four feet square. It had originally
been decorated with a sculptured relief, but it was badly damaged. Then another slab was disclosed, and yet another, these in better condition than the first. Schliemann was overjoyed. There could be little doubt that the slabs were gravestones.

Despite the fierce July heat, the digging continued. The next significant discovery was a stone altar, with an opening in the centre, which, Schliemann believed, was intended to allow the blood of some sacrificial animal to pour upon the dead in the graves below. One by one more gravestones were uncovered, some bearing scenes of hunting or fighting, some with geometrical designs, and some plain. Carefully they were removed, and the workmen dug deeper. Another ring of slabs appeared, then a thick layer of earth, and finally the workmen struck solid rock.

But the rock was not solid everywhere. In one place there was clearly a cavity, about twenty-one feet long and ten feet wide, which might have been the head of a shaft. Schliemann and his wife looked at each other in triumph. If it were a shaft, they had found what they were looking for—a prehistoric shaft-grave.

Under the excited gaze of the Schliemanns and the ephor, the workmen began to explore the cavity. Every shovelful of soil was hopefully examined, in case it should contain some object of value. Deeper and deeper the workmen dug. It was clear by now that the cavity was a shaft, but still nothing of interest had come to light. Then suddenly Sophia discerned a glint in the soil. She picked up a tiny object and wiped it. Her heart beat faster. It was a small gold ring.

The labourers were at once dismissed, as the work now required the utmost care. The Schliemanns and the ephor fell to their knees, and began scraping the soil away with pen-knives. The secrets which Mycenae had kept for
thirty-five centuries were at last to be revealed to the modern world.

And what fabulous secrets they were! The nineteen bodies which the Schliemanns found (in five separate shaft-graves) were literally laden with gold and jewels. The men had golden masks over their faces, and golden breastplates. By their sides lay swords and daggers, inlaid with gold, and golden drinking-cups. The women wore gold diadems, bracelets, ear-rings and necklaces. Their clothes were covered with gold leaves from head to foot. Beside the women were golden toilet boxes. The two children who were found were wrapped in sheets of gold. It was intrinsically the most valuable treasure that has ever been unearthed, before or since.

But it was not the mere value of the articles which was remarkable. Far more amazing was the skill of the craftsmen, and the advanced aesthetic sense which these prehistoric people obviously possessed.

Among the most beautiful articles were two bronze dagger-blades, ornamented with exquisite gold inlay work. The design on one side depicted a lion-hunt, and that on the other a river-scene, with wild cats slinking through the papyrus plants. Another dagger-blade was decorated with lions on one side and with lilies on the reverse. A sword-blade depicted running horses. In every case the hilts were also richly ornamented, and fixed to the blades with rivets of gold. A golden crown, found on one male body, was patterned with stars and edged with starred leaves. The golden leaves on the women’s clothes were decorated with reliefs of bees, cuttle-fish, rosettes, spirals and many geometrical devices. The many ornaments which were found were all exquisitely fashioned. Some bore pictures of butterflies, stags or griffins, while others were covered with delicately traced crosses. The minute
size of some of the articles was almost unbelievable. There was a sardonyx gem less than one inch by \( \frac{3}{4} \) inch, which portrayed a warrior kneeling to a woman, and a small amethyst carved with a deer and her calf. All the workmanship showed a great love of curves and coils, and an incredible appreciation of symmetry.

Probably the most attractive finds of all were the many gold seals and signet rings which bore miniature portraits of elegantly-dressed women, in tight-waisted, full-skirted dresses resembling crinolines. These tiny pictures had a human appeal which is rarely found in objects of such great antiquity.

As Schliemann wrote at the time, the treasures he found in Mycenae ‘are sufficient in themselves to fill a great museum, which will be the most marvellous in the world’.

In the same way as he had identified the treasure at Troy with that of Priam, Schliemann was convinced that the treasure at Mycenae had belonged to Agamemnon. This time, however, he received support from many scholars who had been sceptical of the conclusions he had reached at Troy. There was good reason for this, for there appeared to be an undeniable connection between the shaft-graves and the Homeric poems.

To take one example, the large shields which Homer described (although unknown both in his own day and in classical times) were found portrayed on several inlaid dagger-blades and on a signet ring. Again, there was a gold cup with doves on the handles in one of the graves which nearly, but not quite, corresponded with a cup described by Homer. There were, moreover, pictures of chariots on the gravestones at Mycenae, and Homer mentioned chariots more than once as being employed in the Trojan War, although they were rarely used in his own time. To be weighed against this was the fact that there
were numerous objects in the shaft-graves which had no parallel in the Homeric epics.

Schliemann himself had not the slightest doubt that he had found the graves of Agamemnon and his companions. The very fact that there were several bodies in what he regarded as Agamemnon's grave seemed proof to him, if proof were needed, that they must all have been murdered at the same time. He rejected the idea that three obviously 'royal personages of immeasurable wealth, who had died a natural death at long intervals of time, should have been huddled together in the same tomb'.

These three bodies all wore golden masks over their faces, and golden breastplates on their chests, and had richly inlaid weapons beside them. When the first mask was removed the skull crumbled away on being exposed to the air, and the same happened when the second mask was taken away.

'But of the third body, which lay at the north end of the tomb, the round face, with all its flesh, had been wonderfully preserved under its ponderous golden mask.'

Schliemann lifted the mask to his lips, and kissed it. Then he sent a telegram to the King of Greece, reading,

'I have gazed on the face of Agamemnon.'

Truth, unfortunately, is rarely as romantic as fiction, even when the subject is Heinrich Schliemann. He was mistaken in believing the graves to be those of Agamemnon and his retinue, for, like the treasure of Troy, they belonged to a far earlier age than the Trojan War, now confirmed by archaeologists to have been about 1180 B.C. The bodies in the graves were of persons who died at various dates between 1600 and 1500 B.C., and who would have seemed as historic to Agamemnon as the Tudors do to us today. The bodies were not, in fact, 'huddled together' as Schliemann had thought, but had been separated by
wooden partitions which had rotted away many years before.

Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that Mycenae was still a great citadel at the time of the Trojan War. Moreover, archaeologists have since discovered that nearly all the places which Homer listed as sending contingents to the Trojan War have traces of a civilisation similar to that of Mycenae, and can be presumed to have flourished about the same time. This, together with many other recent discoveries, proves beyond doubt that Homer's poems have a solid foundation of truth.

The importance of Schliemann's excavations at Mycenae, however, does not rest on whether or not they helped to substantiate the historical accuracy of Homer. What is of much greater significance is that they revealed an advanced prehistoric civilisation previously unknown to archaeology.

In 1877 Schliemann made a triumphal tour of England. He renewed his acquaintanceship with the Prime Minister of the time, Mr. Gladstone, and even persuaded him to write a foreword to his forthcoming book in English about Mycenae. He was lionised wherever he went 'as if,' in his own words, 'I had discovered a new part of the globe for England'. A little later he visited Germany, where he received the freedom of Berlin, despite the fact that the German scholars had originally been the most critical of his methods.

Schliemann was now a middle-aged man, but his enthusiasm for the past was as great as ever. By September, 1878, he had received permission to return to Troy, and had recommenced digging near the point at which he had found the treasure. In less than a month, another, smaller collection of golden objects was unearthed, contained in a broken terracotta jar. Later, however, the Turkish
Government again decided that Schliemann was an undesirable intruder in their country (possibly because he had been persuaded to present his Trojan treasure to the German nation), and they accused him of being a spy.

Schliemann left Turkey in indignation. He went to his childhood home, Ankershagen, and met once again the miller who had recited Homer to him, and Minna, his first sweetheart, now a fat old woman. Then, in 1884, he began digging at Tiryns (near Nauplia), which, like Mycenae, had Cyclopean walls. Here he uncovered a prehistoric palace, which was unmistakably like one described in Homer’s *Odyssey*. This greatly puzzled him, because it also resembled part of a palace he had discovered in an upper layer at Troy, which, of course, he believed to be much later than the Trojan War:

The discoveries at Tiryns were Schliemann’s last success, for his next journey, to the island of Crete, was a failure. Crete was at that time under Turkish rule, and, as might have been expected, after the incident of the Trojan treasure, his request to dig there had a cold reception. He was still trying to come to terms both with the Turkish Government and with the owner of the land, as Christmas, 1890 approached.

It was a bitterly cold winter, and Schliemann was hurrying home to Athens, after having had an operation on one of his ears in Germany. Although often in pain, he was determined to spend the festive season with Sophia and his children. He would leave the train from time to time to find a local doctor who would treat him, but he always insisted on continuing his journey afterwards. But at Naples the pain was so severe that he had to cable to Sophia telling her to postpone the celebrations. He saw a doctor and obtained some relief. Then, feeling better, he decided to visit the ruins at Pompeii. The effort was
too much for him. The next morning, the morning of Christmas Day, he collapsed on his way to see the doctor, and was taken to hospital. The following day he died.

Although the world of scholarship is still divided over the value of Schliemann’s discoveries, and particularly over his methods, it would not be an exaggeration to say that he opened the eyes of scholars for the first time to the potentialities of learning about the past with a spade rather than from a book. He himself, of course, had been lucky past all belief, but no one, surely, could have better deserved luck, than this enthusiastic amateur of genius.

Schliemann was mourned by many thousands of people throughout the world, to whom reading of his excavations had brought excitement and romance. He was also mourned by the young archaeologists who had been inspired by his work. As one of his colleagues wrote, it seemed, when Heinrich Schliemann died, as if ‘the spring had gone out of the year’.

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IV

ARTHUR EVANS
(1851-1941)

On the walls of some of the ancient tombs in Egypt were found pictures which baffled the archaeologists for centuries. They depicted broad-shouldered, slim-waisted young men, wearing blue and gold loin-cloths and carrying conical vases.

Who were these people? No one knew. They were certainly not Egyptians, and almost equally certainly they were not people from some subject race. For they appeared to be bringing the vessels to the Pharaoh as gifts from one sovereign nation to another.

It was a mystery, and it continued to be a mystery even after the hieroglyphs in the tombs had been deciphered. For these called them ‘Keftiu’, the ‘Island People’ from the ‘Great Green Sea’, with whom the Egyptians had had commercial contacts. But the historians knew of no ‘island people’ with a civilisation contemporary with that of Ancient Egypt. It seemed as if the Keftiu were to remain an enigma, until, almost by accident, Arthur Evans solved the problem.

Arthur John Evans was born on July 8th, 1851, near Hemel Hempstead in Hertfordshire. His family owned a long-established paper-making business, but was also distinguished in the academic world. Arthur’s father, a geologist, numismatist and antiquary, was a Fellow and Treasurer of the Royal Society. Arthur therefore had the
advantage of spending his childhood in an atmosphere not only of wealth but of scholarship.

But neither wealth nor scholarship is a defence against misfortune, as young Arthur was to learn at an early age. For when he was six he was taken from his home, Nash Mills, to stay at a house in a neighbouring village. He had been brought there, he gathered from the whispers of the maids, because his mother was lying gravely ill at home. If she died in the night one of the servants from Nash Mills would let them know by throwing gravel at the nursery window.

Night after night Arthur willed himself to stay awake and listen. And at last, on New Year's morning, he heard the sound he had been dreading. The following day he was taken to Nash Mills to see his mother, and he studied her features with the utmost intensity. Although he was only six, he knew it was the last time he would see her, and he was determined to remember her all his life.

Arthur's education followed the conventional pattern for a boy of his social standing in this country. From preparatory school he went to Harrow, where he gained several prizes, but did not distinguish himself as his father had hoped. He was already fond of hunting for old coins and potsherds, and his housemaster complained of his 'dirt and untidiness'. He also owned a snake that used to crawl up his shirt sleeve, and emerge at his collar to the horror of the staff. He was extremely short-sighted and wore glasses (with reluctance), but he was wiry and energetic and liked swimming and riding. From Harrow he entered Brasenose College, Oxford, where he graduated with a first-class honours degree in History.

While at university Arthur spent most of the Long Vacations in adventurous trips to Eastern Europe. After a visit in 1871 to what is now called Yugoslavia,
this interest in the Balkans became an ardent passion. He was fascinated by the landscape, particularly of the Dalmatian coast, the mixture of cultures, and the liberty-loving people. He also sympathised with the minorities, both Christian and Moslem, who were suffering at the hands of their Turkish overlords.

After taking his degree in 1875, Evans naturally turned his thoughts towards his future career. He had no interest in paper-making, and hoped to receive an academic appointment at his old university. Unfortunately his sympathies with the Balkan insurrectionaries made him unacceptable to the conservative elements in Oxford. He applied for vacant Fellowships at both Magdalen and All Souls, but no one was surprised when he was awarded neither.

Meanwhile he paid a visit to Göttingen University, which was considered to lead the world in historical studies. On the way he stopped at Trier, where he engaged three men to help him to excavate a Roman cemetery. He made a great many finds, mostly pottery and coins, but there was nothing of any particular significance. Göttingen itself he found disappointing, and three months later he was on his way to the Balkans once more.

This time he was accompanied by one of his brothers, and their troubles began when they were arrested as spies by the Austrians. Arthur’s natural arrogance and pugnacity did not help them, and they spent half an hour in the cells at Brood. On being released they crossed into Turkish territory, and from then on had one minor adventure after another. These included being mistaken for paid agitators, and having to hide in a monastery during a threatened massacre of the Christians.

On returning to England Evans spent several months writing a book on his travels, illustrated with the sketches
he had made at the time. It was kindly received by the critics on the whole, and was a great success among the general public. W. E. Gladstone, who had been sent a presentation copy, even quoted a passage as evidence of Turkish atrocities.

By now, on the strength of several holidays and some reading, Evans was regarded as an authority on the situation in the Balkans. This resulted, in 1877, in the Manchester Guardian offering him the post of special correspondent in the South Slav countries. It was, of course, a job after the young man’s heart, and he set off enthusiastically on January 20th.

Evans’ base was Ragusa (now called Dubrovnik), an enchanting city enclosed by massive mediaeval walls. From there he sent lively, well-documented accounts of the guerilla warfare taking place between the Slavs and the Turks. He often obtained his information at great personal risk, plunging deep into the hinterland that was held by the insurgents. On one occasion he swam across an icy, flooded river, with his notebook and pencil in the lining of his hat. On another, he donned a scarlet cloak in order to look Oriental, and visited a Moslem stronghold in the mountains.

But even in the midst of such adventurous activities, Evans still found time to indulge his love of archaeology. He investigated barrows of Bronze Age date in the Canalese mountains, excavated Roman buildings and explored mediaeval castles. ‘Tell Pa that I have got him a nice flat celt,’ he wrote home, and ‘I have also picked up some very pretty gems and Roman cameos.’

He also found time to fall in love. The object of his affections was a young lady named Margaret Freeman, the daughter of an Oxford historian who was also visiting Ragusa. She was not beautiful, but had a typically English
kind of charm, and was remarkably well educated for a mid-Victorian woman. She was certainly head-over-heels in love with Evans, and he must indeed have seemed a romantic figure. Fresh from his adventures with the rebels, lithe, active and bronzed, it is easy to understand how he won Margaret’s heart. Even his eccentricities—such as the knobby walking-stick nick-named ‘Prodger’ which he always carried—only made him appear more endearing in her eyes.

Back in London, Evans and Margaret celebrated their engagement by visiting an exhibition of the antiquities which Schliemann had discovered at Troy. In the following autumn (September 19th, 1878) they were married from Margaret’s home near Wells, in Somerset. The wedding photograph shows the bridegroom looking irresponsible but happy, holding a new ‘Prodger’ decorated with a large, white bow.

After their marriage the Evanses bought a lovely Venetian house at Ragusa, and Margaret set to work to try to sort out their possessions. This could not have been easy, for Evans was untidy by nature, and did not see sufficiently clearly for the disorder he created to disturb him.

Unfortunately, Margaret quickly became unhappy at Ragusa. She did not appreciate its picturesque qualities, but thought it squalid and dirty. In 1880 her health broke down and she left for England, where she stayed until the end of the year, when she appeared to have recovered.

Evans was still the correspondent for the Guardian, but since the expulsion of the Turks from the South Slav territory, English readers were less interested in the Balkans. The fighting appeared to be over, and Evans had received instructions to confine himself to brief reports on social conditions. These he considered even worse under
the new Austrian administration than they had been under the Turks, and he said so with vehemence.

Peace was short-lived, however. In 1881 an insurrection broke out in Crivoscia, and Evans hurried to the scene. From there he sent dispatches to the Guardian which clearly showed his delight in every Austrian defeat and reversal. This angered the Austrian authorities, who had hoped to suppress the news of the rebellion for fear that the trouble might spread. Evans was ordered to leave the country within seventy-two hours, on the grounds that he had incited the peasants to revolt. He received the expulsion order on a Friday (March 3rd), several hours after the only boat of the day had left Ragusa. There were no sailings in any direction during the weekend, and so the Evanses bought tickets for the boat that left on Tuesday. This meant, of course, remaining in Ragusa for one day after the order had expired, but they had no alternative.

Tuesday came and all seemed well. No one appeared to have enquired whether the Englishman had indeed departed. But as they walked towards the gang-plank a hand was laid on Evans’ shoulder, and he heard a voice saying, ‘I arrest you, Herr Evans.’ To her horror Margaret saw her husband marched straight off the quay, and was told he was being taken to Ragusa Prison. Here Evans was stripped and searched, and led to a cell with an iron ring in the wall to which a prisoner could be chained. When evening came there was no lamp, in case a prisoner tried to use it to send a signal after dark, and a sentry patrolled the corridor outside.

The next morning Evans wondered how to communicate with Margaret. Then he discovered a tiny scrap of paper in his pocket. He pricked his arm to draw blood, and with a tooth from his comb wrote her a few words in his minute, myopic hand. Fortunately one of the gaolers
was a Slav, and he agreed to deliver the note on being assured of a reward from Margaret. Later Evans hid his messages in a scooped out loaf, which was smuggled out of the gaol by a friendly cook.

Evans remained in custody until April 23rd, when an order for his release and expulsion was signed. He had been in prison for seven weeks, and returned to England to be met by a relieved and delighted family.

It was not easy for Evans to settle down, however, for his restless, questing spirit was always longing for fresh adventures. For two years he tried to accommodate himself to life in Oxford, but in April, 1883 he decided to go abroad again.

This time the Evenses were bound for Greece, with an introduction to the famous archaeologist, Schliemann. Margaret was not altogether pleased to be back in the Balkans, and compared Delphi unfavourably with Wookey Hole. But Evans was enchanted with everything he saw, and especially with the treasures Schliemann had found at Mycenae. What fascinated him most among the finds were the tiny engraved bead-seals and engraved gold signet rings. He held them a few inches from his shortsighted eyes, and examined them minutely for hours on end. There was something in their style that he found exciting and puzzling. It was neither Hellenic, nor Egyptian, nor Oriental. Where had this art-form originated? To what culture did it belong? The problem was to tease him for the next ten years.

In 1884 Evans at last received a university appointment. He was elected Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. This museum had been founded in the seventeenth century, but neglect and abuse had almost robbed it of any practical value. To Evans it was a challenge, and with his usual determination he set about making drastic
alterations and improvements. His aim was to create not
a mere repository of curiosities, but a home for archaeo-
logical research and study. In this he was successful, and
within a few years the Ashmolean had been transformed
almost beyond recognition. There were two thousand
new objects, well lit and well catalogued, and plans were
under way for transferring the whole collection to new
premises.

Fortunately his duties as the Keeper did not necessitate
Evans residing in Oxford for the whole of the year. He
was still able to enjoy foreign travel with his wife, and
visited places as far afield as Yalta and Tiflis.

It was on one of these trips that Margaret died. Her
health had never been good since her breakdown at
Ragusa, and trying to match her husband’s energy had
overtaxed her frail body. She was buried in the English
corner of the cemetery at Alassio, and Evans made her a
wreath of scented broom and marguerites.

The year of Margaret’s death (1893) was not only a
sad but a momentous one for Arthur Evans. For it was
in this year that he decided to make a serious attempt to
trace the history of the art-form on the Mycenaean gems.
He had one clue. Some of the designs portrayed an octopus,
a characteristic feature of Aegean art. But where in the
Aegean could a civilisation have existed even earlier than
that of Mycenae and Troy?

As he puzzled over the problem, Evans made a discovery
which had been overlooked by the experts who had more
normal eyesight. For Evans, undistracted by his surround-
ings, which were blurred to him, saw details with the
naked eye with microscopic exactitude. His discovery
was that some of the pictures were arranged in such a
way that they might, in fact, be primitive pictographs.
This was a revolutionary idea, for it had always been
accepted that no picture-writing had existed in the European area. But if it had, then, bearing in mind the evidence of the octopus, it must have been in the Aegean. The question was where?

Evans thought he had found the answer in the following March, when he was browsing in an antique shop in Shoe Lane, Athens. He had discovered some small three- and four-sided stones, drilled along the axis, which appeared to bear hieroglyphic symbols. These were clearly not the familiar Egyptian signs, however, and so Evans asked the dealer where the stones had come from. The reply was, 'From Crete.' From the Aegean island of Crete! We can imagine the effect of these words on Evans.

Crete, almost equidistant from Egypt and Europe, might well have been a stepping-stone in the diffusion of picture-writing. In other words, the Cretans might have learnt about hieroglyphs from the Egyptians, and passed on their knowledge to the Mycenaeans. But was it conceivable that there should have been a prehistoric civilisation in Crete sufficiently advanced, and with such a wide sphere of influence?

Evans was, of course, familiar with the stories told by Homer and the classic authors about this little known island. The oldest tradition was that Zeus, the Father-God of the Greeks, was born in a cave on the side of Mount Ida. There were also many legends (some conflicting) about Minos, who was said to be the son of Zeus and the King of Crete.

According to these, Minos founded the first great naval power in the Mediterranean, and was overlord of much of the mainland of Greece. His palace was at Knossos, and beneath it was a maze in which he kept a bull-like creature called the Minotaur. To feed this
monster King Minos demanded that the people of Athens should send him twelve young men and maidens every year. But the year came when Theseus, the son of Aegeus, lord of Athens, was among the victims, and he devised a plan to save himself and his companions. Before entering the labyrinth, he fastened a long thread to the gate, which he carefully paid out as he walked. Then he slew the Minotaur, and by following the thread was able to make his way back to the entrance.

These myths certainly suggested that the Classical Greeks regarded Crete as a place of some historical importance. Whether they were justified in doing so, however, was a question that scholars had apparently not considered.

The following year (1894) Evans arrived in Crete, and set about exploring the country on mule-back. Wherever he went he asked for seals, but found that the inhabitants were exceedingly loath to part with any they possessed. This was because they valued them as charms for nursing mothers, and feared that without them babies would die for lack of milk. Nevertheless, by the end of his first season on the island Evans had proof of the existence of two early writing systems. One was pictorial, the other linear and quasi-alphabetic, and both appeared to Evans to be clearly prehistoric.

It had taken Evans less than a year to achieve his objective, but already a new ambition was taking shape in his mind. This was to investigate the traces of ancient remains which he had noticed in many parts of the island on his travels. Although little was to be seen, he was convinced from the evidence of the seals that these ruins dated back to pre-Hellenic days. As he wrote enthusiastically at the time, 'The golden age of Crete lies far beyond the limits of the historical period.'
During the three years that followed (1895-98) Evans devoted all his energy to exploring the island. Then, in 1899, when the country had thrown off the Turkish yoke, he acquired the freehold of the legendary site of Knossos. This was in the north, a few miles from Candia (now known as Herakleion), the capital of Crete. Evans was not, of course, the first archaeologist to dig there. Several nineteenth century excavators had been interested in the site. But usually their efforts were frustrated by the Turks, and only superficial excavations had been made. These had revealed some massive walls and a store of huge stone jars, as large as those in which Ali Baba had found the Forty Thieves. Evans, needless to say, was not fascinated by the buildings so much as by the thought that there might be further writings. He even hoped that some clue might be found which would enable the experts to decipher the scripts on the seals.

Evans reached Crete in early March, 1900, and wasted no time in setting thirty men to work. Success came immediately. Within a matter of days a labyrinth of structures had been revealed. These were later identified as the remains of a palace, some six acres in extent, and without doubt pre-Mycenaean. The palace was not all of one period, but had been enlarged and reconstructed as each succeeding generation had taken possession of the building. Indeed, as further investigation was to prove, people had lived continuously on the site for over 2,000 years. Evans decided to call these early inhabitants of Crete 'Minoans', after the legendary king who had lived at Knossos.

On March 30th Evans found what he had come to Crete to find, a kind of baked clay bar covered with a linear script. He at once engaged another seventy workmen, and within a few days had uncovered
700 more tablets. They all bore the same mysterious writing, either linear or pictorial, as he had seen on the seals.

For a moment Evans thought that his mission was accomplished. The tablets confirmed that a picture-script had existed in Europe. But already the splendour of the palace was apparent, and Evans recognised what an opportunity he was being offered. It was, in fact, an opportunity that no archaeologist had ever had before—to reveal almost single-handed an unknown civilisation. Evans decided to accept it, and in the years that were to follow he was to prove that he was supremely fitted for such a task.

Meanwhile the work continued, and on April 5th a life-size painting of a young Minoan man came to light. It was part of a fresco on the wall of a corridor, and was probably at least 4,000 years old.

This figure from a remote, forgotten age naturally caused a sensation both in Crete and beyond. But most excited of all were the Egyptologists. For the figure in the fresco was similar in almost every respect to the mysterious Keftiu. It had the same deep reddish skin, almond-shaped eyes and curly hair, the same broad shoulders, muscular thighs and artificially slim waist. It wore the same blue and gold loin-cloth of non-Egyptian shape, and even carried the same long conical vessel. Moreover, further examination showed that the figure was taking part in the same kind of procession as was portrayed in the tombs. There could in fact be little doubt that it was the ancient Cretans who were the 'Island People' from the 'Great Green Sea'.

As is so often the case in archaeology, the search for one thing had revealed something entirely different. For Evans could not have guessed as he wrestled with the
problem of the seals that they would lead him to solve the riddle of the Keftiu.

Before long the whole of the west side of the palace was laid bare, including the chambers that were the store-rooms and treasuries. These contained ‘Ali Baba’ jars for storing oil (about 17,000 gallons), and for such foods as dried fish, grain and olives. These important consummable commodities must have represented a large part of the royal wealth in Minoan times. There were also rows of small lead-lined pits for precious objects, now empty except for traces of gold foil here and there.

Also early in the excavations (about the middle of April), came one of the most dramatic finds to be made at Knossos. It was a chamber containing a large, rectangular pit, which had a pillared flight of steps leading down from the edge. Its importance was not immediately apparent, however. In fact Evans originally dismissed it as nothing more than a bath-chamber. But further excavation proved that there was no provision in the pit for the escape of waste water, which seemed a curious omission. Then, in the north part of the room, which may once have been curtained off, one of the diggers suddenly struck something hard with his spade. It was the top of a high-backed gypsum chair, its back partially embedded in the stucco wall.

In great excitement Evans had the chair dug out. Then he saw that it was the throne of the king himself. It stood (as it still stands) in its original position, flanked on either side with stone benches on which the counsellors sat. It was the oldest throne in Europe by at least 2,000 years. It might even have belonged to the legendary King Minos.

The pit facing it was later recognised as a ‘lustral basin’, a place where a religious cleansing or anointing took
place. Its presence in the throne room is explained by the fact that the king was not only the ruler, but the high priest of the Minoan people.

It was not only the throne, however, that delighted Evans, but the frescoes on the walls on either side of it. They were in a poor state of preservation, but it was easy to distinguish hills, rivers, reeds and some griffin-like animals.

Frescoes indeed abounded in every part of the palace, producing a riot of brilliant blues, yellows, greens and russets. Some were charming decorative motifs based on scenes from nature, or, since Crete is an island, on under-water life. There were trees and flowers, birds and butterflies, star-fish, dolphins and sea-urchins, all observed and painted with fastidious care. Many also incorporated the double-axe of the Earth-Goddess, which seems to have been to the Minoans what the cross is to Christians.

Most fascinating of all were the frescoes portraying human scenes, particularly those representing Minoan women. There was one depicting well-bred ladies attending a court function which made a French scholar exclaim, 'Mais, ce sont des Parisiennes!' For in dress, style of hairdressing, manner and expression they closely resembled the fashionable Frenchwomen of 1900.

It was one of the frescoes (discovered during the first season's work) that aroused the greatest excitement among the general public. This was a spirited painting of a young woman in the act of somersaulting over the back of a charging bull. She had seized the animal by the horns, and when it tossed its head she would be thrown onto its back, from where she could leap to the ground. This was the first time a picture of 'bull-vaulting' had come to light, but Evans later found the scene depicted again and again. On frescoes, on seals, on a delicate ivory statuette, the
young 'toreadors' of both sexes performed this remarkable feat.

The first question that comes to mind is 'Was such a feat possible?' Could anyone in reality somersault over a charging bull? Modern 'steer-wrestlers' from the American Far West have denied it, and said that no one could grip the horns of a bull in such a fashion. The bull would raise its head sideways, and gore the person standing in front of it long before a purchase could be gained on the horns. Whether this is so or not is still a mystery, however, as no one has offered to put the matter to a practical test!

But supposing it were possible and 'bull-vaulting' had been a sport, or, more probably, a religious ritual among the Minoans. Would this perhaps explain the legend of the Minotaur and the twelve young Athenians who were sacrificed each year? Was it conceivable that the youths and maidens were not fed to the bull but forced to somersault over it for the amusement of the Minoans? If this were so, then the 'labyrinth' of the myth may have been the palace, which might well have seemed a maze to the unsophisticated Athenians.

Scholars can do no more than hazard a guess, but it is beyond doubt that the Minoans held the bull in special esteem. Conventionalised representations of its horns appear countless times at Knossos, and one huge pair evidently surmounted the palace roof. Evans' own theory was that the muffled roar of an earth tremor, so familiar in Crete, suggested the bellowing of a bull to the Minoans. They may even have shared the primitive belief that the tremor was caused by a bull tossing the world on its horns. This would account for their desire to propitiate it by human sacrifice, if, as seems probable, the majority of the 'toreadors' were killed.
Evans continued excavating until the beginning of June, when an epidemic of malaria, added to the heat, brought the work to a standstill. He was back, however, by February, 1901, and was soon making discovery after discovery again.

These included a multitude of charming small objects, such as ivory statues reminiscent of Renaissance work, vases, figurines, and many fragments of ivory, faience and crystal. He found also a gaming-table of exquisite workmanship, faced with crystal and ivory mosaic set in gold.

But what impressed and astonished Evans most of all was the incredibly advanced system of plumbing he discovered. There were sinks, ventilators, lavatories and pits for refuse of a standard unknown in England until Elizabethan times. In Evans' own words,

'The elaborate drainage system of the Palace and the connected sanitary arrangements excite the wonder of all beholders. The terracotta pipes, with their scientifically-shaped sections, nicely interlocked, which date from the earliest days of the building, are quite up to modern standards.'

The supreme example of the skill of the Minoan plumbers was undoubtedly a water-duct beside a flight of stairs. These stairs were out of doors, and the purpose of the channel was to carry away the rain during the torrential winter downpours. The difficulty, however, was that the steps (which were steep) made a right-angled turn on every landing. This would mean, the plumbers realised, that the water would overflow at the first corner because its speed would prevent it changing direction. They therefore fashioned the duct in a series of parabolic curves, which halved the speed of the flow and enabled it to follow the required course.

'Nothing in the whole building,' wrote Evans, 'gives
such an impression of the result of long generations of intelligent experience on the part of the Minoan engineers as the parabolic curves of the channels.'

Evans now began to excavate on the eastern side of the site, and almost immediately came upon another flight of stairs. This was the most magnificent and stately structure at Knossos, and Evans decided to call it the Grand Staircase. It led up to what must have been a suite of royal apartments, including the principal megaron or hall of the palace. These rooms, although on the third floor, were lower than the domestic quarters, because the ground fell away on this side towards a river. Originally, the stairs had reached to a fourth and a fifth floor, from where there would have been a fine view across the valley.

It was about this time that Evans began turning his thoughts towards reconstructing the more interesting sections of the palace. His aim was to give not only fellow experts but even tourists some idea of its former grandeur. If he had not reconstructed he would in fact have left nothing but a heap of broken masonry behind him. For the columns which had supported the roofs and stairways had been made of timber, which had, of course, long ago decayed. It was indeed miraculous that the original level of the floors had in so many cases been maintained by the rubble underneath them.

Unfortunately the cypress trees, which had provided the ancient columns, no longer grew on the island, and imported wood quickly rotted. Evans therefore decided to use iron girders, partly masked with cement, but these proved expensive and far from satisfactory. It was only when reinforced concrete was introduced in the nineteen-twenties that Evans found the solution to his problem. He then ordered concrete columns of identical shape to the originals, and fixed them into the ancient sockets in
the floor. The cypress trees, it is interesting to note, had been placed root upward in these sockets, perhaps to prevent them sprouting again. The more likely reason, however, is that the Minoan builders knew what modern engineers only discovered during the present century, namely, that pillars can support a far greater weight if tapered towards the base rather than towards the top.

Evans was faced, as might be expected, with innumerable difficulties during the course of the reconstruction, particularly in the case of the Grand Staircase itself.

'The middle staircase wall,' wrote Evans, 'above the first flight, was found to have a dangerous list outwards, involving a continual risk to the remains of the whole fabric.' In order to counteract this, 'the wall was first harnessed and secured by planks and ropes; its base was then cut into, along its whole length on either side; wedge-shaped stones and cement were held in readiness for insertion in the outer slit, and sixty men on the terrace above were then set to pull the ropes secured to the casing. The mighty mass was thus set in motion, and righted itself against the solid wooden framework prepared as a stop. This was then removed, and the whole structure refixed in its upright position. By these various means it has been possible to maintain the staircase and balustrade at their original levels, and thus restore to the modern world the structural aspects of this great work which dates back some 3,600 years.'

Although Evans had little option but to reconstruct as he excavated, he was subjected to considerable criticism for doing so. Apart from objections on aesthetic grounds to so much concrete, the main criticism was that he was squandering money subscribed by public bodies. Evans was naturally indignant at these accusations, and decided to dispense with any further financial assistance. He could,
of course, afford to do so, as he was heir to a large part of the fortune his family had made from the paper mills. In fact during the years that followed he spent a quarter of a million pounds on digging, preserving and reconstructing at Knossos.

Evans not only restored the fabric of the palace, but engaged a Swiss artist named Gilliéron to piece together the broken frescoes. This could be compared to solving a highly complicated jig-saw puzzle, with the added difficulty that many of the pieces had disappeared. Gilliéron, however, had a remarkable gift for the work, and could accurately and sensitively fill in the missing portions. When he had done so, he made careful replicas of the frescoes, which were hung as nearly as possible in the position of the originals. The fragments were then removed to the Candia Museum, for all the objects found at Knossos were the property of the state.

As the work progressed the general plan of the palace became apparent. It was a rectangular structure, approximately the size of Buckingham Palace. In the centre was a courtyard, 200 feet by 100 feet, around which rose the buildings faced with gleaming white gypsum. All the formal rooms for state and religious purposes were in the western wing of the palace where the Throne Room had been found. On the eastern side were not only the store-rooms and domestic quarters, but the potteries, the metal-work shops, the carpentry shops and the oil-presses. Also in this wing were the queen's apartments, which, in common with the royal suite, had no outside windows, but were softly lit by light-wells. In other words, the light filtered in from a courtyard, thus avoiding the direct rays of the strong summer sun.

From 1903 onwards, Evans spent eight months of the year in England, and worked at the excavations only
between February and June. His home in this country was now a large house near Oxford, and much of his time was occupied in improving the estate. He cleared vistas in the woods, planted azaleas and rhododendrons, and did his best to make the garden resemble Dalmatia.

Denied children of his own, he had adopted one of Margaret’s nephews, which was an excuse for filling his home with small boys. He gave a stretch of woodland on his estate to the local Boy Scouts, and spent hours telling them stories of brigands and revolts. Some years later he gave the Scouts a headquarters of their own, complete with swimming-pool, and in return was awarded the Silver Wolf.

Most of the winter months Evans devoted to preparing material for a book which he intended to call *The Palace of Minos*. His objective was not merely to describe his excavations and his finds, but to draw a picture of life in Minoan times. This naturally entailed a great amount of research, for his discoveries had posed innumerable questions.

There was, for example, the problem of dating the remains, so that they might be viewed in relationship to other early civilisations. There could be no doubt that they were pre-Hellenic, and many of the objects were similar to those found by Schliemann at Mycenae. Yet at the same time Knossos gave the impression of great age, as if it were the result of long and continuous development. The art was assured, the architecture subtle. The Minoans had clearly been sophisticated, even decadent. Thus it followed that the history of Crete must stretch back to the very dawn of European civilisation.

In order to establish how long there had been a human settlement at Knossos, Evans sank deep test pits at various points on the site. These proved beyond doubt that from
the Neolithic Period (before 3000 B.C.) until about 1400 B.C. Knossos had been inhabited almost without a break. This was presumably possible because Crete was an island, and safe from invasion before the days of great naval powers.

Evans' next problem was to date the successive Knossian strata, a formidable task without written records that could be deciphered. Fortunately, however, the Cretans had had cultural and commercial contacts with Egypt, and Evans had found Egyptian trivia at Knossos. These were of known date, and provided clues to the period of the strata in which they were found. Moreover, the Egyptologists had re-examined the funerary objects from the Egyptian tombs, and discovered that some were identical with Cretan articles. Thus, by co-relating the antiquities found at Knossos with Egyptian objects, Evans was able to date the ruins of the palace.

Evans also speculated on what had caused the palace to be abandoned. Had the Minoans been overpowered by some superior race? This seemed unlikely bearing in mind that Knossos was unfortified, which it would not have been if an attack had been anticipated. Much more plausible was the theory that an earthquake had wrecked the palace, for Knossos was, of course, in a seismic area. This would explain the haste with which the inhabitants appeared to have fled—the workmen scattering their tools, and the priests dropping their sacred vessels. Evans carefully pieced together all the evidence, but had to admit that he could come to no definite conclusion. He could only deduce that the tragedy had occurred during the daytime, for all the lamps were found together as if about to be filled. He also presumed that some superstitious reverence must have surrounded the ruins after the event, for they were left almost totally undisturbed.
It took Evans more than thirty years to write *The Palace of Minos*, a four-volume book with some 3,000 pages. He had neither a secretary nor a typewriter, but wrote every word in his microscopic hand with a goose-feather pen.

Long before the manuscript reached the publishers, however, the world had heard about Knossos through the papers and periodicals. Evans himself contributed lively, detailed accounts of his excavations and discoveries to the *Monthly Review* and *The Times*. He was a celebrated figure, both in London and in Oxford, as he strode along the street brandishing ‘Prodger’ in front of him. His work was also recognised by the learned societies as being an immense contribution to archaeology. He was created a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1901, and an honorary graduate of Edinburgh and Dublin Universities.

In 1908 he resigned as Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, but as Honorary Keeper continued to take an interest in the collection. He presented it with the duplicate finds which the Cretan Government allowed him to keep, and also replicas by Gilliéron of the most important frescoes.

It was, of course, the scripts that had first attracted Evans to Crete, and in 1909 he produced *Scripta Minoa*, volume one. In this he described the hieroglyphs and the two linear forms of writing which he had found on many hundreds of clay tablets at Knossos. He hoped later to write a second volume, in which the scripts were deciphered, but in this, sad to relate, he was to be disappointed. For he never succeeded in understanding the writings, although since his death one of the linear scripts has been partially read. As Evans wrote later,

‘All I have been able to attempt—after copying over 1,600 documents . . . is of a most preliminary nature.’
Elsewhere he said, 'According to every indication—such as that supplied by local and personal names of pre-Hellenic Crete, and even the appreciable verbal survival in Greek itself—the root affinities of the original language lay on the Anatolian side' (by this he meant in Asia Minor). But he was wrong, for the script that has been deciphered was written in an early form of Greek.

Neither comparison nor study nor intuition could help Evans solve the mystery. But he tried so hard to do so that his friends said his own writing had begun to look like the script.

Scholars still hope, however, to find some bilingual inscription, such as a bill of lading written in both Minoan and Egyptian. This would help them to decipher all the intriguing signs, which in turn might throw light on the history of Crete. Evans himself, it must be added, was of the opinion that none of the tablets found at Knossos included any historical records. Just as the frescoes depicted no battles or conquests, so the tablets were of a purely domestic nature.

Evans continued his excavations for more than a quarter of a century, with only one interruption—the years of the First World War. As time went on he learnt more and more of the technique of excavation, and realised that nothing must be hurried or scamped. He even insisted on sieving every spadeful of earth, and examining it minutely two, or possibly, three times.

In 1911 Evans was knighted, not merely for his work at Knossos, but for his overall contribution to learning. He was also made an honorary citizen of Candia, and was crowned with a laural wreath at Knossos itself.

In 1932 he made a sentimental journey to Ragusa, his first love, which he had not seen for over twenty-five years. He visited the house where he and Margaret had
lived, and even recognised some flowers which they had planted in the garden. He also went to see the gaol in which he had been imprisoned, and remarked to the custodian, 'I come here every fifty years'.

The last months of Evans' life were saddened by the outbreak of the Second World War and the destruction that ensued. He saw his beloved Yugoslavia reduced to poverty and misery in a vain attempt to resist the crushing might of the Germans. He saw Greece invaded and conquered, Crete abandoned by the Allies, and several friends killed in the Cretan Resistance. Even the British Museum, to which he had made many donations, was burned and blasted, and the London office of his paper-mills destroyed.

It was also during the bitter, early days of the war that Evans had to undergo a serious operation. He appeared to make a satisfactory recovery, but in fact he was left in a weakened condition. Nevertheless, he continued to take an interest in archaeology, and occupied his time tracing a Roman road on his estate. He also continued to add to his collection of coins, and to his lovely gallery of Italian paintings.

On his ninetieth birthday he received a deputation of his friends, who brought him a scroll on behalf of the Hellenic Society. This recalled 'with gratitude and admiration his exceptional contribution to learning' and 'his lifelong and strenuous devotion to the cause of freedom'.

Three days later, on July 11th, Arthur Evans was dead. He was buried beside his parents in Abbot's Langley churchyard.

What kind of a man was Evans? The answer to this question seems to be that he was a man of paradox. His smile and kindly manners won him affection everywhere, yet he was fundamentally uninterested in other people.
His countless acquaintances would have described him as direct and simple, but his few close friends found him withdrawn and enigmatic. He detested the narrow, academic mind, yet possessed a scholar’s patience and devotion to truth. He was flamboyant and retiring, dignified and ridiculous, fantastically generous and extremely self-centred.

His greatest gift as an archaeologist was his power for visualising a building as it must have been in ancient days. By merely looking at a few broken stones or pieces of fresco he could see in his mind how a whole room had appeared. This was something more than guess-work, for when the architects made their surveys they invariably found that Arthur Evans had been right.

His place, of course, in the history of archaeology is assured, for he revealed a completely unknown civilisation. It was, moreover, the oldest civilisation in Europe, the link between Ancient Egypt and Mycenae. Evans’ discoveries not only explained how the Mycenaean age arose, but put Schliemann’s finds into historical perspective.

Arthur Evans was always modest about his achievements. Standing among the ruins that had brought him fame he said,

‘The spectacle, indeed, that we have here before us is assuredly of world-wide significance. Compared with it how small is any individual contribution! So far indeed as the explorer may have attained success, it has been as the humble instrument, inspired and guided by a Greater Power.’

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V

HOWARD CARTER
(1874-1939)

Of all the rulers of Ancient Egypt the name of Tutankhamen is by far the most familiar to the general public. Yet he was not the greatest or the most important of the Pharaohs. His fame rests on the discovery of his tomb by Howard Carter, a discovery so dramatic and unexpected that it reached the headlines of newspapers throughout the world.

Howard Carter was born on May 9th, 1874, in Swaffham, Norfolk, but spent most of his childhood in the South Kensington district of London. His father was an animal painter (an artist who portrayed people’s pets), a not uncommon occupation in Victorian times. Young Carter was educated privately, because his health was not good, and he was considered too delicate to face the rough and tumble of school. From an early age he spent every spare moment sketching, and it was soon apparent that he had inherited his father’s skill in draughtsmanship. When he was seventeen he obtained a post at the British Museum, inking in pencil tracings made in Egyptian tombs. During the three months he was engaged on his task he showed such outstanding promise that the following year he was invited to visit Egypt.

From then on he became absorbed in Egyptology. He obtained considerable experience of field work under Sir Flinders Petrie, and in 1899 was appointed Chief Inspector of Monuments in Upper Egypt.

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This area included the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings, where Belzoni had excavated many years before. It was Carter’s dream to make a major discovery there. ‘The very name’—the Valley of the Kings—‘is full of romance’, he wrote.

Belzoni himself had been convinced, when he concluded his excavations in 1817, that there was nothing more to be found in the Valley. To quote his own words, ‘It is my firm opinion that . . . there are no more tombs that are not known.’ Nor was Belzoni’s conclusion questioned until 1898, when an archaeologist named Loret discovered a further burial-place. This naturally encouraged others to try their luck, including an American named Theodore Davis. His excavations extended over twelve seasons (1902-1914), much of which time he was assisted by Carter. It was Carter, in fact, who made the first notable find—the tomb of Tuthmosis IV, in 1903. Subsequently several other tombs came to light, one containing some well-preserved chariots and funerary furniture. But in 1914 Davis declared that in his view the Valley of the Kings held no more secrets.

Yet despite this, when Davis decided further work was futile an Englishman applied for the concession to dig. His name was Lord Carnarvon, and he had become interested in Egyptology when he had wintered in Luxor some years before. But he had had no training and little experience in excavating, and at the end of his first season the authorities informed him that if his concession was to be renewed he must employ an expert. Needless to say, the expert he chose was Howard Carter, who had already proved his knowledge and ability under Davis.

Owing to the outbreak of the First World War, serious work did not commence until 1917. Then Carter and Carnarvon decided to make a systematic examination of
the Valley. They drew up a large scale map which they divided into squares, and explored each section in turn. Only when they were satisfied that every inch of an area had been examined did they cross off the corresponding square.

But for all their patient searching the 1917 season yielded nothing of any importance. 1918 ... 1919 ... 1920 ... 1921 ... all were equally barren. Then came the post-war depression and money became scarce. Carnarvon decided the excavations must cease. He invited Carter to his home at Highclere Castle, and told him that the results of the excavations did not justify the expense.

Carter, however, pleaded to be allowed to dig for just one more season. He spread out the map of the Valley, and pointed to the only square not yet crossed off. This was the area on which he had pinned all his hopes. For, if his reasoning was correct, it contained the tomb of Tutankhamen.

Carnarvon listened while Carter put forward his theories. Tutankhamen was a boy-king who had reigned for a brief while at the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty (the fourteenth century B.C.). He was one of the only Pharaohs of this period whose tomb had not been accounted for by archaeologists, and yet several clues had been found to suggest that it lay with the others in the Valley. For example, a cup and a number of pieces of gold foil, each bearing the name Tutankhamen, had been discovered by Davis and his assistants. Even more significant, Davis had found, in a hole in a rock face, several large jars containing objects with Tutankhamen’s seals on them. And, what was more, these objects had almost certainly been used in the procession that preceded a funeral.

But if Tutankhamen was indeed buried in the Valley, why was it that his tomb had not come to light before?
Because, argued Carter, it was in an area that had never been thoroughly investigated—the area that corresponded to the last square on the map. This was the lowest part of the Valley, into which heavy rainstorms washed debris, making it difficult to excavate. In addition, two other factors had added to the problems of exploration. First, a mountain of soil and stones had been thrown there during the building of a later tomb, and, secondly, there were the ruins of stone huts which had been erected to house the workmen who constructed this tomb in ancient days.

So convinced was Carter that his deductions were right, that he told Lord Carnarvon that he would continue the excavations at his own expense, if Carnarvon would allow him the use of the concession. But Carnarvon would not hear of this, and said that he himself would finance the excavations for one more season.

The two men shook hands, and in the autumn of 1922 Carter was once more on his way to Egypt. He reached Luxor on October 28th, gathered together his labourers, and digging began on November 1st.

Only three days later, in the early morning, Carter arrived at the site to find it unusually silent. Although it was past the time when work should have begun, there was none of the usual noise of shovels and picks. Guessing something out of the ordinary had happened, he ran into the trench, where he found the workmen gathered in an excited group. They were peering downwards at the top of a flight of stairs, which—'it seemed almost too good to be true'—was protruding from the rubble. Carter ordered the men back to work, and as they slowly cleared the debris, revealing step after step, the excitement rose to fever pitch.

But it was not until sunset on the second day, when twelve steps had been unearthed, that a plaster-covered
door appeared. Although only a few inches of the top could be seen, there could be little doubt that it was the entrance to a tomb. Carter peered at the plaster in the failing light, in the hope that there might be the impression of a seal on it. At first he could make out nothing in the gloom. Then suddenly his sharp eyes caught sight of a jackal... a jackal and nine captives... the royal seal of Egypt. Beyond the entrance must lie one of the Pharaohs.

As Carter was examining the seal more closely, he noticed that at one point the plaster had begun to crumble. He eagerly scratched a hole with his penknife, and shone his torch through the tiny aperture. It was as he had hoped. The passage was blocked from floor to ceiling with stone and rubble. This was the usual method of barricading a tomb in ancient days, and it indicated that this tomb had never been plundered. Could it be the first intact tomb of a Pharaoh ever found?

Carter's joy was beyond description. As he himself wrote later,

'It was a thrilling moment for an excavator... Anything, literally anything, might lie beyond the passage.'

His delight was made even keener by the fact that twice before he had excavated within a stone's throw of the tomb. But on both occasions he had moved elsewhere, to dig in what he considered a more promising site.

It took all Carter's self-control to keep himself from breaking down the doorway, and exploring what lay beyond, there and then. But instead he filled in the stairway, posted a strong guard over it, and sent a cable to Lord Carnarvon in England.

'At last,' he wired, 'have made wonderful discovery in Valley; a magnificent tomb with seals intact.'

Carnarvon was as excited as Carter at the find. He
arranged to leave for Egypt with his daughter immediately, and arrived in Luxor a fortnight later.

Digging began on November 23rd, and by the afternoon the staircase had been cleared to the sixteenth step. Now the two excavators were able to examine the whole doorway. On the lower part, which had not been visible before, there were further seals, and these, without question, belonged to the young king, Tutankhamen.

But delight was soon mingled with disappointment. For careful examination revealed not only the seals of the king, but also the seals of the priests who were responsible for guarding the royal tombs. This suggested that the tomb had at some time been rifled. Presumably it had not been completely emptied, however, or the priests would not have taken the trouble to re-seal it. Moreover, the priests' seals appeared to be only fifteen years newer than those of Tutankhamen, and so for 3,000 years at any rate the tomb had been undisturbed.

It took two days to remove all the debris from the passage, and when this was done, thirty feet further on, another sealed doorway was revealed. Slowly and carefully the last remnants of the rubble were removed, and then, trembling with excitement, Carter made a small hole in the upper left-hand corner of the doorway. He inserted an iron testing-rod and probed about, but there was nothing to be felt as far as he could reach. He next lit a candle to test for foul gases, and, the result being negative, he widened the hole. Then, with Lord Carnarvon standing eagerly at his side, he raised the candle and peered through the aperture.

"At first I could see nothing. . . . But presently, as my eyes grew accustomed to the light, details of the room within emerged slowly from the mist; strange animals, statues and gold—everywhere a glint of gold. For a
moment—an eternity it must have seemed to those standing by—I was struck dumb with amazement; then Lord Carnarvon, unable to stand the suspense any longer, enquired anxiously, "Can you see anything?"

Carter at last recovered the power of speech.

'Yes—wonderful things,' he replied.

And wonderful things there were without doubt. In the spluttering light of the candle, Carter was gazing on a vision that might have come straight from the land of make-believe. The room was piled high with priceless articles of dazzling beauty and exquisite workmanship. Every one was bright with gold and precious stones, or covered with painting or bead embroidery. It was a veritable Aladdin's Cave.

The first objects to catch the eye were three great gilded couches, their sides ornamented with curiously elongated animals. On top of these couches, and all around, there were gold chests and caskets, alabaster vases, gold inlaid stools and chairs, and countless other treasures—all the fabulous riches of the long-dead king. There were also articles the king must have used in life—the little chair he sat in when he was a child, his musical instruments and his golden chariots—as well as many boxes of food. They were all heaped together, like goods in a junk shop, large unwieldly objects side by side with tiny frail ones.

Among the most valuable and fascinating items was undoubtedly a throne of solid gold. Indeed, many authorities consider it the most beautiful object that has ever been found in Egypt. The panel in the back, studded with silver and precious stones, showed the young king seated on a chair in his garden, while his elegant young queen anointed his shoulder with perfume. Their faces were made of rose-coloured glass, their robes were silver, and they each wore a head-dress of turquoise-blue glass.
Almost equally lovely was a painted wooden casket, covered with incidents from the young king's life. In one scene he was hunting lions, in another riding in his war-chariot, and a third showed him crushing his enemies beneath his heel.

But in all this bewildering array of treasure, the most important item of all was missing. This, of course, was the royal sarcophagus. When Carter and Carnarvon first explored the room they came to the conclusion that it must have been stolen. Later, however, during a more careful examination, a rather curious fact emerged. The wall furthest from the entrance was not constructed of stone, but of plaster, like the doorway through which they had entered. Moreover, there were two life-size statues beside the wall, standing a few feet apart and facing towards each other. They were painted black and gold, with short gold skirts and gilded sandals, and over their shoulders were the remains of linen shawls. On their foreheads each figure wore a royal serpent, and in their left hands they each held a golden wand. Suddenly Carter realised their significance. What he had regarded as a plaster wall was in reality a doorway, which the figures were evidently guarding. In fact, the room in which the two excavators were standing was not a burial-chamber, but only an ante-chamber or entrance hall.

'We were but on the threshold of discovery,' wrote Carter. 'Beyond the guarded door there was to be another chamber, possibly a succession of them, and in one of them, beyond any shadow of doubt, in all his magnificent panoply of death, we should find the Pharaoh lying.'

Carter's excitement can well be imagined. But he did not, as he must have been tempted to do, immediately break this third door open. He decided he needed time to consider the position.
‘We had seen enough and our brains began to reel. . . . We re-closed the hole, locked the wooden grille which had been placed upon the first doorway, left our native staff on guard, mounted our donkeys, and rode home down the Valley, strangely silent and subdued.’

By the time he returned to the site a few days later, Carter had determined to remove and document every single item in the ante-chamber before exploring any further. This was to ensure that there could be no possibility of an object being damaged when the third door was broken down.

‘It was slow work, painfully slow,’ wrote Carter, ‘and nerve-racking at that, for one felt all the time a heavy weight of responsibility. Every excavator must, if he has any archaeological conscience at all. . . . The things he finds are not his own property to treat as he pleases. They are a strict legacy from the past to the present age, and if by carelessness, slackness or ignorance he lessens the sum of knowledge that might have been obtained from them he knows himself guilty of an archaeological crime. Destruction of evidence is so painfully easy, and yet so hopelessly irreparable.’

The work would not have taken so long had it not been for the robbing carried out in ancient days. Although the thieves had been disturbed before they had had time to do much damage—they may even have been caught red-handed—they had left the chamber in utter confusion. Moreover, the priests whose duty it had been to guard the royal tombs had made little effort to restore order to the room. They had bundled clothes into the chests without bothering to fold them, and crammed in with them numerous trinkets which the thieves must have dropped. They had pushed the furniture unceremoniously against the wall, and squeezed boxes and chests into every available
space. It was this that accounted for the junk-shop appearance the room presented.

Further evidence of the tomb-robbers' activities came to light when Carter chanced to peer under one of the couches. There, at floor level, he saw a hole in the wall, just large enough to admit a small man. Shining his torch through the opening Carter could see an annexe, cluttered like the ante-chamber with objects of all kinds. There was the king's sceptre, his hat-box, inlaid with brightly coloured stones, his weapons, the toy-box he used as a child, and a box labelled 'The Linen Chest of His Majesty when a Youth'. Carter himself described the scene as resembling the aftermath of an earthquake, for not an inch of the floor was free of litter. The priests appeared to have made no attempt to tidy this room, or to close the hole the robbers had made in the wall.

Carter was fortunate in obtaining permission to use a nearby tomb as a temporary storage chamber, and as a laboratory where the antiquities could be treated with preserving agents. He was also able to use another tomb as a photographic dark-room, and an office where notes could be made on the finds.

As the work progressed Carter called in many fellow-archaeologists, each an expert in his field, to assist him in his work of documenting his discoveries. One was a specialist in deciphering Egyptian inscriptions, another in photographing antiquities, and a third in recognising the flowers in ancient wreaths and bouquets.

The prodigious task of preserving and removing to storage the 600 objects found in the ante-chamber was, however, Carter's sole responsibility. To the uninitiated this might appear to be no more difficult than moving house, but it was in fact fraught with a multitude of hazards.
Although most of the treasures appeared at first glance as pristine as though they had been placed there only the previous day, time had played curious tricks on many of the materials. The linen, for instance, often crumbled to a fine dust like soot the moment a finger was laid on it. A pair of sandals composed of beads (a favourite form of ornamentation in Ancient Egypt) looked in a perfect state of preservation until one was picked up. It then immediately disintegrated into hundreds of beads, which rolled away across the floor, for the threads which held the beads together had rotted. The funeral bouquets on the walls looked almost as fresh as the day they were made, but would have fallen to pieces in the warm air outside.

To enable such objects to be removed, all kinds of ingenious methods were employed. Paraffin wax was placed over the beaded articles (mainly collars, sandals and corslets), and when this was set they could be handled in safety. The funeral bouquets were sprayed with two or three coats of cellulose solution, and were then able to withstand a change in temperature. Such delicate work required not only a high degree of skill but also endless patience.

One casket alone took three weeks of effort. Made of wood covered with gesso (a plaster surface) and exquisitely painted, it looked to be in excellent condition. The colours were cleaned with benzine, and the whole sprayed with celluloid in amyl acetate to fix the gesso securely to the wood. But a few weeks later it was discovered that the dryness of the air in the tomb being used as a storage chamber had caused the wood to shrink and come away from the gesso. Boiling paraffin wax was poured on the casket to fill up the space between the wood and the gesso and hold it together, and the blisters on the gesso packed with wax applied with a pipette.
Only when the casket appeared to be able to take the strain did Carter dare to open it and examine the contents. When the lid was opened the first object to meet his gaze was a magnificent regal robe, covered with coloured beads and gold sequins. It was, like all the clothes that were found, of small size, for Tutankhamen was only eighteen years old when he died. Carter also caught a glimpse of many other objects hidden under the robe—sandals, vases, strings of beads, a head-rest and a corslet among them. He curbed his desire to pick them up in delight, for he knew by experience how fragile they must be.

The robe had obviously to be taken out first, but this proved more difficult than Carter expected, as it began to fall to pieces the moment it was touched. In the end he had to remove the beads and sequins one by one, and note their positions, so that later they could be sewn onto a replica of the garment. The operation was complicated, however, by the fact that the robe was not lying flat or neatly folded, but had been carelessly stuffed into the casket by the priests. One pair of sandals, surprisingly enough, was perfectly preserved, but another pair, made of gold and leather, presented a problem. The reason for this was that the leather had decomposed during the centuries into a sticky mess like glue, which had dripped all over the gold.

During all the months that Carter worked in the tomb he made it a strict rule that nothing might be touched until its position had been noted and photographed. Like the modern detective, he regarded the position as a clue, in this case to ancient beliefs and burial customs. When this had been done Carter entered every object, however unimportant it might seem, in a card-index file. He also made copious notes on each of them, in his meticulous hand, and illustrated the notes with beautiful
line-drawings. All these records made by Carter are now to be seen in the Griffith Institute, Oxford. They have never been published owing to lack of money.

Nevertheless, despite all his painstaking effort, Carter was the recipient of considerable abuse. This arose largely from his relationship with the newspaper reporters.

Ever since the news of the discovery of the tomb had leaked out, reporters had been arriving from all over the world. But to save Carter the annoyance of constant interruptions, and also in the hope of avoiding unseemly wrangling, Lord Carnarvon had given the world copyright to *The Times*. This meant that every other newspaper and periodical had to apply to *The Times* for news and photographs. Perhaps not unnaturally this caused a wave of ill-feeling towards the excavators by the pressmen of the world. It was intolerable, they declared, that Carter and Carnarvon should regard the tomb as their private property. They were not digging in their own back garden in England, but in an Egyptian tomb, and the public had a right to full information. As the other reporters watched *The Times* correspondent entering the tomb whenever he pleased, while they themselves had to be content with any gossip they might pick up, their anger quickly rose to boiling point. They sent home vitriolic reports of Carter and his work, accusing him of trying to commercialise his discoveries.

In vain did Lord Carnarvon protest that practical considerations had forced him to give *The Times* exclusive coverage. Before he had done so, he said, he had hardly been able to sleep for the ringing of his telephone, and could not leave his house without being intercepted by pressmen. He also pointed out that the Royal Geographical Society had given *The Times* similar rights in connection with the recent Mount Everest expedition. It was all useless.
The bitterness that had been aroused lasted for the whole of the excavations.

This altercation was not the only reason for Carter’s unpopularity, however. As well as newspaper reporters hoping for tit-bits for their columns, thousands of tourists had been swarming into Luxor. They all, of course, wanted to visit the tomb, but in most cases Carter had to refuse them admittance. It would involve considerable loss of time, he explained, and risk serious damage to the antiquities, if he allowed an unlimited number of visitors to watch the work. The tourists were up in arms at once. Carter was conceited, selfish and ill-mannered, they declared, and not fit to be in charge of the excavations.

Looking back on the events, it is difficult not to feel sympathetic towards Carter. Fellow experts, of course, were welcomed at the site, but the ignorant tripper not only wasted Carter’s time but was a perpetual source of worry. One careless step and all the piled-up treasures might have crashed to the ground. Moreover, these casual sightseers came, in many cases, not because they were really interested in archaeology, but because they desired the social distinction of having been invited to see the excavations. This, needless to say, infuriated Carter.

‘Can you imagine anything more maddening,’ he wrote, ‘when you are completely absorbed in some difficult problem, than to have to give up half an hour of your precious time to a visitor who has pulled every conceivable wire to gain admittance, and then to hear him say quite audibly as he goes away, “Well, there wasn’t much to see after all.”? This actually happened last winter—more than once.’

Almost the only people who did not hurl abuse at Carter were the local Egyptians. They did a roaring trade in the Valley, offering to act as guides, and selling every-
thing from fake antiquities to lemonade. In fact, the *Daily Telegraph* described the scene as reminiscent of Epsom Downs on Derby Day. The natives were also at hand to hire donkeys, camels or any other form of conveyance to the reporters when anything of interest was brought out of the tomb. As might be guessed, this was the signal for the commencement of a race across the desert to the nearest telegraph office.

At last, by the middle of February, 1923, the work in the ante-chamber was completed. With the exception of the two statues standing sentinel on either side of the plastered entrance, every article had been stowed away. Even the dust on the floor had been sifted for a possible bead or piece of inlay. Then came the 17th, the day on which Carter intended to break into the burial-chamber. It was the moment for which the papers of the world had been waiting.

With *The Times* correspondent and twenty privileged guests looking on, Carter mounted a platform and began to remove the upper part of the doorway. It was shortly after 2 p.m. After two minutes of chipping in a pregnant silence, there was a hole large enough to admit a torch. Everyone leant forward in expectation.

There had, of course, been considerable speculation among the onlookers as to what lay beyond the plastered doorway, but no one was prepared for what, in fact, was seen. For the beam of the torch was illuminating what appeared to be a wall of solid gold, stretching as far as the eye could see. With infinite care the rest of the plaster was removed, revealing more and more of the golden wall. The murmur of excitement among the distinguished guests was quickly taken up by the crowds outside. Within minutes every reporter and tourist knew that a wall of gold had been found.
In the tomb Carter continued his patient chipping, fearing every moment that a stone behind the plaster might slip and crash against the priceless wall. But it was not long before events took a new turn.

'With the removal of a very few stones,' he wrote later, 'the mystery of the golden wall was solved. We were at the entrance of the actual burial-chamber of the king, and that which barred our way was the side of an immense gilt shrine, built to cover and protect the sarcophagus.'

Such shrines were known to archaeologists from pictures on ancient papyri, but this was the first to be seen in reality. Covered in gold, with panels of blue faience, the shrine was certainly awe-inspiring. It was seventeen feet by eleven feet, and nine feet high, almost as large as the chamber itself. There was in fact not more than two feet between the sides of the shrine and the walls of the chamber and considerably less between the top and the ceiling.

After three hours' work the hole was large enough to admit a man, and first Carter and then Carnarvon squeezed through the gap. Cautiously they let themselves down into the burial-chamber, which was four feet below the level of the ante-room. Then they edged their way sideways along the narrow space that separated the shrine from the walls of the chamber. When they returned, the onlookers (those at least who were not too stout) also squeezed, two at a time, round the sides of the shrine. It was a feat that required no little effort, for not only was the space exceedingly narrow, but it was heaped with funerary objects and possessions of the king. Among them was a stick, mounted with gold, which bore the inscription, 'A reed which His Majesty cut with his own hand'. There was also a lamp, in the shape of a cup, which when lit showed gaily coloured pictures of the king and queen.
At the eastern end of the shrine (to the left of the entrance to the burial-chamber) were found two massive folding doors. When Carter first saw them he felt a momentary pang of disappointment, for they were bolted but unsealed. This, he thought, must indicate that thieves had broken in. But when he drew the bolts and the doors swung open he uttered a sigh of relief. For a second pair of golden doors was revealed, and these bore intact the seals of the king.

Inside this second shrine, Carter was certain, there lay a Pharaoh, unseen by human eyes for nearly 3,300 years. Almost certainly he would be lying in a sarcophagus of gold, and surrounded by treasure of untold worth. But Carter and Carnarvon were archaeologists, not treasure-hunters, and they made no attempt to open the inner doors, for to do so might well have endangered the other pair. But it was not merely prudence that restrained them.

'I think at that moment,' wrote Carter later, 'we did not even want to break the seal, for a feeling of intrusion had descended upon us, heightened, probably, by the impressiveness of the linen pall which drooped above the inner shrine. We felt that we were in the presence of the dead king and must do him reverence.'

Slowly Carter closed the doors of the outer shrine and left the king to sleep in peace a little longer.

Some days later Carter and Carnarvon returned, this time carrying an electric lamp. Unwinding the flex as they went, they examined the walls of the burial-chamber more closely, and were surprised to find another low exit. This led into what was later recognised as the treasury.

In this room, facing the entrance, stood a shrine-like chest covered with gold. On the top were sculptured cobras, and at the corners four goddesses, their arms outstretched as if protecting the chest. Carter realised
at once that it contained the four jars which held those parts of the king's intestines which the embalmers had removed. There were many more chests and caskets, mostly black, and all but one securely sealed. The one which was open contained several statues of Tutankhamen standing on the backs of black leopards. Directly opposite the entrance crouched a figure of the jackal-god, resting on a massive ceremonial sledge. Behind was the gilded life-size head of a bull. These were both emblems of the underworld. The room also contained the usual assortment of furniture and dismantled chariots, as well as model boats (some rigged) and miniature coffins. Among the most impressive items were the seven magical oars, which were intended to ferry the dead king across the waters of the nether regions.

A week after the opening of the burial-chamber the tomb was locked and the entrance filled in. The weather was already turning warm, and Carter thought that it would be unwise to transfer objects from the tomb to the hot atmosphere outside. The season's work was therefore declared to be completed, and all but a nucleus of the workmen dismissed.

The months that followed are notable for events quite unconnected with archaeology. They began with a disagreement between Carter and Carnarvon regarding the ownership of the antiquities that had been discovered. Carter was of the opinion that all the objects should be handed over to the Egyptian Government, but Carnarvon contended that under a contract he had signed with the Egyptian Department of Antiquities a proportion of the finds belonged to him. In March, 1924, the quarrel reached a climax. Carter told his old friend to leave his house, and never enter it again. And, sad to relate, Carnarvon never did. For a few weeks later a mosquito bite
turned septic, pneumonia developed, and on April 5th Lord Carnarvon died. His age was fifty-seven.

This unhappy affair was followed immediately by an extraordinary change of attitude among the newspaper men. The previous hostility was temporarily forgotten, and replaced by the wildest speculation. Had Carnarvon really died of pneumonia? asked the papers. Or could it be that he had died as a result of opening the tomb? There was an ancient curse on anyone who disturbed the Pharaohs, and (who knew?) it might have been called down on Lord Carnarvon. Of course, even the most sensational papers had to admit that Carter was still alive and well. But for how long? they asked. The more gullible readers were given to understand that his death might be expected at any moment.

Time passed, however, and to the chagrin of the reporters Carter remained as fit as ever. But despite this, the legend of 'Pharaoh's Curse' gained such currency that even today there are many people who believe that all the excavators met untimely deaths. Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth. Carter himself lived to be sixty-six years old (he was forty-one when the tomb was opened), and at least two of the experts who assisted him reached the age of eighty. In fact, with the exception of Lord Carnarvon, all the archaeologists present when the tomb was opened lived a normal span of years or are still living.

In the autumn of 1924 Carter returned to the Valley to recommence the excavations where he and Carnarvon had left off. On February 14th of the following year the doors of the second shrine were opened to reveal a third shrine, and this in turn was opened to expose a fourth. The sections of the shrine weighed from a quarter to three-quarters of a ton each, and were almost impossible to dismantle without damage. But despite all difficulties the
work continued steadily, the tension mounting as the climax grew closer. Finally, eighty days after the work had been commenced, the innermost shrine had been taken to pieces, and the sarcophagus was revealed in all its glory.

It was an unforgettable sight. Fashioned from a single block of yellow quartzite, with four goddesses stretching their arms protectively over it, it blazed in the light of Carter's lamps.

Curiously enough, the lid was not made of quartzite but of granite, tinted to resemble the rest of the sarcophagus. Carter conjectured that the original lid might have been dropped and cracked by the workmen, who did not have time to replace it with another made of quartzite. Certainly once the granite lid had been placed in position they might well have been reluctant to move it again, for it weighed almost one and a quarter tons. Even with a block and tackle it was a lengthy and laborious operation to lift it.

But, with Carter standing anxiously by, it was at last raised slowly into the air. The journalists, scholars, government officials and experts from every part of the world who had been invited to watch, craned forward eagerly to see what lay inside.

At first sight the contents were disappointing—only a shrouded human figure. Then one by one the shrouds were drawn aside, and the onlookers gave a gasp of amazement, For there, filling the entire sarcophagus, lay a magnificent gilded and jewelled coffin, carved in the likeness of the long-dead king. The hands of the effigy were crossed on the breast and held the emblems of sovereignty, the crook and the flail. On the king’s forehead lay a wreath of olive and willow leaves, blue water lilies and corn-flowers. Could it have been a parting gift
from his queen almost three and a half millennia ago?

‘Among all that regal splendour,’ Carter recalled, ‘there was nothing so beautiful as those few withered flowers, still retaining their tinge of colour. They told us what a short period 3,300 years really was—but Yesterday and the Morrow.’

The news that the sarcophagus had been uncovered quickly flashed around the world. But on the very day that Carter made this wonderful discovery, he created an even greater sensation by an announcement that appeared in all the principal hotels in Luxor. It read,

‘Owing to the impossible restrictions and discourtesies on the part of the Public Works Department and its Antiquities Service, all my collaborators in protest have refused to work any further on the scientific investigation of the discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamen. I am therefore obliged to make known to the public that immediately after the press view of the tomb this morning between 10 a.m. and noon the tomb will be closed and no further work carried out.’

It was signed ‘Howard Carter’.

This was the outcome of a long and bitter dispute. There were, broadly speaking, two points at issue. One was that Lady Carnarvon, to whom the concession to excavate had passed, claimed that she was entitled to a proportion of the antiquities. This caused the Egyptian authorities to view the work with suspicion, despite the fact that Carter still maintained that everything that was found should remain in Egypt. The second cause of friction was that Carter resented the minute instructions he constantly received from the Egyptians regarding the conduct of the excavations, and the continual stream of official visitors to the tomb.
When Carter's ultimatum was made known, the government immediately replied by cancelling Lady Carnarvon's concession. They also took over the tomb, and forbade Carter to enter it. Then, as if to rub salt into the wound, they opened the tomb to the public, with a firework display as an added attraction. Carter's trusted workmen could not disguise their grief and consternation, as hundreds of visitors thronged around the scenes of their labour.

Meanwhile, Carter himself had left for Cairo, with the intention of fighting the case in the courts. Officially he was suing the Egyptian Government for a share of the finds on behalf of the Carnarvon Estate. The subsequent court hearings were long and involved, but at last it did seem as if an agreement might be reached. Unfortunately, it was precisely at this point that Carter's counsel incautiously referred to the Egyptian officials as 'bandits'. There was an uproar in the court, and, as might have been expected, the government would no longer even consider a settlement.

Carter left Egypt angry and embittered, and embarked on a world-wide lecture tour. It seemed at the time as if he would never be granted permission to resume the excavations. Suddenly, however, events took an unexpected turn. In November, 1924, there was a political upheaval in Egypt following the assassination of the head of the army. The Nationals lost office, and Britain took the opportunity to tighten her control over Egyptian affairs. This caused a change of face on the part of the authorities, and Carter was informed that he might recommence work.

It was by then January, and little time remained before the intensive heat of summer returned, but Carter decided to make an immediate start before any other complications arose.
Once more the shrouds were removed from the coffin. Then the great lid was slowly raised by lifting tackle, and another shrouded figure, covered with wreaths, was revealed. When the shrouds were drawn aside this proved to be an even more striking gilded coffin than the first. Unfortunately, it was stained with a glossy black substance, which had stuck the lid firmly to the base. This meant that it could not be opened without being completely removed from the outer coffin. Eventually, however, eight strong men lifted it out, and the lid was gently eased open. Later the sticky black substance was recognised as the solidified remains of the resinous unguents used as funeral libations, which had apparently been poured over the coffin in bucketfuls.

Inside this coffin there was another figure covered in decaying shrouds, and through them shone the now familiar glint of gold. Carefully the shrouds were taken apart, and suddenly Carter realised the reason for the astonishing weight of the sarcophagus. For the coffin on which he was now gazing was made not of gilded wood, as the other two had been, but of solid gold inlaid with jewels.

The atmosphere in the tomb was silent and tense as the lid was slowly raised by its golden handles. Then Carter leaned forward and looked inside. It was the crowning moment of his career. For inside lay King Tutankhamen himself.

The slight human remains which were the cause of all this magnificence were wrapped in blackened linen, and adorned with priceless treasures. The arms were covered with bracelets of gold, ivory and lapislazuli. The fingers and toes were each encased separately in golden thimble-shaped sheaths. The body itself could hardly be seen for amulets and countless other charms to ward off evil
spirits. There were golden daggers at the thighs, and the legs were enfolded by the wings of two guardian goddesses. But most impressive of all was the mask of beaten gold over the head and shoulders, in the likeness of the king, which shone like glass.

One by one the treasures were removed until only the mummy remained. Unfortunately it was in poor condition, because the libations poured over the body had caused the linen to become carbonised, and in consequence as brittle as charred paper. The libations had also stuck the mummy to the bottom of the coffin, and intense heat had to be applied to free it. This was, of course, extremely difficult to do without damaging the mummy. Eventually the golden coffin was lined with a thick plate of zinc, which would not melt at a high temperature, and the second coffin (which was still adhering to the golden one) was protected with blankets saturated with water. Then paraffin lamps were lit, the black matter melted, and the mummy and the two coffins freed from each other.

The examination of the royal mummy was an occasion of great excitement, both for Carter and his assistants and for the distinguished onlookers. Because of the rotten state of the linen it was solidified with paraffin wax first of all. Then a cut was made down the centre of the whole length, and the bandages removed in large pieces. As every layer of linen was taken away more precious trinkets were discovered.

When all the bandages had been removed from the head of the king, his face was revealed, young, handsome and serene. For the first time the experts appreciated how accurately the craftsmen of ancient times had portrayed their king on so many of the antiquities. They had obviously copied from life.

As far as the newspapers were concerned, the excitement
was now over. But for Carter this was only the beginning. He spent ten more years clearing the tomb, preserving the antiquities and making careful records of everything he discovered. The treasures, restored as far as possible, are now on display in the Cairo Museum. Suggestions that duplicated objects might be sent to the British Museum in recognition of all Carter’s painstaking endeavours met with no response from the Egyptian Government. But perhaps Carter would have preferred them to remain in the country to which they belonged. Only Tutankhamen himself was left in the tomb. When his mummy had been examined and the details recorded, the tomb was sealed and he was left to sleep in peace.

One question still remains to be answered. What kind of a man was Howard Carter? Was he really a fanatic about his work, to the exclusion of everything and everybody else? And was he indeed as bigoted and boorish as the papers of the nineteen-twenties made out? On the first charge the answer must be Yes. He was single-minded in the pursuit of his objectives, and, apart from a little shooting and the occasional study of wild life, he had no interests outside Egyptology. On the other two counts, however, the press undoubtedly exaggerated. He was, it is true, highly-strung, nervous and extremely quick-tempered, and this was not improved by the constant criticism and interference which he had to endure. But he was incredibly patient, and inspired complete devotion in his Egyptian workmen.

His achievements have sometimes been belittled because his finds did not materially add to our knowledge of Ancient Egypt. Also there were no written documents in the tomb, which would have been of value to scholars. Nevertheless, as examples of Egyptian art and craftsmanship, Carter’s finds are without parallel. Moreover, Carter’s
attitude towards his work—his belief that nothing must be overlooked, and everything meticulously recorded—sets an example to all aspiring archaeologists. For Carter, apart from being a superb draughtsman, was a field archaeologist of consummate skill.

Britain, surprisingly enough, awarded Carter no academic honours. But Yale University in America conferred on him an honorary Doctorate of Science, and the Royal Academy of History in Spain made him an honorary member.

Howard Carter never married. He died on March 2nd, 1939, not far from his childhood home in London.

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VI

EDWARD THOMPSON
(1860-1935)

It would be a mistake to presume that archaeology is a science confined to Greece and the Middle East. These areas have a particular interest for us because they saw the dawn of our own civilisation. But they are by no means the only parts of the world where excavations have taken place. Among the most fruitful territories for the archaeologists are China, Ceylon and South America.

It would also be a mistake to suppose that great archaeologists are always natives of Western Europe. The United States of America, to mention but one country, has given birth to several distinguished excavators. Perhaps the best known is Hiram Bingham, who in 1911 discovered the city of the Incas. But almost equally celebrated is Edward Herbert Thompson, whose name will always be linked with the Mayas.

Thompson was born in Worcester County, Massachusetts, on September 28th, 1860. He was fascinated by the past from an early age, and particularly by the history of the primitive Red Indians. As a boy he spent hours searching for relics of these tribes, which abounded in the districts in which he lived. He frequently found arrowheads and other stone implements, and donated them with pride to the local museum. His interest did not become a passion, however, until he read Incidents of Travel in Central America. This was written by John L. Stephens,
a diplomat and explorer, who lived in New York in the early nineteenth century.

Stephens was one of the few people in those days who had investigated the remains of the ancient Maya cities. This was not because these ruins had proved difficult to locate, but because the way to them led through tropical jungle. It required a high order of courage and great determination to make the many weeks' journey to the sites. Stephens had both the courage and the determination, and his account of his explorations, with his vivid illustrations, opened up a new world for young Edward Thompson.

From the time he first read Stephens' *Incidents* he had made up his mind to devote his life to archaeology. Not, like most American excavators of the day, to the archaeology of Asia Minor, but to the study of the civilisations which were the heritage of the continent in which he lived.

Thompson took the first step towards realising his ambition in 1879 when, still a student at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, he wrote an article entitled 'Atlantis is not a Myth'. In it he put forward the theory that the Maya people had originated in the legendary continent of Atlantis. (According to Plato this continent in the Atlantic had vanished beneath the waves in a day and a night.)

In reality no one knew the origin of the Maya, although many conflicting suggestions had been made. All that was known was that these people had settled in Western Honduras and northern Guatemala at some date prior to 68 A.D. They had built cities of stone and concrete on plains which today are covered with jungle, and had evolved a distinctive civilisation. Towards the end of the sixth century they had moved away, for what reason has never been conclusively established. Possibly their
elementary methods of agriculture had exhausted the soil, and left them no alternative. They subsequently built an empire in the Yucatan peninsula, which lasted until the year 1526. Then, weakened by war, by pestilence and by famine, they were easy victims for the Spanish conquistadores.

Somewhat to his surprise, Thompson's article on the Maya was published in a journal called *Popular Science Monthly*. It caused a minor sensation at the time, and Thompson was hailed as an up and coming archaeologist. The result was that the American Antiquarian Society remembered him when planning some Mayan investigations. Although Thompson had had no experience of excavating, and had never visited Mexico, the Society decided he was just the man they were looking for. They therefore asked the President of the United States to appoint Thompson American Consul for Yucatan and Campeche.

Thompson could hardly credit his good fortune. He lost no time in leaving for Merida, the capital of Yucatan, with his wife and two-month-old baby daughter. Barely twenty-five years of age, he could claim the distinction of being the youngest consul in Mexico.

Before he left, Thompson received instructions that he was to devote his time as far as possible to exploration. This was naturally exactly what he had in mind, and he set about his work with white-hot enthusiasm. Leaving his wife and baby behind in Merida, he spent several months sharing the life of the Indians. He ate their food, learned their language, travelled 'light' as they did, and at last enrolled their help with his excavations. Then he explored the Yucatan from end to end, visiting every ancient city and temple that was known. He also discovered several cities which had been forgotten, and undertook
research into the customs of the New Maya Empire. This was the civilisation that had arisen after the Mayas had migrated from their original homes to the Yucatan. Struggling with heat and fever, with insects and undergrowth, Thompson was soon the acknowledged authority on the Maya.

But although Thompson loved every stick and stone of the Maya country, one place above all fired his imagination. This was the sacred city of Chichen Itza, the capital of the Mayas towards the end of the New Empire. It was never out of his mind for any length of time, and it drew him back again and again. In his book *The People of the Serpent*, Thompson describes how he first set eyes on the fabulous city.

For days he had been travelling across fever-ridden swamps, over narrow passes and through tropical jungle. He was nodding with weariness over his horse’s head as he approached the last hill that lead to the capital.

Suddenly, however, he was startled into wakefulness. He had heard a shout from his Indian guide. The man was pointing out a great stone mass, outlined against the moonlit sky. Thompson’s heart began to race as he turned his gaze upwards.

‘All else was forgotten,’ he wrote in his book. ‘A pyramid with terraced sides, panelled walls of cut limestone and broad stairways leading upward, was crowned by a temple.’

It was without doubt an impressive sight. The pyramid measured sixty yards along each side at the base, and towered seventy-five feet above the ground. To Thompson it seemed as massive as an impregnable fortress, or some colossal building of Classical Greece. Indeed as he drew nearer it appeared to grow larger, until it dominated the whole of the silvery landscape. Thompson recognised it
at once from Stephens' description. It was the Temple of Kukulcan, the chief god of the Mayas.

Thompson was overcome with wonder. Tired as he was he no longer thought of rest. Leaving his guide, who had already curled up and gone to sleep, he slowly ascended one of the four steep stairways. It required considerable physical exertion, for the stairway was overgrown with shrubs and the roots of trees, and by the time he had climbed the ninety-one steps to the platform Thompson could not have walked another pace. But he had reached his objective. There before him was the temple. He peered through the doorway, forty feet high, and could just make out some delicately carved bas-reliefs.

Then, according to a friend who had accompanied him, he glanced apprehensively over his shoulder and shuddered. He could feel the spirit of the great Kukulcan, wrathful at the presence of an unbeliever.

At last Thompson slowly turned away. All around him were ruins—broken terraces and crumbling pillars—many nothing more now than grassy mounds. The stones looked like ghosts in the moonlight—pale, sad ghosts of a civilisation that had long ago been forgotten.

But the scene was as exciting by day as by night.

'Pen cannot describe or brush portray,' he wrote afterwards, 'the strange feeling produced by the beating of the tropic sun against the ash-coloured walls of these venerable structures.'

To Thompson they were indeed 'beyond description', as they reared their rugged masses above the tangled undergrowth.

It was not, however, only the temple and the ruins that held Thompson enthralled. Even more intriguing was a raised causeway, about twenty-five feet wide and 300 yards long, which led from the temple to a great murky pool.
For a moment Thompson gazed at it in perplexity. Then suddenly he realised what the causeway must be. It was the ancient Sacred Way of Chichen Itza. And the murky pool was the Sacred Well.

Thompson had read accounts of this well many times. The first occasion had been when he was collecting material for his article ‘Atlantis is not a Myth’. He had come upon a description in *Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan*, a sixteenth century treatise on the Maya people. Its author was a priest named Diego de Landa, who had left Spain to become the second Bishop of Yucatan.

In 1562, when the Spaniards were committing all the injustices of the Inquisition against the Indians, de Landa in his bigoted zeal for Christianity had ordered all the Maya books to be burned. But secretly he was fascinated by Mayan customs, and learnt all he could about his pagan flock. His account of the Sacred Well shows an undisguised interest in the culture the Spaniards were determined to destroy.

‘From the court in front of these theatres’ (two stone platforms facing Kukulkan’s temple) ‘runs a broad, handsome causeway, as far as a well, which is about twice a stone’s throw away. Into this well it was, and still is, the custom of the Itza to cast living men, as a sacrifice to the gods in time of drought. It was their belief that the men would not die, although they never saw them any more. They also threw in many other things, like precious stones and articles they prized. Indeed, if the country had possessed gold it would have been this well that would have contained the largest part of it, so great was the devotion of the Itza towards it.’

This book by de Landa cast a spell on young Thompson, in much the same way as Homer’s *Iliad* had done on Schliemann. Thompson never doubted that de Landa
spoke the truth, and was convinced that the Sacred Well contained treasure. The experts of the time did not share his view, just as the scholars of a previous generation had doubted Schliemann. But Thompson, like Schliemann, refused to be discouraged, and made up his mind to prove de Landa right.

Writers varied, of course, in their descriptions of the well, but all of them agreed on its sacrificial nature. One account was contained in an official report sent to Charles V of Spain in 1579. It was written by Don Diego Sarmiento de Figuero, the mayor of the district in which Chichen Itza lay. According to this gentleman, the ‘principal personages of the land’ after sixty days of fasting, chose certain of their serving-maidas to be thrown into the well just as day was breaking.

‘The women, being thrown in unbound,’ wrote Sarmiento, ‘fell into the water with great force and noise. At high noon those that could cried out loudly, and ropes were let down to them. After the women came up, half dead, fires were built around them and copal incense was burned before them.’

When at last the unfortunate women came to their senses their masters subjected them to long interrogations. For the Mayas believed that the well was inhabited by spirits who knew what lay in the future. And they further believed that these spirits would communicate their knowledge to the women who were thrown in the well.

Before Thompson left the sacred city he vowed the day would come when he would excavate there. But year followed year, and no opportunity occurred to fulfil the promise he had made to himself. There was always work on other sites which was pressing, or research which required his immediate attention.

But as often as work permitted Thompson visited
Chichen Itza, and tried to re-create its great days in his imagination. He conjured up pictures of the solemn processions before the young men and maidens were thrown into the well. And he spent many hours pondering beside the well itself, for 'the wonderful objects that lay concealed' had already become an obsession with him.

It was on one of these expeditions that he noticed some broken masonry, which appeared to differ in character from the rest. His guide informed him that it was the remains of a plantation house, which had been razed by rebels in 1847. Thompson examined the tumbled walls with considerable interest. Then suddenly an exciting idea occurred to him.

'I would purchase the old plantation, rebuild the houses, plant the fields, fill the corrals with fine cattle, and from the sale of the crops, stock and timber, finance my scientific ventures.'

Drawing all his savings out of the bank he bought the plantation, and a hundred square miles of 'jungle-tangle'. Now, twenty-five years after arriving in Yucatan, it seemed that his ambitions were finally to be realised. For not only had Thompson acquired a large estate which would provide him with the income he needed for his work, but, almost unbelievably, the plantation included every single ruin in Chichen Itza. Thompson could dig where he liked, when he liked, how he liked, and no one had the slenderest right to interfere. It is doubtful whether any other archaeologist has ever enjoyed such ideal conditions.

A short while afterwards he left Merida to take up residence on his hacienda, or estate. The problem now was where to begin the excavations.

'Chichen Itza is really two cities,' he wrote. 'The more ancient is overgrown by a thick forest, and its location is indicated only by an occasional grassy, thicket-covered
mound . . . whose sides are covered with scattered carved stones. The newer city is clearly defined by big buildings which are still standing. The whole, including the older and newer city, covers an area of about twelve square miles.

Thompson had little doubt, however, what was to be the main objective of his labours. As soon as he reasonably could he began making plans to wrest the secrets from the Sacred Well.

In Maya language the name ‘Chichen’ means ‘mouth of the well’, and there were in all three natural wells in Chichen Itza. It was almost certainly the presence of these wells, known as cenotes, that had caused the site to be chosen as a city. For there are few lakes or rivers in Northern Yucatan, and these subterranean streams are the main source of water.

Two of the wells were clear, and were of no interest to Thompson, except as places for a refreshing swim. But the Sacred Well was an evil-looking cavity, its surface covered with limestone dust. It was oval in shape, 187 feet long, and can best be described as a sunken lake. The edges were obscured by overhanging creepers, and the limestone sides dropped almost vertically to the water. In the sides were numerous holes, caused by erosion, which were the homes of snakes, toads, turtles and lizards. They also concealed the roots of the tropical plants, which covered the sides from top to bottom. About eighty feet down, on a level with the water, was a ledge on which grew a clump of balsa-wood trees. Looking down into the well was like gazing on ‘a scene from the time when the world was young’, wrote Thompson.

One day as he stood musing on the brink of the cenote, a daring plan suddenly entered his mind. If he were to establish the truth of de Landa’s account he must probe
beneath the jade-green surface of the water. And in order to probe sufficiently deeply he must train and equip himself for deep-sea diving.

It was rash, he realised, to risk life and limb in the search for a treasure which might not exist. He had little money, no mechanical skill, and knew nothing of diving. Such a project had never been attempted before. Yet Thompson knew that he would never be content until he had put his theories to the test.

His first move towards putting his plan into action was to travel to Boston, and take instruction in diving. Then he set about adapting for his special requirements a bucket dredge and a thirty-foot stiff-legged derrick. For dredging was necessary before diving could begin, owing to the accumulation of silt at the bottom of the well.

It was no easy matter to have the equipment transported over the jungle tracks to Chichen Itza. But finally it arrived, and the derrick was mounted on a platform erected at the edge of the cenote. Then Thompson fastened the hawser of the dredge to a winch, and experimentally lowered the grab.

Following this, he estimated which part of the well was most likely to prove of archaeological interest. This was essential, because, with so much silt present, it would have cost a fortune to explore it all. In order to determine which area would be the most rewarding, he made dummies out of logs, about the size of a native. These he attached to ropes and hurled into the water from the end of the causeway which led to the well, since this was the spot from which, he believed, the sacrifices had been made in the olden days. He then measured the length of rope which had been paid out, and in this way could deduce where the 'fertile zone' was most likely to be.

Then, and only then, when his plans were completed,
did he approach a learned body for financial assistance. When he was called to the United States for a scientific conference he laid his scheme before the Antiquarian Society. It was this society which over a quarter of a century previously had arranged for him to investigate the Maya. Its two representatives listened in growing amazement, as he asked for their support for his extraordinary project.

'I found both of these gentlemen very reluctant,' he recalled, 'to put the seal of their approval upon what they clearly believed to be a most audacious undertaking. They were willing to finance the scheme, but hesitated to take upon themselves the responsibility of my life.'

In other words, the experts of the Antiquarian Society considered the plan little short of suicidal. But Thompson ‘finally argued them out of their fears’, and won them over with his passionate enthusiasm. Once having the support of this august body, it was comparatively simple to enlist the help of Harvard University.

Back on the hacienda Thompson set to work. The derrick was positioned over the ‘fertile zone’, and a pontoon moored beneath, on the surface of the water. Then, for the first time, the gaping jaws of the dredge swung out over the abyss and plunged into the pool. For what seemed an interminable time to Thompson, the dredge was lost to sight beneath the surface. Then, slowly at first, the hawser tautened, as the dark-skinned natives worked at the winch. But when at last the jaws reached the floating platform they deposited nothing but ‘a cartload of dark brown material, wood punk, dead leaves, broken branches and other debris’. Thompson was unable to conceal his disappointment. Could he have been mistaken after all?

Down and up. Down and up. Day after day the great jaws swung out, poised for an instant, and plunged into
the pit. But every time the result was the same. Only an evil-smelling mass of muck and slime, decayed vegetation and tree-stumps came to light. Nevertheless each nauseating load was sifted, and methodically examined to make sure that there was nothing of value. But, apart, from a few pieces of broken pottery, which might have been thrown into the well by small boys, no objects of the least significance were found. The mounds of decaying organic matter on the edge of the well grew higher and higher, and the stench they caused became almost unbearable as they steamed in the humid tropical heat.

Down and up. Down and up. A few times skeletons of deer or wild dogs, and once the tangled remains of a jaguar and a cow, were brought to the surface and joined the piles of muck on the bank. But later even finds such as these were exhausted, and absolutely nothing but mud and vegetation appeared. Thompson was not far from utter despair. The disgusting work seemed to last for ever.

‘Is it possible,’ Thompson asked himself, ‘that I have let my friends into all this expense and exposed myself to a world of ridicule only to prove what many have contended, that these traditions are simply old tales, tales without any foundation in fact?’

At last, however, one depressing dank day, when the weather was as grey as Thompson’s thoughts, the dredge brought up something which rekindled his hopes.

‘I remember it as if it were but yesterday,’ he wrote. He was idly watching the natives at the winches, and hardly bothering to glance at the dredge, when suddenly ‘I saw two yellow-white globular masses lying on the surface of the chocolate-coloured muck’.

As soon as the jaws had deposited their load, he seized the objects and examined them closely. They appeared to be made of some resinous substance, and had clearly
been fashioned by human hands. But for what purpose? Thompson kept asking himself. He broke one of the nodules in half, and tasted it. Then he dried a piece and held it over some embers. Instantly a pungent fragrance filled the air.

Thompson’s heart began to pound with excitement, for there flashed into his mind an old Mayan legend.

‘In ancient times,’ it ran, ‘our fathers burned the sacred resin . . . and by the fragrant smoke their prayers were wafted to their God.’

These yellow-white balls were the sacred resinous incense, called copal. They might have been thrown in the well as an offering. Or they might have fallen in during ceremonies on the bank. For Sarmiento had mentioned incense being burnt in front of the serving-maids when they were dragged from the cenote.

That night for the first time for many weeks Thompson slept soundly and long. He was content. All he had found was two small lumps of resin, the kind of objects which might be found in a well anywhere. But, experienced archaeologist though he was, he had already begun to weave dreams around them.

‘For a long time,’ he wrote, ‘the belief had been growing in my mind that the scientific exploration of the Sacred Well at Chichen Itza was to be the crowning event of my life-work. With the finding of those two nodules of incense . . . this belief became a certainty.’

He decided to relinquish his position as consul, and devote himself exclusively to exploring the well. It was now 1909, and he had been consul to Yucatan and Campeche for over twenty-four years. But he had not the slightest doubts about his decision, although he might so very easily have been wrong.

As events turned out, his confidence was justified. For
no sooner had he resumed operations at the cenote than countless copal balls were brought to the surface. Some still bore the impress of the basket which had contained them, and others had slivers of wood projecting from the sides, probably intended for setting the incense alight. Thompson was jubilant. But not half so jubilant as he was soon to be. For only a few weeks after the work was recommenced the copal balls were followed by a hoard of treasure.

Among the objects made of gold there were discs, pendants, figurines, and dozens of beautiful little bells. The copper items included chisels, bells, soles for shoes or sandals, and a great many discs bearing the likeness of the gods. There were pottery vessels, vases, tripod incense-burners (filled with copal and rubber incense), many pieces of basketry and even fragments of textiles. There were also war-like implements, such as arrow-heads and lance-heads, darts made of flint and calcite, flint axes, and hammers. And these were only a few of the hundreds of articles which were recovered from the well during the following few weeks.

One unexpected find of a somewhat different character caused considerable alarm among the Indians.

‘One of my natives had, as usual, pushed his arms, clear to the elbows, into the oozy mass, when he leapt back with terror. . . . He pointed to the head of a small dark-coloured serpent, with a white ringed-neck which stood up menacingly among the muck.’

It exactly resembled the small poisonous vipers, which are common in Yucatan. But it was, in fact, harmless. It was a ritual object made of rubber.

By far the most intriguing discoveries, however, were the hundreds of beautiful articles made of jade. Where had the Mayas obtained these exquisite stones? There
are no known deposits of jade in Central America. The nearest are thousands of miles away in Alaska. Perhaps the Mayas brought them with them from some previous home (Thompson even fancifully suggested Atlantis), but no conclusive evidence has yet been found.

Even more puzzling was the fact that the lovely jade articles had obviously been deliberately smashed in pieces. Why had this been done? Thompson asked himself. The only plausible answer seemed to be that they had been ritually 'destroyed', just as the human victims had been ceremoniously slain. It was all part of the endeavour to propitiate the Rain God, the mighty Yum-Chac, who lived in the cenote. Fortunately the objects were not pulverised, but skilfully broken, and could fairly easily be pieced together again. Similarly there was a quantity of golden bells, which had been flattened with a maul before being sacrificed.

At last, after many laborious weeks of dredging, came the ultimate affirmation of Thompson’s convictions. The first human skeletons were brought out of the water, bleached and polished by centuries in the mud.

Forty-two were recognisable. Thirteen of them were the remains of thick-skulled, low-browed men. These Thompson identified (no doubt correctly) with the captured warriors of de Landa’s account. Of the others all but eight were the skeletons of children, which also bore out historical reports. For several early writers state that infants were sacrificed when the people of Chichen Itza were in dire need of rain.

Eventually the dredge began emerging from the water with nothing but splinters of rock in its jaws. It had obviously eaten through the silt and mud, and reached the rocky floor of the Sacred Well. Now had come the time for Thompson himself to descend into the uninviting
water. For he believed there were a great many crevices and crannies where the dredge could not reach, and which might contain treasure.

Accompanied by one of the two Greek sponge divers, whom he had engaged to assist him, Thompson climbed into the dredge. The natives worked at the winch, and together they rode in the great gleaming jaws to the floating platform. There they donned their diving-suits of waterproof canvas, with collars made of lead and iron-shod boots. The helmets were of copper and weighed thirty pounds each, with heavy plate-glass goggles and air-valves near the ears.

Thompson's workmen were horrified. They were convinced that outraged gods would take him captive, or that some fearsome monster would eat him.

'As I stepped on the first rung of the ladder,' he wrote, 'each of the pumping gang' (men working an air-pump on the pontoon) '... left his place in turn and with a very solemn face shook hands with me. ... It was not hard to read their thoughts. They were bidding me a last farewell, never expecting to see me again.'

Thompson let go of the ladder and immediately sank 'like a bag of lead', leaving only a thin trail of bubbles. As he dropped through the water it appeared to change colour—first to yellow, then to green, then to a strange purplish-black. Finally he was shrouded in a veil of utter darkness, which even his submarine flash-light could not pierce. He had descended approximately sixty-five feet, as he informed his assistants on the brink by telephone.

It was an exciting moment. 'I felt ... a strange thrill,' wrote Thompson, 'when I realised that I was the only living being who had ever reached this place alive and expected to leave it still living.'

A few moments later he was joined by the Greek,
and the two of them shook hands in the inky darkness.

Then Thompson began to grope around him, and quickly realised he was standing in an enormous cavity. This was the hole the dredge had made in the silt, as it scooped up load after load of muck. Around him were walls of silt, thirty feet deep, with tree-stumps and masonry embedded near the base. The masonry proved to be a dangerous hazard, for a piece would come loose from time to time. Then it would plunge towards the bottom, and the force of the displaced water would send the two men cannoning, often head over heels.

On the floor of the well Thompson found some large stones, many of which, he could detect by touch, were carved. These he attached to chains, and they were hauled to the surface, where he later made a careful study of the carvings. One depicted the seated figure of a god, or possibly a priest, with gaily waving feathers.

Once these heavy objects had been recovered, Thompson soon began to find numerous smaller items, hidden in the crannies of the floor. There were two gold tiaras representing feathered serpents, and what appeared to be the tips of gold ritual wands. There were five golden basins, forty flat gold dishes, twenty gold rings, a hundred gold balls, and bucketfuls of broken pieces of gold. The jade articles included hundreds of beads and pendants, beautifully embossed rings and small carved pieces. Other items were copper circlets and copper chisels, a number of statues, pieces of pottery, some objects inlaid with turquoise, some beautifully fashioned spear-heads and a few human bones.

But the most valuable and interesting finds of all were several superbly fashioned ceremonial knives. One of them was made of finely wrought flint, still sharp after centuries spent in the mud. Its handle was of wood, over-
laid with gold, in the form of two serpents entwined together. Thompson believed that these knives had been used in bygone days to cut the hearts out of living sacrificial victims.

Every day for many weeks Thompson came to the surface with the pouches in the sides of his diving-suit bulging. He made as many as two hundred discoveries a day, usually helped by one of the two Greek divers. In all it was a most remarkable hoard, and was invaluable in throwing new light on the Maya.

One question, however, remained unanswered. At what date did the sacrifices commence at Chichen Itza? Some of the carved jade objects from the Sacred Well were unquestionably of very early workmanship. Two of them indeed were inscribed with dates which approximated to A.D. 690 and 706. (The Mayas had an elaborate and accurate calendric system, but it is not easy to correlate it with Christian dates.) Did this indicate that long pilgrimages were made to the well hundreds of years before the Mayas built their greatest city? Or were the objects heirlooms which were carefully guarded for centuries before finally being sacrificed? Thompson found no clues to help him solve this mystery, and modern scholars are no nearer arriving at the truth.

Thompson’s explorations of the Sacred Well enjoy a special place in the history of archaeology. For they were the first examples of underwater work, now an exact and established branch of study. But investigating the secrets of the sacred cenote was far from being Thompson’s only archaeological achievement. During the many years he spent there (almost half a century) he examined practically every single structure in Chichen Itza.

One of the most dramatic excavations that Thompson made was the opening of the so-called ‘Temple of the
High Priest'. This was a pyramid, forty feet high, several hundred yards south of the Temple of Kukulkan.

At first sight there was nothing particularly conspicuous about this shapeless mound, covered with trees and shrubs. Only the four stairways which led to the summit would have caused anyone to give it a second glance. These were flanked with balustrades, carved out of stone in the shape of enormous open-jawed serpents. The top, like that of all the pyramids in Chichen Itza, had once been crowned with a temple which was now in ruins.

It was while Thompson was sounding the floor of this temple that he noticed that one part appeared to ring hollow. There were, moreover, two large polished tiles at the spot where the hollow sound was most pronounced. Excitedly prising the tiles out of position, he found underneath the blurred outlines of a shaft. It was square, and appeared to descend about twelve feet, but unfortunately it was occupied—by a boa-constrictor. Having rid it of this menacing, writhing intruder, Thompson discerned a human skeleton beneath a tangle of roots. He carefully removed it, and in doing so discovered that this floor, like the one above, seemed to be hollow. He again prised up some tiles, and there, beneath his feet, lay a second shaft-grave with a skeleton in it.

There were, in fact, five of these graves altogether, each superimposed on the one below. In all of them were bones, in some cases well preserved, surrounded by small ornaments and rock crystal beads.

By the time Thompson had reached the last grave he was on level with the base of the pyramid and thought his work was finished. But, much to his surprise, the floor of this last tomb, like that of all the others, was obviously hollow. This time, however, when he lifted up the tiles he found a series of steps hewn out of the living rock. By
peering intently Thompson could just make out, at the bottom of these, the faint shape of a chamber.

The first thing to be done was to clear the stairway, for it was choked with wood ash and completely impassable. Then Thompson applied himself to the difficult task of entering the mysterious chamber itself. The only way he could do so ‘was by lying flat on my back and pushing my feet ahead of me’. At the same time he passed basketfuls of wood ash over his head to the workmen who were crawling along behind him. They in turn passed the baskets to his two young sons, who were waiting in the tomb at the top of the stairs.

When the room was cleared it was seen to be shaped rather like a funnel, narrowing towards one end. Thompson was determined to examine it thoroughly, for he had already caught a glimpse of polished jade among the ash. But ‘the work within that deep-down, badly ventilated shaft was not too pleasant’, he admitted later. ‘The air was close; the place frightfully hot, and the big wax candles, dim and smoky, did not tend to make the place more comfortable.’ Nevertheless, Thompson and his assistants worked doggedly on, in the hope of making some significant discoveries. Stripped to the waist, they ‘looked more like chimney sweeps than delvers after scientific lore’, recalled Thompson.

But despite all their efforts nothing came to light, except some polished jade beads, which were half fused together, as if they had at some time been exposed to fire. There was not even a skeleton. Thompson finally decided the room must have served as some kind of depository. He was just about to call a halt to their labours, when suddenly something arrested his attention. The narrow end of the chamber was a natural wall of rock, and leaning against it was a big flat stone. Thompson grasped it with both
hands and began to pull. At first nothing happened. Then, without the least warning, the stone gave way, and Thompson fell backwards.

Picking himself up he waited until the dust had cleared, and then looked to see what the stone had revealed. He had hoped that there might be a few jade beads, or possibly some other little ornaments. But he was certainly not prepared for what did meet his eyes—an enormous, circular, pitch-black cavern. From out of it issued what Thompson described as a ‘cold, damp wind’, which extinguished the candles the explorers were holding. They were now in utter darkness in the bowels of the earth. The two natives stood rooted to the spot in horror.

Finally one of them spoke.

‘Don Eduardo,’ he cried, ‘it’s the mouth of Hell!’ and his teeth chattered with terror.

Thompson shook his head.

‘How could it be?’ he replied, ‘The mouth of Hell would not give forth a cold breath like this, but a burning hot breath.’

Fortunately the natives were reassured. They were Christians, and had been taught that Hell was an inferno. Had they still been faithful to their ancestral beliefs they would probably have fled from the place in fright. For the Hell of the Mayas was a cold, dank region, where lost souls spent eternity in numbing misery.

The opening was roughly circular, and three feet in diameter. By lowering a lamp attached to a tape Thompson calculated that it extended about fifty feet downwards. The problem, of course, was how to explore it. But it did not take him long to devise a method.

He ordered two natives to grasp his ankles, and ‘head downward, my body swinging like a pendulum’, he managed to form a clear idea of the place. Then, warning
his workmen not to speak about his plans for fear people should think him crazy, he scrambled down a rope. He carried a hunting knife between his teeth, to leave his hands free for action, and his pockets were bulging with various small implements.

As soon as his feet touched the bottom of the pit, he lit a candle, and at once gave a gasp of surprise. For all around, half buried in wood ash and rubble, he saw an incredible mass of treasure.

Most beautiful of all was a translucent vase, made of alabaster, filled with polished jade beads. There was also a pendant, carved from a single piece of jade, more than five inches in diameter, and a polished jade globe. Other finds included several large polished shells inlaid with mother-of-pearl, ceremonial flint blades, painted pottery bowls, terracotta votive urns more than three feet high, several incense burners and a quantity of ear-rings. Lastly there were numbers of large oval pearls, but these regrettably fell to pieces the moment they were touched.

'It was a red-letter day in my life,' wrote Thompson. For not only had he found an amazing amount of treasure, but he had thrown new light on Maya burial customs.

The pit beneath the pyramid was the grave of some high priest, although why it contained no skeleton has never been established. The tombs above it were no doubt those of his acolytes or servants, who would minister to his needs in the life that was to come. But whether they were executed at the time the high priest died, or whether they died naturally some time later is not known.

Among the other major structures investigated by Thompson was a pyramid of nine terraces now known as the 'Castillo'. It was not only one of the largest, but perhaps the most magnificent, of all the buildings in Chichen Itza. For the stones were finely masoned and laid
with precision, an outstanding achievement both in art and engineering. It is of interest in this connection to remember that the Mayas hauled every stone by hand, as did the people of Ancient Egypt. They possessed no wheel or any other mechanical device, and no beast of burden, not even an ass.

West of the 'Castillo' Thompson uncovered a ceremonial court, where a ritual game appeared to have taken place. The court was between two parallel walls of masonry, 270 feet long, 34 feet wide and 25 feet high. The game involved throwing a rubber ball through stone rings which were set in the enormous walls on either side. Difficult though it may be to recognise it as such, this was the forerunner of our modern game of netball.

But although Thompson exhumed so many remarkable structures—among them even an astronomical observatory—he had one regret. He never found any examples of Maya writing. He did, however, come very near to doing so.

A native remarked to him once that some years before he had found a sealed vase in an ancient grave. To his chagrin, unfortunately, it did not contain treasure—only a scrap of what appeared to be some kind of paper.

'What was it like?' asked Thompson eagerly.

'It was pleated,' replied the native, 'and had lots of little faces—red and black, like monkeys—painted on either side of it.'

Thompson's heart missed a beat. For ancient Maya books had resembled paper pleated in concertina fashion. Moreover, their hieroglyphic signs were in the form of grotesque faces, which might well suggest monkeys, and were usually red and black. Thompson promised to give the native a fine horse and saddle in return for the paper, but to no avail. The native's wife had thrown it away
during a recent spring-clean, and nothing but the empty jar remained.

The last years of Thompson's life were unfortunately clouded with one unhappy event after another.

During the period 1910 to 1930 Yucatan was ravaged by political upheavals. There were several open rebellions and in the course of one of these there was trouble in the area around Chichen Itza. Some local agitators urged the natives to burn the property of the planters, and while Thompson was away his home was razed to the ground. His valuable library was lost beyond hope of reclamation, and the records of a life-time's work went up in smoke.

Thompson restored his home as well as he was able to do, but his troubles were far from being at an end. Extravagant reports had begun to circulate as to the value of the objects recovered from the well. The intrinsic worth of the gold alone was said to be more than half a million dollars in American currency. In vain did Thompson protest that this could not be so. Only towards the end of their history did the Mayas learn the art of smelting metals, and decorative metals were always rare. Most of the so-called gold objects were of a low-grade alloy, with more copper than gold in their composition.

Finally the rumours reached the ears of the Mexican Government, who demanded that the finds should be given to the state. By this time, however, Thompson had sent the antiquities to the Peabody Museum at Harvard University for safety. The government therefore ordered him to pay 1,300,000 Mexican pesos (about half a million dollars) in compensation. This they declared to be the fixed market value of the finds, and in default they distressed on Thompson's hacienda. Thompson, of course, had no means to pay such a monstrous sum, and he certainly did not intend to forfeit his discoveries. Indeed
he considered he would have been false to his duty as a scientist had he 'neglected to take all possible measures for their... permanent safety'.

A long legal case began, but it was never concluded. For on May 11th, 1935, Edward Thompson died. He had never been permitted to return to his hacienda, but his treasure was still intact in the United States. All the finds did, in fact, remain there, until early 1960, when ninety-four objects were returned to Mexico.

During the fifty years Thompson spent at his beloved Chichen Itza he did more than anyone else to bring the Maya out of obscurity. For although most of the ruins were no older than Salisbury Cathedral, the culture they represented had been largely forgotten. Indeed, Thompson's contemporaries were often stunned to discover there had once lived a race of highly civilised Indians. Until his finds were made known, the general public had supposed that America had no indigenous culture.

As an archaeologist Thompson may well be compared with such early enthusiasts as Layard and Schliemann. For, despite the fact that he lived in the twentieth century and had the support of scientific bodies, he was always an amateur, in the sense that he worked for the sheer delight of working. His primary consideration was not to further academic knowledge, but to present to the modern world an ancient people whom he loved.

His book, *The People of the Serpent*, published in 1932, clearly illustrates his passionate devotion to his subject. Some of the conclusions it puts forward are now known to be mistaken (Thompson's dating, for example, is far too early), but it has a human appeal often lacking in more scholarly accounts.

Thompson did not, it must be mentioned, escape unscathed from his adventures. During one of his expedi-
tions through the jungle he was caught in a rat-trap laid by the Indians, which left him with a permanent limp. Constant diving made him deaf, and recurrent bouts of jungle fever caused him to lose much of his hair at an early age. But Edward Thompson had no regrets, as his own words prove. They are indeed his most fitting epitaph.

‘I have spent my substance in riotous exploration and I am altogether satisfied.’

REFERENCES:

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*Maya* by Charles Gallenkamp.
"A book that is shut is but a block"

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