

SEVENTY YEARS IN ARCHAEOLOGY

CHAPTER I

PREPARATION

THE FIRST chance in life is ever being born at all, and a mighty uncertain affair it seems to us mortals.

My grandfather, Captain Matthew Flinders, who died at forty, left two young friends who kept in touch with his widow and daughter for half a century. One was his cousin, a midshipman on his ship *H.M.S. Investigator*, John Franklin, of Arctic fame. From his childhood, John was always the heroic gentleman. One evening my great-grandmother, visiting his mother, rose to leave, saying it was getting too late; Johnnie, then four years old, at once said, "Never mind, Mrs. Tyler, I will see you home."

The other friend was William Henry Smyth, but for whom my father and mother might never have met. He was a man of wide interests, known as a literary sailor, as surveyor, astronomer, and antiquary. His sons were notable for rising to the top of their professions, his daughters for marrying men who, later, were equally successful. Some of their names reflected his tastes; Piazzini, the Astronomer Royal for Scotland, was named from the Sicilian astronomer; Rosetta, the wife of Sir William Flower, had her name from the Rosetta stone. Their house in London in the 'forties was a centre of

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many interests, and my mother, Anne Flinders, often stayed with them when up in town for meetings.

Piazzzi Smyth had begun his career as an assistant to Sir John Herschel at the Cape, and thence naturally knew my grandfather, Petrie, who was head of a department there. He brought my father and uncles into the Smyth circle on their return to England. Amid the many friends who went to and fro there, it did not escape the eye of Mrs. Smyth that her eldest daughter, Henrietta, and young William Petrie were very intimate. Now she was a very careful mother, and knew her duties. She felt that my father had not that amount of worldly wisdom which she desired for her daughter's success, so Henrietta was promptly taken to Cambridge, and soon after married the sexagenarian Professor Baden-Powell.

Meanwhile William Petrie and Anne Flinders had been constantly meeting at the Smyths, and some years later my father and mother were married. So Mrs. Smyth was the agent by whom scouting and Egyptian archaeology took their present form. B.P. and I both speculate whether either, or neither, of those subjects would have been otherwise so shaped?

My parentage being thus determined, my first risk was being supposed still-born, and it was to an experienced old nurse that I owe my existence. Next, another nurse dropped me, and so punched in my skull, slightly marked on the temple to this day. The old past seemed all around me as I drank in the family stories. My mother had known her grandmother well, who was born in 1745 and knew Queen Anne's dressmaker; pieces of the blue and silver brocade and other dresses had come down to us. The old grandmother was thus a single life linking those who had known 1692 and 1892, when my mother died.

My great-aunt, who brought me up, talked of the college days of her father, about 1770, and was full of

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the stirring events of her youth, of the adored Nelson, and the watch, night by night, for the beacons on the Lincolnshire coast which might signal Napoleon's invasion. The woes of Queen Caroline were a matter of yesterday, and I often passed the house at Charlton where she had lived.

My mother's grandmother was a sturdy old lady, a friend of Wilberforce; her first husband was Benjamin Chappell, grandson of a Huguenot refugee, and my mother had thence her small, alert figure, and very dark complexion, with a true reverence for her persecuted ancestors. The grandmother was closely contemporary with George III, and when he died she sat rocking to and fro and crying, "My king, my king!" It was her pride to have been born at York, "a citizen of no mean city," as she said.

My grandfather Captain Flinders' work, and his long, illegal, captivity by the French in Mauritius, were naturally in the sanctum of family feeling. So long had passed without hearing from him, detained in Mauritius, that his wife had lost all hope, dressed as a widow, and wept over his miniature. They had only just been married before he left for Australian discovery in 1801; she was prevented from going with him, though Captains' wives were tolerated then in the Navy, *sub rosa*.

He returned in 1810, to work hard, on half-pay, at writing his account of discovery, and thus, worn out by tropical disease and work, he died in 1814, unconscious of his volumes issued in time to be laid upon his death-bed. I need say no more about his life, as it has been well written by Professor Scott. A passion for discovery I owe to my grandfather, though his was in space, and mine was in time. The fate of my grandfather's old midddy, Franklin, was often part of our family talk.

In such an air of the past I began to understand things around me. The first puzzle was how could I be

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sure of the reality of what was told me about the world; was all that I saw a mere show and a deception? This was set at rest, when I was three, by the vast extent of a street full of people half a mile away; the disproportion to my little self was too great for it not to be a great reality. I cannot have been more than three then, as before four I knew places very much farther off, and the world seemed wide.

Children look for meanings much earlier than is credited; I saw my little son of two, eyeing the wavelets lapping the beach on a still day; at last he solved the why of it, "the wind is pushing the water up." The sense of duty also comes early; my mother called out to me that I was naughty in doing some trifling thing, so I gave myself the three slaps on the arm, which was the standard punishment, and then did the standard crying, to follow.

My first train journey was when my aunt took me over to see Greenwich Hospital, the Nelson relics and the painted hall; it was a tramp of over five miles going there, she at seventy-two and I not yet four. The return of my uncle from the Crimea in 1857, the launch of the *Leviathan*, the Great Comet of '58, the glare of Tooley Street fire, and the victories of Garibaldi in '60, were the excitements of life which I remember.

From six to eight years old, I had, as a governess, a favourite friend of my mother's, beloved and sufficient. She was succeeded by an injudicious woman. My mother's love of languages—of which she taught herself half a dozen, from Hebrew to Italian—led to its being thought quite natural to stuff me with English, French, Latin and Greek grammars all together, at the age of eight.

The result was a collapse, and a doctor's order that I should be left alone for two years. I soon ravenously browsed on all sorts of books, and ran loose, mind and

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body, to great advantage. I was always fascinated with scales and weights and, whenever they were brought out, I weighed everything available. At ten, a fresh attempt was made upon me with grammars, equally futile. Later on my own account I strove hard, making, in all, ten starts in Latin and five or six in Greek, every one ending ignominiously in my forgetting the early lessons as soon as I got a little forward; never have I been able to hold any language grammatically, but only by the practice of necessary use.

As in the 'sixties such subjects were essential at any school, and as I had chronic asthma which kept me indoors half the year, it was hopeless for me to get any regular education, and I was cut off from knowing any other children, being an only child myself. My father intended to find an ideal tutor for me, who should be certain to keep in touch with his own beliefs; but as such would be rare to find, and a constant flow of fresh matters filled my father's attention, the tutor never appeared. Thus I was taught nothing after ten, till, when grown-up, I took an Oxford extension course in mathematics; this was mainly for algebra, as geometry and trigonometry I had picked up by myself. I always disliked the ungeometrical nature of algebra, like blind Samson grinding at the mill.

Being left to my own devices, I ransacked the marine store shops of Woolwich for coins, thus beginning archaeology when still accompanied by my nurse, at eight, and triumphing in finding an *Allectus*. My mother had inherited some coins, a *quinarius* of *Vespasian* (found in draining the fens, and taken to my great-great-grandfather as the learned doctor of *Donington*), also coins of *Constantine* and others; she had learned of them on her mother's knee, as I did on her knee, and she had collected many more, handed to her by officer friends at Woolwich when they "got the rout."

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When I was eight, a little boy of ten used to come to visit us (later, Rev. Longley Hall, Director of C.M.S. schools in Palestine) and he described the unearthing of a Roman villa in the Isle of Wight; I was horrified at hearing of the rough shovelling out of the contents, and protested that the earth ought to be pared away inch by inch, to see all that was in it and how it lay. All that I have done since was there to begin with, so true is it that we can only develop what is born in the mind. I was already in archaeology by nature.

My mother had a fair collection of minerals and fossils, and had tried in the 'forties to raise interest in mineralogy by popular articles, based on the chemical arrangement. She had been stirred by lectures at the Royal Institution, by Faraday and others, which she heard when staying with an old friend, Miss Marston, afterwards my godmother. That good lady's life had been crippled by a deep attachment to the mathematician Sylvester; she felt the difference in religion prevented their marriage, and they parted, he to follow a meteoric course of bachelor wandering from one university to another, she to decline upon a lady companion, lap-dogs, charitable work and anti-vivisection.

From my mother's collection I soon knew a hundred minerals, and found garnet-granite and serpentine in the gutter-linings of the streets, which I howked up and chipped for specimens. I soaked in old Allan's *Mineralogy* till I knew every page of it, a delightful book not devitalised by abstract science. Minerals naturally led to testing specimens, and so to chemistry, and I collected the testings of every element I could get, to make comparative tables. I revelled also in dozens of pots and bottles with various messes, and in electrotyping, and tried everything that I could start on, out of Miller's *Inorganic Chemistry*.

In the summers, some weeks of fossil hunting filled

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the time. In this desultory, but very living, way, I gradually picked up many useful subjects. Though I dabbled in trigonometry, I did not get hold of Euclid till I was fifteen. Then I sat down in my cousin's garden at Puttenham, and feasted on a book a day with full delight, skipping all the propositions which were already axiomatic to me, and satisfied if I could visualise the reality of those demonstrations which were not self-evident. It was a joy like that of conic sections rather later, in the good old geometrical view so full of beauty, and not assassinated by algebra. This was unconsciously following Matthew Flinders, who taught himself geometry and navigation, so that he was ready for work when he entered the navy.

An external opening of a strange kind came at the age of thirteen, when I was wandering about Blackheath and Lee, where I saw a large tray of Greek copper coins, at twopence each, in a shop window. My mother went with me to look at them, and so we got to know the owner, Riley, a man of rare character. He saw we were fascinated with the hundreds of coins before us, and could not settle which we wanted; so he fetched a bag, poured them all in, uncounted, and told us—entire strangers—to take them home and pick out what we required.

That opened a friendship with an extraordinary man. His influence on all who knew him was remarkable. Above all, he taught one human nature, in rather a Socratic manner, with wits sharpened by all the shady practices of life in dealing and cheating, of which he had a withering contempt; he was the most absolutely honest and straight man that I ever met. His shop was piled with old instruments, books, furniture, pictures and antiquities; while a tempting workshop and lathe were in his back premises.

The place was a centre which all sorts of people frequented, drawn there by his shrewd sayings, his love of

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music and chess, and his considerable judgment of painting. He had always spent his spare hours, when in London, at the National Gallery, and had a sound taste. Blake was one of his idols, and he was not unlike him in some respects; there was much of the same kind of genuineness in both. His mainstay in life was cataloguing for auctioneers and attending sales. He had been used, as a little boy at Dover, to help in smuggling in the jewels for Queen Victoria's new crown, an innocent child who could run to and fro unsuspected.

I used to walk over to Riley once a week from Bromley, and when I began exhibiting antiquities in London he became my door-keeper and was my right hand in all the work. He revelled in the new discoveries, and used to show people round, enthusiastically. It was perhaps the greatest pleasure he could have had in life, to enter into the work of enterprise, and feel how much he shared in it. He taught me more of the world than anyone else.

I got a little insight on examinations by clerking for a sub-examiner, to whom papers were sub-let at so much a hundred. The subject was geometry, and I proposed to simplify his work by making tracings of the right construction to be laid over the answer; if it did not fit, then, plucking was inevitable in a few seconds. After a batch done, he was told by the nominal examiner that he was assessing "like a father," and accordingly all later papers were rated much lower. I was enlightened.

Turning now to the influences on my father's side, there was a tradition of management and organization, his father and grandfather having been Commissary-Generals in the army. They were stubbornly incorrupt Presbyterians, and kept down the customary waste. They knew that "every army marches on its stomach," and my great-grandfather kept up the transport and supplies in the Napoleonic wars on the Spanish and

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Italian side. He left innumerable sketches and water-colours made in the Peninsula.

My grandfather was sent out to Brussels to wind up the accounts of the Waterloo campaign, which kept him there till 1817, when he married a daughter of the deceased goldsmith and banker, Henry Mitton, a former partner of Sir Richard Glyn. During a few years of peace in England, they were settled at King's Langley, where my father was born. After that, my grandfather was sent to the Cape; there he had to manage the material for the Caffre War. His family grew up there, the boys having a long ride into Capetown daily for school. This gave my father a hot-country disregard of English habits, which passed on to me, and served me well in the desert. Some facility in handling men and materials may also have come from the business ways of the older generations. But there were no stories of family life and doings from that side, as my father was singularly out of touch with relatives, owing to his early life at the Cape. He never remembered how many aunts he had or who they were; all that I learned otherwise.

After loitering in Italy and on the Rhine, the family came on to England for education, when my grandfather died suddenly. My father had started on medicine, but methods in 1844 seemed so irrational and unsatisfactory that he dropped it. As his brother said, "William would rather stay out in the rain than shelter in an imperfect house." He had a longing for finding perfection, and for spending time in seeking it, which always hindered success in a world of compromise. He had done chemistry at King's College under Daniel, and when the railway mania of 1847 was raging he turned to surveying.

His party were kept out in the open, surveying all day, and then plied with hot coffee all night to keep them awake to do the plotting, just getting an hour or two on

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a sofa for sleep. Such was the race to get plans completed in time for the day of final entry of Bills before the Session. When the day came, unfinished drawings or blank sheets were sent in, and later visits "to compare plans," with a tip to the custodian, enabled the completed sheets to be substituted before the Bill came up to the Parliamentary Committee.

When that fever was over, he turned to his old interest in electric lighting, and generating current by rotating magnets. The work with a large battery reached the practical stage of brilliant arc light on the steps of the National Gallery, lighting all down Whitehall, and also on Hungerford Bridge. But the company promoters who exploited the scientific work came to grief, and nothing was seen of electric light till, over twenty years later, we had "twinkle, twinkle little arc; ugly, dull, expensive spark." In disgust at mis-handling of the business, my father, when he married, turned off to chemical engineering. From all this I gleaned much in long talks with him on all kinds of chemical and physical questions, schemes and speculations, and for twenty years soaked in all he had to tell. He was a literalist in his beliefs, and sought his longed-for perfection in primitive Christianity, certainly the reasonable course.

It was only natural, in a world so rapidly changing in knowledge and outlook, that each generation should see matters in a different light as time went on. As I am neither a Butler or a Gosse, more need not be said on this score. I delayed writing *Egypt and Israel* till after his death.

A new stir arose when one day I brought back from Smith's bookstall, in 1866, a volume by Piazzzi Smyth, *Our Inheritance in the Great Pyramid*. The views, in conjunction with his old friendship for the author, strongly attracted my father, and for some years I was