

CHAPTER I

THE EXCAVATOR

IN few kinds of work are the results so directly dependent on the personality of the worker as they are in excavating. The old saying that a man finds what he looks for in a ^{Purpose.} subject, is too true ; or if he has not enough insight to ensure finding what he looks for, it is at least sadly true that he does not find anything that he does not look for. Whether it be inscriptions, carvings, papyri, or mummies that excavators have been seeking, they have seldom preserved or cared for anything but their own limited object.

Of late years the notion of digging merely for profitable spoil, or to yield a new excitement to the jaded, has spread unpleasantly—at least in Egypt. A concession to dig is sought much like a grant of a monastery at the Dissolution: the man who has influence or push, a title or a trade connection, claims to try his luck at the spoils of the land. Gold digging has at least no moral responsibility, beyond the ruin of the speculator ; but spoiling the past has an acute moral wrong in it, which those who do it

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may be charitably supposed to be too ignorant or unintelligent to see or realise.

And some systematic outline of archaeological methods and aims is needed, not only for those whose moral sense is so untrained that they may ruin a site, and say "I have done no wrong"; but it may even profit those who take up the name of archaeology when they mean solely art, or inscriptions, or some single branch of the subject. The most familiar teaching entitled archaeological is that of Classical Archaeology, which in the ways of most teachers means Greek sculpture and vase paintings. In spite of all the professorships and schools of that subject, we are still so profoundly ignorant of the archaeology of Greece and Italy that there is scarcely a single class of common objects of which any one knows the history and transformations. Certainly we know far less of the archaeology of classical lands than we do of that of Egypt.

If, then, the character of the excavator thus determines his results, our first step is to consider that character, and to give some outline of the aptitudes and acquirements—the wit and the cunning, as our forefathers well distinguished them—which are wanted in order to avoid doing more harm than good.

Character. Firstly in every subject there is the essential division between those who work to live, and those who live to work—the commercial, and the scientific or artistic aim;—those who merely do what will best provide them a living, and those whose work is their honour and the end of their being. These two halves of mankind are by no means to be found

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ready labelled by their professions. The R.A. who drops his aspirations because portraits pay best, the scientific scholar who patents every invention he can, are of the true commercial spirit, and verily they have their reward. Rather let us honour the professed dealer who will sooner sell a group to a museum than make a larger profit by playing to the wealthy *dilettante* and scattering things. Let us be quit, in archaeology at least, of the brandy-and-soda young man who manipulates his "expenses," of the adventurous speculator, of those who think that a title or a long purse glorifies any vanity or selfishness.

Without the ideal of solid continuous work, certain, accurate, and permanent,—archaeology is as futile as any other pursuit. Money alone will not do the work; brains are the first requisite. A hundred pounds intelligently spent will do more good and far less harm than ten thousand squandered in doing damage. Mere money gives no moral right to upset things according to the whim of one person. Even scholarship is by no means all that is wanted; the engineering training of mind and senses which Prof. Perry advocates will really fit an archaeologist better for excavating than book-work can alone. Best of all is the combination of the scholar and the engineer, the man of languages and the man of physics and mathematics, when such can be found. So much for the wit, and now of the cunning that is wanted.

The most needful of all acquisitions is archaeological experience. Without knowing well all the objects that are usually met with in an ancient civilisation, there is no possible insight or understanding, the meaning of what is met

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with cannot be grasped, and the most curious mistakes are made. A cloud is "very like a whale," the pre-Christian cross is found everywhere, an arrow-straightener is called a ceremonial staff, an oil-press becomes a sacred trilithon, half a jackal is called a locust, and lathe chucks become "coal money." Of course the needed experience has to be gradually built up, and those who first explore a civilisation must work through many mistakes. When I first came to Egypt Dr. Birch begged me to pack and send to him a box of pottery fragments from each great town, on the chance that from the known history of the sites some guess could be made as to the age of the objects; so complete was the ignorance of the archaeology a quarter of a century ago. But when such knowledge has been once accumulated, it is the first duty of any excavator to make himself well acquainted with it before he attempts to discover more. At present the archaeological experience that should be acquired before doing any responsible work in any country ought to cover the history of the pottery century by century, the history of beads, of tools and weapons, of the styles of art, of the styles of inscriptions, of the burial furniture, and of the many small objects which are now well known and dated, better in Egypt than perhaps in any other country.

Next to this is needed a good knowledge of the history. Not only every dynasty, but every king of whom anything is known, should be familiar. The general course of the civilisation, the foreign influences which affected the country, and the conditions at different periods, should be clearly in mind. With-

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out such ideas the value and meaning of discoveries cannot be grasped, and important clues and fresh knowledge may be passed by.

Organization, both of the plan of work, and of the labourers, is very necessary. Scheming how to extract all that is possible from a given site, how to make use of all the conditions, how to avoid difficulties; and training labourers, keeping them all firmly in hand, making them all friends without allowing familiarity, getting their full confidence and their goodwill;—these requirements certainly rank high in an excavator's outfit.

The power of conserving material and information; of observing all that can be gleaned; of noticing trifling details which may imply a great deal else; of acquiring and building up a mental picture; of fitting everything into place, and not losing or missing any possible clues;—all this is the soul of the work, and without it excavating is mere dumb plodding.

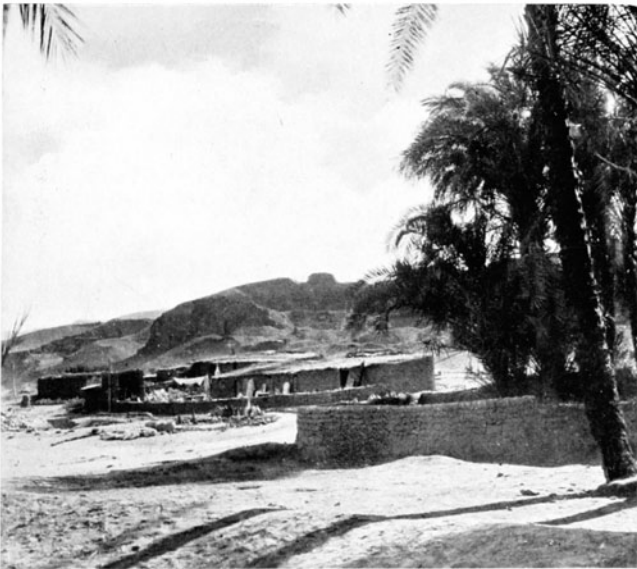
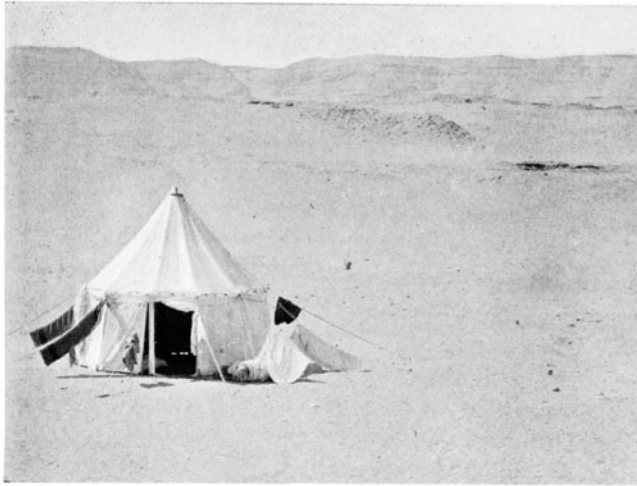
Of more external subjects, such as may be deputed to other helpers, drawing is mainly wanted; more in mechanical exactitude of facsimile-copying than in freehand or purely artistic work. Surveying and practical mathematics, with plan drawing, are almost always involved in dealing with any site. Photography is incessantly in use, both during the course of the working and for preparing publications. The outlines of chemistry and physics and a good knowledge of materials are necessary to avoid blunders in handling objects and in describing them. The ancient language of a country, all important as it is in the study of remains, is yet in its critical aspects

not so essential during field-work. But the excavator should at least be able to take the sense of all written material which he finds ; and in Egypt that should include hieroglyphic, hieratic, demotic, Greek, and Coptic writing. The spoken language of the country should be fluently acquired for simple purposes, so as to be able to direct workmen, make bargains, and follow what is going on. To be dependent on a cook, a dragoman, or a donkey boy, is very unsafe, and prevents that close study of the workmen which is needed for making the best use of them. And a general eye to the safety and condition of everything, both of work, antiquities, and stores, is incessantly wanted if a camp is to be successful and prosperous.

Many of these requirements can well be undertaken by different people ; in fact, not a single living person combines all of the requisite qualities for complete archaeological work. But all of these requirements must be fulfilled by different members in a party, if they are to command success as well as deserve it. In all points, imagination and insight, the sense of all the possibilities of a case, is to be the medium of thought both in theoretical and in practical affairs.

In the externals of the work an excavator should be always his own best workman. If he be the strongest on the place, so much the better ; but at all events he should be the most able in all matters of skill and ability. Where anything is found it should be the hands of the master that clear it from the soil ; the pick and the knife should be in his hands every day, and his readiness should be shown by the shortness of his

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CAMP LIFE, ABYDOS.

Fig. 4. Tent in desert. | Fig. 5. Huts at temple.

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finger-nails and the toughness of his skin. After a week of work in the soil, feeling for delicate things in a way that no tools can do, the skin almost wears through, and the nails break down. But a week or two more at it, and the excavator grows his gloves, and is in a fit state for business, with the skin well thickened, and ready to finger through tons of grit and sand. Nothing can be a substitute for finger-work in extracting objects, and clearing ground delicately; and one might as well try to play the violin in a pair of gloves as profess to excavate with clean fingers and a pretty skin. It need hardly be said that clothing must correspond to the work; and there must never be a thought about clothes when one kneels in wet mud, scrapes through narrow passages, or sits waist deep in dust. To attempt serious work in pretty suits, shiny leggings, or starched collars, would be like mountaineering in evening dress, or remind one of the old prints of cricketers batting in chimney-pot hats. The man who cannot enjoy his work without regard to appearances, who will not strip and go into the water, or slither on slimy mud through unknown passages, had better not profess to excavate. Alongside of his men he must live, in work hours and out; every workman should come to him at all times for help and advice. His courtyard must be the pay office and the court of appeal for every one; and continual attention should be freely given to the many little troubles of those who are to be kept properly in hand. To suppose that work can be controlled from a distant hotel, where the master lives in state and luxury completely out of touch with his men, is

a fallacy, like playing at farming or at stockbroking : it may be amusing, but it is not business. And whatever is not businesslike in archaeology is a waste of the scanty material which should be left for those who know how to use it. An excavator must make up his mind to do his work thoroughly and truly, or else to leave it alone for others who will take the trouble which it deserves and requires.