

# FOREWORD

ON the day following the interment of the mortal remains of Dr. Sylvanus Griswold Morley in Fairview Cemetery, Santa Fe, September 6, 1948, a staff meeting of the Museum of New Mexico and the School of American Research was held.

At this time a proposal was made that, rather than a bronze bust or a portrait, possibly the most lasting testimonial to Dr. Morley could be achieved by asking some of his professional and personal friends to share in such a memorial by contributing reminiscences of their associations with him.

Unfortunately, none of us had access to Dr. Morley's address book—which was as international in scope as Dr. Morley's own outlook. In the absence of the address book, we wrote letters to about sixty persons, asking what they thought of the idea and suggesting, if they viewed it favorably, that they forward an account of their experiences with Sylvanus Morley.

Pending the receipt of replies, Dr. Alfred Vincent Kidder, who happened to be in Santa Fe, wrote an excellent sketch on Dr. Morley which appeared in the September 1948 issue of *El Palacio* and is included in this volume. No one could have been better fitted to prepare such an article, for Morley, Kidder, and John Gould Fletcher were the first students of the School of American Research. Guatemala, Yucatán, and Mexico held special services in Dr. Morley's honor, reports of which appeared in the press and scientific journals of these countries.

Many of the letters brought ready responses. Others were forwarded abroad; but in due course a large percentage of replies

came to hand. Some of them, referring to the early days of hardships in the bush, required discreet deletions.

It is the hope of those who have had to do with compiling this memorial volume that reading the accounts will help to revive pleasant memories of expeditions in foreign lands, and that this book will point up the personal and human side of Vay Morley, comrade and friend.

Dr. Morley himself preserved the record of his scientific attainments, through his many publications, the most popular of which, probably, is his last work, *The Ancient Maya*, brought out by Stanford University Press in 1946. He and Mrs. Morley left symbols of their way of life to the Museum of New Mexico by presenting their collection of Spanish Colonial Ecclesiastical Art, which Governor Dempsey accepted in the name of the State in 1945. It is expected that special housing will eventually be provided for these treasures.

I would like to express my appreciation to those who have so generously helped in the compilation of this volume, particularly Dr. Arthur J. O. Anderson, who has done the editing, and the members of our staff who have assisted in every way possible.

BOAZ LONG, *Director*  
*Museum of New Mexico*  
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*Santa Fe*

# A Bird Moving

BARBARA AITKEN •

**M**y recollections of Dr. Morley are all of thirty-five years ago. I remember him at the first Rito de los Frijoles Summer School when he was Dr. Hewett's trusted lieutenant: Morley, Chapman, Nusbaum—what an excellent team! Morley had already done a season's work in Guatemala, but his unassuming modesty made little of it; he seemed young, happy, gentle, scholarly, most liberal in sharing his knowledge. The workmen from San Ildefonso had a great liking for Mo'le—"Bird moving" was his Tewa name, explained as an allusion to "a yellow bird seen moving in the cottonwood tree."

Two years later I enjoyed his hospitality in his beautiful Santa Fe home.

Archaeology, and ethnology too, need more such truly civilized men.

- Broughton, Hampshire, England.

# A Match Between Raconteurs

HORACE ALBRIGHT •

I HAD known Vay Morley for about twenty-five years, and frequently chatted with him at the Cosmos Club in Washington, where he ranked as a most interesting scientist, full of amusing incidents and good stories which made him ever a delightful companion. Not, however, until 1947, when we were invited to Los Alamos, New Mexico, for dinner and to hear a lecture being given before the Mesa club did I get a full picture of his unusual versatility.

Morley had arranged the passes for a party of some five persons, and his daughter, Mrs. Edwin Brooks, received us at the Los Alamos sentry gate. We then drove to her home where ladies of the club had prepared light refreshments. Some ten of us sat around in a room. My business associate, Tom Cramer, of Carlsbad, New Mexico, led off with a story. Morley countered with another, and for nearly an hour the entire company sat spellbound while these two gentlemen amused and delighted us with talk that flitted from serious to frivolous and back again.

Tom Cramer, a yarn-spinner known throughout the Southwest and California for his wit and charm, was in rare form with his tales of desert and mountain men and women and their escapades in the old days of occupations from mining, range-riding, and pioneer practice in law and medicine, to pursuits dangerous and sinful. But in Vay Morley he more than met his match as a raconteur. Morley's stories reflected the rich experiences of the jungle, the hard frontier life of archaeologists and their dependence in

• New York, N. Y.



many cases on the trails of the *chicleros*, as well as delightful reminiscences of trips to Europe, the American republics, including his services as representative of American institutions in foreign lands. And there was plenty of the spice of life in his hilarious matching of Cramer's funny concoctions of fact and fancy.

Seriously, Vay's was a versatile, dynamic and vivid personality which imparted a bit of inspiration to all who knew him well. I wish with all my heart he could have had twenty more years in the lands he loved, and especially in old Santa Fe.

# At Top Speed

JACK P. ARMSTRONG •

I FIRST met Dr. Sylvanus Griswold Morley, "Vay" as I eventually knew him, either at the end of 1914 or early in 1915. At the time I was British Consul attached to the British Legation, at Guatemala City, on special duty. He called at the Legation to introduce himself and to tell me that he had a "war assignment" in the Gulf of Fonseca, and that his job was to investigate and report upon enemy naval activities in that area and to suggest cooperation between British Consular Officers in that district and himself.

A great and lasting friendship sprang from that occasion. Looking back over the thirty-five years of very friendly relationship which was of course intermittent, although considerably frequent, I am reminded of his untiring and immensely difficult task in the assembly of facts relating to the Maya civilization and culture; his outstanding and almost unique contribution to that task, and results achieved, as are apparent in his monumental work *The Ancient Maya*. Such a vast and complicated undertaking could not have been achieved except by the untiring energy, earnestness and intelligence which he gave unsparingly to everything he undertook. And this is more remarkable in view of his frail physique and indifferent health consequent upon the privations and exactions of a life spent in the rugged and inhospitable fastnesses of the lost Empires of the Maya.

No man literally lived more on his nervous system than did Vay Morley. Vay died as he had lived—at top speed. There was no

• United Fruit Co., Kingston, Jamaica.

changing of gears in his life. He was always in “high”; he never bothered with what was at right or left. With characteristic and tremendous energy, he ploughed along that great furrow he had laid out since youth with the single-minded purpose of laying bare the mysteries and beauties of a lost cause, which he achieved with consummate skill, backed by a tenacity of purpose and unusual gifts. What an example he set to all young men and women, whatever their vocations, to start the furrow and not look back!

In 1915-1918 he spent a good deal of time in Guatemala, less in the city than in the field, which of course was the focus of most of his activities. Occasionally he would disappear from view and his return would be hailed by a telegram from the Mexican border to say, “Am looking forward to dining with you tonight.” My wife and I did indeed look forward to a session with Vay. How we enjoyed his news of Maya discoveries, topical talk and his provoking sense of humour, and his amusing and unconventional running commentaries on all subjects. He seldom told a “good story,” his was the greatest of all gifts, an entirely spontaneous wit arising out of the general conversation.

It is difficult to give any adequate picture of Dr. Morley, because I can’t remember, apart from telegrams, ever having received more than one communication from him during the thirty-five years of our friendship. But I do well remember the occasion of one of his unannounced descents upon Guatemala City when we scratched together a number of friends to meet him at a luncheon party we hastily improvised. It was a Saturday when some had golf engagements and others varying social duties to fulfill. Dr. Morley “took the floor” from the start, as was his wont, not by reason of being garrulous or unduly talkative—he was neither—but by reason of his original approach to almost any question. Ignoring golf and

other social engagements, the lunch broke up at 5:30 when he unceremoniously seized his hat and a small cane he usually carried and made off, saying, "*Adios*, I had an engagement at 3:00 p. m. and must go." We heard no more of him for weeks or perhaps months—to the great regret of our guests who often enquired as to when another party with Dr. Morley could be arranged. Nothing could be "arranged" with Dr. Morley; everything was spontaneous or not at all.

Even his appearance was original. I can't say that I ever saw him in a new suit. His clothes were, to say the least, nondescript, largely due, of course, to his life in the bush. He would turn up to dinner in almost any garb; and his personality was such that no one seemed to notice what he wore, and nobody cared. "Morley is here" was all that mattered.

In his moments of relaxation no one enjoyed more than he the pleasures of leg-pulling. With his quickness of mind he lost no time in tearing to pieces any loose statement or unconscious slip, and he did it with the utmost of good taste and humour, never giving offense.

I remember that on one occasion he invited me to introduce him at a Conference he was to give in Guatemala City on some phase of Mayan research and results achieved. I knew nothing about Mayan civilization, any more than a few fragmentary facts he had seen fit to tell me, such being his contempt for the layman. Nevertheless all I could do was to apply to the task a dull and formal talk, with little or no emphasis on his achievements nor, what was much more important to Dr. Morley, any reference to the great prize which awaited efforts of the archaeologists. After the lecture he chided me with having made an utterly colorless and humdrum effort, lacking any imagination. That, however, did

not affect his dramatic and wholly fascinating lecture, given in fluent, if ungrammatical and,—as I chided him—less than elementary Spanish with a disregard of the genders, to an appreciative and amused Guatemalan audience.

It took me some time to live down my obvious delinquency, but it was never dull to hear and answer his amusing and incisive gibes.

I regret I have not at hand, if I have it at all, the only letter I recall ever receiving from Dr. Morley. It was a masterpiece of humorous description. The occasion was a trip he and his frail and devoted wife, Frances, made up some obscure and probably uncharted river flowing from the Petén, Guatemala, to the Yucatán peninsula or some such direction. This painstaking and evidently exhausting journey contributed not a little to undermine his then critical state of health. The hardships and objects and incidents of that journey are described in the letter with all his energy and delightful and occasional Rabelaisian sense of humor. His objective was research regardless of the hardships. He counted no costs once the objective had been established. I saw him shortly after his return and became not only painfully aware that such activities could not continue indefinitely, but also that unless a halt could be called to them he would not survive to give us that precious gift which was stored away in his mind and in danger of being lost forever.

The last time I saw him was at his temporary home outside Mérida (Mexico) and at visiting distance from Chichen Itza, Dr. Morley's greatest achievement in the field of Middle American Archaeology. It was there that he was at last engaged upon the momentous task of giving to his fellow men the sum of a life's work, *The Ancient Maya*.

Dr. Morley, as I knew him, was a genius, with a definite and

practical purpose. He was not what one might expect him to be, a somewhat impractical intellectual. Indeed his work in archaeology was essentially practical. He was no intellectual, but he was a scholar. He would have enjoyed Mr. Winston Churchill's recent indictment of the "degenerate intellectual" and would have found much food for thought and argument on the subject. One can well imagine how he would have enjoyed an analysis of those of our mutual friends and others coming within the purview of Mr. Churchill's indictment. It would have furnished Dr. Morley with an incomparable opportunity for the exercise of his genius and sense of humour in assessing the qualities and shortcomings not only of the personalities who would possibly come under the ban but also of his friends and acquaintances.

I never discovered that Vay had any hobbies, other than his diaries, which I had the opportunity of reading and which more than anything else, outside his life's work, would throw light on his enthusiasm, sense of humor, and talent, unless it was his taste for Spanish Colonial architecture and furniture. The artistic value of much of this he overvalued, I think. We both set the pace in Guatemala for the collection of furniture, silver, old paintings (chiefly portraiture), glass, china, picture frames, and so forth. Wood carvings were salvaged from the devastating destruction of churches occasioned by the 1916-17 earthquakes in Guatemala, which destroyed so much of the city and some of the splendid Spanish Colonial churches. The wood carvings from the churches were put to all sorts of practical although often incongruous, uses. Looking back over our enthusiastic search for such oddments, I can't help feeling that we acquired a good deal of rubbish, and that neither of us displayed much discrimination in what we did acquire; other than cleaning up and preserving for posterity a



great deal of interesting relics of a bygone age, and of eventual historical interest.

Dr. Morley seemed little interested in literature. I never knew him to refer to any outstanding and interesting book; nor did he divulge at any time an appreciation of literary work. Archaeology was the soul of his existence and indeed it occupied all his time. This is not remarkable since the task was of great complexity. There was always the possibility, however remote, of stumbling upon a Rosetta Stone, of course. The production of such a work as *The Ancient Maya*, where day-to-day discoveries could destroy conclusions, however indefinite, arrived at after years of patient and painstaking research, was a bold and phenomenal achievement. The infinite care to compare and check day-to-day information and correlate those findings gave Dr. Morley, with his vigorous and remorseless application to his task, little or no time for study in other fields of endeavour. His was an orderly and scholarly mind with an incisive appreciation of the probable and improbable to the disregard of everything of a speculative nature.

Occasionally I suggested to Dr. Morley, half seriously, that by the exercise of a good deal of imagination and some guess-work, plus a little wishful thinking, a cradle could be found for the Maya race. Dr. Morley's intellectual integrity could never be influenced by any such suggestion, nor any apocryphal data used as an approach to his fascinating subject. His scholarly digestion would have been completely upset by such a diet. He realized, as do all scientists, that while speculation is one of the most attractive expedients in all research, its use is also one of the most dangerous. The origin of Maya civilization is rife with speculation by laymen but could find no place in any of Dr. Morley's conclusions, indefinite as these must, by the very nature of things, remain.

Dr. Morley had a fairly large range of friends, and, as may be gathered from some of my remarks above, his friendships were not confined to any one class of historical or intellectual research workers. He enjoyed society and quiet entertainment. He ate and drank little. The great strain on his nervous system forbade any sort of excess, but on the contrary, made diet obligatory. Nevertheless he enjoyed Central American cooking and nearly all the appetizing albeit highly spiced and seasoned dishes common in Guatemala.

If I were asked to say what I thought most characteristic of Dr. Morley I would not hesitate to say it was the high speed at which he lived. I never knew him to sit idly at rest or relaxed. When he visited one, it was for some specific purpose, unless it was for a meal; and when that was over, unless there happened to be some reason or topic brought up that interested him, he would depart—probably as he had arrived—out of the blue. One wondered how such a comparatively frail body, not free from tropical disorders, could contain such dynamic energy. I would hazard the guess that the final recording of his life's work would never have been accomplished had his physical condition not forced him to slow down his mode of life.

Knowing really nothing of Maya archaeology, I hesitate to make any reference to matters of interest connected with that subject of which Dr. Morley had at times given me explanations, because I might confuse these with what I have read and my own conclusions which might be wholly at variance with the true facts as expounded by him. But I do remember such outstanding matters as the discovery of the Maya Chronology enabling dates to be established with accuracy, the existence and development of their grain, *teocinte*, the probable reasons for the abandonment of their



exquisite palaces, and so forth, all of which is to be found in *The Ancient Maya*, and is fascinating reading.

Dr. Morley had a deep affection for Guatemala and his many Guatemalan friends; no one incident in his life, I am sure, gave him more pleasure and satisfaction than to have received the Order of the Quetzal from the late President Ubico. Also, how he would have enjoyed the knowledge that a monument to his memory would be erected in Guatemala City! With what peace of mind, deep affection, and justifiable pride he would have received the news! And how proud I feel, as one of his more intimate friends, who may live to see the unveiling of that monument, that his name and work are to be perpetuated by the country which, more than any, inspired him to his great achievement.

## One of Guatemala's Most Distinguished Sons

MARÍA HERRERA DE ASCHKEL •

|| CONSIDER him one of Guatemala's most distinguished sons, intellectually speaking; for who, if not Sylvanus G. Morley, as an eminent archaeologist and historian, gave to the world in *The Ancient Maya* knowledge regarding a civilization of which we as Guatemalans feel so justly proud? This book, translated by Adrián Recinos, is one of our most interesting companions.

• Guatemala City, Guatemala, C. A.