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WHO DARED

By David Bauman

AMBITION. The desire to go further than any have gone before. The will to create something lasting - no, more than that: something permanent. The burning need to leave one's name inscribed in the halls of eternity. To hell with the risks and all those who say "it can't be done." Mother of spectacular successes; reckless father of countless follies and crushing failures.

The costly race to reach the South Pole epitomizes the effects of ambition - a merciless driving force. The expeditions of Robert Scott, Ernest Shackleton, Roald Amundsen and others received the proud backing of nations, the support of wealthy financiers, and captured the world's imagination. These men trudged across an absolutely barren, icy waste toward the end of the world simply to be able to say, "I was first."

Leader of the British Expedition of 1907-09, Ernest Shackleton was an explorer first and a writer second. But he knew that his backers would require both a proof of what had been accomplished and a promise of future successes. The sale of books would, of course, defray costs and build momentum for future expeditions. The Heart of the Antarctic was issued first in a deluxe edition, two large quarto volumes bound in vellum, richly illustrated with photographs, drawings, and maps. Only 300 numbered copies were produced for subscribers—for Shackleton's loyal supporters. This deluxe edition was also accompanied by the only edition of The Antarctic Book, which contains reproductions of drawings done by the party, the poem "Erebus" by Shackleton, the story "Bathybia" by Douglas Mawson, and other items produced by the expedition to while away the frigid Antarctic nights. All 16 members of the shore party signed this book - including Shackleton, of course - and it has never since been reprinted.

Henry Morton Stanley was a writer first - a journalist by trade - and an explorer second. He was fully aware of how his every decision, his every move would be recorded for posterity - by him! His quest to find the British missionary David Livingstone in the hinterlands of Africa catapulted him to the fame he so desperately sought. But 15 years had passed since he had uttered the immortal words "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" What could he possibly do for a follow-up? In 1886, he returned to the continent for a final expedition, via the Congo, to relieve and rescue the Emin Pasha, the besieged governor of isolated Equatoria in southern Sudan. Stanley hacked and slashed his way through the nearly impenetrable Ituri Forest, which he crossed not once but three times in the course of his travels. The conditions were brutal; sometimes the expedition could achieve no more than three or four hundred yards an hour. The perilous journey nearly cost Stanley his life, and only a third of the men with whom he set out returned alive.

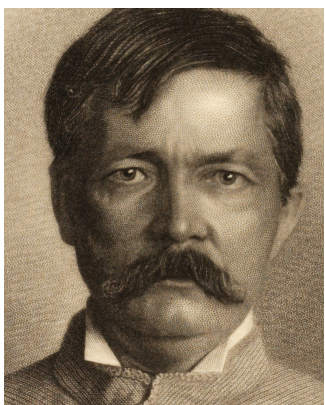
The record of this harrowing expedition, In Darkest Africa, was published in two massive leather-bound volumes, profusely illustrated with engravings and etchings, in an edition of only 500 copies - 250 for sale in England, 250 for America - each copy personally signed by Stanley. Editions published later were in a substantially reduced format, and sold by the thousands to a public eager to learn more about the mysterious "dark continent," as the Scramble for Africa was well underway.

Thomas Edward Lawrence was a man whose outsized ambition was matched perhaps only by his talent. He aspired to make his mark as a writer more than as an adventurer. "What is the perversity," he wrote, "which makes me, capable of many things in the world, wish only to do one thing, bookwriting: and gives me no skill at it?" It was not until the Arab Revolt of World War I and his own dramatic participation in it that he knew he had his subject and his theme.

The writing and production of Seven Pillars of Wisdom is itself a legendary saga, filled with lost manuscripts, numerous drafts and redrafts, publishing crises, and financial difficulty. The book's illustrations, including vivid pastel portraits of the main protagonists by Eric Kennington, are exceptionally compelling. The text was typeset by the then-unknown Manning Pike, an American studying at the London School of Printing—Lawrence called the finished product "glorious work." By 1925, after six years of agonizing, the edition was close to publication. In the end, there were only 170 complete copies for subscribers, 32 incomplete copies presented to men who had served with Lawrence in Arabia and who could not afford the complete copies, and nine "spoils." On each of the 170 subscribers' copies Lawrence wrote in his careful handwriting "Complete copy i.xii.26 T.E.S." (He had adopted the last name Shaw in 1923 so that he could escape from his "Lawrence of Arabia" renown and re-enlist in the Royal Tank Corps.)

Were any of these expeditions truly a success? Shackleton came within 100 miles of the South Pole before he was forced to turn back; Roald Amundsen would become the first to reach the pole a few years later. Stanley lost fully two-thirds of his men to the rigors of the jungle trek, only to discover that the governor of Equatoria did not wish to be "rescued" after all. And the suddenly famous "Lawrence of Arabia" could only watch in despair as his dream of an independent Arabia fell apart shortly after victory had been achieved, at such great cost.

And yet, Shackleton, Stanley, and Lawrence each - somehow, against the odds - managed to produce wonderful books. The Heart of the Antarctic, In Darkest Africa, Seven Pillars of Wisdom: these firsthand narratives give us the best idea of the leadership required, the courage demanded, the sacrifices endured, the reverses suffered, the adversities finally overcome. These gripping tales of endurance, as told by the protagonists, illustrated with the pictures they selected, sealed with their signatures as authentic and true, these books are the true successes of their various expeditions. These books are the lasting - no, permanent - monuments to the force that drove Shackleton, Stanley, and Lawrence to the breaking point and beyond. Tributes to this singular force that accepts no compromise: ambition.



The authors, clockwise from top left: Henry Morton Stanley, Thomas Edward Lawrence and Sir Ernest Shackleton.