

concentrated on the first hollow, he would have discovered only one of them.

It was a long, slow business. His hands became blistered from driving the bar into the turf; winter rains turned the hillside into squishy mud, after which it froze solid. Covering five thousand square yards with sticks at nine-inch intervals requires over a hundred thousand sticks; fortunately intelligent guesswork was able to reduce the number considerably. And it gradually became clear that Lethbridge was dealing with at least three separate figures. The central one was a woman on horseback, with a chariot behind her, and the symbol of the waning moon above her. To the right of the chariot there was a giant warrior, a sword raised above his head. To the left was another giant figure of a man, with white rays emanating from his forehead—Lethbridge assumed him to be the sun god. An object like a giant cloak billowed behind him.

And so the investigation had justified the assumption that old 'fairy stories' may contain a core of truth. Here was the origin of the legend of the buried golden chariot, and the warrior with his phantom horse. Careful excavation of the turf soon brought to light the face of the 'goddess'—a great round moon-face, with goggling eyes and perfunctory nose and mouth. Her 'horse' is a curious monstrosity, not unlike a dragon with a bird's beak. In fact, both the goddess and her mount look like science fiction monsters. The White Horse of Uffington has this same stylised, surrealistic quality.

Understandably, the excavations became one of the chief subjects of gossip in Cambridge, and Lethbridge became aware that he had achieved a kind of dubious celebrity. Most of his academic colleagues seemed to feel that the whole thing was a hoax, or at least, a piece of unconscious self-deception. To Lethbridge, the outlines in the chalk were perfectly clear; there was an obvious difference between the eroded chalk of the figures and the untouched chalk around them. Some of his colleagues professed to be unable to see the difference—or they suggested it had been made by Lethbridge himself as he excavated the figure. Fortunately, he was not the type to be unduly worried by hostility. He disliked what he called 'academic trade unionism', and his private income had allowed him to remain aloof from university rivalries. He had always gone his own way; the few colleagues he respected regarded him as a brilliant archaeologist, and these were the only opinions he cared about. So he continued to

excavate the giants, and to ponder on the problem of who made them, and why.

OS CELTAS



To begin with, the answer looked as if it might be fairly straightforward. At an early stage in the investigation, his colleague, Sir Cyril Fox, had suggested that the female figure was Epona, the Celtic horse goddess, said to be the result of a union between a man and a supernatural mare. This was a logical guess, for the style of the figures was Celtic, and all the evidence suggested that the people who carved them were the Celtic invaders who came to Britain sometime after 600 BC.

The Celts were one of the most remarkable races in European history—as remarkable, in their way, as the Greeks and Romans; if historians have shown less interest in them, it is because of the absence of written records. (The Celts acquired writing only around 500 AD.) They originated somewhere in central Europe, probably in the regions that are now Czechoslovakia and Bavaria. It has been suggested that they may have settled in Ireland as early as 1500 BC. But the great Celtic 'explosion' occurred after 500 BC, at the end of the Bronze Age. In fact, it was the Celts who were responsible for the end of the Bronze Age, since they brought the use of iron to the countries they conquered. They invaded Gaul (France), Italy, Greece, Asia Minor, and spread along the Danube as far as the Black Sea. Their warriors were tall and fair, although another variety of Celt was dark-haired and round-headed. The historian Lewis Spence describes them as 'that race of artists, poets and aristocrats'. They were formidable fighters but, as the Greek historian, Strabo, pointed out, 'boasters and threateners, and given to bombastic self-dramatisation'. They were also dreamers, intelligent, temperamental and pessimistic; Plato mentions that they were inclined to drunkenness. It can be seen that the Celtic character has changed very little in three thousand years.

The religion of the Celts was Druidism. This seems to have been a form of nature worship; their sacred places were groves of trees. Wells and rivers were also worshipped. Their chief deities were Lug, probably a fertility god, and Matrona, the nature goddess and earth mother. But there were some four hundred gods and goddesses in all, including Epona (or Eponos), the horse goddess, Moccus, the boar god, Taroos, the bull god, and Cernunnos, the horned stag god. The oak was their sacred tree (the word druid probable comes from the Greek drus, an oak). So was the mistletoe. The latter is, of course, a

KADITI

convento

visgo - planta
parasita