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A Keen Eye for Clues

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Samuel Goudsmit, a pioneering atomic theorist who specialized in the exacting, quantitative art of interpreting line spectra and who, with George Uhlenbeck, discovered electron spin, also contributed key studies of nuclear moments, neutron scattering, and the statistics of experimental measurement. Beyond the traditional ambit of laboratory, desk, and blackboard, Goudsmit was drawn to a wider world of inquiry – to museums and archaeological sites in Cairo as a respected amateur Egyptologist; to the MIT Radiation Lab early in WWII and to the briefing rooms of British pilots, analyzing the effectiveness of radar; and across wartime Europe by jeep, as head of an Allied mission in pursuit of clear information on Germany's secret fission program. After the war he took up chairmanship of a major physics department and editorship of the *Physical Review*, where he created the ambitious new journal, *Physical Review Letters*. The present author, Goudsmit's assistant at the journal forty years ago, looks for a common element that might explain this extraordinary diversity of interests and contributions, and finds one in Goudsmit's abiding delight in solving puzzles of every kind, coupled with a detective's keen eye for clues.