

UPS AND DOWNS  
OF A WANDERING LIFE

*By*

Walter Seymour

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OF A WANDERING LIFE

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**Walter Seymour**

*Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope; who think that age will perform the promises of youth, and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow: read the story of the writer of these pages*

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## CHAPTER I

### *EARLY LIFE AND SCHOOL*

One of the greatest of English writers, for whom I have the profoundest veneration, Herbert Spencer, considered that a man's progenitors had great influence on his character and impulses, so my readers - if there are any - must forgive my mentioning one or two facts about mine, which may account for my wandering propensities and curious ways of life.

My father belonged to a branch of the Seymour family settled in Ireland, and my grandfather, Admiral Sir Michael Seymour, was one of the fighting captains in the war with France. My uncle Sir Michael, my cousin Sir Michael, and brother Sir Edward, have continued the family propensity for the sea.

There was an Admiral Seymour commanding against the Spanish Armada. Among my forbears was John Hampden, also Sir Humphrey Gilbert; while General Monk, Duke of Albemarle, was first cousin, and blood-relation to an ancestor.

The Rhett family of South Carolina, whose ancestors were the first three Governors of Carolina, are distant cousins, and they, while being rather remarkable in a fighting generation for their duelling tastes, are considered by many to have been almost the greatest instigators of the American Civil War.

I have also a well-authenticated descent from Edward the First, though I don't quite know which of his great qualities I have any fraction of. There have been no family wounds from poisoned arrows since then.

Having done with them, I may state that my father, Richard Seymour, was a Canon of Worcester, and that I was born at Kinwarton, in Warwickshire, where he was Rector, on the 9th December, 1838. After having pretty well worn out the patience of a long-suffering governess, I and my brothers had the tuition of two tutors, who were also successively my father's curates, and with them we often differed, but, having the advantage of superior strength, and the possession of a cane, they came off best.

Close to our garden was a small river, our delight in every way, as we could bathe, hunt rats with the dogs, and catch fish and eels, with the result that even in floods none of us were drowned, and that we boys and my sisters turned out good swimmers.

We had, of course, our share of pet animals. Dogs large and small: Dido, a fierce retriever, in her youth would take any one of us by the leg and drag us round the lawn in spite of howls, to the amusement of the others. Pip, a rough grey terrier, would stand on his hind-legs and growl defiance in the ear of any dog he could reach like that, and was nearly killed more than once. My brother Albert took him to Oxford, where he was supposed to live out of college, but he frequently evaded the porter when he happened to be loose, and made straight for the rooms he wanted.

Ferrets and guinea-pigs, of course, succeeded rabbits. We had a shower-bath in the house, and all the animals had to take their turn of that bath, to their great disgust.

That ferrets were not affectionate my youngest brother Jack found a painful proof. I and one of my brothers were crossing to the ferret-house, and found there Master Jack castigating a large white one. We asked him what he did that for. He pointed to his bleeding lip, and said: "I was only kissing the beast!"

We learned to ride early on a donkey, who was knowing enough to brush us off under the bough of a tree when she had enough of us, and ponies followed, my first fox-hunt being when eight or nine.

In due course I went to school at Radley, the monastic system of which was not welcome-rise at six; a cold schoolroom, for the heating apparatus got out of order, and there were no fires for weeks. The small boys used sometimes to say: "Ha, ha! I am warm: I have seen the fire!" Chapel at eight; then tea and bread-and-butter; plenty of school; a remarkably plain dinner; chapel again, and more tea and bread-and-butter. The head-master was the "Warden", and the un-

der-masters were called “Fellows”; and there were many fads in the early system which were modified till it is now a most excellent public school. I fell under the displeasure of William Sewell, the Warden, over some silly nonsense, which he chose to make a great fuss about, and he treated me, as I still think, with much injudiciousness, and also injustice, which was the verdict of all the school. I think that, except in his own mind, he knew as much about ruling boys as he did about governing the Mormon City. It ended in my father transplanting me to Charterhouse, then in the middle of London, where he had been.

The corporal discipline system at Radley was like that of Jack Easy’s school—no flogging, or very rarely, but a plentiful use of the rattan-cane. Like Jack, after enough experience of both, I personally much prefer the classic birch to the common cane. As to which causes most personal annoyance there can be no difference of opinion among those who have been experimented upon.

I learnt about as much Latin and Greek as the average boy does, which means that, under the English public-school system, having been taught Latin for eleven or twelve years, I wrote it very badly, and read it with great difficulty, needing a dictionary up to the end. All because it was called a “dead language” and a doggerel form of learning, it was therefore used; whereas, if I had not learnt more of a live modern language in two years, I should have been called an idiot. Of Greek I learnt, of course, less, and the absurd rule of trying to write verses in each was the fancy form of teaching, when the amount of verse-writing of most boys would hardly have arrived in English at, “A was an Archer, who shot at a frog; and B was a Butcher, who had a big dog”. The French master, a clever gentleman, was made a joke of, and the boys who cheeked him to his face were never punished. Such was the regard the masters had for any learning, however useful, of which they were ignorant. I soon got to the end of Colensoe’s “Arithmetic”, and then, as nothing higher was taught, my arithmetic hours were wasted in doing old sums, and the same with the four books of Euclid. The drawing-lesson was equally a farce, and waste of time and money, as it was an extra.

Hullah, the well-known, popular singing-master, drilled us into the “Hardy Norseman” and “Ye Mariners of England”, sound being as much a requirement as harmony, and voice-production, beyond being told to open your chest and mouth, was a needless detail.

Angelo taught fencing, and we thrashed each other with single-

sticks, and punched the noses of our mates with boxing-gloves by the light of Nature to our hearts' content.

Masters were not always of the wisest. My brother Dick was a boy not easily repressed. One day, when he was making the other boys laugh, the master said to him: "Seymour, you are a fool". "You have no right to call me a fool, sir!" "Solomon would have called you a fool". Yes, sir; but you are not Solomon".

Cricket we worked hard at, and, in spite of the limited extent and roughness of the ground, were very keen about it, and turned out some good cricketers.

Football, of course - though that was long before the rules of "Soccer" and "Rugger" were invented - filled up the winter play-hours but our speciality was football in the cloisters - a rough and very violent form of sport.

I arrived at the sixth form, and got through its requirements with too much facility to learn as much as I ought to have done.

English verse I wrote easily, and got a medal for some strange lines on the Crimea, which I concocted during our holidays. I remember that I followed this success up by writing for the *Newdigate* at Oxford; and a friend of mine, who really could write, some years later came across my poem among some papers, and remarked that it was almost bad enough to have won the prize. The subject was the Indian Mutiny, and when he came to the lines -

"The sun was setting, and the bugle peal  
Called the tired soldier to his evening meal!"

he fairly roared with laughter.

As a small boy, it took great labour to teach me to read, so much so that my nearest sister, who was far sharper, thought I was deficient; but at Charterhouse I dipped deeply into an excellent library, and read insatiably, especially poetry.

I remember an "exeat" one Saturday to go down to Sheerness to see my brother Edward, a midshipman on board the *Terrible*, just returned from the Crimea, where she had seen a good deal of service.

I was asked with him into the wardroom, where I had to take wine with most of the hospitable heroes at table, after which the ceremony was repeated in the midshipman's berth in rum, with effects rather disastrous to a young schoolboy. And the hammock in which

I passed the night seemed to me at first to have brought the movement of an Atlantic swell with it.

The holidays spent in the wilds of the country after London were delightful. We had the kindest and most hospitable of neighbours near us in Mr. Darwin Galton, a country squire of the best sort, to whose kindness I owe much of my early knowledge of shooting and riding. He had no boys of his own, and was kindness itself to us. I remember one day in his room looking at a print of the celebrated Barclay of Ury, and asking him: "Mr. Galton, who is that rat-catcher-looking man?" He roared with laughter, and said: "That rat-catcher-looking man is my uncle, the celebrated Barclay of Ury, who walked a thousand miles in a thousand hours, and trained Tom Cribb for his great fight with Molyneux!"

Mr. Galton was a most practical man in every way, and on his farm and estate had many dodges of his own.

One, I remember, was in the kitchen-garden on the newly-sown beds, or to guard strawberries, where three or four cats, each with its little kennel and a long string to range about, were kept to frighten the birds.

He said to us one day when we had been cleaned, and had ridden over there: "Now, boys, next time you come, don't come dressed up smart; come in your 'pig clothes', then you can have some fun with the keeper, fishing or ferreting". And so we did after that, learning much about ferrets and other animals.

Another neighbour was Sir Francis Goodricke, of Studley Castle, where we were always welcome, and spent many happy days, his family being our greatest friends, and one of his sons was later on my partner in the wilds. His name was Holyoake before he took that of Goodricke.

His was a curious history. Of an old Warwickshire family-squires and bankers at Wolverhampton-he was the celebrated Frank Holyoake at Melton and Newmarket.

Sir Harry Goodricke, his great friend, died young, and left him Ribstone Hall in Yorkshire, and Cleremont in Norfolk.

He also succeeded him as Master of the Quorn, where he had a short and glorious reign. He built Studley Castle on the old Holyoake property, and married the sister of that most popular and charming man, Mr. George Payne.

Lord George Bentinck was a great ally of his, and a frequent visitor

at Studley; and at one time Sir Francis, Mr. Payne, and Mr. Charles Greville were partners in racing.

Sir Francis later became serious, and gave up racing and society, and eventually sold Studley. His eldest son Harry, my dear old friend, got a bullet through him at the Redan, within an inch of his heart, a wound from which he seemed to recover. He was very strong and active, and a very good cricketer, but he died young from the effects of his wound.

Our only other near neighbours were the Throckmortons of Coughton - that quaint old house where their relatives the Catesbys, Treshams, etc., used to meet early in James the First's reign - and as they were active Roman Catholics, had no friendly feeling for the King. Vide Guy Fawkes!

Sir Robert was a charming gentleman of the world of manners now, alas! passed away, most courteous and kind to everyone. Many a pleasant day's shooting I had at Coughton, and at Buckland in Berkshire, and his sons Willie, Dick, and Jack were among my dearest and most intimate friends in those happy days of youth and enthusiasm.

The free hospitality of those days is in some ways moderated, and strong temperance people would say, "Thank God for it!" In those days beer was always on tap for everyone who could make an excuse to call at an open-handed house. One of Sir Robert's sons told me that when they lived at Coughton Court the consumption of beer in a year was ten thousand gallons - about twenty-seven gallons a day, so that a hundred people would drink a quart each. But, then, two quarts a day was not much for stablemen, footmen, gardeners, keepers, and all who could make any excuse to call at the house.

When one knows that in old days at Wynnstay there were three men in uniform called "drawers", one wonders less. We may presume that the drawers brewed also, as all beer was brewed at home, and capital stuff it nearly always was! No salt and tobacco put in it by the publicans.

Though Warwickshire was not then among the known cricketing counties, we had a good eleven, and far more enjoyable matches, to my mind, than the present professional affairs. I and my two brothers played, and we had the Mordaunts (John and Osbert), David Buccannon, Tom Ratliff, Beau Featherstone, Kenny, etc.

Beau Featherstone was a very good boxer, as my nose bore witness for ever after. One evening during a two-days' match someone

threw out of a window to us below a set of boxing-gloves, which he and I put on. He presently landed me one smartly on the nose, and the glove, when thrown out, had picked up a small, sharp stone, and this split the bridge of my nose. Everyone laughed, and all declared afterwards that it had improved its shape.

A French lady at Leamington amused us by asking "What for do they call him Beau? Is it because he is so handsome?" And he was mighty good-looking!

With a small local club at Kinwarton we generally managed to win our matches, over which party spirit occasionally ran high. When going to play in the Birmingham part, it used to be remarked: "You had better bring a fighting umpire with you!" I remember an amusing incident: A big man was in. "How's that, umpire?" "Out". The big man: "Hout be dommed; oi be the biggest mon in this here bonk, and here oi boid!"

But the decision of the umpire was sometimes of the quality of the local man: "No ball! Wide! Hout, by gum!"

I have lively recollections of the system of medicine both at Radley and at Charterhouse. If a boy at Radley complained of illness, the inflexible matron administered to him a most searching remedy called a "black dose"; made, we believed, chiefly of senna. I know it was the nastiest compound I ever put inside my unlucky mouth; and its strength!

There was an infirmary of which I was twice an inmate, once with mumps, and again from an accident.

Tree-climbing was one of our delights, and I had a nasty fall from a bough breaking, and I came down on my head. All I could remember of it was being given a leg up into the tree by Lord Walter Ker, so well known afterwards in the Navy and at the Admiralty. Then I found myself in the schoolroom, and then in chapel. I was overhauled and sent to the infirmary, where were two other boys with some complaints - possibly none, only "shamming".

I don't think we were very bad, as we kicked up such a row that we were tried and condemned. My companions were severely caned, and sent back to the schoolroom. I got off, as it was thought that caning might be bad for my head, though that was not the part on which the punishment was inflicted.

At Charterhouse our medico was a great character - Dr. Myles. I think I may say that he belonged to the old school of drastic-remedy

doctors. Though he could supply many things, he had a sad deficiency of “h’s” in his talk.

One of the senior boys came to him, and was examined, and the doctor said: “My boy, you over ‘eat yourself!” “Oh no, sir! I beg your pardon, I have lately been most careful in food”. “I don’t mean you eat too much, but you get too ‘ot!”

They told a story in the hall, where the authorities had their mess, that one day, being asked what he would take, he said to the master, Dr. Hale, who had before him a calf’s head: “Well, master, I will ‘ave some of your ‘ead”.

In all ordinary complaints there were two remedies, the white mixture and the brown mixture, the latter being the most powerful; and one or other was ordered according to symptoms.

The birch was then in daily use, sometimes, one may say, wholesale. One might see six or eight sad-looking youths following the head-monitor into the room of execution, and someone would at once give the cause as a “bedroom row” - a bolster-fight, probably - the noise of which had brought up the house-master. No questions were asked, but the whole roomful was birched.

I remember a small, funny little boy, who was a frequent sufferer. He rejoiced in the appropriate name of Rodwell. A mischievous, cheeky urchin, he was a day-boy, and we heard one day that he had suffered under his father, the Rev. Rodwell, who had caught him in his surplice baptizing the kitten.

We used sometimes to prig the old birches, and in one house, whoever got a “duck’s egg” as his share in a house cricket match was summarily birched by the rest of the eleven.

I was at Charterhouse under three head-masters. Dr. Saunders, quite an old-fashioned Head who birched his way to the Deanery of Peterborough.

Can anyone say why the castigation of boys has so frequently led to high places in the Church?

Dr. Elder succeeded him - a very clever and good master - but his health soon broke down, much to our regret, and he was succeeded by Dr. Elwyn, a first-rate scholar, though not a master of great personal influence.

