

A Gallant Gentleman

General Seely's Story of an Adventurous Life: Cheating Death on Land, Sea, and in the Air; When He Nearly Killed General Botha: A Maori Idyll

By FRANK WHITAKER

"To die," said Peter Pan, "would be an awfully big adventure," to which General J. E. B. Seely no doubt replied, if he ever met Peter Pan, "Probably, but why die?"

A man who has survived apparently certain death by each of the four elements; who has been drowned and revived; fallen a distance commonly thought to be fatal, and lived; faced an enemy rifle at almost point-blank range and been spared; flown in an aeroplane with a burst petrol tank and escaped unscathed; and "over and over again on the western front found myself alone unharmed when every one of those around me had been killed or wounded"—a man who has flouted dangers like these can afford to talk like that. A charmed life? Why, the normal expectations of a cat are, as they say in the North, a "fool to!"

The Problem of Fear

General Seely has now told the story of his extraordinary career in "Adventure," and told it well. The book moves in a crescendo of excitement from the first page to the last; it is curious to note how the scale of the adventures grows as the years go by. It begins with a solitary walk down a cliff and widens and deepens, involving more and more people in a kind of arithmetical progression, until it merges in the supreme adventure of the War itself.

As a boy General Seely often listened to the tales of his uncle, Colonel Browne, who had won the V.C. for spiking a gun at Lucknow, and who managed the family estates at Brooke, in the Isle of Wight.

It was he (says General Seely) who first set me thinking over the problem of fear. I will remember walking along the beach and reflecting that being frightened was a foolish thing, like biting one's nails; obviously it did no good. I set to work then to try to overcome this falling; and thought I have never succeeded, the constant conscious attempt has been very helpful.

It was apparently helpful not long afterwards, when a cliff at Brooke gave way under his feet and he dropped seventy feet on to the beach, for he says his dread vanished like a flash, and he "seemed to be just happily dreaming suspended in space." Fortunately, a lot of the cliff fell too, forming a perfect cushion for his landing. He lay there for two hours and took a whole term to recover from his injuries, but the experience "proved to me that fear was foolish, and that no case, however desperate, is ever hopeless."

The Seven Eggs

His next experience was being drowned while diving for eggs. He had brought up seven, and someone else eight. That meant, of course, that he must go one better. Down he went again... six... seven... and then he found that the others were several yards away. He had a moment of agony when he felt he must breathe or burst, but he overcame it and took one more stroke.

Then all at once the pain and agony ceased. It was as though when some great orchestra has been playing crashing and discordant sounds, suddenly the music is resolved into a beautiful major chord with every instrument in perfect tune. Then I found myself walking over a green field in glorious sunshine, with bright yellow buttercups studding the grass; in the distance church bells were ringing, and I had a sensation of complete joy and happiness. I was fished out, black in the face and unconscious, and was finally brought to by artificial respiration.

Many years later a sailor who had had his consciousness restored in the same way told him that he had gone through precisely similar sensations. So that, apparently, is what it feels like to be drowned.

The Flag on the Steeple

At Harrow this lively youngster, with the aid of a companion and a

child's bow and arrow, shot a rope over the beams in the church steeple, hauled himself up from stage to stage, and tied a Union Jack to the top. His career at Cambridge was ended abruptly by a hair-raising experience with a runaway horse in Switzerland. With bridle broken it galloped for miles down a mountain track and deposited him, unconscious, with his legs dangling over a chasm two hundred feet deep. He was laid up for months with congestion of the brain. ("My dear Jack, that explains it all!" said the then Mr. Balfour twenty years afterwards, when Seely, who had been the first to leave him on the fiscal question, told the story at a Commons dinner-party.)

Next he swam out with a line to a wrecked French ship, received a gold medal, a broken rib and a punctured lung. He set off on a long sea voyage to recover his health, served as an A.B., was swept out of his cabin by a huge wave, and saved himself only by clinging to the after-rigging as it swept past. During the same storm his companion, Tom Conolly, fell from a yard a hundred and twenty feet above the sea, clutched a swinging rope—and held on. As the ship heeled over he caught the ratlines and descended safely to the deck! Truly miracles seemed to follow Seely wherever he went.

The Maori Princess

In New Zealand he was nearly drowned again, and then came an adventure of a more romantic kind. While swimming one day in a pool in the heart of the Maori country he encountered a lovely girl, "the most beautiful thing—animate or inanimate—that I had ever seen, like the most perfect Greek statue, with the poise of Raphael's young St. John the Baptist at Florence" and a "delicious enigmatic smile." She was the sister of the local chief.

The rest of the story is soon told. As we wandered about the great forest finding strange birds, hot springs and occasionally the track of a wild boar, I was often with the princess—as she was called. She started to teach me Maori, including many kind and friendly words in that singularly melodious language. I can still say in Maori that "my soul is filled with respectful adoration." It was all very delicious and innocent, but difficult to see how it could end.

She gave up the Kiwi mats, and was dressed in ever-changing costumes of garlands of flowers and leaves. After a few days the chief came to see me and quite politely, but bluntly, asked me my intentions. To use the novelist's phrase, I was "torn with conflicting emotions." This girl of seventeen, though some would have described her as an untutored savage, was without doubt the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. Moreover, though she could run and jump like a gazelle, and swim like a salmon, she had the manner and bearing of a queen; thoughts and ideas of unbelievable charm and beauty.

I had often heard people make speeches about cementing the Empire with friendship and the union of hearts; here was a union of hearts if ever there was one. But for Tom, we should have married and I suppose I should have become what was termed a "Pakeha Maori." Tom had only one argument and refused to give another single word of advice. He said I should break my mother's heart.

So they parted the next day—how General Seely tells in a charming little passage:—

I put my arm round her, and kissed her, no rubbing of noses in native fashion, but a kiss from one to the other. She burst into tears and so, I confess, did I as I jumped into the canoe and in a moment shot into the stream, under the dett blow of the twelve well-wielded paddles. Just before we rounded a bend I looked back and saw her standing hand-in-hand with her brother. She waved farewell to me and I never saw her again.

The Man Who Would Not Shoot

When the Boer War broke out General Seely, who had meanwhile joined the Yeomanry, went out in charge of a squadron, and had two of the most amazing adventures of his life. While reconnoitering a ruined Kaffir kraal he was surprised by a shot of Boers:

I stood quite still, watching a man aiming his rifle at me. It was a clear, sunny morning, and he was

within twelve yards of me. I could recognize his body from among a hundred others. It was no good for me to run away, because I realized that I could not be missed; so I stood still waiting for the end. Then an extraordinary thing happened. The man lowered his rifle, looked straight in the eyes, turned round and walked away. It was said to me in explanation of this curious episode that my three troops, who had already got round the flank of this small party of the enemy, had made the man realize that he must get quickly on his horse in order to escape. But I know perfectly well from the look he gave me, and from the deliberation of his movements, that what really happened was this. He was sorry for a young Englishman thus surprised, and, out of sheer good nature, decided not to kill me.

The Horseman in the Mist

In the other adventure he himself was the man with the gun. It came to him at an advance post on the top of a high ridge, on a misty night when a party of Boers had been reported near. Suddenly a figure on horseback appeared through the mist, riding towards the outpost:—

The corporal was about to fire, but I snatched his rifle from him, whispering, "Let him come on." The mist was drifting in swathes over the hill and for a moment he was invisible; while I heard the horse advancing on the stony ground; then for a second I saw a commanding figure silhouetted against the grey mist. The corporal was so excited that he shouted to me quite loud: "Shoot, sir!" The figure turned and galloped away. I fired, reloaded, and fired again; I ran forward with the corporal, but although the range was not more than fifteen yards, I had made a clean miss both times. I make this one confident claim to distinction, that I made the luckiest bad shot for the British Empire that any man has made! For the commanding figure was Botha himself! He was reconnoitering his enemy's front before making his desperate and successful attempt to break through.

It was Botha himself, years later, who told General Seely of his escape, and it was Seely who recommended the King to make Botha a Lieutenant-general of the British Army. "This is the first time," the King replied, "that I have been asked to make a man a Lieutenant-general for his brilliant services against us." But he made him a full general, and as the world knows, Botha lived to render invaluable service to the Empire.

Preparing for War

General Seely returned home to find himself a member of Parliament, and he devotes a large part of his book to the stormy politics of the ten years prior to the War. In a deeply interesting chapter he describes the growth of his conviction that war was inevitable, and how as soon as he became Secretary for War in 1912 he set to work with redoubled energy and secrecy to prepare for it. In his view, the historian of the future will fasten "war guilt" not on any single person, however highly placed, but on the political aspirations and policies of the contending nations; and his definition of these rival policies will be a desire by Germany to expand, a resolve by England to maintain its status quo.

In 1912 General Seely had an interview with General French with far-reaching consequences:—

He came to me and said: "Would it not be a good plan for us to invite to our manoeuvres an eminent French soldier who is likely to take a leading part in the defence of France if the war which you anticipate happens?" As always, the difficulty in preparing without inciting undue suspicion and distrust was sufficiently obvious in this case. But I decided to take the risk, and said, "Yes. Whom shall we invite?" He replied: "I think the most remarkable man in the French Army, although he is far away from being senior, is a man called Foch."

Foch's Prophecy

And so Foch was invited. When the manoeuvres were over, he made this striking prophecy:—

"The armies have outgrown the brains of the people who direct them. I do not believe that there is any man living big enough to control these millions. They will stumble about, and then sit down helplessly in front of each other, thinking only of their means of communication to supply

these vast herds, who must eat four little armies, directed by my friend French, with your sea power enabling you to send them where you will, may well prove decisive if ever a conflict comes."

But before the conflict did come there were exciting events at home. The one that affected General Seely most closely, of course, was the Curzon incident, for it led to his resignation. He traces the development of that unhappy business temperately, and as far as one can judge from the published documents, fairly, although probably have differed from him on more than one point.

There was excitement to spare in those days, but it was not of the kind that appealed most to Seely's active temperament. He confesses that he grew sick of politics, and one can imagine the tightening of the lip and the squaring of the shoulders with which he heard the fateful declaration of August 4th, 1914.

Within a few days he was at the British Headquarters, "never expecting to see England again." Every day his duties took him into the British and French front lines and back to Headquarters to report personally to Sir John French what he had seen. No man saw more in those weary, confused days, when whole armies stumbled blindly over the fields of France and Death lurked round every corner. But Fate was kind to Seely. Shells and bullets encompassed him, but in the language of the time, his name was written on none of them.

Eventually he went to Antwerp, where he found "the whole business in Winston's hands."

He dominated the whole place: the King, Ministers, soldiers, sailors. So great was his influence that I am convinced that with 20,000 British troops he could have held Antwerp against almost any onslaught. From all I learned and all I saw, I think it very possible that had Winston not brought his naval men to Antwerp, the Belgian Field Army would not have escaped. Had Winston been vigorously supported, even thus late in the day, the Germans would have been forced to advance such large forces that their detachments in Ypres would have been stayed, and might have been prevented altogether.

The Arrest of Mr. MacDonald

On General Seely's return to Headquarters one night, General French told him that "some idiot at Dun-dee" had addressed Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, who had come over to visit a hospital, and asked him if he would put the matter right. He did so; "MacDonald took it very well, and after a word or two of serious protest, laughed the matter off." Later he took Mr. MacDonald up to the front line, and it was only by great good fortune that they escaped with their lives. They stumbled into the middle of a French counter-attack; shells fell all round them, their car was repeatedly hit by bullets, and finally they took refuge in a support trench, where they were nearly shot as spies!

From first to last, when he reached safety covered with mud, the future Prime Minister, says General Seely, "behaved with the utmost coolness."

Eventually General Seely was given the command of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade, which he led with conspicuous gallantry and success. For their brilliant capture of Moreuil Ridge at the end of March, 1918, which saved Amiens, they received high praise from Foch and General Rawlinson, and were mentioned in the communique of the day. Soon afterwards, suffering badly from the effects of gas, Seely was ordered home.

He was one of the few non-professional soldiers who reached high rank as a combatant, and he scathingly criticizes the follies of some of his superior officers. Many avoidable disasters, he says, were caused by the failure of commanders to make personal surveys from the front line before ordering an attack, and many hardships were traceable to their attempts to apply obsolete theories to new conditions. He clearly ranked French above Haig, and sympathized with French when he was recalled.—John O'London's Weekly.

The wind frequently turns an umbrella, but a borrower seldom returns it.

He—"You are the breath of my life." She—"Let's see you hold your breath."

Sunday School Lesson

May 4. Lesson V.—Promotion in the Kingdom.—Matthew 22: 17-23. Golden Text.—The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.—Matthew 23: 23.

ANALYSIS
I. THE WAY TO GLORY, 17-19.
II. FALSE AMBITION, 20-23.
III. TRUE AMBITION, 24-28.

INTRODUCTION—The conception of the kingdom of heaven runs through this Gospel of Matthew, and in our lesson the problem of rewards in the kingdom comes up for discussion.

I. THE WAY TO GLORY, 17-19.

The heroism of Jesus is evident in the decision to go up to Jerusalem. He knew that the issue between him and the scribes was reaching a climax, and that he has been marked out for death. But this was not to be a mere result of fate. There was a willing choice on the part of Jesus to accept this path as the only one by which he could bring salvation to the race.

We also are to notice how his thoughtfulness for the disciples leads him to prepare them. They were filled with the idea that they were advancing to a kingdom of great earthly power, in which they would have positions of distinction, and now Jesus warns them against such futile hopes, and tells them clearly of the kind of reception they may expect.

V. 18. It was the habit of Jesus to speak of himself as "the Son of man," a title which implied Messianic standing, and which, in its best application, implied that he would at last return crowned with glory. But the way to such reward led through suffering. There is no misunderstanding in the mind of Jesus.

V. 19. He also knows that, since the Jews cannot pronounce sentence of death, he will have to stand before the Roman authorities; but his sensitive nature shrinks before the cruel torture which he will have to endure. He had frequently pictured the details of such a trial scene. But beyond the cross lay the crown. He knows that after death he will rise again and return to the fellowship of the Father. He always associates his resurrection with his death.

II. FALSE AMBITION, 20-23.

V. 20. Ambition is not wrong in itself, and depends altogether upon the objects which we seek and the motives which inspire us. It is not wrong for this mother to have lofty aims for her sons, and we may admire her resolution and insistence.

V. 21. It was the way in which she put her request, and the conditions involved in this, that were so wrong. Three things may be noted in her request: (1) It revealed a total misapprehension of the teaching of Jesus, who had come to bring a distinctly different kind of kingdom from that which she thinks of. He had never wondered at an earthly rule. (2) It was inconsiderate in that it placed Jesus in a very invidious position. He would either have to refuse her request or else, if he granted it he would awaken hard feelings on the part of others. (3) It was selfish in that she wanted to get something at the expense of others. If other disciples would have to be satisfied with lower positions, thus rivalry and envy would be started among them, all due to false ambition.

V. 22. The answer of Jesus reveals at once his perfect wisdom and his wonderful courtesy. He first tells them that they do not know what they have not realized the nature of the kingdom. Then he does that which shows the fitness of his feelings. He knows quite well that the others will be very indignant at the two. Accordingly he asks James and John if they are willing to pay the price of promotion, which is trial, hardship and, possibly, death. We respect a man who goes through hardships for their ambition, and Jesus tries to place these two in a good light as he shows them agreeing to accept this call to heroic service.

V. 23. He refers to the condition of reward. The high places do not go to favorites—all is arranged by the Father in accordance with the laws of the moral world. If they will labor and serve worthily, they will be sure of a high place. Thus in a way Jesus grants them their request, at least he shows how they may obtain their desire.

III. TRUE AMBITION, 24-28.

V. 24. The indignation of the ten is quite intelligible, and these others no doubt felt they were justified in being angry.

V. 25. But Jesus has a lesson for them also. Let them learn from this incident the lesson that earthly ambition rests upon a false foundation. The passion for earthly power and distinction is that which inspires those

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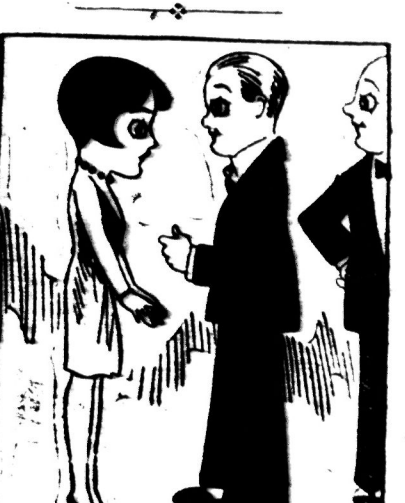
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who guide the affairs of the Roman Empire, which they so much hate and fear.

V. 26. The test of greatness in the kingdom of God is self-sacrificing service and love. There is a true ambition, and it is to serve. Let this inspire them, and they will forget all about worldly ambitions. The pure love of others will drive out all lower motives.



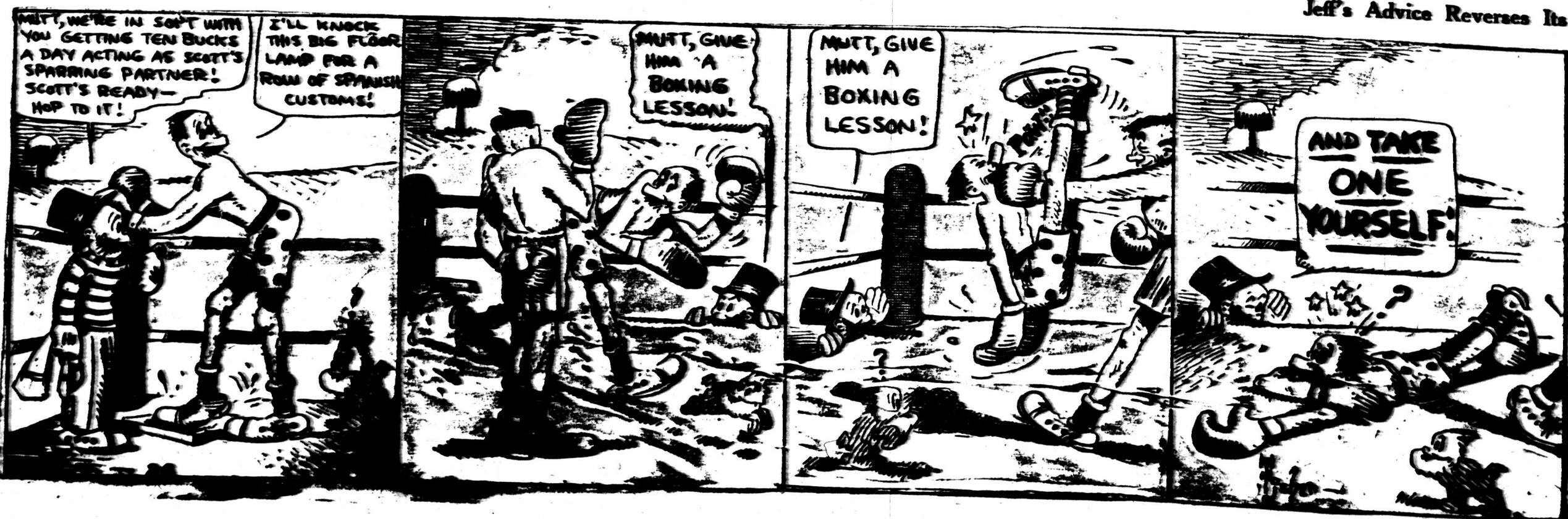
"I'm glad George has worked out a new system for playing the races."

"Do you think it will win?"

"No. But it will vary the conversation when he comes to explaining how he lost his money."

Imitation forms our manners, our opinions, our very lives.—John Weiss.

MUTT AND JEFF—By BUD FISHER



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Requiem

Roads are so dusty. Days are so long. My feet grow rusty. Just from wandering. All the worlds a-maze. Even miles stoned. Cause I'm such a Longing for you.

Where shall I go? Since you have seen What I do when When you just haul

Where can I find What I found when You were unkind; But I simply can't Where shall I go? Since you have seen



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