

A person is sitting on the edge of a dark, craggy rock formation on the left side of the frame. They are looking out over a vast, rolling valley. The valley is filled with green fields and some trees in the foreground. In the distance, there are low mountains under a sky filled with soft, white clouds. The sun is setting on the right side of the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow over the entire scene.

***DAVID
HANNAY***

***LIFE OF FREDERICK
MARRYAT***

David Hannay

Life of Frederick Marryat

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CHAPTER I.

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Frederick Marryat, one of the most brilliant, and the least fairly recognized, of English novelists, was born in Westminster, on the 10th July, 1792, some seven months before the outbreak of the Great War. He was the second son of Joseph Marryat, M.P. for Sandwich, chairman of the committee of Lloyds, and Colonial Agent for the island of Grenada. His mother was a Bostonian, of a loyalist family. Her maiden name was Geyer—or according to Mrs. Ross Church's life of her father, Von Geyer—and the family is said to have been of Hessian origin. The Marryats themselves were a Suffolk stock. In Marshall's "Naval Biography," which appeared during Marryat's own life, the novelist is said to have descended from one of the numerous Huguenot refugees who settled in the Eastern Counties during the persecutions of the sixteenth century. The family version of its history, as given by Mrs. Ross Church, contains a longer and more splendid pedigree, going back even to knights who came over with "Richard Conqueror." These things, though set forth with faith no doubt, are to be received with polite reserve by the judicious reader. For the rest, whatever the remote origin of the Marryats may have been, they were during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries very distinctly middle-class people—dissenting ministers, doctors, or business men—manifestly of good parts and industry. Some of them wrote sermons and printed them. Thomas Marryat, the novelist's grandfather, was a doctor and the author of a medical book. His father was, as the

places he held show, a prosperous man; and the future novelist entered the world under fairly favourable circumstances. There was, it is clear, no want of money, and the family were active people with a marked tendency to use their pens.

As no detailed life of Marryat was written until long after his death, when no witnesses were left who could speak with knowledge, there is an almost absolute want of evidence as to the character and probable influence of his family life. If we are to argue from his stories, it was hardly to be called happy. These guides may not be entirely safe, and yet they afford evidence of a kind not to be lightly dismissed. A writer whose pictures of home and school life are habitually disagreeable, cannot have had many pleasant memories of his own to look back on. With Marryat this was the case. In all his earlier stories, and until he became decidedly didactic, and religious, in his later years, he described the relations of parents and children, of schoolboy and schoolmaster, as either indifferent or hostile, or as contemptuous even when affection is not absent. Peter Simple, Mr. Midshipman Easy, and Newton Foster are the sons of men whom they may like, but cannot respect, of whom two are maniacs, and one is a harmless imbecile. Their mothers are either utterly shadowy or repulsive. "Frank Mildmay," the first and the most autobiographical of his stories, is also the most destitute of kindness. Something may be allowed for rawness in the author, and something for direct imitation of the earlier Smollettian model. Marryat, too, publicly protested that he was not the "Naval Officer" of this first story. But, by his own confession,

he put many of the incidents of his own life into it, and we may safely conclude that what is wholly wanting in the story was not prominent in his own experience. Now what is wanting is any trace that Frank Mildmay had the smallest filial regard for his father, or was conscious of any maternal influence, or thought of his home life with affection, or of his school as other than a place of torment. That is not how men write when they look back kindly on their first years. If Thackeray and Dickens drew such different pictures of boy and school life, we know why. It is not necessary to rack the scanty evidence about Marryat's early years, to find reason for believing that his father was probably a hard and dry man of business, whose prosperity never melted the provincial dissenter quite out of him. Of his mother there is nothing to be supposed at all.

It is to be noted that although Mr. Joseph Marryat was a prosperous man, he did not send his sons to a public school. Frederick and his elder brother (Joseph also, and not unknown as a collector of, and writer on, porcelain) were sent to some sort of academy kept by a Mr. Freeman, at Ponders End. It is an almost universal experience that the boy who has been at a private school may remember an individual master with kindness, but never has any degree of respect or affection for the place itself. He is not one of an ancient body like the public-school man, and has nothing in his memory to set off against the restraint—or in the old hard days the floggings and hardships of school life. The Wykamite might laugh at the wash pot of Moab, but what private-school boy would forgive his master for turning him out to wash in a back yard? What is inflicted by a public

school is inflicted by the school itself; in a private establishment it is inflicted by the master, and is a personal wrong. Marryat was no exception to the rule. His memories of Ponders End were not of a kind to make him draw cheerful pictures of school life. That he was far from a model pupil, and had his share of the cane, has nothing to do with it. He scamped his work, and forgot it, as many other boys have done and will do. Not only that, but he was the cause of scamping in others. Mr. Babbage, who was for a time his schoolfellow, is the authority for a story which shows that Marryat was indeed a model young scamp. Babbage wished to work (it does not appear whether they called it "sweating" or "greasing" at Ponders End), and to get up for that purpose with another "swot" at the absurd hour of three. With intentions which were only too obvious, Marryat, who was his room fellow, proposed to join the party. Babbage objected, and thought to escape the intrusion by the easy method of not waking Marryat. This answered until the creator of Mr. Midshipman Easy first bethought himself of drawing his bed across the door, and then when even the moving of his bed did not rouse him, of tying his hand to the handle. For some nights Babbage got over the difficulty by cutting the fastening, until Marryat found a chain which could not be cut. Babbage had his revenge. He invented an ingenious machine for jerking the chain, and went on waking his chum repeatedly for no purpose. At last a compromise was made. Marryat joined the good boys for early study, and of course it was not long before others joined too, and then the letting off of fireworks and various noises betrayed the secret. How many of the party were

flogged does not appear. Before long Marryat had to be up at six bells in the middle watch on duty too often to leave him much inclination to turn out voluntarily, even for mischief, when he could by any chance get a night in.

It is also recorded of Marryat that he ran away to sea three times, that is, he ran away with the intention of getting to sea, but the end of the adventure was always capture, return to school, and more cane. His great grievance is reported to have been the obligation to wear the clothes which his elder brother had outgrown. The detail seems to indicate a certain narrowness, not to say sordidness, in so prosperous a household as the Marryats', and the aggravation was certainly gross enough to justify the protest. On one of these occasions Mr. J. Marryat showed a remarkable weakness. He gave the truant money and sent him in a carriage back to school. This error of judgment had a very natural consequence. Marryat slipped out of the carriage, found his way quietly home, and took his younger brothers to the theatre. At last his father came to the very sensible conclusion that the sea was the best place for such a boy. Being a man of some influence and position, he was able to start his son well, on board a crack frigate, and under a distinguished captain. In September, 1806, Marryat entered the *Impérieuse*, captain Lord Cochrane, and sailed for the Mediterranean.

CHAPTER II.

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Fortune could not have done Marryat a greater kindness than to send him to sea on the quarter-deck of the *Impérieuse*. She enabled him to share in the most stirring work to be done at the date at which he joined the service, and under the command of one the most brilliant of naval officers. In 1806 the war of fleets was over. Trafalgar had broken the heart of our enemies, and from that time forward their squadrons never even attempted to keep the sea. Napoleon built line-of-battle ships in batches, but only to keep them manned and armed, lying idle in port. The English fleets had so completely established their supremacy, that they used the French roadsteads as familiarly as their own. The blockading squadron off Brest anchored in Douarnenez Bay, in sight of the French lookout, and there repaired their rigging or caulked their seams as coolly as if no enemy's fleet were in existence, and they did it with perfect impunity. Admiral Smyth has told how audaciously the Mediterranean fleet was wont to anchor off Hyères in the absolute confidence that the French would never come out of Toulon. Their only chance of service was when the French would be decoyed out by some particularly audacious frigate, which was sent in to insult them at the very mouth of their harbour. Then there was a chance that they might be drawn further than they could go back before the in-shore squadron was upon them. But such breaks in the monotony of blockade were rare. For the most part our line-of-battle ships were employed in cruising to and fro,

with intervals of harbour—their officers and crews spent their lives in drilling aloft or at the guns, and in keeping decks and metal-work in a condition of faultless cleanliness. That passion for neatness and smartness which has never left the British navy rose to its height in the last years of the Great War, and did indeed sometimes attain to actual mania in the minds of captains and first lieutenants in want of something to employ themselves and their men upon.

There was, however, one class of ship which had a fair chance of active service. The frigates were never, even to the end, reduced to mere patrolling. It was to them indeed that fell all the brilliant fighting in the last ten years or so of the war. The French never altogether ceased to send forth cruisers which had necessarily to be pursued and captured. Moreover, there was work to be done upon the enemy's coasts, convoys to be taken, forts to be destroyed, privateers to be cut out. After 1808 we were in alliance with the Spaniards, and there was then no want of chances for enterprising officers to distinguish themselves against the French invaders on the coasts, particularly in the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean, including the Adriatic, and the East Indies, were the great theatres of the war until the Americans struck in.

It was a material addition to his good fortune in being appointed to such a ship, and on such service, that he should have begun under the captain who then commanded the *Impérieuse*. The novelist who was to give the most living of all pictures of the navy at its greatest time could not possibly have met with a better chief. Lord Cochrane, who is better known as the Earl of Dundonald, was, next to Nelson

(the master of them all), that one of the naval officers of the Great War who was most distinctly a man of genius. There were others who were brave, able, honourable gentlemen. In pure seamanship many may have been his equals. In a service which included such men as Blackwood, Hallowell, Willoughby, the Captain Hamilton who cut out the *Hermione*, Broke of the *Shannon*, and a hundred other valiant gentlemen, even Dundonald could not hope for a pre-eminence in valour. It may even be allowed that he never, while fighting for his own country, was able to achieve anything so complete, so distinctly what Cortes called a “muy hermosa cosa,” a very pretty piece of fighting with a squadron, as Sir William Hoste’s little gem of a victory over the French frigates off Lissa. He was not allowed the chance to handle a detachment of ships in independent command. But there was in Dundonald the indefinable something—“those deliveries of a man’s self which have no name,” that combination of passion and faculty—which makes the man of genius. Whatever he did was done with a burning fire of energy. The fire was not always pure. There was a self-assertion about the man—never base, but always aggressive, a pragmatistical Scotch fierceness, a love of hate and scorn, a total inability to keep measure, which can be seen on every page of his Autobiography, and explain why it was that he was always, in our service or out of it, a free lance. He was of the race of Peterborough not of Marlborough. To the highest rank he did not belong, but he was divided in kind from the brave, able, disciplined, but shadowy men, who do the regular drilled work of the world. He was a magnificent, rugged individuality. Even in books he

is real as only such men as Nelson and Wellington are real. On those who knew him his influence, even if it only produced repulsion, must have been profound. One so open to impressions, and so able to retain them as Marryat, must have been another man all his life for having known and admired Dundonald. It must be remembered, too, that Marryat saw Dundonald at his best—on the deck of his frigate, and not at the Admiralty or the House of Commons, where he was apt to make himself intolerable by his wrong-headed violence in right, and his inability to see that for the work of the reformer, as for all work, there is a proper time, and a fitting manner which must not be mistaken, under penalty of failure.

The influence which Cochrane had upon Marryat might indeed be demonstrated from his works. The captain of the *Impérieuse* remained his type of what a British officer ought to be. All his frigates' captains who are mentioned for honour have something—and several of them have much—of his first commander in them. That this should be the case in "Frank Mildmay," the first of his books, and to some extent an autobiography, was almost a matter of course. In this book the cruise of the frigate on the coast of Spain is the very service of the *Impérieuse*. But it is equally true of Captain Savage of the *Diomedé* in "Peter Simple," and of Captain M—— of the "King's Own." Both are Scotchmen, penniless gentlemen of good descent, officers of boundless skill, daring, and withal judgment. It is on this last quality that Marryat dwells by preference, and it is this which he picks out for special praise in Cochrane. "I must here remark," he says in the private log quoted in Mrs. Ross

Church's life, "that I never knew any one so careful of the lives of his ship's company as Lord Cochrane, or any one who calculated so closely the risks attending any expedition. Many of the (*sic*) most brilliant achievements were performed without loss of a single life, so well did he calculate the chances; and one half the merit which he deserves for what he did accomplish has never been awarded him, merely because in the official despatches there has not been a long list of killed and wounded to please the appetite of the English public." This fondness of the public for a long list of killed and wounded was a favourite subject of half-serious jest with Marryat, and he learnt from others, if not from Cochrane, how a despatch ought to be written in a "concatenation accordingly." It would seem that Marryat had little admiration for the brainless, headlong courage which rushes madly at whatever happens to be in front of its weapon. He would have condemned even with contempt (and Hawke, Nelson, Cochrane, would have condemned with him) such a piece of frantic swash-bucklery as the last fight of the *Revenge*. The men who were daring with judgment, who risked for a reason, who took care to cover themselves as they lunged, and who then went all together, sword, hand, and foot, with the speed of lightning, and with unerring accuracy of the eye which has brains behind it, were his heroes. In any case Marryat would have arrived at these conclusions, but he assuredly did so the sooner, and the more heartily, because for three years he fought under a fighter of this stamp.

Marryat was fortunate in his messmates as well as in his captain. A crack frigate of those days had the pick of the

lieutenants' list, and of the "young gentlemen" who were to be the captains of the future. The *Impérieuse* had a particularly good staff, some of them old officers of Cochrane's, and in the midshipman's mess Marryat met comrades who were good fellows, and gentlemen too. He formed friendships which lasted through life, particularly with Lord Napier, and with Houston Stewart.

I have thought it well to dwell at some length on Marryat's entry into the service, because its conditions are of vital importance in his life. Whatever his training had been he would have been a writer. His private log shows that from the beginning he found pleasure in the use of his pen; but had he not been a naval officer he would have been a very different writer, and, more, had he gone to sea in a less happy way, the misfortune would not have failed to have its effects on him. The tamer life of a line-of-battle ship, the tedium of a small craft engaged on convoy, might have driven him back on shore by mere boredom. On board the *Impérieuse* he was able to live his life to the full. There he had three years of active and daring fighting. The impression they made on him was never effaced, and has been recorded by himself. In the private log, quoted by his daughter, he sums up his memories in words which it would be a dereliction of duty not to quote:

"The cruises of the *Impérieuse* were periods of continued excitement, from the hour in which she hove up her anchor till she dropped it again in port: the day that passed without a shot being fired in anger, was with us a blank day: the boats were hardly secured on the booms than they were cast loose and out again; the yard and stay tackles were for

ever hoisting up and lowering down. The expedition with which parties were formed for service; the rapidity of the frigate's movements night and day; the hasty sleep snatched at all hours; the waking up at the report of the guns, which seemed the very keynote to the hearts of those on board, the beautiful precision of our fire, obtained by constant practice; the coolness and courage of our captain, inoculating the whole of the ship's company; the suddenness of our attacks, the gathering after the combat, the killed lamented, the wounded almost envied; the powder so burnt into our faces that years could not remove it; the proved character of every man and officer on board, the implicit trust and adoration we felt for our commander; the ludicrous situations which would occur in the extremest danger and create mirth when death was staring you in the face, the hair-breadth escapes, and the indifference to life shown by all—when memory sweeps along these years of excitement even now, my pulse beats more quickly with the reminiscence."

The years of service which thus impressed themselves on Marryat's memory may be divided into three periods. First, a cruise on the coast of France from Ushant to the mouth of the Gironde; then a longer period of active work in the Mediterranean; and finally, a return to the ocean, and the action in the Basque Roads. The young midshipman's first actual experience of cruising was one which was doubtless present in his mind when he wrote the song whereof the chorus tells how "Poll put her arms akimbo," and said, "Port Admiral, you be——." When the corporal reported to Mr. Vanslyperken that the crew of the revenue cutter were

singing this ditty, the outraged commander asked whether it was the Port Admiral at Portsmouth or Plymouth. The officer who was, we may be sure, spoken of by the crew of the *Impérieuse* on the 17th and succeeding few days of November, 1806, in an equally mutinous fashion, was the Port Admiral at Plymouth. According to the custom of Admirals who did not have to go to sea themselves, this officer was exceeding zealous in enforcing the Admiralty's orders to despatch ships to sea smartly. The orders came down for the *Impérieuse* to go to sea, and the Admiral would have them obeyed. Go she must—"The moment the rudder—which was being hung—would steer the ship," as Dundonald says in his Autobiography, and while she had "a lighter full of provisions on one side, a second with ordnance stores on the other, and a third filled with gunpowder towing astern." But the tale should be told in Marryat's words, and not in his captain's:

"The *Impérieuse* sailed; the Admiral of the port was one who *would* be obeyed, but *would not* listen always to reason or common sense. The signal for sailing was enforced by gun after gun; the anchor was hove up, and, with all her stores on deck, her guns not even mounted, in a state of confusion unparalleled from her being obliged to hoist in faster than it was possible she could stow away, she was driven out of harbour to encounter a heavy gale. A few hours more would have enabled her to proceed to sea with security, but they were denied; the consequences were appalling, they might have been fatal. In the general confusion some iron too near the binnacles had attracted the needle of the compasses; the ship was steered out of

her course. At midnight, in a heavy gale at the close of November, so dark that you could not distinguish any object, however close, the *Impérieuse* dashed upon the rocks between Ushant and the Main. The cry of terror which ran through the lower decks; the grating of the keel as she was forced in; the violence of the shocks which convulsed the frame of the vessel; the hurrying up of the ship's company without their clothes; and then the enormous waves which again bore her up, and carried her clean over the reef, will never be effaced from my memory."

The frigate had been carried into a deep pool, and rode the gale out at anchor. When daylight came she was found to be inside instead of outside of Ushant—and was got off with no greater damage than the loss of her false keel. But the escape was a narrow one—the adventure must have shaken Marryat rudely into the life of the sea—and have impressed him deeply with the possible consequence of pig-headedness in pig-headed Port Admirals.

The cruise of the frigate on the French coast was not very fruitful in incident, and early in 1807 she was back in port. There she remained for the greater part of the year, while her captain was fighting the battles of the navy in the House of Commons. A general election took place in the spring, and Cochrane, who had sat already for Honiton, stood with Sir Francis Burdett for Westminster. They were elected, and the captain of the *Impérieuse* at once began, or rather returned to, those attacks on abuses in the Admiralty and dockyards which were so uniformly right in substance and wrong in form. It is a pleasing instance of the inability of man to hold the balance even when his own interest is in