

# FLIGHT TO THE PRIMITIVE

*Ernest Thompson Seton*

*S. E. Read*

Caleb viewed him with paternal pride and said: "I knowed ye was the stuff the night ye went to Garney's grave, an' I knowed it again when ye crossed the Big Swamp. Yan, ye could travel anywhere that man could go," and in that sentence the boy's happiness was complete. He surely was a Woodcrafter now.

**S**LOWLY I CLOSED the book, and, after an envious look at the last illustration — a magnificent sketch of Yan in the full regalia of an Indian chief — placed it back on its shelf, along with *Rolf in the Woods*, *Lives of the Hunted*, a few Hentys, some Horatio Algers, a simplified Homer, a *Gulliver*, a *Swiss Family Robinson*, some recent numbers of *St. Nicholas*, a collection of annuals (chiefly *Boys' Own* and *Chums*), the *Books of Knowledge*, a Bunyan, and a Bible. As I did so, I knew that I would never completely forget Yan, who proudly bore the name of Little Beaver, or Sam, the Great Woodpecker, or Sappy Guy Brown, or Caleb, the kindly old trapper, or even the aged Sanger Witch, Granny de Neuville.

Fifty years later — give or take a year or two — I saw the book again — not *my* book, but one fresh from the presses. The old illustrations were still there — the footprints, the flowers, the birds, the designs for tepees and bows and arrows, the glowering lynx, repulsive Sappy Sam, with and without war-paint, and noble Yan, erect as ever in full regalia on the last page of the text. Ernest Seton Thompson and his *Two Little Savages* had survived not only the bite of time, but also the world's violent entrance into an age of atomic hazards and ever-expanding horizons.

Part of the reason for this extraordinary survival is to be found in the man himself, part in the central theme that repeats itself with modest variations in all he wrote, and part in the skills he employed. Let me start with the man.

He was born in South Shields on the east coast of England on the fourteenth of August, 1860, and was duly named Ernest Evan Seton Thompson. Largely, I gather, because of the violent antipathy with which he regarded his father, he was not happy with his name and early in his career started signing his sketches and writings Ernest Thompson Seton, a name he legalized in 1898. For a brief period, he succumbed to maternal pressure and changed to Ernest Seton-Thompson — this time with a hyphen; he regarded this as a pseudonym and after his mother's death reverted to Ernest Thompson Seton, dying as such in Santa Fé, New Mexico, on the twenty-third of October, 1946. His little name game has confused at least two generations of readers, librarians, and bibliographers.

In 1866 the family migrated from South Shields to Lindsay, Ontario, at that time a frontier village not far from the eastern edge of Lake Simcoe. Here the father, a financially broken ship-owner, intended, with more romantic imagination than hard-headed realism, to start life anew as a "gentleman farmer". It was a mass migration, for Mrs. Thompson, a true Victorian, had been fruitful; she had given birth to fourteen children, ten of whom, all boys, had survived. Ernest Evan was the eighth. He was dominated by his older brothers and had little in common with them. He despised his father, whom he describes as a financial failure, an indolent individual, an overbearing husband, and a tyrannical, brutal parent. Even toward his mother his feelings were ambivalent. A deeply religious woman, she was much given to prayers and long Biblical quotations, to hopes of salvation and threats of damnation. Her unthinking orthodoxy repelled him. At times, too, she neglected him, burdened and confused as she was by the complexities of her responsibilities. But in moments of crisis, especially those arising from the lad's recurring illnesses, she lavished tenderness and affection upon him. The confused, harried, and sensitive boy rebelled against the accepted conventions of religion and against his family. For refuge he fled to the world of the outdoors — first in the still wild, open country around Lindsay; later amidst the fields, streams, and the marshes that were yet within walking distance of the growing town of Toronto; still later in the vast, mysterious spaces of an opening Manitoba; and finally in the great wastelands and mountains of the American West. Nature became his sanctuary. In it he found clarity, order, and comfort rather than darkness, confusion, and anguish; and through his detailed observations of the

world he had chosen he developed his skills as artist and writer.

Of the genius of the man and the complexities of his life little of value has been written. The available encyclopædic articles give some facts about his life and work but nothing else. The few periodical articles I have checked are brief and superficial, with two notable exceptions: Fred Bosworth's "The Backwoods Genius with the Magic Pen" (*Maclean's*, 6 June '59) and Michel Poirier's "The Animal Story in Canadian Literature: E. Thompson Seton and Charles G. D. Roberts" (*Queen's Quarterly*, July '26 - April '27). The first is a short but lively profile of the man, spiced with some astute observations and unusual information; and the latter contains a perceptive and well written analysis of a limited number of his animal biographies. Two brief American biographical works have been published, but neither can be considered as a serious study. As for Engström's *Buffalo vind: en biografi över Ernest Thompson Seton* (Stockholm, 1953), it is beyond my realm of competence. In short, I am reasonably convinced that the best source of information on Seton is still Seton himself, primarily his erratic and sketchy autobiography, *Trail of an Artist-Naturalist* (New York, 1941), and *The Arctic Prairies* (New York, 1911), an unevenly written but sporadically interesting account of a canoe trip down the Athabasca to the plains country near the Arctic Circle, made by the author and a friend in 1907. Of only slightly less value as sources of self-revelation are his other major works, for rarely could he keep himself out of the picture. *Two Little Savages* is thinly disguised autobiography; *Lives of the Hunted* and *Wild Animals I Have Known* are well larded with personal anecdotes; and *Rolf in the Woods* and *The Gospel of the Red Man* reveal his basic religious beliefs and ethical principles.

The foremost impression I get from a reading of his works is that of a deeply sensitive and introspective man, somewhat egocentric and opinionated, who concentrated all his powers on the observation and minute study of nature and, especially in his later life, on the spreading of his "gospel". With the move to Lindsay, the boy was brought into an intimate, exciting contact with primitive, unkempt nature.

He quickly learned the simpler lessons of woodcraft and eagerly listened to tales of great hunts and Indian warfare told by men who had lived out their lives on the edges of civilization. He read tales of adventure and survival, such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Swiss Family Robinson*, and later, in Toronto, the works of the naturalists, starting with A. M. Ross's *Birds of Canada* and eventually moving into the formidable works of Alexander Wilson, the great Scottish-American ornithologist of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and of James

Audubon, the most famous of all naturalists of the frontier world. Under the influence of such men, the young boy soon began to keep his daily journals, and began, too, to sketch much that he saw — animal tracks, animals, birds, leaves, flowers.

By his early teens he had begun to retreat from his family and from his school-mates, in order to develop his own peculiar, off-beat interests. He was an intellectual eccentric, an anti-social, juvenile hermit, an explorer in search of an earthly paradise. Eventually he found it in a quiet, cool, isolated glen near the River Don. With a typical egocentric gesture he named his Eden “Glenyan”, for Yan was the name he had given his hermit-self. It was in Glenyan that, with crude tools, he fashioned his first crude shanty. Here he methodically studied the flora and fauna around him, and began to develop his conviction that in the world of nature man can find comfort and consolation, an ever-renewing strength, and all the essential rules for ethical and moral behaviour. Here, too, he first assumed in full the role of the romanticized Red Man.

In some ways Seton undoubtedly regarded himself as a mystic. His “voice” and his visions directed him in his activities, his way of life, and his beliefs. Though he eagerly sought for fame — and fortune — he preached the doctrine of the simple life close to nature, and in the spiritual shrine that he erected he placed in his holy of holies an idealized symbolical figure — the American Indian, the Red Man. From his childhood on he was deeply moved by anything even remotely associated with the Indian way of life. As he matured he not only came under the influence of the writings of Fenimore Cooper, but he also met many Indians in his wanderings through Manitoba and during his long canoe trip down the Athabasca. Generally he admired them, but he was not blindly consistent. He found many of the Indians in the far north indolent, dirty, superstitious, and savage. But these, he would have argued, had been corrupted by the corrosive influences of a white civilization. Actually his ideal was the Indian of the past, untainted by external forces.

This ideal is partially developed in the character of Quonab, “the last of the Myanos Sinawa”, the profoundly religious, highly moral, and friendly Indian, who teaches Rolf Kittering, an abandoned white orphan, the true way of life; it is deeply imbedded in *Two Little Savages*, when Yan and Sam are brought to maturity and wisdom through studying and practising Indian manners and customs; and it reaches full bloom in *The Gospel of the Red Man; An Indian Bible*, a work compiled by Seton and his second wife towards the end of Seton’s life. This is an anthology of sorts in which are gathered “the inspiring teachings

of the Red man," prayers, ethical codes, laws of behaviour. Its most revealing section is the preface, in which Seton takes a last, lingering look at his own age. In it he finds little that is good. The White man's way has failed. His culture is materialistic and poisonous; his religion arid, punitive, fruitless. Slowly but all too surely he is destroying himself. But salvation can yet be found through following the new *Gospel*. For this work, Seton expressly hoped, was to have a universal religious appeal; it would bring unity and peace into a world fraught by dissension and torn by fears; it would satisfy Christian and Buddhist, Catholic and Protestant, Presbyterian and Methodist — all alike. If man would only retrace the tracks of the noble Indian, he could once again find his way back to nature — and survive.

To the sceptic and the scientist, Seton's beliefs doubtless appear naïve — the products of a simple mind. But to Seton himself they were fundamental. They provided the main thrust that led to his establishment of the Woodcraft Movement and to his early support of the Boy Scouts in America, and they run as a central strand in all that he wrote. His sincerity is obvious; and it is this sincerity that is one of the great factors in his success as a writer.

**F**ROM HIS EARLIEST DAYS in Lindsay and Toronto Seton studied the world of nature around him. Animals, birds, flowers, trees, the signs of changing weather, the medicinal folk lore of herbs — all came under his scrutiny. By curious games and devices to sharpen the memory he increased his powers of observation. Though he finally submitted to his father's commands that he should be an artist rather than a naturalist, he satisfied his own longings by becoming an artist who sketched and painted animals and birds to the almost total exclusion of all else. In 1879 he was gold medalist at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto, and in the following year, according to his own account, he won a seven-year scholarship at the Royal Academy School of Painting in London, only to abandon it after twelve months or so to return to Canada because of ill health. Later, in the 1890's, he went twice to Paris to study and paint. At a time when he might have come under the influence of the French Impressionists — Cézanne, Monet, Renoir, Van Gogh — he preferred to carry the bodies of dead dogs to his attic rooms to perfect his knowledge of the anatomy of the wolf. The anatomy studied, he then painted — and exhibited — wolves, large and small, and realistic.

He prepared one massive canvas, four-and-a-half feet by seven, entitled "The Wolves' Triumph," for entry in a Paris exhibition. It was rejected. The subject, said the critics, was revolting. They had some reason on their side: a picture of a wolf pack finishing off the skeletal remains of a human body is a gruesome sight even though the winter setting is done with skill and feeling. The picture was eventually exhibited at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, much against the wishes of some members of the Toronto selection committee who were inclined to believe that it might leave an unfavourable impression of the Canadian way of life.

In brief, Seton never became a great painter. He remained basically a skilful illustrator doing what he loved to do — portray animals and birds, sketch the tracks to be seen in wilderness sand and mud; illustrate, with patient detail, the best ways to make tepees and bows and arrows, or to start a camp fire, in the Indian way, by rubbing-sticks. And his specialization paid off. Not only did he do a thousand drawings of animals and birds for Merriam's *Century Dictionary*; he also used his skill to illustrate all that he wrote.

But what of Seton, the author? First he was prolific, especially in the period from the 1890's to the 1920's. He started in a modest way with articles and short stories, but eventually he wrote more than thirty volumes, ranging from scientific and semi-scientific works to the vast bulk of his writing, which is specifically directed towards the younger reader. In all his works, however, Seton centres his interest on one focal point — the world of nature.

From the moment he bought Ross's *Birds of Canada* (he was then thirteen), he was well on his way to becoming a self-taught naturalist. Early in his career he published scientific articles on birds and animals, and in 1909 he produced his *Life-Histories of Northern Animals: an Account of the Mammals of Manitoba*. Not until some nineteen years later, however, when he was approaching seventy, did Seton complete his most ambitious work, his *Lives of Game Animals*. This vast work, originally published in four volumes, immediately brought him recognition as an outstanding naturalist. Professor McTaggart Cowan, himself a wild life specialist of international reputation, tells me that the *Lives* still stands as an invaluable reference work in its field, in spite of errors and unscientific observations and of its anecdotal passages and personal reminiscences. For Seton, even in his scientific garb, could never get far away from the technique of the tale, nor from the personal approach he exhibited with such skill in his more popular writings.

In some ways Seton was actually in revolt against the scientific method. To him

the type of natural history then current was too general, too vague, to be effective. Scientists, he said, placed their emphasis on the species. For him a true understanding of animals and birds came through a study of the individual. To him each animal was different, possessing its own particular characteristics, its own special profile of behaviour. Moreover the line of demarcation setting man apart from animal was a slight one. He even endowed his heroes and heroines with human virtues — dignity, sagacity, mother-love, love of liberty, obedience, fidelity — and encouraged man to look closely at the beasts of the fields and the birds of the air so that he, man, might learn from them ways to a better life.

At times, especially in his early stories, he so humanized his figures as to strain the credulity of his more critical readers and to antagonize the scientifically minded. At first, he even made his animals talk, not as the animals of Aesop talked, but as human beings talk when caught in situations that arouse such emotions as terror, love, or pity. He translates the single “thump” of a rabbit into “look out” or “freeze” and the triple “thump, thump, thump” into “run for dear life.” In his later stories, however, he declared this conversational technique to be “archaic”, but he never ceased to endow his heroes with human characteristics far beyond the accepted reaches of instinct. In “The Springfield Fox”, for example, his heroine, Vix, leads the pursuing hounds across a railway trestle just in time to have an engine overtake and destroy them. And Wahb, the aging and heroic figure in *The Biography of a Grizzly*, is given a truly Roman end when, worn out and burdened by a sense of defeat, he courageously enters a cave filled with fumes he knows to be lethal.

It was, I believe, because of this same stress on the importance of the individual, with its consequent narrowing of the gap between animal and man, linked of course with his ability to tell a good tale, that Seton as a wild life biographer was from the first successful. He started in a modest way with such tales as “The Story of a Little Gray Rabbit,” which appeared in that grand old magazine for children, *St. Nicholas*, in October, 1890, and he was soon in full flight as a writer of animal fiction. With the great success of *Wild Animals I Have Known* (it was published in 1898 and ran through four editions in two months) his fame was firmly established.

It would be a mistake to suppose that Seton’s path to fame was completely smooth. Naturalists especially regarded his works with scepticism. Foremost among them was the famous and formidable John Burroughs, who turned his sharp pen against Seton in “Real and Sham Natural History”, in the *Atlantic Monthly* for March, 1903. The attack opened obliquely and ended frontally.

Early in the article Burroughs warmly praises Roberts' most recent work, *Kindred of the Wild*, a volume in which "one finds much to admire and commend, and but little to take exception to . . . in many ways the most brilliant collection of animal stories that has appeared." This was a bitter dose for Seton to swallow, but more bitter was the one given a page later. "Mr. Thompson Seton says in capital letters that his stories are true, and it is this emphatic assertion that makes the judicious grieve. True as romance, true in their artistic effects, true in their power to entertain the young reader, they certainly are; but true as natural history they are not."

Seton was deeply hurt. He was, if one can judge by his writings, a self-centred man — opinionated and sincerely convinced of the validity of his techniques. He was also sensitive, especially to this unfavourable criticism from a man he had long admired. His autobiography bears witness to his distress. He devotes a full chapter to the Burroughs affair. He refused, he says, to answer the attack publicly, waiting, rather, like a clever hunter until he could meet his antagonist face to face. The chance soon came, for the two men were brought together at a dinner given by the fiery little Andrew Carnegie, who not only loved wealth but also worshipped famous authors. With Boswellian glee, and with considerable gloating, Seton records his conversation with the older naturalist. Burroughs, he says, was awkward and ill at ease. He, on the contrary, was self-possessed and quickly took full control of the situation. It was he who chose the subject of conversation — wolves, his favourite topic. With barrage-like intensity he covered Burroughs with probing questions about his first-hand knowledge of these animals. Had he ever seen even *one* wild one? Under the attack, says Seton, all that "poor old John" could answer was "No", "No", and "No", until finally, after a further scattering of shots, he completely "broke down and wept".

If the incident is accurately recorded the evening must have been far from a jolly one, but I am moved to doubt by what follows in a subsequent paragraph. Burroughs, says Seton, quickly made a public apology in the *Atlantic* for July, 1904, by lauding Seton in these words: "Mr. Thompson Seton, as an artist and a raconteur, ranks by far the highest in this field; he is truly delightful." But a glance at the actual article bears interesting fruit. Entitled "The Literary Treatment of Nature" it really continues Burroughs' early attack, though perhaps with slightly less acidity. "I do not expect my natural history to back up the Ten Commandments," wrote Burroughs, "or to be an illustration of the value of training-schools and kindergartens, or to afford a commentary upon the vanity of human wishes." And, most significant: "We have a host of nature students in



our own day, bent on plucking out the heart of every mystery in the fields and woods. Some are dryly scientific, some are sensational, and a few are altogether admirable. Mr. Thompson Seton, as an artist and *raconteur*, ranks by far the highest in this field, *and to those who can separate the fact from fiction in his animal stories, he is truly delightful.*" As I have indicated by the last italics, old John's public apology was limited, to say the least. I still wonder a bit if he really did break down and weep before Carnegie and his assembled guests.

Yet this brief encounter has its points of interest. The soundness of Burroughs' position is obvious, but so, too, is the deep faith that Seton had in himself. The modern naturalist still looks on the Seton stories as a strange mixture of fact and fiction. But the young reader is not a trained naturalist, and willing to suspend disbelief, if any exists, he reads the biographies as written, feels the full impact of their conflicts and tragedies, and obtains much factual information about the world of wild life.

**S**TANDING QUITE ASIDE from all of Seton's other works are two books that demand special comment — *Rolf in the Woods* and *Two Little Savages*. The first is nominally an historical novel for the young; the second a rich brew in which are mixed nearly all the ingredients found in varying degrees elsewhere in his writings. It is the quintessence of Seton.

I first read *Rolf* shortly after it appeared in 1911. In the half-century that had slipped away since then the details of the yarn had disappeared beyond recall, but the general impact of the book still lingered. When I re-read it recently I could easily see why. Set in the era of the border war of 1812-14, the story revolves around its two central figures — Rolf Kittering, a desolate, insecure white orphan, and Quonab, a noble Indian, with whom Rolf seeks refuge and through whom he learns the ways of life in the woods, and the values of a simple and primitive religious faith. The inherent didacticism in the work is not repulsively obvious, for both preaching and teaching are well blended with the exciting events of the narrative itself, including Rolf's escape from the combined tyranny of a besotted uncle and a rigid New England society, the struggle for survival in the deep woods of the Green Mountains, and the dangers of acting as scout and guide for American forces along the Canadian border.

The actual war, with its causes, events, and attendant horrors, is carefully kept

in the background, for Seton hated war and the military mind. Only towards the conclusion of *Rolf* does he allow the excitement of armed combat to creep in at all; he prefers — and in this he is consistent — to concentrate on the more peaceful thrills of camping, canoeing, hunting, trapping, and learning the Red Man's way of living. It all makes for good reading, and inasmuch as there is something of a plot with considerable suspense it is a good yarn, too. Seton wrote nothing else quite like it.

But another work also stands by itself — the classic in the Seton canon — *Two Little Savages*. It contains the essence of all of the beliefs that Seton held so dear. It is also the best and most evenly written of his works, evidencing not only his superb knowledge of animal life, but also his ability to tell a good story, to handle dialogue and to catch the sounds and accents of dialects, to write clear expositions, to preach unobtrusively, a good sermon, and to create convincing characters. It has been, I would guess, the most widely read of his books, and it is the book, I believe, that will last the longest.

Basically the ingredients are autobiographical. In the summer of 1875 the fifteen-year-old Thompson was seriously ill, and, under the doctor's orders, he was sent to Lindsay to live with the Blackwell family, who had moved into the large house formerly owned by Mr. Thompson when he was attempting, without success, to be a "gentleman farmer." William Blackwell, the head of the household, was a practical, hard-working, hard-bargaining man. Superficially he was tough and severe, but under the surface he was kindly and understanding. To Ernest he was a better man by far than his own father. As for Mrs. Blackwell, she was a fountain of motherly sympathy. Quickly the lonely, sickly boy became a member of the family group. In *Two Little Savages* the Blackwells become the Raftens, and one of the Blackwell boys is transformed into the second little savage — Sam. As for Ernest himself, he is given the name of Yan — his favourite nickname from his Toronto days. Even the minor characters are drawn from the folk of the village and its neighbouring farms — dirty, snivelling Guy; old Caleb, wise in woodcraft and Indian lore; and the Sanger (Lindsay) Witch, the ageless Granny de Neuville, who, though a repulsive crone, proves an unending source of folklore and herbal knowledge, which she transmits to Yan in a thick Irish accent. Around these characters the plot is formed, and thin though it is, it is sufficient to hold most readers to the end. The vicious three-fingered tramp is duly caught and subdued, and the evidence extracted from him is enough to terminate the bitter quarrel between Raften and old Caleb, and to restore that poor but dignified ancient to his rightful place in the community.

The obvious plot, however, is really a subsidiary affair. The real purpose of the work is to show how Yan, the insecure, sensitive, unhealthy boy, achieves status among his fellows. This he does through his unremitting study of nature, through practical camping, through learning *and* using Indian woodcraft lore, and through his willingness to venture into the dark and mysterious recesses of the forest and to face danger.

To Sam and Yan achievement brought excitement. It was exciting to make a tepee — not any old tepee but a real Indian tepee. It was exciting, too, to make a fire with rubbing-sticks, to cook, Indian fashion, to listen to the strange night noises, to track animals (even the family cat), to trap, to hunt, to kill — not a coon but a spitting, vicious lynx. It was exciting for these two little savages to do all these things for the very reason that in such things Seton himself found his own particular, exciting way of life. He knew of what he wrote and was able to convey that knowledge with enthusiasm to the millions who were to read the work.

Thus far I have said nothing about his ability as a writer in the more limited sense of that word. To avoid some comment on him as a literary person would be a continuation of the silence with which he has been generally treated by literary historians and critics. But to separate his skill as a stylist from the other ingredients that he poured into his moulds is not an easy task. Perhaps he did not even regard himself as a literary figure. His writings indicate little interest in the great works of literature and he seldom refers to other writers. Yet he did formulate for himself a simple theory of composition from which he seldom wavered. It is found in an interesting passage in *Rolf*, and, reduced to its fundamentals, is this: follow the practice of Wordsworth and write of what you know and of the times in which you live. To do otherwise is folly. In following this theory Seton placed severe limits on himself, but it may be said that it was partly through his limitations he achieved success. He knew of what he wrote; he knew for whom he wrote; and what he said was generally stated with apparent simplicity, and effective lucidity.

I at one time thought that Seton was not really interested in writing as an art. But I am now convinced that he was a conscious stylist, quite willing to alter and to prune in order to produce the effects he desired. As a writer of expository passages he was a master; he could handle dialogue with an easy naturalness (this is especially evident in the *Two Little Savages*); and in his best descriptive passages he writes with sensitivity and poetic feeling. Take, for example, this description of a marten, from *Rolf in the Woods*:

Into a thicket of willow it disappeared and out again like an eel going through the mud, then up a tall stub where woodpecker holes were to be seen. Into the largest so quickly Rolf could scarcely see how it entered, and out in a few seconds bearing a flying squirrel whose skull it had crushed. Dropping the squirrel it leaped after it, and pounced again on the quivering form with a fearsome growl; then shook it savagely, tore it apart, cast it aside. Over the ground it now undulated, its shining yellow breast like a target of gold. Again it stopped. . . . Then the snaky neck swung the cobra head in the breeze and the brown one sniffed, and sniffed, advanced a few steps, tried the wind and the ground. Still farther and the concentrated interest showed in its outstretched neck and quivering tail.

This, which is not atypical, illustrates Seton's competence as a writer. The structural quality of the sentences is such as to produce impressions of rapid motion and of tension. The language, basically simple, is precise and concrete, and appeals to the multiple senses of the reader. And the well controlled occasional metaphor or simile adds a touch of poetic magic to the overall effects.

But Seton nods much more frequently than Homer. His punctuation can be not only erratic but erroneous; his grammar is by no means always precise; and when sentimentality or moralizing overpowers his judgment he produces bathos of the worst order. This will serve to make the last point. It comes from the story of Tito, the wily coyote. She is quietly approaching a prairie-dog, just before the kill:

She soon cut the fifty yards down to ten, and the ten to five, and still was undiscovered. Then, when again the Prairie-dog dropped down to seek more fodder, she made a quick dash, and bore him off kicking and squealing. Thus does the angel of the pruning-knife lop off those that are heedless and foolishly indifferent to the advantages of society.

(*Lives of the Hunted*, Toronto, 1901.)

It should be evident from the quotations above that no valid claim can be made for Seton as a great writer; but it can be argued that, within his limitations and for his particular purposes, he was usually competent, and at times good. But — and again it must be said — he cannot be finally judged solely as a writer. His success came from his extraordinary ability to fuse into a unified and an artistic whole his manifold gifts — his wide and deep knowledge as a naturalist, his skill as an artist, and his competence as a writer, especially for the young.

Today the success that he first achieved some seventy years ago has been reaffirmed by the myriads of people who have read, and loved, and remembered

his works. His brilliant successors, such as Williamson, Gerald Durrell, and Haig-Brown, all of whom write with deep insight of the animal world, have not driven the ancient Nimrod off the stage, nor have the radical changes that have occurred in our own civilization; a brief bibliographical excursion reveals that at least twelve of his volumes are in print and that a limited number of his works are being translated abroad.

Some day, perhaps, old Seton Thompson — or Thompson Seton — will be forced into the limbo where dwell forgotten authors. But for the moment he sits securely on his small throne in the hierarchy of the living. And I believe that he will continue to hold his place so long as the young pitch tents (even backyard, drugstore tents), or gather around camp fires with the gloom of the forests as a backdrop, or look with inquiring eyes into the world of nature.

