

SPORTING GOVERNOR



As Captain Norrie in 1920, the New Zealand Governor-General won a steeplechase at Newbury, England. The horse was Bonnie Charlie.

TOWARD the end of the South African War the Boers in a part of the country occupied by British troops presented a gold watch to an English cavalry officer because of his kindness to them.

His son still treasures the watch—a thick, solid, dependable timepiece. But it is a safe assumption that had the son been placed in a similar situation to the father he also would have been given a gold watch. Any South Australian will vouch for this because of the many fine qualities the son, Lieut.-Gen. Sir Charles Willoughby Moke Norrie, KCMG, CB, DSO, MC, displayed while he was Governor of that State.

Probably as good a guide as any to a man's character is the manner in which children react to him. Sir Willoughby Norrie was always a prime favorite with children, from the big Adelaide schools down to the tiny bush classrooms that he constantly visited.

After one Empire Day address to school-children he asked, "I have enjoyed being here. Now, is there anything I can do for you?"

A small voice tentatively suggested a half-holiday.

"Well, there's an unselfish lad," Sir Willoughby said. "I'll give you a whole holiday."

When he left South Australia in June to spend a short time in England before taking over the Governor-Generalship of New Zealand he was referred to by most South Aus-

tralian children purely and simply as "Willoughby."

The fact that he has five children of his own ranging in age from 26 to six undoubtedly has some bearing on Sir Willoughby's ability to cope with youngsters.

His success with adults can be attributed to a downright goodfellowship which so endeared him to South Australians that there was general disappointment when his new post was announced. The disappointment was not only because Sir Willoughby was leaving the State but because he had not been announced as Governor-General designate of Australia, a position for which many felt he was eminently suited.

If it were the fashion to hang labels on people Sir Willoughby Norrie would be remembered in South Australia as *the Laughing Governor*. For wherever he went laughter seemed to follow him—warm, human laughter lacking completely any cynical bitterness.

A clue to his character was contained in a speech he made a year ago when he opened *Victoria House* in one of Adelaide's big department stores. This house was furnished in the Victorian manner. Its object was to raise funds for the Red Cross. Most of the men present wore formal dress. One of the few exceptions was the Governor who wore his father's old snuggery jacket, "in honor of his memory," he explained, "and of your Victorian party."

Then Sir Willoughby said, "I happen to be a Victorian—a relic of the Victorian era—born AD 1893 in a place called London. I am nostalgic for the hip-bath I used as a child in front of the fire every Saturday evening; amused that my wife appeared never to have seen or used a stereoscope, amazed at the transformation and improvement from those days to this.

"The Victorian era was a blessed period of peace and prosperity, port and progeny. There were, of course, many limitations of that age, but it was a good, solid, happy time of English life at its best."

Their own rules at croquet

It may have been this nostalgia which prompted the Governor to return in 1950 from a trip to England bringing with him, of all things, a croquet set. This provided several hundred Adelaide citizens with regular daily entertainment. For Government House, Adelaide, although surrounded by high walls and hedges, is probably the least private vice regal residence in the Commonwealth. Onlookers were always intrigued by the sight of Sir Willoughby, a notable horseman and big game fisherman, and Lady Norrie playing croquet each day after lunch. As Sir Willoughby explained it wasn't really croquet. It "was golf croquet"—a game which only Lady Norrie and he knew just how to play because they had invented it. "We can jump hoops and do anything within our local rules," the Governor said. "Of course," he added, "visitors seldom win."

This was typical Norrie whimsy—the human touch which gave life to most of his statements and which, somehow, gave people the feeling that they knew him personally. Indeed quite a number of South Australians did, for in his term of office he journeyed tens of thousands of miles, visiting faraway, isolated, almost forgotten areas, always taking a keen and personal interest in the problems of the lonely, outback farmers and settlers.

Yet in 1944 when he was given both his knighthood and his Governorship little enough



Behind these massive jaws was attached 2225lb of live shark—until Sir Willoughby Norrie, as Governor of South Australia, killed it. This picture was used to advertise the State overseas.

General Norrie, after success in Australia, is headed for a bigger job in New Zealand

was known by South Australians about him. He was a soldier and the son of a soldier—the late Major G. E. M. Norrie. He was educated at Eton and Sandhurst. In 1913 he joined the 11th Hussars and within 18 months was a Mons veteran. At Nery, Lieutenant Norrie's troop charged and captured the first German guns taken in World War I. He ended the war a captain with a DSO, an MC and bar, two Mentions in Despatches and four wounds. His only brother was killed on the Somme in 1916. For her voluntary work with the Red Cross his mother was awarded the OBE and CBE.

After the war he continued his career as a cavalryman and was with the 10th Hussars when the Duke of Gloucester was also a member of that regiment. He was Commanding Officer of the 10th in India in the early 30's.

An ardent horseman and lover of all the sports connected with horsemanship, he was particularly fond of pig-sticking. This demands that the exponent of the sport while on horseback stick the pig with a spear before it can use its own long tusks.

One morning while hunting deer on the banks of the Ganges, Colonel Norrie, accompanied by an Indian groom, found himself with a pig and no spear. The pig charged, squealing with fury at the colonel's horse. As the groom carrying the rifles was several yards behind he tried to beat off the attack by lashing out with his field glasses, swinging them on the end of their strap.

The groom raced up and handed Sir Willoughby a gun, but there was no time to aim and fire it. The pig charged again, was dealt a stunning blow on the head with the rifle butt, but still pressed the attack. Sir Willoughby galloped away pursued by the furious animal. While he rode he loosened a stirrup-leather, turned suddenly on the pig and knocked it out with the stirrup-iron. He then dismounted and finished the job off by throttling it with his bare hands.

In 1938 his first wife died, leaving him with a daughter, Rosemary, and son, George. The following year Sir Willoughby married Patricia Merryweather, daughter of the late Emerson Bainbridge, MP, and at the time of his appointment as Governor they had two children, Guy and Sarah.

In the early years of World War II Sir Willoughby Norrie established a reputation as one of the outstanding armored leaders of the war. He was commanding officer of the 30th Armored Corps that bore the brunt of the fierce desert fighting in the Knightsbridge area and fought Rommel's panzers to a standstill in 1942.

When he retired from the Army he set about developing his 500 acres at Tetbury in the lovely, rolling country of Gloucestershire. The stately Norrie home was part of an old priory, dating back to the 14th century. Adjacent was a farm that Sir Willoughby developed into a model property complete with milking machines and water tower to control the irrigation system.

The general was at Tetbury when word came that he was to be next Governor of South Australia and the news that he was a farmer as well as a soldier was well received in a State largely dependent on its agricultural products. Sir Willoughby, they learnt, was an excellent polo player and steeplechase rider. He had been a member of the National Hunt for 10 years and a steward at Sandown Park, Hawthorn Hill and Aldershot. His best 'chaser was Arduous which for

a time had been the best 2-mile 'chaser in England. Sir Willoughby had always kept a few brood mares and he announced that he intended to race some horses in Australia.

South Australians packed the Adelaide Town Hall for the swearing-in ceremony and they saw a self-possessed, tall, handsome, ruddy-faced man with neat grey moustache and smooth grey hair. They were impressed by the speech he made. He told how he and his wife and family were looking forward to their sojourn in the State, how he had first encountered Australians in World War I and had been Sir Winston Dugan's staff captain in the 75th Brigade for a time, how he had commanded Australian troops in the Libyan Desert in World War II and what a magnificent job they did at Tobruk.

The battle for permits

Then the puckish Norrie humor broke through. Sir Willoughby expressed the opinion that although he was the 21st Governor of South Australia none of his predecessors had more difficulty in obtaining a passage to Australia than himself. "Permits were required to buy wood for our packing cases," he said. "Special coupons were required for our clothing. Exit permits and passports had to be procured. Customs and excise people took a friendly interest in our doings. A licence was necessary to move our luggage by motor transport. A permit to get labels printed was obtained, and when these were pasted on our luggage we were told to take them all off again. Finally we had to get permission to bring out our one and only pet canary." (It was later learnt that this bird, to which the Norries were devoted, boasted the name of Neville Chamberlain.)

The audience received the speech enthusiastically. It was undoubtedly a success. It was also the first speech Sir Willoughby had made to a civilian audience in his life.

That was the start of the Norrie legend. It soon developed. Sir Willoughby's name is one of those that lends itself to many variations and it was not long before he was telling the story against himself of the ner-



As commanding officer of the 10th Hussars, Norrie was resplendent in ceremonial dress.

vous schoolboy who referred to him as "Sir Wallaby Nirrie."

At the end of 1945 a daughter was born to Lady Norrie. She was christened Annabel Adelaide—a tribute to their capital city that was not lost on South Australians.

At Marble Hill, the vice regal country residence outside Adelaide, the Norries, as the Governor put it, were in the habit "of getting about dressed like tramps." One day a young man stopped Sir Willoughby and Lady Norrie and asked them if they lived in the district. When the Governor said he was at Marble Hill his questioner wanted to know if he worked there.

"I told him I was the Governor and even worked on Saturdays," Sir Willoughby said. "So the young chap took us through an orchard to meet his father.

"D'you know who this is, dad?" he asked. "The old man looked me over and said, 'I seem to know your face—I've seen it in the papers. Aren't you Don Bradman?'"

"One of the greatest compliments any Governor could have," Sir Willoughby said appreciatively when telling the story.

In June, 1948, Sir Willoughby achieved the doubtful distinction of being the first South Australian Governor ever to be thrown from a camel at the lonely township of Maree.



In 1948, Sir Willoughby was thrown from a camel and seriously injured. An ambulance plane brought him back to Adelaide—and to a never-ending series of jokes about his horsemanship.

When he was making one of his northern tours he expressed a wish to ride a camel, but as he climbed into the saddle the animal threw back its head, stunned him, and Sir Willoughby was flung to the ground.

Taken back to Adelaide on a stretcher an x-ray showed that a bone in his back had been injured. He was in bed for some weeks.

In a talk to Port Pirie schoolchildren he told them that since the fall he was known as Sir Wibbly Wobbly.

He related to a meeting that he had overheard one man ask another, "What would rank, in your opinion, as great salesmanship?"

The second man replied, "I suppose to sell a camel to the Governor."

When he attended a reunion of members of the Imperial Camel Corps Association he greeted them with "Fellow camel riders . . ."

In the university students' annual parade one of the exhibits was a "camel" decorated by a sign advertising a book entitled *How to Ride a Camel*, Willie B. Sorry. When a picture of this creature appeared in *On Dit*, the university magazine, there was a prompt request from Government House for a copy of it.

But as well as quips there is always plenty of solid meat in the Governor's speeches, whether he is talking on soil erosion, cricket or the communist menace. He also believes in setting practical examples and two of the first children to take advantage of a learn-to-swim campaign in 1950 were Sarah and Annabel Norrie.

During the war Sir Willoughby developed a firm friendship with the man he is replacing as Governor-General of New Zealand—Lord Freyberg, VC. While Tobruk was besieged the two generals used to talk together over the field radio-telephone—addressing each other as Bernard and Willoughby. When these talks were intercepted by the enemy, the Germans paid no attention to them, happily believing that the vital information that one general was casually passing on to the other was no more than the idle radio chatter of two signallers.



Sir Willoughby Norrie's manner made him popular with Australians. He is a sportsman and can tell a good story, even against himself.



The Governor who is now a Governor-General strolls in Adelaide's Government House gardens with members of his family. The girl on the left is his niece. The baby was then a year old.

In 1948 Lord and Lady Freyberg visited Australia as guests of the Commonwealth Government and spent several days at Government House, in Adelaide, with Sir Willoughby and Lady Norrie. A few months later the South Australian Governor and his wife returned the visit and in New Zealand Sir Willoughby went big-game fishing and river fishing.

During his term in South Australia the Governor invested a considerable amount in purchases of racehorses and had I. Reid, one of the veterans of his calling in South Australia, as his trainer. His livery of black, claret sleeves and cap was as familiar on South Australian courses as 53-year-old jockey R. Medhurst, who always rode for him. His horses won several races but racing men maintain that, generally speaking, the Governor did not have the luck he deserved.

It was a different story with fishing. The waters of Spencer's Gulf abound with giant sharks and fishing them is an exciting, dangerous sport. It appealed to Sir Willoughby so much that on rare occasions when he could escape from his vice regal duties it was a safe bet that he had gone to Spencer's Gulf.

South Australians were delighted when the Governor's term was, in 1949, extended to a further three years. And, if only from a fishing viewpoint, it was fortunate for Sir Willoughby, too. For it was in 1950 and 1952 that he made the catches which placed him in world class as a big-game fisherman.

Lure a shark can't resist

The practice in shark fishing is to trail a dead seal behind the craft leaving a lure that a shark will follow for miles. Reaching the boat the shark circles warily for a while before making a rush for the dead seal. As it rises to seize the meat it is the job of the boat's skipper to drop a baited hook into the gaping mouth.

For the fisherman the few minutes that precede the taking of the bait are as tense and exciting as any part of his struggle with the shark. Sir Willoughby Norrie knew this feeling one day in March, 1950, when he was the guest of Dr. A. L. Tostevin in the 48ft yacht *Nyroca*. Off the northernmost island in the Sir Joseph Banks group, just east of Port Lincoln, a huge white pointer shark came, following the scent of seal meat as unerringly as a plane on a radar beam.

Sir Willoughby described what followed in an article in the English magazine *Country Life*. "The shark looked, from above, not unlike a midget submarine, strong, slim and menacing," he wrote. "Proud and arrogant, it came straight to the dinghy behind the yacht, shook it, and bit it viciously. Then it circled the yacht before going straight for one of the dead seal lures hanging over the stern."

"The others on board begged for time to get the cameras ready, but the shark was hungry. We shouted and made a noise to keep him off for the cameras. But he came in with his jaws wide open, and the skipper, Jim Green, dropped the bait into his mouth as he rose to within a few inches of the deck.

"As he started to make his run and I felt the first pressure on my line, I struck vigorously, and was confident he had been well and truly hooked. He went out 400yd to 500yd, and then followed a long, hard tussle. He was hooked at 2.58 pm and brought alongside at 4.50 pm. When weighed on the scales at Port Lincoln wharf the shark tipped the scales at 2225lb."

It would have been a world record but for a small technicality. During the battle skipper Jim Green helped adjust the drag on the reel and the rules demand that fish should be landed singlehanded.

The Governor's most exciting catch came on January 18 this year when he hooked another huge white pointer. "It was by a long way the best fish I have ever taken," the Governor says. "It jumped right out of the water at least five times—a most unusual thing for a shark—and was game to the end."

This shark weighed 1713lb and was awarded an Australian record in the 80lb breaking-strain class by the Australian Game Fishing Association. It was also recognised as the largest shark or fish ever caught anywhere on a 24-thread line.

Sir Willoughby's departure from the State was a happy one. At a mayoral banquet he apologised to the American Vice-Consul and proceeded to tell the story of an American sailor looking down from a huge US battleship onto a British destroyer moored alongside.

"Hey," the Yank called to one of the destroyer's crew, "how's the second biggest fleet in the world today?"

"Fine," replied the Bluejacket. "How's the second best?"

A few days later the Governor and Lady Norrie gave a reception to celebrate Queen Elizabeth's birthday. It was also their last Royal birthday reception in Adelaide, a colorful, scintillating affair.

This is the second South Australian Governor given to New Zealand. In the 1840's Sir George Grey went to the Dominion after spending four years in Government House, Adelaide. In that time he saved the State from financial disaster by drastic but effective economic measures. His New Zealand administration was equally effective.

New Zealanders can be certain, South Australians maintain, that Sir Willoughby Norrie will uphold that tradition. #