

Autobiographical note by Reginald Stewart Moxon (1875-1950)

I, Reginald Stewart Moxon, was born on June 19th 1875 at Tollington Park College, London, of which school my father was Headmaster. My parents, Geroge and Martha Moxon, had four children, two sons and two daughters, Ethel Annie, Reginald Stewart, Thomas Allen, and Eliza Agnes Ryle. I was, therefore, their eldest son. Up to the age of fourteen I was privately educated by my father, who gave both my brother and myself an excellent grounding both in mathematics and classics. We both took readily to mathematics and before we went to school had mastered the elements of Arithmetic Algebra and Geometry to such an extent that those subjects never gave us any trouble in later years. I well remember the zeal and care with which my father taught us in his spare time; an early riser himself, he frequently prevailed upon us to get up a considerable time before breakfast so that he might give us an hour's tuition before the duties of the day began. But it was to Latin and Greek that my mind at a very early age was particularly attracted, and it was in that direction that the lines of my subsequent development were drawn. Our early training in these subjects also was given to us by my father, who in sympathy, patience, and lucidity of instruction was to my mind as a teacher unsurpassed. My progress, however, before we left London, suffered one serious hindrance. From my thirteenth to my fourteenth birthday while we lived in Hornsey I was afflicted with a disarrangement of the digestive organs, so serious as nearly to prove fatal. The trouble, however, was gradually overcome, owing doubtless to the recuperative powers of youth aided by the skill and attention of our London physician, Dr. Goddard, and the unceasing care and tender nursing of my devoted mother.

In the year 1890, when I was turned 15, the family left London and removed to Manchester where my brother and myself were placed at the Manchester Grammar School under Dr [Michael George] Glazebrook and later under Mr J[ohn] E[dward] King. There I remained till 1894 under the excellent tuition of such masters as Mr Withers (late Professor of Education at Owen's College) Mr Carter and Mr Broadhurst whose names will not quickly fade from my memory. During this period we resided at Didsbury – a suburb of Manchester – in a large and charming house where my mother's last three years were spent. For on reaching Manchester after a life of self-sacrifice and devotion to others she began gradually to decline, her illness being aggravated by three of the coldest winters I remember, and on October 28th 1893 she died and was buried with her parents at Prestbury, near Macclesfield. Twelve months after her death I went to Cambridge where I spent five years studying Classics and Theology.

Amongst the friends I made there were J. D. Nairn (now Headmaster of Merchant Taylors' School and my brother-in-law for in my rooms at Caius College he first met my sister), E. C. Quiggin (now Professor of Celtic at Cambridge) and W. F. Whitton.

My academic distinctions at Cambridge include an open scholarship, a First Class in the Classical Tripos (1897) and a Second Class in the Theological Tripos, Part II (1899). Here let me say that it is impossible to estimate how much I owe in my early training, and my expensive education since to my father's care, his moral and spiritual instruction and his unflinching self-denial where the welfare of his children was concerned.

From the time that my mother died we spent most of our holidays at Clayton-le-Moors, Lancashire, where my uncle, Canon Johnson, was Vicar and Rural Dean. There we were always welcome and found a second home. In fact, the loss of our mother was softened and in a sense repaired by the care and affection bestowed upon all four of us by my aunt, Elizabeth Harriet Johnson who has ever been to us all a mother in all but name.

In the year 1899 I accepted the Senior Classical Mastership at Warrington Grammar School where I remained until the year 1905. But my desire for years past had been not only to follow in my father's footsteps as a schoolmaster but also above all to be a Clergyman.

Accordingly in December 1899 on S. Thomas' Day, I was ordained Deacon in Chester Cathedral, being chosen by the Bishop from the candidates of that year to read the Gospel. The only member of my family who was able to be present on that memorable occasion was my brother. A year later I was admitted to the Priesthood. This I combined with my scholastic duties the work of a Parish Priest, preaching regularly every Sunday, first at Stockton Heath, then at Northenden, and later on, as one of the Bishop's special clergy, at different Churches in Cheshire as need and occasion arose. In spite, however, of the arduous duties of my two-fold work, I found opportunity while at Warrington for foreign travel. The importance of this as an educational factor has long been recognised. During that period, therefore, I visited not only many countries of Europe including the Classical Cities, Athens and Rome, but also Egypt, Palestine, Asia Minor and the Isles of Greece.

Two events of paramount importance occurred during this period. One was a serious cycling accident in the year 1900 which very nearly proved fatal. My sister Ethel, then married to Dr Nairn, Headmaster of Merchant Taylors' School, came over to nurse me, and after being confined to bed for three weeks in a precarious condition, I was, by the mercy of Good, restored to health and strength again in time to take priest's orders in December of that same year, thus fulfilling at once my own ambition and my father's long-cherished wish.

The other great event was my meeting with a subsequent engagement to my future wife – Ina Mary Rowson. This incident alone makes my period in Warrington stand out as one of the most momentous in my life, for from December 7th 1904 when we first became engaged, to the present day our union has been one of unmixed blessing and happiness to me.

In April 1905, soon after returning from the East, I was appointed Sixth Form Master at King's School, Canterbury, where I spent seven of the most valuable and happy years of my career. For the first three years I was a resident master, living in the Green Court under the shadow of the Cathedral, and under Dr Galpin I learnt many valuable lessons as to the traditions and conduct of a good English Public School. During this time I wrote a Latin Dissertation on the Apocryphal Gospels for which I was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Divinity at Cambridge. I followed this up by a series of articles for Murray's Dictionary of the Bible including one on "Gnosticism showing how far that fourth-century heresy is foreshadowed in the New Testament.

On April 22nd 1908 I was married to Ina Mary Rowson at S Anne's, Soho, London W.C., and in the delightful house where we lived at Canterbury, - Vernon Villa, Vernon Place – my sons, Martin Stewart and Gerald Richard, were born.

During this period I had many appreciative letters written to me by the Headmaster, Dr Galpin, with regard to the work I was doing with the scholarship boys in the Sixth Form. But the results of my labours were perhaps best seen in the numerous open Classical scholarships and exhibitions at Cambridge and Oxford gained by pupils of mine.

Nor were my ordination vows neglected by me during these three years. From the day I was married to the day I left Canterbury I preached two and very often three or even four sermons a Sunday. Not only did I regularly take duty in the morning at Patricbourne, a village three miles from Canterbury, and in the evening at Ickham, a village five miles away, but it fell to my lot to preach in School Chapel three times a term and occasionally I was invited to occupy the pulpit in the Cathedral itself. And on the preparation of my sermons I bestowed particular pains and care, for it was my highest ambition to excel as a preacher, as my Uncle had done before me, and this wish was not from any desire for self-glorification, far from it! but because I knew that whatever talent I had in that respect was capable of being vastly improved and that my influence and power of doing good would by that means immeasurably increase.

Two years before we left Canterbury I obtained a motor bicycle and side-car which enabled my wife and myself to get about the country a good deal and see much more of the

“Garden of England” than would otherwise have been possible. In this we used constantly to visit Margate, Folkestone and other sea-side places on the Kent coast, thus adding very considerably to the pleasure of our holidays. In the year 1910 my Uncle, Canon Johnson, died. He had by this time resigned the living of Clayton-le-Moors and was staying with my brother the Vicar of Alfreton, Derbyshire. There my Aunt continued to live after Canon Johnson’s death.

During this period I went abroad several times, visiting Brussels, Lisbon, Madeira and Paris, the latter place chiefly for the purpose of collating some Latin manuscripts of a Theological work by Vincentius written in the fifth century A.D.

On December 4th 1911 I was elected out of 150 applicants to succeed Mr F. H. Chambers as Headmaster of Lincoln School and entered on my new duties in January 1912.

This ancient and important Public School, in spite of its magnificent buildings, had gone steadily down under the late headmaster, so much that at the time of my appointment there were only 56 boys on the books and one boarder.

On June 14th 1914 a little girl was born to us, Gwenyth Enid, and was baptised by the Subdean in the cathedral.

In August of that year the Great War with Germany broke out. Our beautiful school buildings were commandeered as the Fourth Northern Hospital. Temporary buildings were erected for the school and an adjacent house named Coldbath House was used as our residence. This migration and uncertainty as to the date and condition of return might be expected to have acted as a handicap to the growth and organisation of the school but in spite of all difficulties the increase in numbers was steadily maintained and we returned to our own buildings in 1920 with 200 boys, 43 being boarders. While we were at Coldbath House my edition of Vincentius of Lerins was produced and published in 1916 by the Cambridge University Press.

In 1920 Martin went away to a Preparatory school at Deganwy under Captain Lloyd. In 1922 I completed a book entitled “The Doctrine of Sin” which was published by Allen and Unwin Ltd for which I was awarded the degree of D.D. by Dublin University. On February 28th Ina and I went over to Dublin to have the degree conferred. The ceremony was very impressive and as I stood there in my scarlet robes I achieved an honour never before attained by a member of our family.

In September 1923 Martin went to Shrewsbury School where my brother was a master.

In 1924 we all went to the Riviera at Easter and stayed at Mentone and later in the same year another book of mine was published by Jas Clarke and Co entitled “Modernism and Orthodoxy” to which the Bishop of Lincoln wrote a Foreword.

In 1925 I reached the age of 50 by which time I had saved £12,000 invested in gilt-edged securities though as my father was still living I had no money left to me. I was glad to feel that whatever happened my children would not be left penniless.

In 1926 my father who had been failing through old age for some time died at Yarmouth where he had retired to live near the sea with his sister my Aunt Hannah. The end came suddenly on the morning of Monday June 14th. Allen and I went over to Yarmouth for the funeral and I took the committal service in Gorleston Cemetery.

Transcribed by Graham Jagger, quondam President of the Moxon Society.

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