

PEOPLE & IDEAS

# George Gregory.

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I suppose it is difficult to forget the house in which one was born for it becomes part of life, and always retains a place in the background of what is done in later life; and because of that, it is important where a child is born, and the factors that are most active there. It cannot be said that I was privileged in any special way in the home in which I first saw the light of day. It was one of a group of seven that was built originally to house men who worked at the coal mine there, and their families, and appear to have been designed to provide a minimum of help and convenience to tenants. There was a large living room downstairs, together with a pantry. One window admitted the light, and entrance was by one door. The ceiling was made of rough boards that were laid on cross pieces, so that it was easy to talk to people who were upstairs. There was a large open grate with an oven at its side, while at the back of the grate, and above it, was an entrance to an oven in which bread was baked. The window was a fixed one, which was convenient, for people were most careful about the admission of fresh air from the outside.

The area upstairs was divided by a partition fitted with a door, which allowed four bedsteads to be put up, but there were two windows instead of one, that may be opened a little. They were always closed in the evening to keep the night air out, because it was believed to be injurious to health. All the houses were similar in structure, and formed a small hamlet that nestled against the hill-side, about half a mile from the outskirts of a small town named Radstock.

Such was the house in which I was born, and the place where I grew up to manhood; and looking back to it as I do now, I am forced to the conclusion it was a very poor place indeed, lacking many things that are thought to be essential in modern society that succeeded it, and vitally needed for the growth and development of a child.

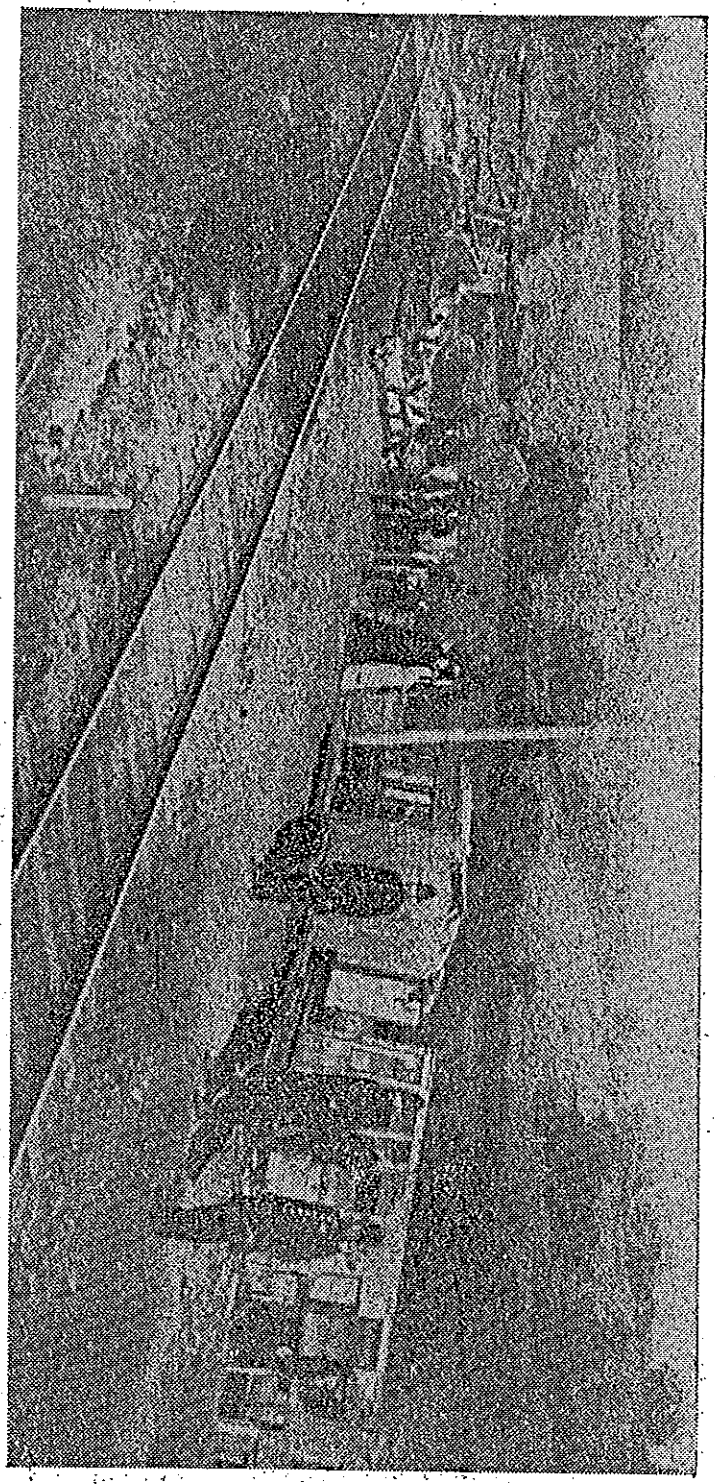
I might have had a better start if my parents had been better equipped for their task, for both of them were illiterate, and only mother was able to write. My father never read a book, and never gave a hint that he had read one. Mother did not read much, being content to read portions from the Bible. There was a feeling in the home that books were not intended for people like us, and were not actually necessary; and that was not to be wondered at, for my parents' schooling had been very short. Not much work was done in school at that time, for it was thought to be sufficient to have an elementary knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Children left school very early to commence work, and references which my late father made to his schoolmaster suggested to me that he ought to have been in a place where he might have been taught how to do his job more effectively. My parents were not to be blamed therefore for their illiteracy, for they derived from a period in which education was sadly deficient, and many opportunities existed to escape from it altogether. Be it to the credit of my mother that she was pious, and urged her children to improve their position, and to make success their aim. Both parents were very industrious, and gave the utmost of what they were capable of to promote the comfort and well-being of home and family life.

My father did not talk much, his conversation being mostly about work, which kept mother informed. Again, when he had a free evening he usually went to Radstock to have a drink and a chat with his friends, therefore I recall few things that he talked about. He was prone to speak of the time when men could be ordered back into the mine to do a double shift when men should have been going home to rest. There was no limit to the hours that could be worked, it was not unusual therefore for a man to hear his name called by an official named Samson when he stepped off the cage at the end of the shift. He was ordered to take the place of another who had not arrived; and he spoke with humour of the way men tried to evade the official and to

go home unseen by him. Again, my parents lived with father's parents after the marriage until a child was born, when something happened to cause them to move to a farm cottage about a quarter of a mile away. It does not appear to have been in a good condition; and it seemed that rats could find an easy entrance to the top of the house to make themselves comfortable, for father told how he lay in bed at night, and listened to them moving on the upper side of the ceiling like disciplined regiments of soldiers. They marched from one end to the other, turned, and promptly marched back, and thus went to and fro until their manoeuvre was complete. I think I was more interested than scared, and thankful that nothing resembling it ever occurred above us at night. Again, my father was pleased to relate how he went out as a beater during the shooting season, and was specially pleased to describe how Lord Jolliffe at Ammerdown jumped over a five-barred gate with the aid of a spitter (tool with a long handle having a cutting edge for digging up thistles) as a lever. Again, he would say wittily that he married a Bishop as his brother had married a Fox. I was puzzled for a long time until I learned that mother's name had been Bishop, and my aunt's name had been Fox.

One of the most tragic stories he used to relate was that of a train disaster a short distance down the valley at a place called Shoscombe Bottom, in 1876. There was only a single track from Bath to Evercreech Junction at the time, and the railway ran along the valley in front of the hill where we lived, and was laid down on an old tram-way along which coal was conveyed from the collieries to Bath. At the place where the disaster occurred, the railway sloped upwards a little to pass around the foot of the hill that had been cut back to make an easier bend. It was a help in the movement of trains, but it meant that neither driver was able to look round the bend in either direction. On the day of the accident a second train had been allowed to pass the signal, and go on to meet one that was coming from Bath. Both trains proceeded until they approached the top of the slope in the

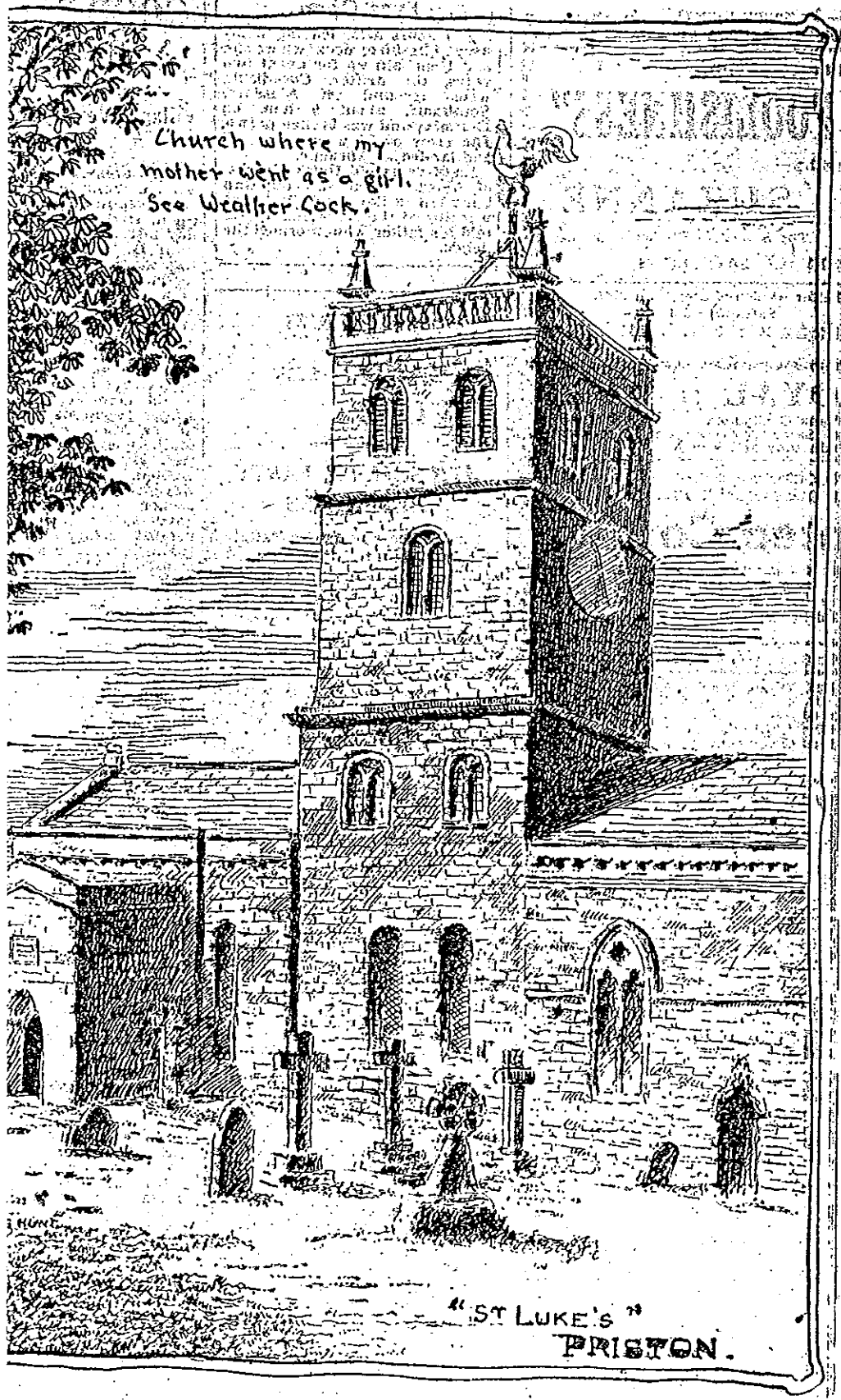


The scene at the bedside after the crash.

1876

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Church where my  
mother went as a girl.  
See Weather Cock.



"ST LUKE'S"  
PRISTON.

cutting when a head-on collision was inevitable. The smash was a bad one, and several people were killed, but what impressed me most was the account of how the bodies were laid out in one of the farm buildings for identification. It was not all tragedy however, for it was reported that one of the passengers extricated himself from the wreckage, and walked to his home about a mile distant without saying a word about the accident.

My mother appeared not to have many stories to tell of life before her marriage. Her father was blind, and she was reared in the small village of Priston Nr Bath, a short distance away. She was the daughter of poor people who encouraged her to go out to domestic service as early as possible. She had a brother who migrated to Australia to seek a fortune, but never returned. He wrote home giving news that he was succeeding. Then a long silence followed which was broken by the news of his death, and that his estate consisted of a tie-pin and watch and chain.

Mother told us how she and other girls went out leazing (gleaning) in the harvest fields at home, and after they had separated the wheat from the ears, they took it to a mill where it was ground into flour for them. It was then made into bread. It was not much, but it helped to eke out a small income, and give a little money for other things.

I do not know how father and mother chanced to meet in the first place, or how long the courtship lasted, but the day arrived when they agreed to marry, and go to Bath to buy some things for the house. They were doubtless a little excited about it, as they had cause to be, but mother's excitement changed to astonishment when father told her during the journey that he had no money, and the contents of her purse must decide what they bought. They married however, and settled in their new life; and in time mother gave birth to a child whom they named Florence. She died of consumption at the age of twelve, and her body was buried beside the path in the church-yard at Writhlington.



The grave was marked by a single rose bush. That was before I arrived on the scene, but I often heard references to 'Florrie' during conversations between my parents.

Mother spoke often about the weather-cock that was on the church steeple in the village of her childhood, and made me long to see it. I feared that my imagination had enlarged it beyond recognition, but it was not so, for when I visited the church a few years ago I was able to see it as it was <sup>observed</sup> by her as a child. It was the size of a huge bird, standing with its head erect and tail fully extended, appearing to act as a kind of sentinal for the village folk, making a mental note of when they came to worship, of conversations in the street below, weddings, children at <sup>play</sup> ~~part~~, and processions of mourners on the way to the last resting place of the dead. The weather-cock was often brought into the talk of the villagers, when it was said something would happen when the weather-cock went down to the brook to drink. Mother's talk about the church and clergyman drew me to the place when I was older, and as I searched among the grave stones I was not a little interested to find the names of families that had been referred to in the old home.

~~I do not know how many situations (places)~~  
 I do not know how many situations (places) mother had previous to her marriage, but I recall clearly that at the Vicarage at Englishcombe about a mile away. It was a peaceful village on the outskirts of Bath where life was mostly uneventful, where birds sang in the springtime, and to where swallows returned after a long flight from the South. It was where primroses and white violets made hedgerows lovely, and where a rural atmosphere had been preserved from generation to generation. It was a place too where everyone knew everyone, and neighbourly relations were the rule. It could almost have been a replica of Sweet Auburn, the loveliest village in the plain. And the Vicar was similar in some respects to the church dignitary referred to in that poem. And it was to his house that mother sallied forth as a girl to toil for her daily bread, and, if possible, take a

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little money home. I visited the village later in life, and was more than pleased to find the vicarage, and the house of the coachman of those days. The two were united in my recollections, for one night after quietness had descended on the village, and all were asleep in the vicarage, sounds were heard within the house that suggested the movements of a burglar. The family was alerted, and mother told how she leaned out of the window and called to the coachman to come and protect them. My memory fails me at that point, and I expect the intruder ran away to (quoting the poet Gray) 'Leave the world to darkness and to me'.

These are only a few recollections of things that were spoken of -- =

by my parents, and on the whole, I felt they had lived through very hard times, suffered many privations, and often found life to be a grim struggle to keep the wolf from the door. My parents' memories went back to the 1850's, and all students of history are aware of the difficulties and hardships that existed for poor people at that time.

Some of my very vivid memories are still very vivid to me. They are not numerous in that life was mostly uneventful and routine, and experience seldom rose to an exceptional level. I recall an elderly woman whose name was Love Green who came to live with us. She was my mother's cousin, and a widow of a baker in the village where mother had been reared. She was well known as a pious woman, and in addition to other duties, she undertook to put us to bed after we had said our prayers. There was an occasion however when we children had undressed downstairs near the fire so as to be ready to jump into bed. So I ran up the stairs as fast as I could, kneeled beside the bed, and quietly repeated the Lord's Prayer. It was our formal prayer, and I was assured that nothing more could be expected from me. I was actually getting into bed when Love Green reached the top of the stairs, and reproved me at once for not having said my prayers. I explained to her that I had done so, but she would not believe me, and actually became indignant. I stood my ground however, and refused to say the prayer the second time, the consequence being the old lady descended the stairs feeling very grieved.

That was not the only time when the bed-side was a scene of trouble, for the bedstead was an iron one, and I was not always a good boy, hence my mother tied me to the pillar of the bedstead as a punishment, and made me learn verses of Scripture that must be recited correctly. I remember learning the account of the temptation of Jesus that way, together with other parts of the Bible. I would not like to say that any good came of it, but one may say the same about other things that are done in the name of correction. Mother was a believer in corporal punishment also, and always kept a stick on hooks above the fireplace,

and hurt me when she used it with a will.

I recall very clearly how mother took me to Writhlington church on Sunday evenings. The building was across the valley from where we lived, and it meant a walk for half an hour. My father allowed himself an hour for the journey, to have a quiet stroll, stopping now and then to look at things that attracted his attention, finally arriving at the church where mother and I joined him. Mother actually took me to keep me out of mischief, for I had already attended a Primitive Methodist chapel at Green Parlour morning and afternoon. It meant much more than that to me however for I had reached an impressionable age. I recall the sound of the bell as we walked under the trees to the church, the swish of ladies' dresses as they dragged on the matting along the aisle, the venerable figure of the clergyman as he entered the pulpit, and the singing of the choir before they came out to their stalls. We walked along the path to a little grave when the Service was over. It had a rose tree growing on it, and marked the spot where the remains of an older sister lay.

I am unable to remember such sermons as were heard, but the Rev A Ramsay prepared them with great care, for we could see him walking on his lawn in front of the house, and often stopping to write, and thus have his sermon ready for the next Sabbath. He was a widower, but gave all his sons a preliminary education. One of them became Bishop Ramsay of Malmesbury, another followed him in the living, and was appointed to the Board of Directors of the Cooperative Wholesale Society when he retired.

The esteem of my late mother for the clergyman was very great, and I recall her informing us for a number of years in succession that the sermon on the following Sunday would be on the fall of the leaf. I still go to the old church when I am walking that way, find the key of the door, sit in the old pew, and try to realise the conditions that impressed me so much eighty years ago.

But speaking of the church reminds me that my parents were not

very strict as sectarians for they allowed us as boys to attend a Primitive Methodist Sunday School about a mile and a quarter away from home. It was a galvanised building that was erected to meet the spiritual needs of people who lived in cottages in the area. I was taken by my brother when I was very young, for I recall being in the first class where my uncle was the teacher. He was unable to read or write, but he knew the letters of the alphabet, and taught us from a book. He worked in a coal-mine, and was illiterate as most adults were at that time. I was still very young when I transferred my allegiance to a Wesleyan Sunday School in Radstock where my day-school teacher took a class, but I do not know how long I continued to do so, or anything I was taught, but I recollect vividly that a few of us went together, and that we did not object to a little adventure now and then when circumstances invited it. For example, we had to pass a large market on the way to and from school that had a low wall with short iron railings around it, and it provided a challenge one Sunday afternoon to attempt something unusual. We were returning from school ~~one after-~~ ~~noon~~ when one of the boys suggested that we climb over the railings to see what may be found inside. We responded at once by climbing the wall, then the railings, and made our way to a box from which we may step down to the floor. Needless to say, we were not only interested in climbing fences, especially when we saw oranges in a container. We were unable to resist the temptation to take, filled our pockets, and returned to where our climb had commenced outside. An orange was a great prize to gain, for our parents were unable to buy them for us; indeed, we felt like men who had found diamonds in a stream, or gold in running water, and possibly no fruit was ever so delicious. Our age was such that we were unconcerned about the ethics of conduct; and it is interesting to know that one of those boys became an Inspector of Police later in his life.

It was to be expected that boys of our age, and in our circumstances, had never seen the sea. It was not because it was a long

distance away, nevertheless it cost money to pay for the journey, and in the absence of that we had to be content with what imagination gave us. We had heard about waves, and the large expanse of water, had seen pictures of boats on their voyage, but it was all a little vague and remote. There was however something that may be likened to the sea, which was a field of growing wheat or barley, either of which had a great fascination for me, especially when a breeze blew across it, which made it easy to imagine the advancing tide and active wavelets in it; and so when it was about eighteen inches high, and the weather was fine, we went to the field and took all our ~~clothes~~ clothes off, and swam about as though we were in actual water. It was great fun as long as it lasted, but I never knew why we were not discovered, for we trod the stalks down, and made our feet very dirty. Such things meant nothing to us at that time, we enjoyed the excitement of it, and when we entered the real sea at Weston-super-mare we failed to find a similar excitement. Sometimes we built a small dam across the stream at the bottom of the hill with stones and mud, and jumped about in the pool. That was its own brand of fun.

I must have been very young when I walked along the lane to meet a child who lived there. There were two cottages on the side of the lane opposite to a field where a farmer turned some horses in the evening and on Sundays. There was no entrance gate, but only a gap in the hedge where children and horses may go through. So it was that on the day I have in mind, a single horse was grazing alone over the hedge, and my little boy friend and I were curious in wanting to go and touch it if it were possible. The chance was a fair one, and the prospect was good, All went well for a time, and the animal appeared not to object to being touched, until my friend went back to touch its tail. Neither of us was old enough to realise that the safest end of a horse is in front of its head. So it was the little fellow seemed to cause resentment in the horse, for it kicked him in the temple, stamped its foot, and continued to eat the grass. It was a

hard kick that caused the other boy to fall on the ground where he lay unconscious. I felt he must be dead, and ran into the house as fast as I could to tell his mother about it. She arrived on the scene as fast as her legs would carry her, picked up the child in her arms, and carried him indoors. Things were not quite as bad as I had imagined, for he soon recovered from the shock, and died much later at the age of eighty.

Another incident took place about a stone's <sup>throw</sup> away from the place that involved a horse. On that occasion a horse was rubbing its sides between two trees when it became jammed, and was unable to get out; and the more it tried the more it became wedged in. Men appeared on the scene who tried to lift it out, but it was in vain, and ropes were finally placed around the animal to lift it out. One tree was then cut down.

These incidents took place outside of my home, but returning to that in memory I recall an incident that no sensitive child could ever forget. It occurred one evening after we had gone to bed, and had fallen asleep. Our parents were downstairs. It was never made clear to me what actually happened before the incident, but mother must have fallen and struck her head on the stone floor, thus making herself unconscious. Her condition ~~worsened~~, she became light-headed, and commenced to call for the girl she lost at the age of twelve. She repeated the words, 'Florrie, I am coming!' 'Florrie, I am coming!' We could not fail to hear her voice coming up through the floor, and we all got out of bed, and went downstairs to find her lying on a long chest that father kept his tools and other things in. I remember how we pleaded with her not to die and leave us. She must have continued in that state for a considerable time, but she became quieter, sat up, and we crept up the stairs to bed.

I had a sister who was older than myself, who, I think, should have gone on to be a Deaconess or Minister, for when our parents went to church on Sunday evenings and left us at home, she would sometimes

arrange the chairs, and conduct a little Service for us alone. I ought not to smile when I think of it now, for my sister did not when she assumed that responsibility; indeed, she was sincere, and very serious.

I admit that I was not always kind to my mother in spite of my pleading with her not to die; and it was necessary sometimes for her to beat me with a stick which was kept for that purpose, for I cannot prevent the thought that I was never given a stroke too many. I remember coming down to breakfast one morning, and doing something that caused her to reprove me, and threaten to beat me, whereupon I ran out of the house not fully dressed. I persuaded myself that I could manage without her support, and that of my home, for there were plenty of blackberries on the bushes to satisfy my hunger. I made a paper hat for myself, and went down the hill to a field at the bottom where I stayed until tea-time. So far so good, but my thoughts about my mother did not prevent me becoming hungry. I became very hungry in the afternoon, and lonely too, and so I made my way up to a field where other boys were playing games, and after a short time I was very willing to be taken home by my brother, and to be sent to bed as a punishment. I did not attempt to run away again, but an older girl in the neighbourhood attempted to do so. She cut her hair off, dressed in her brother's clothes, and entrained for Bournemouth where she was found and sent home.

Another incident in my childhood might have had tragic results, that was associated with a large oak tree that grew a short distance from my home. It was hundreds of years old, and stood with its twisted trunk and gnarled branches until a few years ago when it was pushed over by a storm. It was so old that it had commenced to decay in the middle from the ground upwards, thus making a cavity of considerable size. Decay had made three holes through the bark, one of which was large enough for a child to crawl through on its hands and knees. Thus three or four children could sit down inside, and pretend



they were in a little house, or a tent of durable construction. Thus it was that we sometimes crept into the tree, and had rare fun playing a game of pretence. All went well for a time, and we went in and came out safely until one of the children brought some matches to kindle a fire to make our little retreat more cosy. We did not give a thought to the possibility of smoke or how it could get away; and it made matters worse when we began to sit with our backs against the openings in the trunk of the tree. The matches were thus produced, a small fire was made, and all were excited until the smoke began to reveal its possibilities; for it first rose up, then spread out, then it floated about until the cavity was full. It was a signal for the children to put their noses into the holes in the bark to get a little fresh air, but all were seized with a fit of coughing. It was fortunate the fire burned down before anything more serious happened. Then one boy crawled out and was followed by the others, who were much relieved when they were able to breathe pure air once more, for their lungs had been filled with smoke and their eyes with water. We all agreed to keep the affair a close secret, and never tell anyone about it. We could not know what might happen to us if our parents heard about it, but they would at least have been shocked to hear about our partial suffocation.

The old tree suffered badly during a storm, and some of its branches were drawn to the side of a hedge where they may now be seen. I saw them a short time ago when I passed that way, and paused to reflect on what might have been on that never-to-be-forgotten day.

It must have been about that time when a machine came to the farm to thresh wheat. It was always attractive to us boys, and the drone of its fans was a call to us to come and see the operations. It appeared to be a situation in which no harm of any kind could happen to us; but we were such boys that one could never be quite sure. On the day that I have in mind, a man was working on the rick throwing sheaves to the top of the machine. He was lacking in some way, and

appeared not to be quite grown up. In fact he had a nickname 'Baby' which we thought we were at liberty to use. He was a very good workman, and we were safe so long as he was on the rick. At the same time we could annoy him by shouting 'Baby'. There was fun in that, too; but we made a mistake when we stood a short distance away, and called him by that name, especially when he was irritated already. But we shouted and laughed until the man picked up a sharp stone and threw it, striking my upper lip, where it cut deeply into the flesh. It bled profusely, and I ran into the farm crying. I recall vividly how the farmer's daughter named King took me to a tub of water, and bathed the wound until the bleeding ceased. Then I went home with my hand to my lip. I was the last person to deserve sympathy, for I was to blame, but the man's mother, whose name was Trim, thought differently, for she came all the way from her home the next day, and offered my mother a little money to atone for what her son had done. Speaking frankly, I don't like the memory of the incident, and I would like to erase it from the record.

There is another memory that dates from about the same time, but I was only an observer on that occasion, and not a participant in what was done. I have stated that men's wages were very low, and poverty was real, so that men depended upon extra means to buy all things that were needed in the home; and one of those means was the keeping of pigs, and fattening them for sale. There were usually four, that were kept in a house in the garden. They were bought for thirty to forty shillings each, and sold for nine to ten shillings for twenty pounds. My mother usually looked forward to having a new dress when the pigs were sold. There were other benefits, too, in that fertiliser was provided for the large garden, and all the waste from vegetables could be profitably used. I did not know the economics of the business as a child, but I remember that a grocer named Fox, who worked in a mine also, and lived about half a mile away, came for one of our fatted animals. He went to the house where they were

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kept, selected one of them, caught it by slipping a cord in<sup>to</sup> its mouth, and dragged it away squealing and making an awful din, assisted by men who pushed behind. They proceeded to a place where two paths crossed where a stool had been placed in position. The men then lifted the animal, and held it on its right side on the stool while the butcher/grocer pushed a knife into its neck, and the pig bled to death. If blood did not run fast enough, he worked the poor creature's front leg to force the flow of blood until the body lay still and the dead.

It was the first stage of the operation, for straw was brought to cover the body; and set alight to burn until every hair on the upper side was burned off. Then it was turned over on the other side, which was burned after the same manner. That was the second stage of the operation, for hot water was then poured on the body as it was being scraped and cleaned. The animal was finally lifted into a wheelbarrow and taken away to the grocer's shop where it was weighed, cut into pieces, and put in brine. It was the usual practice at the time, and many animals went to their doom in that way. Thus people had good meat for their table; and it was usual for the seller to bring some of it home for the frying-pan, or saucepan.

Little children were excited by the fire; but the memory of the knife and blood is still gruesome to me.

The thought of the saucepan reminds me of the time when I went to the Board School, and was probably in Class I or 2 in the Infants' Department. I was then six years of age, and the coal miners were on strike. All the Union funds had been paid out, and the Miners' Agent was collecting funds in other coalfields to ensure a supply of food. People had been unable to save money owing to their low income, which kept the Union reserves very inadequate. Men did not strike then unless their conditions were desperate; and the strike that is referred to above had continued for a number of weeks, and soup-kitchens had been arranged where children may have a good meal. I

remember that we had to take basins to school one day, and proceed to a Mission church afterwards where we were given a good meal. My older sister went in with the basins, and we sat on the bank of the hedge on the opposite side of the street to eat steaming hot soup that had been given to her, and had bread and meat in it. It was like eating honey and fruit, and I shall never forget it. Strange as it may appear, I lived in a house on the very spot many years afterwards, where I often recalled the events of that day.

There is another recollection which I share with a decreasing number of old people, for it was the time of the Boer War, and I remember how as children we sang lustily, 'We'll make them remember Majuba Hill, when the sixty-six they slew. And now we're at war we'll show the Boers what British pluck can do.' Our patriotic fervour knew no limits at that early age.

These are the more vivid recollections of my childhood, but there are lively memories also that date from that time. They reveal a larger outlook and wider sphere of action, and indicate a deepening interest in what was taking place in the world about me.

I recall how I joined other boys in a search for hazel nuts, and arrived finally at a place by the side of a brook that was known locally as 'Ten foot'. Nuts were known to grow there, and the bushes were ear-marked each year. But on the day I have in mind a number of young men were bathing there. We observed them over the wall of a bridge for a time when our thought reverted to nut picking. There were many nuts to be seen, but most of them were on a few branches that extended over the water. They could not be reached from the bridge, and the only course that seemed to be open to us was to walk out on a lower branch while picking nuts on that above. I appeared to be the right weight for such an undertaking, and offered myself as a volunteer. I got into the bush carefully, selected a branch as a platform, took hold of the branch above on which nuts were growing, and proceeded to move along to where it may be pulled down. I may then fill my pockets

and return to the bank. The plan offered good prospects of success, and everything could have gone successfully if the branch on which I was standing had remained intact, but it did not do so, and I soon realised I was going down in the water while clinging to the branch above me. It was believed widely there were ten feet of water at the spot, and I was unable to swim, and I went down until the water was above my knees. We had become alert to the danger by that time, and not a little scared, and we shouted for help as loudly as we could; and fortunately for me, the men were only a short distance away, and one swam along quickly and helped me to the bank. Needless to say I felt much relieved when I felt firm ground under my feet, but my pants, shoes and stockings, were soaked with water. So what was I to do in such a condition? I could not go home in that state. But one of the boys had a proposal to make, and it was that we go to a workmens' shelter where a fire was kept. It was late in the afternoon, and the men may be gone home; and what remained of the fire might be revived enough to dry my clothes. It seemed a reasonable proposition, and we all set off on what we hoped would be a successful quest. The proposer was right, we soon had a blaze, and I took my wet things off, dried them, and set off for home as the innocent boys we claimed to be. There was no sign in our appearance that anything had gone wrong.

It is a matter of interest to me that the man who rescued me from the water lived in this village where I now reside, and he died some time ago at the age of eighty.

It must have been about that time when I spent a whole day doing a turn at 'bird starving'. It was my older brother's work actually, but for some reason he was unable to go out that day which I have in mind. The field that had to be watched was outside of my mental world although it was only a mile or so away. I was given directions about where it was to be found, and provided with food and drink, I set off in search of my sphere of work. I found it quite easily, was informed that wheat had been sown, and my duty would be to prevent any birds taking it from

the soil. The chief offenders were rooks that went from one part of the field to another, and I had to walk towards them shouting, 'Chuala, chuala bird. If I had my clackere I'd hit thee backerds. Chuala bird'. And so I tramped across the field, to and fro, until the heavy soil clung to my boots, and made them so heavy that my little legs ached, and I was relieved to go home at the end of the day. Curiously enough I can now see that field from the front of the house where I live. I never went bird starving again, but the knowledge of geography I gained was helpful to me later, for there was an old village beyond the field called New Buildings at the bottom of a hill where children met in a school-cottage. A school was built later to accomodate all the children in the neighbourhood, but that was the first school in the village. The schoolroom is mentioned here because it was used for meetings of different kinds, and other things.

I was instructed to find my way to that building because gifts for poor people were being distributed there. Two maiden-ladies named Jarret were rich, and gave out of their surplus to relieve the poor and needy in the parish. I have referred to the elderly lady who came to live with us whose name was Green, who, when her savings were spent, was obliged to apply for parish relief, that was two shillings and sixpence per week in normal cases. <sup>A</sup>Laves of bread were given where the need was very great. Mrs Green was given money only, which had to be fetched. It was that that made her entitled to a gift at the school. I did not have much difficulty in finding the place, and duly received what had been allocated. It was not much, but it was to me to whom a panny was almost a fortune. The room is now used as part of a cottage, and I pass it when I go that way; and when I cannot fail to recall that day in boyhood when I came down the hill in search of a gift for an old lady who was expected to live on half a crown a week.

I appear to have had an interest in horses from an early age, and many of my earliest memories have to do with my relations to them. They were very docile creatures to me, and obeyed me as though I had been

their owner. But there was an innocent attachment before that time when I took risks with them, and was wholly unaware of what their response may be. I had to walk through a wood on my way from school where I was expected to keep to the path, but that of course was too much to expect of a child whose nature was to wander about, and so I was ready to get through the fence to walk among the trees in Tynning Wood. I got under a wire fence on one occasion that must have had broken ends, for I discovered when I rose to my feet that a long strip had been torn out of my corduroy trousers from the top to the bottom, and left hanging. They were intended to last for a long time, but alas, they were grievously marred even after my mother had repaired them.

I was returning from school alone on another occasion when I strayed in the same wood to a place where a chestnut horse was feeding. It was tethered to a peg by means of a chain. I knew its owner very well, and had often seen it drawing a cart, but it seemed to have become too fond of wandering, and had to be restrained. I walked along to it very boldly, observed it biting the grass as I would have eaten a cake, and then made it raise its head. It was impossible for me to know what it thought of my deed, but I recall clearly what I thought of it. I had an idea that I could make the animal move backward and forward as its master was seen to do. It refused however, and I tried a little force by tugging at its chain. I wanted to make it move round the peg backwards and thus liberate itself, but our ideas about that were poles apart, for when I raised my arm to push, the horse turned and snapped at my forearm. I was frightened as a small child, and turned away in fear of what could be worse. I turned away therefore to continue my homeward journey, have my dinner, and come back to school. Little did I suspect that something serious had happened when I crossed the brook and climbed the hill. But I felt a little irritation in my arm as I looked down to the wood from the top; and knowing the horse had snapped at me, I proceeded to remove my coat, and pull up the sleeve of my shirt to find an explanation. It was a moment of discovery, but not at all comforting; indeed,

I was horrified, for the animal's teeth had pinched my coat so tightly that the skin of my arm was bitten right through, and the strange thing about it was there were only a few drops of blood. I stood with my gaze fixed upon the wound, not knowing what to do or say. Then I thought of my mother, and commenced to run. I know that mothers have to be prepared for all kinds of situations that are caused by the children, but my mother was not prepared to deal with that, so she fastened a bandage round the arm, gave me food to eat on the way, and set off to find Dr Worger's surgery in Radstock, a mile distant. I recall him most vividly, and the way he wore his glasses on the tip of his nose. By that time the piece of skin that was cut had curled and shrunk, and the doctor's problem was to find a way to stretch it back to cover the normal area, stitch it in position, and get the edges to heal. If I remember correctly, the doctor rubbed a caustic substance over the place that caused a sensation of burning, and then went on to put in nine stitches, Then, binding a bandage round my arm, he told mother to bring me again. So far so good. But the doctor was not sure how effective the healing would be, and I was warned that a piece of skin from another part of my body may have to be grafted on to the place, and I did not like the thought of that.

And so the days went by, and he examined the wound to see what progress was being made in healing, until he observed that some was healing and some was not, and the latter was cut off. It was fortunate for me that a thin skin formed over the wound to make a skin-graft unnecessary.

The stitches were ultimately removed, and we all felt assured the wound had healed. I have borne the mark of that bite for over eighty years, and marks of the stitches may still be seen. It was definitely a case of 'a horse's bite being worse than its bark'.

The same wood awakens the memory of an incident that meant much to people who lived in a cottage on the outskirts. It occurred one evening when it was very dark, and when children were expected to be in bed, but for some reason one little girl was not. I am unaware of what the reason



was. The child may have been in the home of a neighbour, or with one of her little friends, but she had not returned to her home when darkness fell. Calls were made at homes where she may be found, but in vain. Then it was thought she may have gone into the wood, and being unable to find a way out, she had sat on the ground and fallen asleep. The mother went into the wood to extend the search for her at a time when I was out of doors up on the hillside near to my home, and I recall how quiet and dark it was when her voice pierced the air, and rose to where I was standing. It was obvious to me it was a mother's voice, for there was a tone of distress in it as she cried, 'Mary!' and waited for a reply. There was no child's voice however, and the cry advanced towards the boundary of the wood and returned to its starting point. Finally darkness and silence covered all as before. That mother's cry did not pierce the atmosphere only, but my heart too, and it is one of the most poignant that made a condition in my memory.

The chief thought which these recollections suggest may be that we as children were capable of doing almost anything if we were satisfied it would give a little pleasure, or supply fun in some form. We lacked the means for fun making, so we had to use any opportunity that was offered by circumstances; and they were most helpful sometimes. We liked riding the farmer's horses, and were not averse to a little bare back riding. Indeed, we hoped to get into the saddle one day, or do a little jumping. Our legs were short, but we were able to press our knees against the sides of a horse, and keep ourselves steady. A horse's back is very different from that of a cow that is broad, and the animal is not disciplined to carry a rider. However we were able to compare the backs of the two animals, and were secretly willing to have a go on the back of a cow. And an opportunity presented itself when we were in a field that sloped with the hillside, for a cow was resting on the ground, chewing the cud after having made a meal of grass, she remained undisturbed as we passed, which caused us to feel she was a quiet animal. We turned back therefore, crept to her rear end cautiously, and

one of the smaller boys climbed on to her back. It did not occur to us that she had not given her permission for that to be done, and was very adverse to such a thing; indeed, she decided she would not tolerate it, got up on her front feet, then her rear, and shooting out her tail, she commenced to run down the field. But the young jockey was equal to the emergency, holding on until the animal slowed down to a stop. There had been much caution in getting on to her back, but there was none in getting off, and the experience was so uncomfortable and discouraging that it was never attempted again.

We were soon big enough to ride a hard-tyred bicycle, but having one each was out of the question, so we put our pennies together and raised the sum of one shilling. And that was not an insignificant sum of money at that time, and much could be done with it. Even so, one could not buy a new bicycle. But there was always the second-hand shop to be explored, and a real bargain might be obtained. The pneumatic machine was rare, the cushion tyre was in general use, and the hard-tyre cycle was being superseded after giving much service. We thought therefore that we may be fortunate enough to get a hard-tyre machine with our limited capital; and in time were successful in obtaining one that bore many signs of wear and tear. It was obvious it had been out in many storms, and had been treated most unsympathetically, but it was intact, and in running order; and we were as pleased with that old machine as people are today with a Rolls Royce or Daimler. We could be trusted to take great care of it. It was a first reaction, but we soon revealed a lack of good sense in our use of it, and put it to tests that were almost beyond its ability to bear; and it meant that one day, being more thoughtless than usual, we ended the career of a machine in which we had invested all of our capital. And it happened in the same field where a boy had ridden on the back of a cow, for we had taken the machine to the top of the hill, where, after mentally marking our the course for a ride across the slope of the hill, a boy mounted the saddle, another stood on the rear spindle, another on the front, and all

moved away slowly. I did not know anything about momentum at that time, but I know today that an object develops thrust after it is set in motion, and it was so in the case of our bicycle that went faster, and faster, so that it could not be restrained by the brake. The front wheel was pressed into the ground by the weight, especially where the turf was soft, and one jerk followed another until the machine could stand it no longer, and gave expression to its protest by breaking its front forks. That meant all riders being thrown to the ground, and sent rolling over and over on the grass; and it was a little time before either of us recovered from the shock of it. We were fortunate in not having any bones broken; but we were unable to laugh very much, in fact we almost cried when we examined the machine, for it would never be ridden again. We picked it up as best we could, and carried it home with heavy hearts and many regrets. It might have been fortunate for us that things happened as they did, for the machine might have gained a far greater speed, and ended in more serious disaster.

It was not until some time later that the pneumatic-tyred bicycle came into general use, and my older brother who earned wages was able to buy one for his own use. I looked at it with great admiration, and sometimes got it out when he was away from home, leaned on the saddle, and rode down a short slope at the side of the house. The ride was short but I liked the effect of it, and hoped that one day I would have an opportunity to ride it along the road. The hope changed in time to strong desire, and later still into a resolve that I would if necessary take the machine by stealth to have my first ride on that type of cycle. It meant that I waited for some weeks before an opportunity arrived, for my brother decided to go to South Wales for a holiday with his cousin. An arrangement was made for both to meet, ride to Bath in a horse and trap to catch a train, thus leaving me free to have a pleasant ride. The morning of his departure arrived, packing was finished, and away he went to find rest and pleasure in new surroundings. I must have waited for an hour after his departure to assure myself that he was

out of the district, when I went to the house where the cycle was kept, and, unseen by my parents, got it out, looked at it admiringly, and walked away along the garden path towards the road. I had no difficulty in mounting it, and although the front wheel wobbled a bit at first, I soon reached the main road at the top of the hill. I did not feel absolutely certain, even then, that my brother would be out of the district on his way to the city, and so as a precaution, I decided to take a route he was not expected to use. I had not considered the driver of the horse and what preferences he may have, and there could be a great difference between what I thought and what he did. Actually, the lane I selected and wrote off was the route he chose to take as a short cut, and unknown to me the events of the morning were moving towards a confrontation. I was enjoying the ride immensely when I looked up and saw the horse and trap approaching. The cycle thus became an embarrassment for I could not abandon it to hide until the travellers passed. The track was narrow, and the inevitable thing for me to do was to go right on, and passing very close to the trap. I could not escape my brother's gaze, and he must have recognised the machine as his. Thus my little balloon burst, all the pleasure of riding vanished, and I must prepare to receive a censure from my brother when he returned from his holiday. And so the little boy who set out with a feeling of elation came home dejected, and with an assurance that a day of reckoning would come; but strange as it may seem, my brother saw me from the trap but failed to recognise the machine I was riding, and no reference to the incident was ever made.

I must have been a nice little fellow in my age of innocence. My face was attractive, and something in my behaviour must have commended me. Whatever it was, I had made a good impression on the farmer's widow, who felt she could trust me with a most important undertaking; for she had friends in Bath who were well-to-do, and they thought it would be nice for their little girl to spend a week at the farm. She duly arrived in a dog-cart that had been sent to the station to meet her, and was finally given a friendly reception by mother and daughters. It was a

good beginning but not altogether what the young visitor wanted, for she was a child, and wanted the company of other children. So one day my mother dressed me in my best suit of clothes, put my collar on, and sent me to the farm to be told I was wanted to take the girl into the fields to pick flowers, and see the animals and birds. I confess that I felt a little embarrassed at first for the girl was a little 'Miss', and I was a country boy, but my mother had committed me, and I must behave in a way that was likely to increase the goodwill of the farmer's widow for my mother. Thus little Miss Aristocrat and I set off to explore and enjoy, and return possibly with a great story to relate. Everything was pleasant for a time, and we did all that was expected of us until I realised she did not belong to my class. There was something different in her speech and behaviour, and the question arose, 'Can two walk together except they are agreed'? I had a feeling they could not, and my relation to her commenced to change until I had no more desire for her company. There was however a problem that arose from devising some pretext or means for bring<sup>ing</sup> about our separation. But I did not have to wait for long, for we arrived at a place where she became detached for a moment or two, and I acted quickly, to leave her to find her way back to the farm as best she could. It may be thought that I was very unkind, and lacking in chivalry, but it was the result of a natural reaction of one child to another. I did not see her again, and now I suppose she is an old lady; but the incident provided me with a vivid memory which I will never forget. I visited the place a few years ago, and as I stood on the exact spot where the decision was made, I said to myself, 'Ah, it was here that I left a young lady to her fate'.

The wood in which I was bitten by the horse lay across the narrow valley from the scene where this event took place, and as I revisit it in memory I recall a situation that was much more serious. The wood was bordered by a railway at the lower end, and a footpath led across the wood at the side of the track to enter a field that extended to the slope of the hill. Part of it was level with the wood, but as it contin-

ed it reached the top of a steep slope near a stile. I suppose thousands of people walked along that path to and from the town without any difficulty or risk, but there is usually an exception, and on the occasion which I recall it was a woman named Emm who was returning after doing her shopping, to her home about three quarters of a mile away. I suppose I was too young to express an opinion about her condition, but I saw enough to persuade me that she had visited an inn before setting out for home. It was thought at the time that a little alcoholic drink provided stimulus for the journey. But whatever the determining factor might have been, it was a fact that when she reached ~~the~~ the path at the top of the slope she stepped on the edge, fell over, and rolled to the bottom. She was there when I arrived on the scene, when it soon became obvious to me that the movement of her leg indicated a compound fracture below the knee. She moved from side to side, and raised her knee, while her grown-up son knelt beside her sobbing as though he were my age. I watched them for a time from the top of the slope, and wondered what would be done; but I was not kept in suspense very long, for four men came down the hill carrying a hurdle (a rectangular wooden frame used in making pens for sheep) which they had obtained at the farm. They laid it on the ground beside the injured woman, picked her up and laid her on it, then took up the hurdle by the corners, and walked away towards her home. There was no first-aid for her, and her bones remained unsecured until a doctor reached her home and put the leg in splints. She lived in a cottage opposite the place where the horse kicked the little boy to whom reference has been made.

I wish that her's had been the only case of fracture that I became acquainted with but it was not. Conditions change in many ways, and incidents vary in form and character, but people have broken their bones at all times, and suffered much as a result. My father did dangerous work but he never had a fractured bone. Mother was less fortunate for she broke her leg at a place where danger was entirely absent. It happened one Saturday evening when she was setting out for town where

she could buy a few things at the market. She went down the garden path, and over a stile into a field, and was about to take the path that led through it when she stepped on the turf at the edge, slipped and fell, thus sustaining a fractured leg. I had gone to town earlier in the evening, and did not hear about the accident until I was returning home. Needless to say, I was shocked when I heard the news, and hastened home as fast as I could to find that a bedstead had been set up downstairs, and mother was in<sup>bed</sup>. A doctor had been and set the bone, secured it in the right position, and left. I was thankful I had not seen what took place at the time and place of the accident, especially see the men carry her home, for it would have remained a painful memory until now. As things were, we were in a predicament as a family of five. Father must go out to earn wages; and I think two brothers were working. There was only a sister older than myself to help with the work, and, apart from the help of neighbours she would have to be a little mother to us all. And she did the work very well for a girl her age, but I recall a day when she brokedown and cried, for she could not push the needle through the material in father's working trousers to repair them. They were made of fustain, and sewing required strong fingers; and a small girl did not have them. It meant that paper had to be spread upon the bed on which mother lay, and the dirty trousers placed there for her to mend for father's use the next morning.

It is interesting to recall that my sister once entered an orchard on her way home from school, and farmer Pickford made mother pay him 2/6 for a few apples that were left on the ground.

I am unable to recall any more from the time when Mother became a bed patient, but I know it was a blessing to us all when she became able to resume her normal duties in our little cottage.

Some of my experiences were most amusing, and we sought that by every means we could think of. I remember the apples that grew in the orchard near the farm-house, and we had to pass it on our way to school, hence it was natural that we wanted to get through the hedge to pick

the fruit to augment our breakfast and dinner. Nothing ever happened to us except that a bedroom window would sometimes open, and the farmer's widow would shout, 'Hi you boys!' when we ran away down the hill. It actually emboldened rather than intimidated us until we moved with complete freedom about the orchard, and regarded the trees as though they were our property. There was a nice pear tree also that grew on the side of the house, and was fastened with spikes. The number of pears was exceptional one year, which made us feel we were entitled to some of them when they were ready for picking. So we crept under the low wall at the side of the house one day, climbed over it, and began to go up the tree. Other boys decided to pick from the lower branches while I reached for the higher; and we were doing very well until a window opened, and the farmer's wife leaned out and shouted to us. We had to do some quick thinking, but we were soon over the low wall and out of sight. She was very lenient towards us at all times, and we liked her for it, and the most drastic thing she did was to send a collection of apples to our homes as evidence of what we were doing. But, in looking back over the years as I do now, I incline to think of those thefts of apples as part payment for mother's work at the farm, where she worked a full day for a pound of fresh butter.

I remember too that we could cause much annoyance to people when we tried to make fun for ourselves. One of our tricks was to fasten a button to the end of a long piece of cotton, fix it to a window frame with a pin, and move away the length of the cotton to pull it and let it go, thus making taps on the window. There was one case in particular where an elderly man named Hobbs lived alone in a house adjoining a field. We decided therefore that we would have a bit of fun with him, and went to his window quietly after darkness had fallen, to fix the button in position, but, in doing so, we allowed it to strike the glass too soon. The man heard it, and exclaimed, 'What, cockroaches!' but all became silent as death. Then we did the job properly, and retreated into the field to pull the cotton and wait. We saw the man rise from his chair, come to



the window and draw the curtain aside, but he was unable to detect any cause for what he had heard. Thus he stood for a moment or two and went back to his chair. Finally we tapped again when the man suspected human action, and came out into the field to find out who was there, but the pin that held the button in position was drawn out, and the boys scampered away into the darkness and safety.

Climbing the pear tree against the farmer's house was possible because we were expert in climbing trees that grew on the side of the hill. They consisted mostly of elms, and each of them was an invitation to our ability to climb it; and we often went up branch by branch until the top was reached. If the distance between branches was too great for reaching we threw a rope and pulled ourselves higher, and finally reached the top in that way. The operation was hard and risky, but I have always been thankful we did it, for it gave birth to the idea of climbing, and induced a will-power to persist until the task was completed; and it proved a great help to me in after life. There was one occasion when I climbed a tree, when there was something more than the thought of climbing, for I had been walking alone at the time when I observed a homing pigeon flying towards the tree. I could tell by the wing movements that it was tired, and wanted to find a place to rest before flying off in the morning. It would be feeling renewed then, and would be able to find a little food, and resume its journey to its home loft. I understood the psychology of the pigeon's mind to an extent, and I thought I would be able to catch the bird if I used a little guile. My brother would be glad to have it in his loft.

It was late in the evening when I commenced to climb to climb the tree to locate the position of the bird, and I went from one branch to another very stealthily until I was able to see it. The bird was alert to my approach from below, so I waited patiently for it to turn its attention away; and kept it under observation until its eyes closed and reopened. They then closed a little longer, and I crept to a higher branch without disturbing it. I next made a rough estimate of the distance

between me and the bird to make sure that I could reach it, and satisfying myself that I could grasp it, <sup>I</sup> and waited until it was too tired to open its eyes again. I was kept alert for the pigeon opened its eyes occasionally to close them again. And I suppose I waited in that very uncomfortable position for more than an hour when I thought the time for decisive action had arrived, and all that remained for me to do was to grasp the prize. My hand went out as fast as a flash of lightning, but not quite fast enough, for the bird flew off as soon as it felt the touch of my fingers. I don't know what happened to it, but it was gone, and all that remained for me to do was to come down the tree and go home. How often since then have I recalled that familiar proverb, 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush'.

A short distance from where the tree grew was a rubbish dump that was made at the Braysdown Colliery, and we and other boys were fond of climbing to the top of it. It was an artificial hill upon the top of a natural one that enabled us to have a fine view of the landscape as it extended from east to west. And I remember climbing up one day with <sup>the</sup> <sub>a</sub> small boy who was kicked by the horse referred to earlier, whose father had served with the British Forces in India. All soldiers who have retired from active service have stories to tell, and this boy's father was no exception, for he spoke much about the fighting that had taken place in India, and in which he had taken part. We stood together on the top of the rubbish tip as he repeated some of those stories, then looking away to a distant wood in the east he pointed it out and said, 'There is India'. I looked also, and even believed he was telling the truth. I recall my late father telling me on one occasion that the Queen was his aunt and I believed him. There were hayricks in a field adjoining the wood, and, pointing to them, the boy said, 'They are the houses in which the Indians lived.' So the idea was planted firmly in my mind that India could be seen from the spot where we were standing on the rubbish dump. How small the world can be to the mind and imagination of a child!

Again, I must have been very young when I first saw a balloon in the sky. It was not a common sight in those days, and when one was observed it invariably raised the question, 'Is anyone in it'. I had an excellent view of a balloon with passengers one afternoon when I was sitting at the side of a brook, for it descended close to the ground, returned to a <sup>g</sup> <sub>^</sub> altitude, and floated away towards the south. The balloon and penny-farthing bicycle had not quite gone out of use, and no motor-car had yet made its appearance on the roads in our district. It was the Victorian era drawing to its close.

Younger people may sometimes wonder how the old folk managed to exist on such a low income, but there was no mystery about it to us. Prices were low, and spending was influenced by the fact that standards were lower, and home life was more self-dependent. It is always possible to use a higher income by purchasing more things until all the money has gone, and well-to-do people and the poor have no cash at the end of the week. Poor people have an advantage in many cases.

How did my late mother manage on low wages? In the first place she was able to pay when she had the cash, and was not obliged to put cash on the counter for what she bought in the form of groceries. She always paid as cash became available. It was impossible for example to put cash on the counter for a pair of shoes, or a suit of clothes, or article of furniture. Rent was two shillings and six pence a week. There were a large number of fruit trees in the garden from which fruit was gathered, and sold for making jam. Pigs were sold when mother would get a new dress and settle accounts. Enough vegetables were grown to keep the family a whole year. Meals were determined mostly by mother who was quite an expert in her sphere. She baked six large loaves every Friday, and a large current cake in a tin; and that had to last for a week. If any stale bread was left it was soaked and currents mixed in it, made into a pudding that was boiled, or baked. Some flour was used to make suet puddings that were boiled in a saucepan. Any meat or bones that were left were put in a saucepan with suet dumplings to make a substan-

tial meal for all the family. Rice was boiled, and eaten with milk and sugar, or baked in the oven. Potatoes were sometimes ~~baked~~<sup>boiled</sup> into flour and made into a cake. Pea-soup with pieces of bread was very acceptable, especially in cold weather. Salt butter was cheap, and bread and cheese made a good supper. There was also bacon for the frying-pan, and eggs from the hens' house in the garden. My parents never bought anything from a baker's shop, and no tinned foods. The standard diet was low but it produced strong and healthy families who enjoyed their meals, and felt they had little to complain about when a good meal was placed on the table. There was always home-made jam in the safe, and usually some home-made parsnip wine was available for a little treat. We depended completely on what mother made, and she did her work well. We also owed much of our comfort in dress to her and the way she could use her needle. I was becoming a big boy when she bought a sewing-machine, but she did all the sewing by hand before that time. She was good in doing repairs, and no objection was raised to her patches. She was skilful also in altering a garment that had been worn by an older child so that it may be worn by a younger, thus ensuring more wear until the point of non utility was reached. We were unable to follow fashion or style; and nothing useful was ever thrown away. It is obvious therefore that more was done with money than is the case today. Use rather than possession prompted spending, and people were unable to discard things at will as is the case when money is plentiful. To really understand how poor people lived at the close of the Victorian era on such low incomes one must know the conditions and the kind of people who were affected by them, and when that is done it leads to the discovery of a different world; and in most cases to a different type of person who did the spending. My late parents were poor, but they always contrived to put meals on the table, and empty dishes usually followed a repast.

It may be asked how country children used their spare time during such a period, and how they amused themselves. There was no cinema for us. We were unable to buy things that were essential for games, not even

a ball. There was a magic lantern in which slides were placed to throw pictures on a screen, and entertainment at the chapels. What could children do to obtain a little pleasure? The reply is that it depends on the children; and we had fertile minds for some things; and were able to provide our own forms of amusement, For example, we practiced archery, but we could not buy bows and arrows. We went to a hazel bush, and cut a stick, bent it by drawing its ends with string, which gave us a bow. It was only necessary for us to cut short straight sticks from the same kind of bush, and we had the thing we wanted. Any kind of object was set up for a target, and we shot away to make ourselves very jubilant. We cut larger sticks sometimes; and a longer one for a cross-piece, and set up a frame for jumping. It was good fun, but it often meant our mothers had to darn holes in our stockings. Again, we found much pleasure in flying the kite. A hazel stick was bent until its ends were joined. Then a central stick was fixed for a rib, the frame was covered with paper, a tail was made by tying pieces of paper into a long piece of string ~~to~~ for a balance, and the kite was ready to take the air. All that was needed was a ball of string and reel for winding, and a fair breeze. Thus we went into a field and held the kite up until it was blown away by the air current. We stood with fixed gaze, and not a little enraptured.

Another game that gave us much pleasure was called 'Kick out the tin'. A circle of stones was made on the ground, and any kind of tin was placed at the centre. One boy was left to watch, and asked to turn his face away while other boys disappeared into a thorn hedge. The game was for the boy who was on the watch to walk to and fro in an effort to discover those who were concealed, and call out the name if a boy were seen. He would then come out of hiding. On the other hand the boys in the hedge waited for an opportunity to run out when the watcher's face was turned away, and kick the tin out of the ring, thus freeing all the boys who had been called out, and allow them to hide in the hedge again. If all were called out the first one out had to take his turn as watcher

It was an exciting game, but it often meant torn clothes for our mothers to mend, and we had a good scolding when we went home.

We also played games such as rounders, cricket, tip-cat, and others. The games of the girls were not so varied. They liked to play hop-scotch, skip, make houses with small stones for walls where they pretended to do things that mother did at home. Time fails me to tell of the fun we had in the barn near the farm-house, and in the hay and harvest fields.

Again, we were very interested in Nature as children, and much of our pleasure was derived from it. We observed the appearance of leaves very carefully, especially on the violet plant, which told us that white scented blossoms were on the way. We went to the plants again and again hoping to find a bud; and sometimes we were fortunate, and bore it home in triumph where it was placed in water. Violet buds were encouraged to open out in that way, and every one of them was a precious find and possession. We gathered more as their numbers increased, and came home with our pockets full of them. We would walk half a mile to where they grew so that every Spring brought us floral gifts. We searched along banks, among bushes, under trees, and all the time we were as happy as children can be. We liked primroses too, especially when they first appeared; but we enjoyed seeing rather than picking them for banks could be yellow with them. Cowslips grew all over certain fields, and came later, but their appearance was always a call to us to come out and gather. I missed the violets and primroses when I lived in Devon and Cornwall, and when I returned to the home district when my work was done I proceeded at once to gather roots for planting in the garden. They all seem to like being there, for I have lovely blossoms under the window where I now look but do not pick.

Bird nesting was good fun too, and we must have walked miles in search of nests, and trying to defeat the birds' efforts to conceal their work. We knew them all and the kind of nest they built. Those of rooks were our first interest, for it was a pleasure to see them return to the old ones, caw at each other, and fight for possession. Swallows

were given a great welcome as they returned to their former nests and commenced to repair them, or build new ones. Thrushes and blackbirds remained through the winter, and whistled lovely tunes when Spring arrived. Skylarks were as interesting to us as they had been to Shelley, and it was a great pleasure to lie on the grass and listen to them singing high in the sky, and out of sight, and then dropping down to rest in the grass. We used to search for their nests but they were concealed very skilfully and hard to find. I recall one occasion when I was searching for a nest in the grass when I found a rabbit sleeping very snugly, and unaware of any enemy. I looked at it for a few moments, then stooped to pick it up thinking it may like to be fondled, but I was wrong, for it struggled so violently that I let it drop, when it ran to a hedge as fast as its legs would carry it. I suppose I should have killed it, and asked my mother to put it in a saucepan with dumplings, but I could not. I was out walking in Cornwall many years after that when a fully grown hare overtook me on the opposite side of the road. It seemed a little dazed, and went under a small heap of thorns for shelter. I might have killed that but I would not, and left it to enjoy its life so long as it was able. I related the incident to an old lady the next day, and she said, 'Why didn't you kill it and bring it to me. I love jugged hare!' I never have been fond of taking life, and always feel a little sad when I see the body of a bird that was killed by a passing car. One of the pleasures of bird nesting is to discover the nest, for some can be cleverly hidden in ivy or long grass, or green plants on a bank. Some are put in a position in a thorn bush that gives a maximum protection against enemies. Some are wonderful constructions, as is the hiding place of the spider as it watches its extended network of web and line. We observed the stages in the building of nests, were made excited as the number of eggs increased, and followed the growth of the young with absorbing interest. We took them out during the later stages to fondle them as though they were pets; indeed, Nature provided an aviary for us for we could not visit the collections of birds in the cities. Some

birds flew, others swam in the brook and the pond; and some of them did both. They were all members of our large aviary. But all birds did not respond in a friendly way, for I recall an occasion when I climbed a tree and put my hand into a hole where an owl's nest was suspected, and I was bitten severely. Its hoot was evidently more congenial than its bite.

I was unfortunate in that no books were available to give me information about Nature. Ours' was a house without books. My father never held a book in his hands, and mother read the Bible only. I was successful in getting a few prizes that consisted only of JACK AND HIS OSTRICH, THE CRUCIFIXION OF PHILIP STRONG, and JOHN HARRIES the Cornish poet. They formed my library at the age of eight. My father took a weekly paper that contained a serial story about STRONGDOLD THE GLADIATOR which I read regularly. The books were scarcely enough to give a child an introduction to literature; indeed, more attention was given to the thought of work than to books at that time, and valuable time was allowed to pass unused. I liked going to school, and took an interest in lessons. I 'ran away' from school one afternoon, and then I spent the time in a small brickyard where I learned how bricks were made from clay, and heated in ovens. It is not surprising therefore that, when I left school at the age of twelve, I could say I had not been educated anywhere, or in anything. It was a pity for I liked the books I had. I enjoyed reading about Jack's rides on his ostrich across the veldt in Africa. The realism of Philip Strong's struggle with mill owners and strikers stirred my whole being. The story of John Harris's life, and extracts from his poems made an impression that was never lost. There were enduring pictures in some of his verses. For example,

Hail to thy opening eye,  
 Thou little lovely flower. The first that cometh bless  
 The first that cometh blossoming  
 Within my English bower.  
 A thousand griefs are past.  
 A thousand tears are shed.  
 Since on this bank I saw thee last  
 Lift up thy yellow head.



Again.           When toiling in the darksome mine,  
 As tired as tired could be,  
 How has the glad thought cheered my soul  
 My children watch for me.  
 And as I op'ed the garden gate  
 Which led into the lane,  
 How danced my heart to see once more  
 The faces at the pane.

Again,           A voice seemed sounding on the hill,  
 And whispering through the briar,  
 Climb, Davie, climb, the way is free  
 To higher things and higher.

These are interesting recollections to me, but although I liked reading, it was not until I was half way through the 'teen years that I began to have access to books to commence serious study.

The horse was very prominent in common life when I was a child, and was used extensively for such work as had to be done. Men rode on horse-back when making a journey. The horse-and-trap with four passengers were frequently observed on the road. Ploughing was done by horses, and farm waggons of all kinds were drawn by them. Well groomed animals with polished harness drew the carriages of the wealthy, and whereas today people use the motor-coach for pleasure trips, large brakes were then in general use that were drawn by two or four horses. Thus it was that when the officers at the Sunday School decided to give the scholars an outing to Cheddar and Wells they arranged for two and four horsed brakes to take us. It was an event of much importance, and we were thrilled by the prospect of it. We had to meet the brakes in the centre of the town about a mile away, where we climbed steps to seats that faced each other in rows. We wore our best clothes, took a supply of provisions, and when all was ready, the driver cracked his whip and we were off at a trot. It was not for long however for a steep hill lay before us, and speed was reduced to a walking pace. Things were different at the top of the hill for we were able to proceed leisurely into what was the far west to our minds. We reached the Mendip Hills where the horses were rested, and we left the brakes to take a little refreshment, and then resume the journey. The slow rate of travel enabled us to have a good view of objects of interest, to talk, and sometimes to sing. We settled down to

down to enjoy the journey , and not merely to reach the end as soon as possible. Singing consisted mostly of hymns, but sometimes we sang, Wimbledon to Wombleton is seventeen miles, which was repeated ad infinitum. All looked forward to reaching the crest of the Mendips where the road begins to descend down a winding course, cutting ever deeper into the rocks until it enters the famous Cheddar Gorge where rocky sides stand up for hundreds of feet. It was awe inspiring, for a huge boulder might have broken away at many points to fall and kill us all. It never did however, and we finally drew up at the village inn, and were free to walk where we wished to do. It was usually strawberry time when the trip was made, and when the berries were as delicious as anything can be. We entered Gough's caves, walked back through the gorge, and climbed to the top where we had an extensive view of the moor and beyond. Thus we enjoyed ourselves going from place to place until we returned to the brakes, and followed a road that ran under the Mendips to the city of Wells where we had tea.

Two things in Wells interested me most. One of them was the Bishop's Palace with its moat and swans, and the other was the Cathedral. All stood gazing up at the west front with its ladders and ascending and descending angels, and venerable figures standing under canopies set in niches. But we were interested most of all in a striking clock inside the Cathedral that presented a little tournament each time it struck the hour.

Time passed all too quickly, and we made our way to the brakes once more, and began the long climb up the western slope of the Mendips. I have done that many times since then, but with a difference, for a car ignores the bottom of the hill and goes on without delay, but the brake stopped for those to get out who could walk. We did not like it very much for our legs were getting tired; and the climb could be monotonous. That however did not necessarily follow in the case of boys, who could devise means for breaking up any monotony to substitute a thrill. It occurred on one occasion I recall when we were nearing the top of the

when we came alongside a field where turnips were growing, and a few of us got over the wall and pulled one each. They were nice for hungry boys who were very pleased to have them. We climbed into the brakes again as we reached the top of the hill, and went on comfortably and slowly to the place where we assembled in the morning. All felt they had had a pleasant ride and an enjoyable day as we separated for the mile walk to our homes. Travelling by motor-coach is very different, and longer distances are covered, but the total effect may not be greater. The old means of locomotion ought not to be despised, for our happiness was as real to us at that time as any happiness has been in the new age.

I have referred to my interest in homing pigeons in the story of my attempt to catch one of them in a tree, and it was one of those interests that advance with one's childhood. My oldest brother kept a loft, and his birds were a major interest to him. They interested me from my childhood, and I followed their life from the time they left the egg. But the most lively interest commenced when they reached the flying stage, when I could take them a few yards away, hold them up as high as I could, and watch them fly to the loft. It was not difficult for them to do it if they could see their objective, and after a little practice they could fly to the top of the house where we lived. They were able to join the others after that in making circuits round the cottage. It was all so simple, but little did we realise what a wonderful creature the bird was. When I held it in my hand there was a resemblance between it and myself in that we were both endowed with powers which wise men do not understand even today, for common as the homing pigeon was no one knew how it found its way over hundreds of miles to its loft. The distance between the point of liberation and the loft may be made up of land or sea, but they were expected to arrive at an appointed time when conditions were normal. I have known birds that could find their way across a hundred miles in any direction. It was a practice to build up to a long distance flight, and it was where we played a part as children. We put a few birds in a basket, and set them free a short distance away, Then

we took them further on another day; and it was repeated until the birds could fly a mile on their own to the loft. They were taken two miles when a bicycle became available; and the distance was increased to four miles. They were next despatched by train; and a time arrived when they were put on the train in the evening to be liberated in the North of England, and even in Scotland. Our interest in them increased after the time of their liberation, and we looked up to the sky frequently to see the bird that arrived first. Some of them flew high, and dived to their loft like a falling stone. Some flew low to come in over the trees. Some rested on the top of the house. Others went straight into the loft. The long flights were most interesting, and we were very proud of the birds.

We were interested in other racing pigeons also for North Country clubs sent birds to the South as far as France. They grouped themselves during their flight, and followed each other as though all the birds in a basket were keeping together. We lived on the north side of a wide valley, and it was possible to see them come over the opposite hill to pass over a width of our hill-top about a quarter of a mile <sup>long</sup> wide. We were fascinated by the sight of them, for we thought of each bird, and of what may be taking place in its head, for all of them appeared to know where they were going, and would not be diverted.

I heard a man on television try to explain this strange action, and he thought birds gathered much information about the country during flights around their lofts. He said that birds had been known to fly over an area twenty miles in diameter, but it was evident he did not know very much about pigeons, for I never knew such a thing happen in the case of my brother's birds. There is a more reliable clue, I think, the presence of a high tower on the ridge of the hill on the opposite side of the valley, and the fact that those racing birds passed it on their way to the North and the Midlands was a sign they used for guidance, and it was a case of an inner urge prompting them to fly from one landmark to another. A long distance flight was not arranged

without preparation for it would seem to invite failure. Owners proceeded by stages which gave the birds a chance to select 'Guide posts' on the land. It was always sad to see pigeons that were unable to keep in line with others, or that had been longer in getting away, or had lost their way. They were weary and hungry; and many of them were willing to join my brother's birds, and be tempted into a trap with a little food. Many of them stayed with us after their liberation, while some gave an impression they were at home until one day they stretched their wings, and disappeared for ever, after flying round a few times.

There was a red letter day at Whitsuntide that was set aside for the Sunday School treat. It was only a small school, but the officers arranged for ~~us~~ some of the money at least to pay for the expense of the tea, so they arranged an itinerary through the district, where we sang, and a house-to-house collection was made. We introduced ourselves by singing :-

Another year has passed away.  
 Time swiftly speeds along.  
 We come again to praise and pray,  
 And sing our festal song.  
     We come, we come.  
     We come with songs to greet you. etc.

The singing must have been poor although we were helped by a few men. There was no instrument, but men knew how to pitch the tune. The collecting was done by my uncle. The itinerary followed the same route each year, and our little legs ached as our stomachs became empty. There was one bright spot however, for when we reached the top of a hill on the return journey we sang at a farmhouse where milk was given to us. It was lovely to our tender lips, and I remember the sensation of drinking it even today; and having been refreshed, we made our way to a field near the chapel to have a good tea. All the fatigue vanished then, and we became as fresh as young rabbits. Arrangements were made for children and adults to spend the evening in the field where we shared a common delight. There was no band to entertain us, but I recall one occasion when we had a single violin. There was no dancing, but much running

about. My allowance of sweets at home was then three mint shrimps on Sunday mornings, that were bought in the market the previous evening for one penny a quarter pound, hence it was no wonder that I was excited when my uncle threw nuts and sweets into the field for us to 'scramble' for them; and I did not object to a little 'scrambling' for biscuits, especially if they had sugar on them. There were no races, but we were able to enjoy the activities of older people. There was a game in which an adult was blindfolded, and told to wheel a barrow between two sticks that were pushed in the ground. Some of them had no sense of direction, and walked straight away from the sticks to the amusement of all who were watching. It was amusing also to see the expression on the face of a person when the blindfold was removed.

Another popular game was 'bachelor' in which males and females, formed a double column with a 'bachelor' at its head. When he clapped his hands the couple at the rear of the column advanced along the sides, <sup>and</sup> tried to run past him to re-unite beyond. His business was to catch the lady, and if he was successful they took up a position at the head of the column, and the former partner did the clapping. Again, there was much excitement when the chase was on, but that was not easy for the ladies whose dress dragged along the ground, and often had to be held up when walking to keep them above the dirt or mud. Ladies running was like walking against the sides of a bag that enclosed the legs.

An amusing diversion from that was to throw sticks at a wooden figure (named Sally) that had been stuck into the ground. The object appeared to be on loan for it was produced each year, driven into the ground a measured distance away, and sticks were thrown at it. The poor creature suffered much battering but always turned up smiling. There were swings for the children, but we were not interested ~~in~~ very much for we had our own at home where we swang from the branches of trees.

They were some of the things that kept the little company in motion, and when people felt the need for a rest, a fiddler was present to play a merry tune. It was almost like being on a Village Green in the Middle

Ages except we did not have plays and dancing. My walks take me past the same field now and then, but only the trees remain. All the elderly people have gone, and the children now grown to their seventies are looking back to the past of long ago.

There is another recollection that calls for attention when a review of childhood is made, and it is the memorable nights when I commenced work. I took the school-leaving examination as soon as I was twelve years of age, passed it, and set off for my labour certificate that permitted me to work. It was not the first time when I did a little work, and received money for it. That was a few years earlier when I had to lead horses in the hay-waggons, and chanced to follow the workmen to the farm on Saturday evening when they drew their wages. We all stood in a building outside the door waiting to be called in and be paid in our turn. I stood with them until the last came out, when I entered trying to assume the air of a workman. I can see the farmer mentally even now, standing with his hands in his pockets, and moving coins with his fingers. He asked me what I wanted, and I explained that I had been leading the horses, and doing other things, and I would be glad to have my wages. He looked down at me, laughed, and probably admired my pluck, for he put a few pence in my hand, and I walked out as proud as a turkey cock; and I was not reluctant to talk about it when I reached my home. The case was different however when I arrived home with the labour certificate for it meant school days were over, and in a few hours I would be a twelve-year-old workman toiling for my daily bread.

It was arranged for me to work on the night shift at the coal mine at Writhlington where my father was employed, and my duty was to carry a box containing fuse and explosive for a fireman. I was dressed in a working suit and given a good supper, after which I set off down the hill to the top of the pit at 9 pm to work for a few shillings for a full week. The boy whom I was to succeed had commenced work at 7.30 pm which would be my time in the future. I waited at the side of a large fire with men who were on the night shift for a time until the fireman

and boy returned to the surface to enter a report. Then we were all supplied with five tallow candles, and after joining the other boys we followed the workmen down the pit. I thus took my first plunge into the earth while my brothers and sisters were cosy in their beds. I had a good supper before leaving home, but the sight of the other boys eating their food at the pit bottom made me feel hungry, so I opened my bag and ate what was intended for a meal much later in the night. Needless to say I was alert, and ready to explore the underworld, when the fireman came for us to follow him along a tunnel to the workings. There were two recesses cut into the side at one point where we rested to allow the men to settle down to their work, and the other boy and I sat in one of them, but the complete silence of the place soon caused me to feel tired. Then my eyes closed, and I was soon fast asleep. It was against the rule, but rules are no effective barriers to sleep in the case of a twelve year old lad at 10 pm. I cannot recall being reproved by the fireman for that lapse, for we resumed our journey later, and arrived finally at a place where men were tunnelling. Again, there was a space at the side of the track where I sat as the fireman talked to the men about their work, and I fell asleep again. It might have been serious for me that time for it was noticed only when some men were going to turn a waggon over on its side in the place where I lay, but I was so very tired at midnight. I did not sleep again but rather commenced to improve, so that I was feeling fresh when I left the pit about 4.30 AM. My father had made a good fire before I returned home, and left for work at the same pit, and I recall that I whistled as though it were midday. Mother came downstairs later, and I remember her saying she was pleased to realise that I was happy after my first shift, but she did not want me to wake everybody. I did not remain on the night shift for many months, for I was transferred to the day shift to work at the bottom of an incline where trams of coal were lowered by gravity as empties were drawn up. Another boy and I unfastened the full trams from the rope and replaced them with empties. Young men worked at the coal face at ~~the~~ that time, and wore



a rope around the body called a 'Gus' that was a piece of hemp with its ends tucked in, and had a short length of chain attached. There was an iron crook also so that a youth could go along on his hands and knees and pull like a horse, having the chain between his legs. It was a devilish thing to use, but lads regarded themselves as grown-ups if they wore it. So it happened one day that the other boy and I put on a 'gus' and hooked each of them to trams that were waiting to be drawn to the top of the incline. He sat on the floor behind the trams, and I stood in the front one with one leg over the side. Thus we pulled against each other; and then, without any warning, the trams began to move as they were pulled by full ones that were being pushed over the top of the incline. There was no time for decision, and the other boy was dragged along the floor, and I had my leg caught between the tram and the side of the tunnel. Fortunately the front tram was pulled off the rails, and the man at the top of the incline who operated a machine suspected something was wrong, and applied the brakes to prevent any further movement. We shouted at the top of our voices until men ran to see what had gone wrong, and then detached us from the empty trams. It was a miraculous escape for the other boy might have been crushed to death, and I might have lost my leg from the knee. The thought of it makes my nerves twitch, as do many other things that happened to me as I worked in the mine.

There is one other event that calls for a short reference, but it was my cousin and not I who was involved, and responsible for it. He had been able to buy guns with his pocket-money, and had an airgun in the first place, then one that fired short arrows, then a gun that fired pellets, and lastly a single-barrel shot gun. He fired at any living creature that was wild. But he was carrying the gun under his arm one day as he looked for a bird, when it went off accidentally and discharged a number of shots into the heel of his cousin who had come along from the town. His boot was taken off at once to reveal a bad wound. The lad

was very distressed, tried to replace the boot but was unable to do it; and so holding the boot in one hand, and stepping on the toe of the injured foot, he walked back to his home a half a mile away. I am happy to relate there was no permanent damage, and a good recovery was made. It seemed to me at that time to be little short of a tragedy, but in looking back as I do now, it presents a picture of childhood going out with a bang.

PART 2.

MYSELF IN THE  
'TEEN YEARS.

The change from school life to that of a wage earner is not a small one, and its results are by no means to be overlooked. It may be made easy, and even enjoyable, by the kind of work that is taken up, and it may lessen considerably the severe effect of what has to be done, but it has its own effect when the new conditions are wholly unrelated to experience as it has been linked to home and school, for it is well known that physical strength and energy may be the first and last need. School lessons may be ignored in such patterns as are required for work, and that is the pre-requisite for the pay packet.

I attended a Board School for a number of years before presenting myself as an addition to the work force at the Writhlington Colliery. My education had been free, but I would have been obliged to pay if my birth had been a little earlier. Both of my brothers had to pay a few pence per week, but I was not involved in that, as I was exempt again when the school leaving age was raised to 13. I was actually working when the change was introduced, but I was afraid that I may have to return to school until I was 13 years old. It meant therefore that all was clear for me to venture into the labour world at the age of 12 as has been stated; and that was a change whose nature and result were very extensive. There were no regrets on my part however, it seemed rather like being on the crest of a wave, and being borne along by a new tidal energy. I could equate myself with adults in that I was receiving wages, and I was not a little proud when I went to the colliery office for the few coins that were paid for my labour. I gave the cash to my mother, and was elated not a little when she gave me six pence as pocket money.

My attention became focused progressively upon work and wages, and as I did so, my memory of school days withdrew into the background of thinking. I was a worker like my brothers, and was thus able to make my contribution to the enterprise in which I was engaged; and while adults may regard it as a minor one, I did not share their views. I was part of

a whole, and the total output of the whole is the sum of its parts, and a major operation may depend at times upon a minor task as it is integrated into the whole; hence the success of the colliery depended on me to an extent, and when looking at the tonnage for the week I could think 'That is what we have done'.

The attitude was very different from that of an older sister, who went into domestic service at the age of twelve, with people named Angels in the neighbouring town of Midsomer Norton. The husband kept a shoe shop on the main street, and his wife needed a little help in the house. My mother and sister carried a trunk to the station where it was arranged for me to meet them and help to carry it. Mother brought me some nice bread and jam for my tea, which was eaten as we waited for the train. The taste of that made an imperishable impression on my memory, and thought of the jam causes saliva to flow after seventy five years. We left the train at the next station, found a shop with the name Angels above the window, and walked in to introduce our young hopeful to Mrs Angel, who took her upstairs to her room, <sup>and</sup> returned with her, wearing a white pinafore. She was thus ready for action, and when mother and I left the house it was with an assurance that Annie was going to be useful and happy. Our surprise may be imagined therefore when she returned to her home two days afterwards, and gave the information that she had 'run away', and walked the whole distance between the two towns, and a further mile to her home. Mother was very upset by it, and persuaded her to go back to the Angels'. It was fortunate that her home sickness soon passed and the Angels' gave her a <sup>good</sup> home, and were very nice to her.

I have no adverse comment to make about her behaviour for it was the most natural thing for her to do, and what might have been expected when there had been a good home; and one must not overlook the fact that my sister was only a small child. But I found myself as a wage earner in a position from which I was unable to run away. The only thing that was practicable to me was to think of some excuse for not going to the pit, that would have been suspected and disallowed by my parents, both of whom

were hard working people. There was no means of evasion after I had gone down in the cage, for I was obliged to adjust to conditions, and continue working until the time for return to the surface after work was finished for the day.

Arrangements for the work of lads like myself were very humane at the colliery, and allowed a period of preparation before more strenuous labour was commenced. I was thus allowed to do light work only, and suffered no injury of any kind. At the same time I was growing very fast, and soon became a strong youth for my age; and because of it I was soon transferred to a place where much greater effort was demanded of me. I was made what was known among miners as a carting-boy, and commenced to do work that was reserved mostly for teenagers. The thought of that is now becoming faint, for much machinery was introduced before the final closure of the pits. The origin of the name may be uncertain, but I suspect it was due to the resemblance to a horse pulling at a cart. Some animals were called cart-horses because they were put in shafts and made to pull. A carting-boy was different in that he had two legs only, but he had arms and hands that could take the place of front legs and feet; so it was a case of going along on hands and knees, and a box of coal that weighed one to two hundredweight being pulled in a place that was one and a half to two feet high. There were no wheels on the box, and the gradient could be as high as thirty degrees. The coal face was laid out in the form of a capital T, with the face extending from twenty five to thirty <sup>yards</sup> on both sides of the stem to which the boxes of coal were pulled, and loaded into trams/waggon. Pulling was easy when the box was empty, but having reached the point where coal was being extracted from the seam he must fill it to make the return journey. That was not all, for a rule demanded that a carting-boy use his hands and forearms for picking up the coal, and the use of a shovel by stealth could mean a fine of two shillings and six pence. It was a rule that was ignored rather than observed. It must be clear to anyone who has imagination that pulling a full box was much more difficult, especially if the floor

sloped upwards , and a youth had to pull so hard in some conditions that his body seemed to be on the verge of being cut in two. I have pulled that way until I remained on all fours utterly dispirited, protesting against such inhuman work; and my thoughts often went to the surface where flowers were in blossom, the sun shone, and birds sang; but the coal must be cleared away, and it did not allow much scope for sentiment. And let me repeat here, the rope was worn next to the skin, there being no clothes on the upper part of the body, so that a piece of new rope made the back and sides very sore indeed. Again, there was light only from a tallow candle during the whole of the shift, that was carried in the waggon. The atmosphere may be cold, but I worked so hard that perspiration could be seen rising from my arms and body, and it could run into my eyes. When the waggon was filled with coal, it had to be taken along a tunnel whose dimensions were very small, to a place <sup>where</sup> it may be changed for another empty that was brought back to the coal face. Again, that part of the work could be easy, but there were gradients in places where a carting boy must move to the front and pull as a horse pulls at a plow. A full waggon left the rails sometimes, and the full weight of ten to twelve hundredweight had to be lifted with the rope/gus that was around the loins. It too was inhuman and brutal, but one got used to it, and even felt a secret pride in sending a good tonnage to the surface. That was bad enough for a lad of my age, but it was not the worst aspect of the position, for there was a moral aspect whose consequences were far more disturbing. It had nothing to do with the work actually, but rather with other workers who were carting-boys whose language left much to be desired. Things were not so bad when we were on the move, but the words that were used, and things that were said, when all were together were almost bad enough to annihilate a saint. Jokes were coarse, and references were infamous, and I had no adequate means of protection to ensure moral security. Conversation took place before the commencement of work, and during lunch breaks that is beyond adequate description. We had sometimes to wait together for empty waggons to be sent to us

when there was more of it; and it went on day after day, and week after week, until I despaired of getting my mind clean again. I had never been in such a situation. I have heard much bad language from mental patients, but most of it was divorced from will and intention. I have listened to women swearing, and have been sworn at, but there was always something to cause me to withhold judgment. The talk of fellow workmen was different in that their minds were corrupt, and to them evil seemed to be good. It was not true of all young men, for the talk of some was informative and morally clean, and did not taint other minds when words were spoken. A young man of that type with whom I worked studied for the Baptist Ministry. He was the son of a coal miner who was blessed with the gift for public speech. He was an excellent platform man, and was welcomed wherever he went. He studied his books in the evening after work in the pit was done, and dirty clothes were put away, passed his examinations, and was invited to take the Pastorate of a Bristol church. I shall always feel grateful for the privilege of working with him, and I admired him very much as a senior; and what he was felt to be was a great encouragement and inspiration to me. I shall never forget seeing him going down the hill one evening on his way to the pit for the night shift, for when I looked at him dressed in his dirty clothes I observed a man who was on his way to a successful ministerial career in the Baptist Church, but alas, to be also stricken down all too soon by a form of illness that made his mother an invalid for many years.

I wish I could state we were adequately rewarded for the work we did, but we were not, for a man worked for eight hours doing very hard and dangerous work for about seven pence an hour, which appeared a little better <sup>when seen in a</sup> ~~which appeared~~ week's wage of thirty shillings. But there was not always a week's wage, for days were lost when orders for coal were not forthcoming. Six days' work would be reduced to three during the summer, and carting boys' wages were less than adults'. Some of the face workers among the men were able to earn a higher wage than others because conditions were more favourable. The consequence was that many



men were obliged to seek for <sup>other</sup> ~~this~~ work to augment their low income. My late father went out on the farm with a scythe, and that, together with stone for sharpening, were kept when he was unable to use them again.

I remember one occasion when a group of lads undertook to break a stack of stones at the roadside for road mending, and they were paid a shilling per cubic yard for breaking them down to a definite size. They provided their own hammers. I was one of the group, but it was a case first and last because roadmen took an exception to it, for it meant depriving them of the means of livelihood.

I recall, too, information that was given to us by mother that father allowed her only ten shillings for housekeeping one week, and she came back home after walking part of the way to the market. She was baffled as any woman might have been. Mother was a woman who had much resource, but the task before her made her feel impotent. It was nice to have good summer weather then as it is now, but it brought the spectre of hunger and want; and it was useless to appeal for help from any Public Fund. It was a time when we were obliged to eke out with potatoes, rice, skim-milk, salt butter, which were all in great demand. It is obvious that one could survive only as they were tough; and it goes far to explain the hardness of miners as a class.

It might have reduced the severity of conditions very much if we had been privileged to come home to a bathroom that was cosy and warm with hot and cold running water, but it was too early for that. Water had to be brought from a well in buckets, that was two hundred yards down the garden path. It was heated in saucepans on an open fire, and poured into a large tin bath in front of the grate. Free coal allowed us to keep good fires in the open grate, but, even so, being naked in a cold draft was most unpleasant, and it made bathing a hurried operation. Agnetha had to be present to stoop to wash our dirty backs. There was only one room only, so she had to look out of the window while the legs were being washed. Then the dirty clothes were collected and dried, and put away until the evening when they were placed on a chair by the fire.

trousers were almost like ice to the touch in the morning.

My father always went to the pit before I descended the stairs in the morning, for he liked to have a chat with other men before getting on the cage to descend. It meant also that he was entitled to come up the pit on the first cage when work for the day was finished. My brothers followed him one by one into the 'Black hole of Calcutta' to my 'teen age imagination. I normally descended the pit at 5.30 am, and stayed until 3.30 - 4 pm. The eight-hour day was much later when it was made legally binding.

It is easy to think that having worked hard as we had done, we preferred to spend our evenings in a leisurely way. I was restored not a little by a good meal which mother prepared, but it did not remove the feeling of fatigue completely. So we sat about, talked about work and the affairs of the day, and watched my brother's pigeons. We took a stroll in the fields sometimes, and strange to relate, we sometimes walked more than a mile to play football. It did not imply much running about, for we adopted a leisurely attitude until the ball came close enough to be kicked. There were exceptions of course, for there could be a tussle to deprive others of the possession of the ball. I was thought to be good at that by club officials, who gave me a place in the team, and <sup>let me</sup> take part in matches. My brother played at centre half and I at left half, and my cousin at left back. All of us made up a collection of crude players as a team, but we were good fighters, and managed to score an occasional goal. I had the distinction of doing what I never saw another player do in scoring a goal from a point over the half-way line. It may seem incredible to a doubting mind, belonging rather to the sphere of phantasy, but it <sup>was</sup> ~~is~~ a genuine fact, for a strong wind was blowing down the field at the time, and the visiting side was making an attack upon our goal. All members of the team were moving up the field, even the goal-keeper left his goal which he was expected to defend. I was quick to take in the whole situation, and stopping the ball as it came to me, I kicked it high into the air and it was carried by the current, and dropped at a

place where it would bounce over the keeper, and roll into the net. He was surprised, but not more than I; and I suddenly became the hero of the game, and a player with a tremendous kick. I played a few matches on after that, and then faded into oblivion.

I remember going to the field one evening to kick the ball about, but only to find it deserted, for one of the young players had been killed in the mine that day, and no one wanted to play football.

It was about that time when I walked through the village where I saw youth being carried from his home to a conveyance that bore him to a hospital in Bath. He was a companion to an extent, and had developed appendicitis. His operation was not successful, as were most cases of that kind at the time.

A small Methodist chapel stood on the opposite side of the road where he had lived, and I became interested in it in my early 'teens. It was about a mile from my home, and I first attended the Sunday School. I became a member of a Bible Class there, and had at least three teachers. One was a cultured man who was church organist also, very fond of music, and earned his livelihood by doing clerical work for a coal factor a few miles away. His parents kept a Grocer's shop near the village. Another teacher was a local preacher, and Parish and District Councillor. He was also the mens' representative at the pit where he worked, and was considered to be superior to many of his class. He gave good instruction, but did not mind digressing to topics that had little to do with the Lesson for the day. A third teacher was a literalist in his ideas about the Bible, and did not allow much latitude in interpretation. They were all good men, but their instruction left much for me to unlearn when I arrived at the age of discretion. I considered that I was on the way to becoming a good Christian, and in time I would compare very well with those whom I knew; hence it came as a shock to me when some time later, a Mission was being held in the chapel, I was pulled from a pew to go out to a penitent form to confess my sins and receive forgiveness. Heaven knows I had enough sins to confess, but I would

have gone out to make that exhibition of my [self] on my own. But I was announced a new convert, and listed as one of the results of the Mission. My mother was very pleased to hear about my conversion, but actually I had not changed a bit, for I continued to attend the Services as I had been doing, and to say my prayers. At the same time, I was an adolescent and on the verge of deepening emotional life, and experience that comes during that period. My interest in meetings at the chapel increased, and I became detached a little from other lads, attending the Womens' meeting during the week, and was most interested in what they said. I went to a Class Meeting that was held before the morning Service, and accompanied one of the men to his home to wait until the morning Service. I was very interested in two of them who were neighbours, and were kind and helpful to me. The son of one learned to play the piano, and liked to practice a little on Sunday mornings, and one morning when I was in the dining room he was playing in the parlour as usual when his mother called out, 'Harry, not that today'. It was nice music to my ear, but not so to his mother, for it suggested dance music that was not permitted on Sundays. Harry did not make a fuss about it, but being an obedient son, changed the tune for another. I often recall the incident to compare it with what is common on Sundays now. It may be truthfully said, 'The times have changed, and things are not what they were'.

Harry's mother and the wife of the man next door were very friendly, and were not averse to a little chat now and then; and I, staying next door one Sunday morning, learned a little about what was a secret plan of Harry's mother, for she had a daughter named Rose, and mother was secretly hoping to bring us together as sweethearts in the course of time. I was surprised to hear she thought so highly of me, but I told the neighbour I had other ideas about my future, and the girl's mother's strategy must be ineffective in that important matter.

I liked the meetings of the Christian Endeavour Society that were held on Friday evenings, and were open to both sexes; and people of all ages. They provided an opportunity for self-expression. A subject was

set for the week that was considered in the light of daily readings from the Bible, and one of the members would read a paper on the meeting-night which outlined the results of his or her study. That was followed by a discussion. I recall how I memorised short meditations which I found in a book at home, and stood and repeated them as though they were impromptu ideas, and thus acquired an experience of speaking on my feet. I found that <sup>less</sup> more difficult than in my later life when thinking had to be done in a disturbed mental atmosphere that was caused by the proximity of other's thoughts, so that a greater degree of concentration was needed to follow the line of my own thoughts. There is a helpful gap between speaker and audience when one is on a platform where one is able to draw the thinking of listeners to a focus. There is indeed a mutual concentration, and while much energy is given out, much comes back also, and the second can be very powerful. That condition may be absent in a small company, especially when other people are engaged in deciding what they will say when they stand. Thus the society was a good training opportunity for attaining skill in what is one of the greatest Arts. The transition from that to a pulpit was easy, and Methodism was indebted to it for many of its lay preachers and Ministers.

I found a similar help in the 'Experience meeting' when members stood to give an account of how they had fared during their Christian life, and what progress had been made. It interested me very much in the subject of self-expression; and as I had no education in such matters, I observed the action of the mind and its use of words in others' speech. I was also able to perceive how ideas were retained in the mind while they were being explained, developed, and applied. I learned how to arrange thoughts in a sequence. I was able to go on from that to put down a sequence of ideas on paper, commit them to memory, and thus have an outline of a little speech. Thus I was able to make short speeches to imaginary audiences when I was alone. That together with the recital of poetry was very helpful training. It

must be remembered that I left school at the age of twelve when my education had scarcely commenced, that I was engaged in doing hard manual work in the pit in inhuman conditions, and so far as preparation for public service was concerned, I resembled one of the pioneers of science who made his own means of investigation as he went along, observed and studied evidence, and advanced by the aid of such theories as were personally formulated.

At the time at which I write I had no coherent picture of the future, my thought was undifferentiated, and I considered myself as belonging to a whole situation rather than as one who was emerging from it in the pursuit of ends that had been selected. My actions were not unobserved by others who discerned the signs of native ability in me, and were interested in what may arrive in the development of my life. And the first evidence of that was a request that I become Secretary of the Sunday School. It was not an epoch-making event, neither was the band called out to parade the street, but it was much more significant than I suspected at the time. It meant more to me because I had no experience of such work, and was obliged to give it prolonged and serious attention. I knew nothing about secretarial duties, and had no training, so again, I had to learn by actually doing the work that was implied. The work taught me rather than a teacher in class..

Again, I was asked by the superintendent of the school if I would address the open school on the Bible lesson for the week. It was not easy, and my recollection of the act gives me little pleasure, yet it meant a step forward, and an increase in my self-appraisal.

It is clear to me now as I look back, that those simple events had a place in the plan of my life; and it is not always what is thought at the time that is the more important, but what it links to in what follows. Something other may have commenced in the unconscious mind that needs what is to be done in order to go forward to open out into another sphere of action, that is of more importance than what is being planned; and it was so at the point in my experience.

The end of the year arrived when I was expected to prepare a report for the school, and I was a little anxious for I wanted to do it well. I was aware of my shortcomings and lack of experience, and sought advice on the best way to do what had to be done. It was during one of those conversations when I was advised to seek the help of a former Bible Class teacher who was doing clerical work at the time. He did not hesitate a single moment in giving his reply, and arrangements were made for me to visit his house when he returned at the weekend so that I may have all the assistance he was able to give.

He took great care in explaining how such a report should be drafted then we had a most enjoyable and free conversation, and when I was ready to leave, he took a book from his shelves that has lived with me, and in me, for more than sixty years. The book was a library edition of SELF HELP by Samuel Smiles. The reference may raise a smile among some moderns for they have no liking for the industrial context that made the volume so popular in the Victorian Era. Nevertheless, I was impressed by its quality for I had never touched such a book of high quality; and the impression deepened and became vivid as I took it home, read the stories of men who had helped themselves, struggled against enormous difficulties, suffered painful privations, became destitute, and overwhelmed by conditions. Many of them reached the lowest levels of depression, but went on to rise Phoenix-like from the ruins of their plans and collapse of their expectations to find a way to success. Such information stirred dormant powers in me. I began to see myself as an individual, and how I may be able to make a break from the general situation of which I had regarded myself as an inseparable part. I realised that my lack of education was not decisive of what I might become, so I commenced to reach out into the future to form a mental picture that would concentrate my thinking, and enlist all my available energy. But that was not easy, for the isolated life of the rural area deprived me of information about positions in society that may be won, and the means with which to work for

personal objectives. My outlook was bounded by work, and such bits of information as came from conversation, and it was thought to be sufficient to do the day's work and rest or play in the evening. We were not interested in social ladders, and even about the activities of important people. Interest rather than ambition was the dynamic element that forced us to penetrate outside the borders of our mental outlook.

Our greatest problem was to find a way to make our winter evenings pleasant, for we lived in semi-darkness during the day, having only the light from a tallow candle, and it could be dark on the surface after we had had a meal, and made ourselves clean; and there were five more hours before bed-time. So we played games of drafts, dominoes, and cards, or stood around talking if the weather was fine. There was a town about one mile away, but there was no cinema or other means of entertainment. There were special treats occasionally when the round-a-bouts came for a week, or a menagerie or circus. Even so, we did not have much cash to spend on such things. There was pleasure however in watching others having fun, and the mechanical music stimulated our life not a little. Dancing was considered immoral and to be shunned. Thus we sought to make our own music, and commenced with a pipe which was made from a stick. Then we went on to play tin whistles, mouth organs, the concertina, and melodian, but while I could play tunes, I could never master the technique of them. There was something however that seemed to offer a diversion, for evening classes were held at the school a walking distance away whose Master was popular among the young men in the villages, who played in the soccer team, and was very sociable. It cost only a small fee to attend the classes, so when October arrived some of us decided to go. I was then sixteen years of age, and was ready to receive a little suitable instruction. I am unable to recall the subject that was taught by the Master, but there was wood-carving, and arithmetic that was taught by a charming young lady. She was most attractive, and her



manner certainly helped to sustain our interest in the subject. The wood-carving lesson meant most to us for we could take our work home to do it between lessons. A number of us took a circular table-top, and after marking three inch circles all around it at the circumference, we went on to cut out a continuous pattern. My work did not call for special mention yet it implied achievement to me, and I paid a carpenter for fixing a leg to it; and I used it until recently when I passed it on to a person who took a fancy to it. The woman thought it was good enough to go into her lounge.

I decided to go back to my old school to evening classes in the autumn of the following year. The Master took a class for elementary chemistry and arithmetic. The enrolment fee was returned at the end of the session, and prizes were offered for merit; and it was a matter of importance to me at that time. I walked more than a mile to attend the class, and that after a day's hard manual work in the pit. I enjoyed the lessons however, especially the experiments. I was actually awarded a first prize, having gained 427 marks out of a possible 450. The book was presented to me for 'good conduct and progress', and I treasured it until recently even after a thousand others had gone from my collection. It contained short chapters on remarkable events in the history of the world, and reading it as I did, my mind underwent an expansion, and adjusted a little more closely to literature; and as the spring and summer passed, thoughts began to take shape in my mind, imagery was imported, and ambition began to stir. I commenced to have feelings such as come with the formation of plans, and the projection of purposes. At the same time, there was no clear object as yet that beckoned and made me collect my resources for adventure. I continued to feel the influence of SELF HELP as a deep undercurrent in life and conduct.

I then went back to evening classes at the former school in the autumn of 1906, where an additional class preceded the Master's, ~~class~~ that was held in another room where the technical aspects of coal-

mining were taught. The subject was one that appealed to me, and I soon acquired a lively interest in it, my ambition became vivid, and it was not long before I was studying with a purpose in mind. One of my earlier books was LUPTON'S COAL MINING which contained an outline of the subjects to be studied to obtain a Certificate in MINING ENGINEERING; and I read it again and again with much interest and profit. I then acquired a great book in LYALL'S GEOLOGY which fascinated me very much, opening my eyes to behold a new world, and made rocks vocal with a language I had never known. Indeed, one of the immediate results of reading it was the transformation of the valley that ran along the foot of the hill where I lived, where outcrops of stone may be seen on both sides of the valley which must have formed a continuous bed, but had become detached by the denuding action of water over a period of millions of years. I learned also that the Mendip Hills, a few miles to the west, had been pushed up through overlying strata by a mighty subterranean upheaval; a disturbance that turned the coal seams in the south topsy turvy so that they were being worked upside down. I learned also that I was living in a region where tropical forests once grew, but had been transformed into seams of coal. It seemed incredible at first, but I was convinced when I saw the fossilized forms of ferns and stems in rock adjacent to seams of coal that men were extracting. I have seen scores of them scattered about the rock; and many were whole.

Again, my late father kept a large pebble the size of a coconut, on a window-sill, which he brought from a pit he was helping to sink down through strata to a coal seam. It had no significance for me until I read LYALL'S book, and learned that it had belonged to a large bed of pebbles over which the sea had washed before it was covered with water that was full of sediment which built the strata above it. Facts such as these were new to me, made me think as I had never done, and affected, not my view of the earth only, but everything that was brought to my attention.

I had been reared intellectually on cosy ideas about religious matters that offered certainty to any who would enquire, and presented truths that were regarded as fundamental as the atom. It was necessary to accept certain ideas about the Bible, subscribe to doctrines that were popular in the churches, and to conform to what was being done. My reading caused the commencement of a change in me that led me to a position where I thought more about things becoming something other, which meant I found it difficult to think about finalities at all. I read eagerly such subjects as the evolution of religion, the historicity of the Books of the Bible, and the analysis of the Gospels. I became interested in heresy trials, and the great struggles in the Church in the west. I <sup>I</sup>also wanted to know something about Comparative Religion. Coal-mining was my principal subject, and I studied that early and late. I was very interested in fossils also, especially in the limestone, and often went to a quarry in search of them; and sometimes discovered forms in which the mouth and parts of fins were preserved.

Mining Maths demanded much of my time, but I went ahead quickly until I was able to do most of what was required. I recall with gratitude that when I began to study seriously a young pupil teacher brought me her copy of Meiklejohn's Arithmetic, and thus helped me to get a good start. She is in this world no longer, but I still remember and appreciate the help she gave me. Needless to say, my library became bigger, being increased by prizes and purchases until I looked at it with a feeling of pride and pleasure.

The Mining-class became an outdoor one in summer when we went to a field to use a dumpy-level, and to learn about surveying and levelling. Degrees and measurements were taken in the field and plotted indoors later. I took Correspondence Courses with the Cambrian School of Mines, and obtained their Diplomas in Mining Engineering (First Class) and Surveying. The Course in Maths was taken also.

I was then twenty years of age, and had a feeling that my progress

was good for I was able to tackle papers that were set for the Second Class exam, and much of the work that was required for the First, but I had to be 23 years old to be free to take it. Indeed, I felt so confident in my ability to take the Exams that I arranged to attend a class to study Electricity and Magnetism at the Technical School in Bath during the winter evenings. There was no train service for the return journey so I borrowed a bicycle; but I had overestimated my strength, for there were two steep hills between Bath and my home, and they were too much to climb after hard work in the pit as a cart<sup>ing</sup>-boy, and I had to abandon the effort after Christmas.

Great changes were taking place in the little hamlet where I lived during the period of these activities. There were seven cottages only but a large area of land, and when a local colliery owner acquired the property, all the old cottages were demolished and replaced by two rows of parlour-type houses, one of which was allotted to my parents. It was a change indeed for it became necessary to obtain sitting-room furniture. The lack of cash raised a problem that pressed for a solution; but they were helped out of difficulty by a Pedlar who supplied the furniture, and agreed to a payment of cost that was spread over a period of time.

All was well at first, but the owner of the houses was owner of a nearby pit also, and when he was short of labour he requested a number of us to go there to work whether we liked it or not. We knew that rejection of his demand could lead to an ejection from his house. It seemed to us a reasonable construction to place upon the facts. My two older brothers were the earliest to go, and then things continued as hitherto. But in the meantime my cousin was successful in passing the First Class Exam, and was transferred to the pit as a Mining Engineer. He had worked hard as any man in the position had to do, and his success brought him his promotion. The fact that he was a relation caused us all to be interested in him and his career; and mother often referred to him as an example whom I may try to emulate. I was not