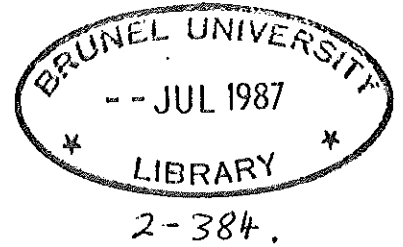


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# HAD I BUT KNOWN

BY

KATHERINE HENDERSON



## INTRODUCTION

I suppose everyone, or at least a great number of people, long to do something during their lifetime, out of the ordinary course of events. A challenge of some sort, and many do not get the opportunity to put it into practice until they reach retiring age. To travel, go fishing, visit places of interest which have been impossible during the long busy working years, to make something, to read books they never had time for, to indulge in a hobby, and a host of things conjured up in the imagination for years. Well, my challenge was to write a book, to pen my thoughts and memories of some of the experiences I have encountered during my working days.

Having reached that age, I can now recount in the next few pages some of these experiences.

Life has always seemed a challenge to me, and perhaps that is why I thrive on opposition - it seems to bring out the best in me, by that I mean the greatest effort to master the obstacle that stands in my way. I do not always succeed, and failure to do so is ashes in my mouth, but when I do succeed, I feel quite elated and ready for the next one.

*Katherine Henderson*

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## CHAPTER ONE

I was born on Sunday morning, February 23rd 1908, whilst some of my brothers and sisters were at Sunday School, the youngest of fourteen children. My parents, John and Annie Wightwick lived in Ruckinge, a tiny village about seven miles from Ashford, our nearest town. It is a quiet little village, with chiefly arable and farm land, with the Royal Military Canal separating the marshland from the hilly parts. Our home was about half a mile on the marsh side of the Canal, and therefore commanded an extensive view, due to the flatness of the land. It was wonderful pastureland for sheep, for which Romney Marsh is noted, the land being reclaimed from the sea many, many years ago.

Life was hard in those days, long hours at work for the men, and small wages. If one was lucky one had a bicycle to get to and from work, otherwise one had to walk, and several miles at that, night and morning. Later on in life I often marvelled how those men stood the pace year after year, with no paid holidays as they have now, but only Good Friday and Christmas Day off. Their lunch consisted chiefly of bread and cheese and a bottle of cold tea carried in a flag basket - a coarsely woven flat bag - across their backs. Then when the day's work was done, there was always the garden to see to in the evenings, after a hot meal, yet in spite of this, the majority lived to a ripe old age.

Ours wasn't a particularly happy family due chiefly to my father being a martinet. He had been in the Army in his younger days, so perhaps that had something to do with it. His word was law, he could be likened to Mr. Barrett of "The Barretts of Wimpole Street" never giving an inch. My mother was a small, energetic and courageous woman, she had to be to cope with such a large family, but I am sure she was a little afraid of my father, as most women in those days lived in awe of their husbands.

My first recollection of anything was when I was about two to three years of age, though I am not absolutely certain of the exact date. We were out in the hayfield, father, mother, brother Bert and my sister Louie, who was nearly three years older than I was, and myself. Whilst raking the hay into heaps ready to be picked up and carried to the stackyard by horse and wagon, they uncovered a wasps nest and of course this annoyed the wasps and unleashed hundreds of angry ones ready to do battle with anyone they met. The grown-ups gave them a wide berth for a time, and Louie was detailed to carry me across the field to the furthest point for safety. She sat me on the grass with strict instructions not to move as they didn't want

me to get stung. Louie wandered away, and I was petrified, feeling that the wasps would find me and sting me to death. I cried in my loneliness, but knew it was more than my life was worth to get up. However, no wasps came near me, and when later they settled down again, father destroyed the nest.

I started school at a very early age, long before the usual starting age of five. Louie asked mother one morning if she could take me along to school with her, and mother agreed with misgivings no doubt because of my tender age. However, as I behaved myself, I was allowed to stay, and from then on I was allowed to continue at school. No doubt being the last of the family and having no one to play with, I was glad of the companionship of the other children. We had a very interesting teacher, a Miss Harris, who later on became aware of my obstinate nature which has dogged my footsteps all my life, sometimes with good results and sometimes the reverse, but give in, I would not, if I felt I was in the right. Whether it had anything to do with my mother's teaching I do not know. She was a Methodist, and I think the rules were very strict in those days, and she imparted them to us, but they were not always received with enthusiasm, especially with those members of the family who grew up with other ideas and exercised their own opinions. But her advice and training did influence some members of the family - two brothers became local preachers later in life, two sisters became Salvation Army lassies, and Richard, the delicate one of the family, would stand up to a beating from father, rather than shelve his principles, especially on a Sunday morning. If father wanted him to turn the grindstone whilst he sharpened his scythes and bagging hooks on it ready for work on Monday morning, Richard flatly refused, but said he would get up early on Monday morning and turn it, but Sunday - no! - he was going to Sunday School, and no amount of arguing or even force would deter him from going. This, for a delicate boy was a challenge, and he met it with fortitude, as father was a big man, and a fearsome one at that.

We all went to the Methodist Sunday School at 10 a.m on Sundays, then again to the afternoon service at 2.30 and evening service at 6.30. We found this a bithboring at times, especially if the preacher was uninteresting to us younger ones, but somewhere along the line a preacher dropped a message which really did register with me, and which stood me in good stead much later in life:-

"Never run away from fear, because it will pursue you,  
stand up to it and face it, and you will conquer it."

How true were those words!

The Sunday School Anniversary, on the first Sunday in May, was the high light of the year. First, we had special hymns to sing having practised these for weeks before, recitations to say, sometimes with

trepidation, particularly for me as I was of a nervous disposition. We had books for prizes, according to the number of attendances throughout the year and good conduct, but most of all, we had a new rig out! How proud we were of our new clothes and squeaky new shoes! Mother, who was a wonderful needlewoman, used to make our dresses, and one year she said she would not have time to make us new ones as she had to make dresses for two girls who would perhaps be going to the Anniversary. She would therefore have no time to make any for us and we would have to wear what were our best clothes and make the best of it. Needless to say, we were not very happy about this, and resented wholeheartedly being used as models for fittings etc., those two girls being about our size. Louie said she would like to damage hers, and I thought seriously about tipping the ink bottle over mine, but somehow we never did. We racked our brains as to who these two fortunate girls were, and concluded that they were Jane and Violet Smith who went to school with us. How we hated them for doing us out of our usual treat, though they did not seem to understand this sudden burst of hatred.

At last the dresses were fitted and found complete, wrapped in tissue paper and boxed ready for delivery. We did not see who collected them as it was to be a surprise, and by not knowing who these girls were, we could not warn them ahead of their good fortune. Imagine our feelings on the Anniversary Day, when, instead of wearing our best clothes as mother suggested we should have to, these two beautiful new dresses were taken from their packings for us to wear! We were the two girls who would be going to the Anniversary, the dresses were for us and not for the Smith girls. Mother had misled us because she didn't want us to tell the other girls what we would be wearing. She didn't tell us a direct lie, but just a "fib" which is first cousin to a lie. All our pent up feelings disappeared as we donned our new dresses complete with hats to match with lovely pink roses on them. We felt like duchesses, and gave our best to the singing and recitations. Mother was wise enough not to repeat the ruse.

Although Louie and I were extremes in nature and outlook, there was a strong bond of affection between us; whilst I was shy and of a nervous disposition, she was the "tomboy" with a fiery nature inherited no doubt from father, for she grew up to be the "sergeant-major" type of person, ruling all who would be ruled, yet she had a heart of gold and would help anyone in need. She seemed to thrive on work, though not always willingly, but there seemed to be an inner force driving her, and this did not diminish throughout her whole life.

When Louie and I were thirteen and ten respectively, we left Ruckinge School and went to Belsington School, which had a much higher standard of education. Mother decided to change our school after a shocking performance of vindictiveness on the part of the

Headmistress, Miss Burman, a difficult woman to say the least. Miss Burman had her favourites who could do no wrong, and were constantly being held up as an example to the rest of the class who were subordinates, inferior, and hardly worth bothering about to her way of thinking. We felt the rough edge of her tongue quite frequently, myself included. One day she made some unkind remark about my home which wasn't true, and this hurt me very much because mother did not warrant such an accusation with not a mite of truth in it. So childlike, I told mother what she had said when I arrived home from school. Mother sent her a note by me next morning inviting her down to see for herself how wrong she had been in her accusation. When I gave it to Miss Burman she was livid and denied she had said it. Turning to me in a fury she said "I will give you a lesson to write Katherine that will teach you not to tell tales" and commenced to write the lesson which I have to write a hundred times, on a slate - we used slates to write on in those days with slate pencils. The lesson was:-

"All liars shall be burnt with fire and brimstone"

Well, I could hardly believe my eyes, because for one thing I had not told lies about what she had said, and I felt it was unjustifiable to have to write such a lesson, so I wrote a hundred times:-

"I must do as my mother tells me, which is to speak the truth"

When I had finished and folded my arms to prove it, Miss Burman called me out to her desk to show her. This I did, but when she saw what I had written, she was furious. She rubbed it out and told me to write a hundred times what she had written on the top of the slate. So back I went to my seat, only to write a hundred times as before:-

"I must do as my mother tells me, which is to speak the truth"

Again I was called out to her desk when I had finished, and when she again saw what I had written her fury knew no bounds. "You will write what I have put" she said, "because you will stand by me and write it". So she rubbed it off again and I felt no, I won't, why should I, so I simply started again "I must" and she knew then what I intended to write. She snatched the slate from me and hit me on the head with it, breaking the slate and giving me nose bleed for hours afterwards. Louie took me home during the lunch hour as they could not stop my nose bleeding, and I spent the afternoon at home. Mother was furious with Miss Burman and threatened to report the matter to higher authorities because to hit a child on the head with a heavy slate hard enough to break it, could have caused some serious injury. I can't remember whether she did or not. Years later, when I had time to reflect on this episode, I must confess I was a very obstinate pupil, but I still feel it was unfair, as I did at the time,

to blame me for telling lies, when I had merely repeated word for word what Miss Burman had said.

Although a change of schools tends to give a child "butterflies in the tummy" Louie and I welcomed it, if only to get away from Miss Burman. We had over a mile to walk to Belsington School, but this we did not mind much, though we resented having to get up earlier in the mornings to get our allotted jobs done before starting out, Louie's to make the beds and wash up the breakfast things, and mine to empty the pots (no inside sanitation) and to feed the pigs. We had four, and I did not mind doing the latter, mixing their corn for feed always fascinated me, and the pigs of course got to know me - as Louie said in a fit of temper one morning - "One pig recognising another!"

Whilst at Ruckinge School we could do no right, however much we tried, and in the end gave up trying; at Belsington we could do no wrong, not because of favouritism, as that did not exist there, but simply because our work was recognised on its merit and we were judged accordingly. I soon realised this, was keen to learn, and developed a thirst for knowledge. Geography, Maths and Sewing were the subjects I enjoyed most; I loved going to school and hated the holidays. Prompt at eight o'clock we started for school, sometimes along the road and sometimes walking along the Canal. This was not so far to walk and was also very pleasant as it was banked with trees. But there was always the fear that there might be cows in the fields we passed through, and I was still afraid of cows and horses. My father tried to cure me of this fear by making me go and round up our own cows in the field for milking. It was no use protesting, if father said 'Go' then go I had to. How I used to pray that God would protect me! Three of our cows would see me coming and know the reason and start walking quietly towards the gate, but the fourth one named Betty, with enormous straight horns like a bull, used to go on grazing, not attempting to go with the others yet all the time keeping an eye on their progress towards the gate, then, at the last minute she would rush across the field like a tornado, making me tremble at the knees. I gave her as wide a berth as I possibly could, whilst she rushed through the gate to catch up with the others. She gave a wonderfully rich milk, but it is a wonder her milk wasn't turned into butter with the swing of her udder before it ever reached the milking pail! This did not cure my fear of cows and horses, I still don't like them unless there is a barrier between us. Perhaps the fear originated from hearing mother and father discussing an uncle who was gored to death by a bull he had reared from a calf. I wasn't supposed to be listening, but you know what children are, 'ears flapping' when grown-ups are talking, especially if it is supposed to be confidential to them alone.

Once a year father had one of our pigs killed, reared for the occasion. This was most distressing for me, having fed it twice a day with corn from a tiny piglet, when once it was old enough to leave its mother. It was more of a pet than a pig, and then to have it killed to eat was anguish to me. I would rather have gone without the delicious food it provided us with, than to know it ended up on the block like this. Father did not do the actual killing, though he helped the slaughter man at the time. To me it was cruelty in the extreme, and I used to vow I would never touch a morsel of it, it would choke me, I would go hungry first, but alas, mother thought otherwise. It was an absolute nightmare to see the poor creature hanging up by its hind legs on the scaffold, with its belly ripped open and cleaned out; we had to pass it to get to the lavatory up the garden, and I would get Louie to come with me and hold my hand, although she was a bit scared of it too, but she was always braver than me - if it was a moonlit night, it was a hideous sight.

From then on, it was a very busy time for mother who, after father had cut the pig into joints, set to to turn it into bacon and hams, salting them down in great earthenware crocks, cleaning and scalding the intestines ready for making sausages. Louie and I were detailed to make the sausages once the meat had been cut up in to small pieces with sage and seasoning added. The mincer had a long funnel and we had to slip yards and yards of intestine skin on to it, so that when the meat came through the mincer it went straight into the skin. It was my job to turn the handle and Louie's to ease the skin with the sausage meat in it off the funnel, and then to twist it at a certain length to form the sausages. We had yards of sausages which, even with no preservatives would keep for weeks. Mother was a first class cook, having been cook to a titled family in her single days, so now began a very busy time for her, making delicious ficed cakes, brownells, trotters, pork brawn, pork chops from the head, there seemed no end to what mother could do with it. Alas, I forgot my vow to never eat any of it, the delicious smells from the kitchen overcame my pet aversion, and I tucked in with the others wholeheartedly, joining in with the oohs and aahs and sighs of satisfaction! It was a lovely sight to see those great sides of bacon and huge hams hanging up on their hooks, nothing like a pig about them then!

The next year the whole thing was repeated, and the next and the next, and so it went on for as long as I can remember, even after I went out to work. The first year I was at work, mother sent me some sausages through the post (post was quicker in those days than now!) thinking I should like to have some, but this was not received with good grace by the lady of the house, who asked me rather sarcastically if the food provided there was not good enough for me. I said "yes, of course it was, it was just that mother thought I would like to have some."



"What, a whole pound?" she asked, "and who is going to cook them may I ask" I said "I was going to ask cook to do this for me."

"Oh, you were, were you, well in that case you must share them with the staff" - there were six of us - so in the end I had one small sausage!

I explained all this to mother and she never sent me any more. She always sent me a big slice of iced Christmas cake, which I could easily smuggle up to my room to eat, no one being any the wiser.

Father had one of the best equipped tool sheds one could wish for, every tool from the largest size to the smallest, all neatly arranged in their allotted racks along the sides of the shed. They were beautifully kept, but no one, unless permission was granted by him, was allowed to use any of them except himself, and after use, they had to be cleaned and put back in their racks again. Every Saturday, Louie and I were detailed to chop enough wood for the fire to last the week, and we had a three-legged chopping block and hand bill with which to do it. With the smaller sticks this was quite easy, but with the 'bats' as we called them, as thick as a man's arm, the hand bill was not heavy or shap enough, they needed an axe. How tantalising it was to know that father had half-a-dozen axes in his shed of which any of them would have cut through these 'bats' in a couple of strokes. Louie, who was more venturesome than me, would occasionally help herself to one of these axes noting exactly how they were positioned in the shed, so that after cleaning it she could put it back again in its right position and father would be none the wiser. How I admired her courage and wished I could be like her.

Just imagine what a catastrophe it was, when one night the shed caught fire and was completely gutted. Father had been working in it as usual after dark, with the light of a hurricane lamp hanging from a cross beam, and the draught from the door must have caused it to flare up and set the thatched roof alight. There was no time to call the fire engine which was about three miles away, and no telephone in the village, and for anyone to cycle there, call out the firemen, round up the horses, harness them to the fire engine and race over to us would have taken a good two hours, and in the meantime the shed was blazing to high heaven, so it was all hands to the pump, drawing buckets of water and passing them hand to hand to fling on to the fire and hope for the best. This seemed to go on for hours, and as I lay in bed, I could hear the shouting and a bit of swearing going on. I was absolutely petrified, feeling the house would catch fire as it was quite close. I did come downstairs in my nightdress ready to run if necessary, but was promptly told in no uncertain terms to go back to bed and stay there, which I did, literally quaking with fear.

Next morning, what a shambles where the shed had stood, nothing but a smoking ruin and all those beautiful tools lying about handleless,

completely useless in their present state. It really was a horrifying sight and a sad loss too. I'm ashamed to say the thought did go through my head, 'so much for father's precious tools!' Maybe I was a bit of a rebel at heart, tho' I didn't dare show it, I was too afraid of father's belt.

Not only were the shed and all the tools destroyed, but also two of his five bicycles as well that were kept there, or at least they were ruined. He was just as possessive with his bicycles as he was with his tools, no one was allowed to ride one, no matter how urgent the need unless he specially gave permission, and if he did, you can rest assured it was for his own benefit. Only he was allowed to ride them. They were beautifully kept, wheels shining and well oiled, frame polished, and a gadget he made to hang them on so as to preserve the tyres. Oh yes, father was never lacking in ideas, and work was second nature to him, perhaps that is why he drilled us children so much. I expect he meant well, but as children we took a very dim view of it. Even the boys resented his attitude, though until they left school, they dare not antagonise him by speaking their mind, but strange to say, once they had done so, he seemed somewhat subdued in manner. Though always the master, he never relinquished this right, but by this time it was too late, it was difficult or almost impossible to forgive his harshness of our younger days. I too found courage to speak out when I was about fifteen or sixteen, and gave him a piece of my mind, years of pent up emotion came tumbling out, and once I had opened the 'flood gates' I couldn't stop. I shall never forget father's face, he was so astonished he couldn't speak, to him it was incredible that I, the baby of the family and his favourite (or so I was told by the older ones) should dare speak to him like that. He simply got up from the table where he was sitting and walked out of the house and slammed the door. After that outburst he was quite different to me, kinder and more tolerant, perhaps that is the way with bullies, once they get a dose of their own medicine they know how it feels to be crushed. Mother gave me a good dressing down afterwards, but I could take it from her, as bullying wasn't her nature, she was a strict disciplinarian, and we respected this.

Our water was drawn from a well in the garden by pump, and after many years of use, the pump gave out, and we had to draw water up with a bucket on a rope, standing near the edge and dropping the bucket upside down into the water, which, on hitting the water, turned right way up and filled. This we hauled up. I had to do my share of drawing water, young as I was, I suppose I was about ten years old, and often as I gazed down into its depths I would shudder in case I fell in, with no hope of getting out. This well was to be our last line of retreat according to mother, during the first world war, rather than sacrifice us to the Germans should they land, we were to jump into the well and she too would follow, that being a better death than at the hand of the Germans. To us youngsters death in any form was terror, and thankfully we didn't have to jump. I doubt if we would have donesso voluntarily

I'm sure we should have had to be pushed in.

Up to now I have said very little about the older members of the family, simply because I being the youngest, quite a few of the older ones had married and lived away, in fact some of those not married did not live at home, father's harshness driving them from home as soon as they left school, and they had to fend for themselves. Those who were married and had homes of their own sheltered their younger brothers as they left school, finding them work and giving them the love and security they lacked at home, until they got married and had their own homes. The girls of the family were sent out to service, which was the only occupation for girls in those days, so I did not see much of my older brothers and sisters until I was about eight or ten. By that time the first world war had started. My brothers Jack, Fred, Billy, Richard and Bob were in the Army, and Tom was in the Navy. Bert, not old enough for conscription was subject to epileptic fits and therefore would not have been fit for Military Service. Billy and Richard died during the war whilst serving in the Army, Bob was badly wounded, Tom's ship was torpedoed and it is a miracle he survived. Jack and Fred managed to survive but how? Louie and I were too young to realise the full impact of war, which was a good thing, and we were ready to grasp any fun that came our way. Occasionally, we went to Dymchurch for the day, this being our nearest seaside resort, and if we went with the Sunday School outing, which was once a year, we went by horse and wagon, rigged up with seats for us, about two dozen altogether and we had a most exciting day, otherwise we cycled there. I remember on one occasion, my sister Nellie, then grown up and married, took Louie and me, still schoolgirls, to Dymchurch for the day, and as there were not three ladies bicycles available, we had to walk. We thought this would be fun, in spite of its being a good seven miles there, so we started early in the morning and being fresh and the excitement of a day out, we really enjoyed the walk, but after a day there paddling, building sandcastles and having fun, it was no joke walking that seven miles back home again in the evening. I don't suppose we needed singing to sleep that night!

During the war, my sister Alice came to live in the bungalow next door, so that she could have company whilst her husband was in the Army. She had two children, a little younger than myself and it was nice to have someone about my own age to play with as well as Louie. One day during the school holiday, mother and Alice went up to Ashford to do some shopping, leaving Louie and I at home with strict instructions not to get into mischief - as though we would! - and what children wouldn't, being suddenly let loose from parental control and school discipline. We looked around to see what we

we could get up to, as "forbidden fruit is always the sweetest!" We did a few things which we knew were not permissible, put the gramophone on and listened to our favourite records, set the chimney on fire by tipping paraffin on hot coals, and the flames coming out of the top of the chimney had us petrified. A man passing put this out for us, and we heaved a sigh of relief. Having recovered our breaths from this fright, we sauntered into the garden and saw father's lovely radish bed which made our mouths water, so we pulled up a few, cut the tops off, and stuck the tops back in again, watering them as we had seen the grown-ups watering plants, hoping no one would know what we had done and that they would grow radishes again - what a hope! - the wretched tops wilted and gave the game away. When father came home that evening he noticed how some of his radishes 'looked sick' pulled one up to investigate, and discovered the reason, and all the other wilted ones too. He stormed indoors and demanded to know the culprits who had so desecrated his precious radish bed. After first denying all knowledge of this sacrilege, we had to own up, and two sore unhappy little girls went to bed that night! To give credit where credit was due, father was a very hard worker, and took a pride in his work, gardens included, so it was not to be wondered at that he lost his temper with us.

We had a penny a week pocket money, and this had to go in our money box to save up to buy something we needed such as hair ribbons or presents for the family; occasionally, we would insert a knife blade into the slot and a penny would slide out, and we would buy sweets or oranges with this, unbeknown to mother.

Louie left Belsington school when she was fourteen, so I had three more years on my own there. I loved school and was completely happy there, it was heaven after Ruckinge school. I left when I was fourteen, having reached the highest standard of <sup>V</sup>XI one year before and was sometimes detailed to take over the Infants class for an hour to relieve the teacher. I was very sad at having to leave, and begged mother to let me stay on at school for one more term - I suppose in my mind I was putting off the evil day when I should definitely have to leave - but mother was adamant, and wiser than me, knowing full well that I should feel exactly the same at the end of an extra term, so why prolong the agony! Childlike, I didn't feel like that "Sufficient for the day" was my motto! - so I had to leave.

CHAPTER TWO

Mother did not want me to go out to work, as by this time she was in her sixties and needed help in the dairy and with milking etc., but I knew this was not the life I wanted. I wanted to go out into the world and make a life of my own, besides I was afraid of cows, even our own, which apart from Betty, were as docile as kittens - but they were cows and I could not overcome my fear of them. I piled on the agony therefore, saying I would be absolutely useless at home, and suggested that Louie, who was working at Margate and hated it, should come home instead. So the deal was done - Louie came home and I went out to work.

I did not fare too well in my first job, I hated it, was terribly homesick, and only stayed for three months.

My next job was 'under-Nannie' - I was allowed to clean the pram, but not to push it! I was reasonably happy there, they had a full staff and Montague the baby was adorable; after a time he had a little sister. The 'thorn in the flesh' there was the old family governess who used to walk about in soft-soled shoes, sneaking and prying on the staff and then telling tales to the mistress, often causing trouble. The staff had their meals in the staff room, a huge room with an enormous table in the centre with drawers all round it which were to stand us in good stead. Nannie and I joined the others for supper, Montague being asleep in his cot. We were supposed to have bread and cheese and cocoa for supper, having had a good hot meal mid-day, but cook felt this was unfair, that if the family needed two good hot meals a day in order to do nothing, surely we, who were working from 6 a.m to 10 p.m needed as much, if not more, so she used to cook extra of whatever the family was having and serve us up the same. All went well until the old governess decided one night to come into the staff-room as we were eating our supper - she had her meals with the family. She took in at a glance what we were eating and promptly took the news to the mistress. Cook received a good dressing down and was told it was bread and cheese and cocoa for the staff for supper and not a hot meal, so for a few nights we had this and took a dim view of it. Then cook rebelled again, and as there was always plenty of food in the store cupboard, which was never locked, she started cooking us an evening meal again, not always what the family had, but we had to be ready in case the governess appeared, so each of us sat at an open drawer with our plate of hot food in it, and if we heard footsteps, to close the drawers quietly and appear to be eating bread and cheese which cook had laid on the table in case of emergency. When the coast was clear we would open up the drawers again and continue eating our hot meal. This act was never discovered whilst I was there and I left

after two years. Another incident occurred there which did not involve me, but left a life long impact on me. It concerned Winnie the housemaid, who had been there for some time. She often complained to us that money was left in the governess's room in the most unusual places where it must have been placed deliberately with the sole purpose of testing Winnie's honesty, or seeing that she did the room properly. Winnie vowed one day that if Miss Brown the governess continued doing this, she would teach her a lesson. Well, eventually she did. She found a half-crown under the carpet where it could not possibly have got accidentally; this caused an eruption in her placid nature, and she decided to act - she got a long nail from the tool box, together with a hammer, and nailed the half-crown to the floor. Later, Miss Brown came into the staff room and said very sweetly though vindictively: "Oh, Winnie, did you see a half-crown laying about when you did my room this morning?"

"Yes" said Winnie, "I did, and left it where I found it."

"Where was that?" said Miss Brown.

"You should know" replied Winnie.

"Don't be impertinent" said Miss Brown, "or I shall report you"

"Well, go ahead" said Winnie "do just that, I've had enough of your methods of testing my honesty, and if you can't remember where you left your half-crown, then I will show you." She straightaway took her to her room, turned back the carpet and showed her the half-crown nailed to the floor.

"There's your money Miss Brown, you can always find it where you left it."

Miss Brown was furious and went straight to the mistress and reported this. Winnie was called to the drawing room, severely reprimanded and dismissed there and then with a month's money in lieu of notice. We were sorry to see her go, as she was, to leave us, but said she went with the satisfaction of having 'got even' with Miss Brown, who never again taxed the staff over money.

We all liked the cook, who was the wife of the footman valet, she was very good to the staff, and a wonderful cook too. She had a placid nature compared with some cooks, and how we missed her when she became ill and eventually died. She was replaced by a very sarcastic cook, and none of the staff liked her. I used to hate going into the kitchen to collect the baby's food, and was always afraid to say anything for fear of saying the wrong thing. She didn't stay long and left soon after I did.

It was at about this time that I gave myself the challenge of reading my Bible from cover to cover, and not to read another book or magazine until I had finished it. It took me two years, though I must admit I did not understand all I read, the Bible is too difficult to read and understand without deep thought, but at least I had read

it from the first words in Genesis to the last words in Revelation, and I wasn't sorry when I finished it - it is too heavy for a young teenager!

My next job was with the Thompson family, who lived about twenty-five miles from London, and the furthest I had ever been from home. This time I went on my own and was treated more like one of the family. Mrs. Thompson was very sweet and kind, and so was Margaret the daughter, who was engaged to be married, but Mr. Thompson was another 'kettle of fish' acting strangely at full moon. The whole family knew this, and Margaret would often come and sleep in my room at these times. Being a 'green horn' I did not know quite why she did this, unless it was a feeling of friendliness, but I learned later that it was a protective measure for which I was most grateful. She and her fiancé were kindness itself, they used to take me about with them on their motor-cycle combination, Margaret in the side-car and I riding pillion. I loved it; we travelled for miles, and often picnicked at Virginia Water, or Windsor Great Park. Cars were not so plentiful as they are today, though Mr. Thompson had a Morris Cowley. I had a bicycle and used to cycle for miles on my half day to Slough, Eton, Windsor, Ealing, Beaconsfield, and all round the district for miles. Then in the evening I would go to the Cinema for ninepence, and sob over the Pearl White serial which always ended at the crucial moment and we were left in despair for a whole week until the next episode. On Sundays I went to Church with Margaret and her fiancé! One incident is worth mentioning:-

Mr. Thompson was a Freemason, and when he attended a Masonic dinner, he switched off the electricity at the mains at home before leaving, and we had to use candles. Why he did this I never knew, perhaps it was sheer cussedness. The family seemed to accept it and I felt at times that they were just a little afraid of him, as they never bothered to switch on again after he had gone out, having previously got the candles out ready for use. One evening after he had gone, I quietly put the switch down again, thus giving us electric light when it got dark. Mrs. Thompson was surprised and said he must have forgotten to switch off before leaving for his Masonic dinner. I said nothing as I had a little plan to carry out!

I went to bed as usual, and the family did likewise, and after giving them sufficient time to go to sleep, and verifying it by no light showing under the various doors, I crept downstairs like a frightened kitten, taking my torch, and switched off the electric light at the main, so that when he came in he would find the switch as he had left it. Then I proceeded to remove the light bulbs from the hall, drawing room and dining room and landing, so that when he came in, switched on at the main, and then again at the usual switches, he still had no lights. I knew from past experience he would be the

worse for drink and wouldn't have the sense to figure out why he could get no light. I waited upstairs in my bedroom at the top of the house, complete with all the bulbs I had removed, until I heard him stagger in 'three sheets to the wind' with drink, switch on the main switch and then the ordinary ones, but no light came on. I could hear him cursing and swearing and stumbling up the stairs, where his bedroom light came on when he switched on. I set my alarm for crack of dawn next morning, then, taking the bulbs with me, I crept downstairs and put them all back again, so when he came down to breakfast, he was completely mystified as to why he could get no light downstairs the night before, when they seemed to be working normally now. I told no one what I had done, and the family thought he was more than ever the worse for drink and must have imagined it.

Another time he scared the life out of me: I was reading a book by an open window, and although it was dark outside, it was quite warm. Suddenly, I felt someone's hand on the back of my neck, and looking up, saw a white grinning face at the open window. I screamed, as I thought it was a ghost, but it was Mr. Thompson, who had on a dark polo neck sweater, and therefore it did not show up, only the awful grinning face. Mrs. Thompson and Margaret came running to see what was the matter, and when I told them, they tried to cool me down, and stayed with me for a little while. They guessed who it was. He was most unpredictable at certain times, doing the oddest things. He once took all the red hot coals out of the kitchen range and put them on the hob, thus reducing the heat in the oven and spoiling the food cooking in it. Another time, he picked up the joint of meat from the dining table, complete with dish, and flung it into the empty grate, smashing the dish and splashing grease everywhere, to say nothing of the joint lying in the hearth. Then he dashed up to the pub, and asked for a glass of beer and some bread and cheese, saying there was no lunch for him at home. The publican and his wife obliged him, but took what he said with a 'grain of salt' as his peculiarities were well known in the village. I grew to hate him, and only stayed on because Mrs. Thompson and Margaret were so kind to me, but after three years with them I could stand no more and left, though I corresponded with Margaret for years afterwards.

Margaret had an older sister, who was married, and lived in the same village. She had one little boy, and when he was about three years old, he had a little sister, and one day he said to me: "Sisters aren't much good, you can't play with them, they are too small." So I told him that his sister would grow bigger and would be able to play with him in time, but he didn't seem to be able to grasp this, so I gave him an illustration by saying: "Look, Martin, when I was a baby, my mummy said I was so small she could put me in a quart milk jug" and showed him the size of the jug I meant. "Coo," said Martin, "you could hardly get in a water butt now!" I was, I admit, pretty plump, but didn't realise I was that size!



I joined the Thompson family in the first place because I wanted to learn how to cook and keep a room clean. I didn't have much chance to learn at home, as mother was so efficient - she preferred to do things herself - a mistake I fear, as a little help and advice from her would have helped us when we either went out to work or married. However, mother thought she was doing the best thing, and we girls didn't particularly want extra work on top of our usual jobs, so to learn the hard way, and at someone else's expense was our only hope. Unfortunately, there was not much variety in the menus, but enough to get a basic idea. It was strict routine: joint on Sunday, cold meat on Monday, minced or hashed up on Tuesday, steak on Wednesday, chops on Thursday, fish on Friday and stewed steak on Saturday. A milk pudding every day and stewed apple and egg custard on Sunday.

One day I asked if I could make a roly-poly pudding like mother made, for a change, and was given permission, so I got the recipe book and followed the instructions, not knowing the difference between plain flour and self-raising flour; the recipe was for plain flour with baking powder added. Well, the only flour we had was self-raising, so I used that and added the baking powder as instructed, tied it in a cloth, and put it on to boil. A little later on, there was an explosion in the kitchen, and running in to find the cause, discovered all my lovely roly-poly pudding in fragments all over the kitchen range. It had burst its cloth and exploded all over the stove with not a mite of pudding left in the saucepan. It was a frightful mess, and a bitter disappointment, and it was then I learned the difference between the two flours.

Whilst still with this family, my brother Bob was married in Staffordshire, and I was the only member of the family who could attend, being half-way there already. I was very fond of Bob, but did not take kindly to his bride, though she did not know this. It was at this wedding that I fell in love with her youngest brother, which proved to be the only love of my life, though I did not marry him. We were both in love and were engaged about three years, and then somehow we came 'unstuck'. I think the reason was, he was living in Staffordshire, and I was working in London, and we saw very little of each other, though we wrote long love letters every day. I used to see other girls out with their boy friends, and I had to be content with letters and brief meetings, and our courtship seemed to drag on with marriage no nearer, so I broke off the engagement, and decided to try and find someone nearer with whom I could go out. I must have been stupid indeed, as I could have tried this method and seen whether he came up to Billy's standard before I broke the engagement, and if not, well, Billy was still there. But somehow, I could not do that, I like to treat others as I would like to be treated myself. I was promised to Billy, and that was enough for me to play the game straight. No one in my life ever came up

to his standard, and those I did become friendly with, and they were few I can tell you, fell very short of his standard. I have lived to regret my hasty decision in parting with him. I learn the hard way!

Some years later, I met him again whilst staying with Bob and his wife, but he had married and I was completely heartbroken. However, life goes on and I had to go on with it.

It proved not a very happy marriage, which made my burden heavy to bear, feeling that I had not only ruined my own life, but his too. Eventually, he had a daughter, whom he adored, so this gave him something to live for. She grew up to be a sweet girl, and spent several holidays with me after I married several years later.

### CHAPTER THREE

After leaving the Thompson family, I went to work for a Scottish family who lived at Highgate, where there were two teenage children who liked to throw their weight about! I wasn't particularly happy there and food was in short supply. However, I had one wonderful experience there; we all went to Scotland for a month's holiday, taking a furnished house in Forfar. This holiday coincided with the birth of Princess Margaret at Glamis Castle, which was about six miles from Forfar.

We travelled by car, and stayed the first night at Newcastle, arriving to the sound of the church bells ringing for the evening service, it being Sunday. The journey was a revelation to me, never having travelled so far before, nor had I ever been in an Hotel before. I found this a little alarming and was afraid I would get lost with all those rooms and corridors, but I didn't.

We started early next morning on our journey, stopping at Jedburgh to view the Castle, which is very fine indeed, then on to Edinburgh to visit the Castle, with its magnificent view, and the Thistle Chapel, a War Memorial which has to be seen to be believed. It was built, furnished, glazed etc. by Scottish work people, but the stone used to build it came from Wooller in England. Some of the old buildings were pulled down to make room for the Memorial Chapel, and the stone reused as far as possible in its building, but this was not nearly enough, so they had to go to Wooller for the stone to match the old. Finally, we arrived at Forfar in the evening.

About a week later, our morning papers had headlines in bold capitals - It's a girl! - and we knew then that a second daughter had been born to the Duke and Duchess of York at Glamis Castle. Like everyone else, the children and I joined in the celebrations - as only the Scots know how! and we danced around the bonfire that night with all the locals. I doubt if anyone who could keep awake that night went to bed!

One day, during the holiday, the young lady from next door decided to take me on a trip to Glen Clova, a beauty spot high up in the mountains, and cut off by snow during the winter months. It is a tiny little village, only a handful of houses, and the smallest church I have ever seen, a congregation of a dozen and the church would be full. The bus ran there and back only once every three days, but we decided to try our luck and started out. The bus ride itself was a novelty as we were hemmed in by mountains with only the winding road in between. Once there, we explored the village, which did not take

long as it was so small, and then set out to find the Loch higher up the mountain. It was hard work at times, sometimes having to pull ourselves up by hand to whatever there was to grip, but this only added to the excitement. Eventually, over the last ridge, we found what we had sought, the most beautiful sight imaginable, a Loch, calm as a duck pond, without even a ripple, flanked on three sides by mountains and making a perfect reflection in the water. I held my breath and could hardly believe my eyes; I took some snaps to prove that we had seen this. We had our picnic lunch there and revelled in Nature's handiwork. Unfortunately, we could not stay long as time was pressing, and we had to catch the bus back to Forfar as to miss it meant staying there for another three days until the next bus came. So reluctantly, we started to descend, but I had only gone a short distance before ripping both heels off my shoes, which were, I admit, unfit for such a use, being high heeled. I found it very difficult to get a grip on the sloping ground, and had a few tumbles, until I found a thick stick which I used as a brake, and we eventually reached Glen Clova, caught the bus and arrived in Forfar in the evening. But for those snaps, my employers would not have believed we did get to the Loch.

Another day I thought I would visit Dundee, and did so, and once there I felt the easiest way to see as much as possible would be from the Church tower, so arriving at the Church door and stating my desire to the verger, he showed me the way to the Tower, and asked if I was going up alone. I said "yes" and started to climb the winding stairs. About half way up, suddenly there was a terrific noise and vibration, so close at hand that I was literally petrified, not knowing what it was. I was too frightened to move; then it stopped, and it dawned on me that it was the clock striking and I was right opposite it. So now the question was - do I go down and admit I was frightened, feeling a coward in the process, or go on to the top? I went to the top, knees shaking, and had a good look around the town or city - I am not sure which it is. Then, hoping I would not suffer the same experience going down, I descended as fast as I could. As I came out of the door, the verger asked me if I was all right - he thought I might have panicked when the clock struck. "Oh, no" I said, "I'm perfectly all right" and hoped he didn't notice how I was trembling, because it was the biggest fright I had ever had, though I hated to admit it to him. I've never forgotten that trip to Dundee!

When the holiday was over, we very reluctantly returned home, staying the first night at Otterburn, a delightful little village where they make the beautiful Otterburn rugs. The Hotel was small, but lacked nothing in comfort. London seemed very dreary after the beauties of Scotland.

It was whilst I was still with this family, that father died in

hospital, and the home was broken up. Mother went to live with Louie, who was by this time married, and lived at Lodge Land, where mother spent the rest of her life, though she lived for several years with Louie. Soon after this, the boss died suddenly, the house was sold, and the family moved to a smaller flat. I decided to move too, having been with them for three years. Although in the normal course, I dreaded leaving one place for another, I wasn't sorry to leave this family. I hadn't been too happy, and resented wholeheartedly the two teenagers constantly trying to intimidate me; it made my hackles rise, though I had to control this feeling which in itself was a bad thing, as I felt at times that I should explode with emotion.

After leaving Highgate, I went to live with the Macdonald family in Hampstead, one of the nicest, kindest families one could possibly work for. They had one little baby boy, Gordon, whom I grew to love dearly. There always seemed something angelic about him, and yet he was a real boy, full of fun, mischievous like most boys, and a joy to be with. He grew up to be a parson, and I for one was not surprised. This job left nothing to be desired, and passed a good many expectations; I never knew what real happiness was until then. The flat was situated overlooking Hampstead Heath, and commanded a beautiful and extensive view.

We used to go to Eastbourne for the Spring holiday, staying at an Hotel, also to Scaynes Hill to her friend's lovely house in the heart of the country. How I enjoyed those lovely quiet country walks with Gordon in the pram! it was so peaceful after the noise and bustle of London life. In the Autumn, we always went to the East Coast for a month, taking a furnished house. It was a tiny village, but had a first class golf course, and this was the attraction for the Macdonalds, who played golf every day. It also provided the holiday-makers with a safe beach for the children to play on, and when the tide was out, it left a glorious stretch of sand for everyone to enjoy. It was an ideal spot for holidays, and in the cool of the evening, there were the most beautiful walks to enjoy after supper. It was quite unspoiled by commercialism, not even ice cream vendors or similar, allowed on the beach, so that the children once there were quite happy with spades and buckets, shrimping-nets and dinghys, and the adults could relax in deck chairs and soak up the sun.

When Gordon was two years and nine months old, he had a little sister, Helen, a beautiful baby with blue eyes and fair skin. It was then that Phyllis came to help me with the children. She was an orphan of a fairly well-to-do family, and after her parents dies, she lived with an aunt. She was a very rich girl in her late teens, and whilst she was with us, she came into a considerable fortune. An aunt had died - not the one she had lived with - and had left her some money.

I can see Phyllis now, dancing round the room waving this cheque in her excitement. She stayed with us for about a year and then went out to Canada, to her Uncle who was a Professor at the Agricultural College at Guelph, Ontario. After a time, she became engaged to a master at the College and not long afterwards she suddenly had a heart attack and died in her mid-twenties. I was very sad and terribly upset. After she went to Canada I managed the two children on my own.

For some unknown reason, I developed a cough, and as I was not sure if it was merely a nervous cough or something worse, I went to the Chest Clinic to see if it was T.B. Fortunately, there was nothing wrong with my chest, it was purely a nervous cough, so this was a great relief!

About a year after this, mother became very ill, and we thought she was near the end, and Louie sent for me. I went down for a few days and we took turns to sit up with her during the nights, as she really was very ill. After several days, I began to feel queer myself and developed a very sore throat, but I did not take too much notice of this, because I was subject to bouts of tonsillitis. However, it became so painful that I could hardly swallow anything, so when the doctor came next time to see mother, Louie asked him to have a look at my throat, and perhaps be able to give me something to relieve the pain. Well, he did, and gasped "Where have you come from" and when I told him "from London" he said, "Are there any cases of diphtheria near you?" so I said, "not to my knowledge - why?" He said he thought it was diphtheria, and that I must be isolated in that bedroom, away from everybody, and told Louie to put hot fomentations on my throat every half hour. Poor Louie, as though she hadn't enough to do already with mother ill, and we thought dying, a husband, and three young children to look after, with no amenities such as water laid on, gas or electric cooker, and now me, ill with diphtheria and needing attention every half hour. She must have been in despair, though she didn't show it, but soldiered on heroically - she was wonderful. Mother recovered, and lived for some time after this.

The doctor took a swab of my throat and said he would send it to the laboratory, and would see me again as soon as he had the result. He came two days later, and said the swab proved positive, and that I had diphtheria. He gave me an injection, and said the ambulance would collect me and take me to Folkestone Isolation Hospital, and that I would be there for at least six weeks, and in the meantime I was not to move out of bed. Well, after he had gone, I got up, had a bath, dry-shampooed my hair with Robin starch, and went in to mother's room to say "Cheerio" to her, not good-bye - I thought good-bye too ominous! I had never been in hospital before, so did not know what

to expect. Louie packed my case, and wrote to Mrs. Macdonald to tell her of my plight. The ambulance came, complete with stretcher, whilst I was in mother's room saying "cheerio", so I thought it was stupid to carry me out to the ambulance on a stretcher, and after all, I was no light weight. So, after arguing, they let me walk out to the ambulance. Once inside, they wanted me to lie down, but I begged to be allowed to sit up, as I should have to be in bed for weeks. I think it was because the nurses were having a dance that night, that they were so reasonable with me. However, when we arrived at the hospital, the nurse said it was more than her life was worth, not to take me in on the stretcher. I saw her point of view, and laid down on it and was carried in, feeling sick with movement and apprehension of hospital life. I was given another injection, and laid flat in bed with no pillow, and with strict instructions not to move. I laid like that for three weeks, not allowed to do anything, not even put my hands in water when the nurses washed me. When the Medical Officer of Health came to see me, he said; "If you adhere to rules and do as you are told, you may only have a minimum amount of complications to contend with for the rest of your life, though it does affect the muscles, but if not, I could not answer for the consequences, and you will be the chief sufferer." Well, quite frankly, I wanted to get better as soon as possible, and with as few complications as possible, so irksome as it was, I did as I was told. After lying quite flat for three weeks, they gave me one thin pillow, then a week later, a second pillow, and a few days later a third one. I was thrilled, feeling I was well on the road to recovery and discharge. Then later, I could sit on the edge of the bed for a little while, and the next day for a little longer and so on, and then the joy when the nurse told me I could sit out on a chair beside my bed, but they would help me. I thought this offer of help quite absurd, as I had two good legs to stand on (as I thought) until I put my feet on the floor and hadn't the strength to stand. I could have wept with disappointment, but they told me not to worry, that strength would gradually come back and they would help me until it did. We had two or three deaths whilst I was there, which needless to say, cast a gloom over everyone, and for some unknown reason the mortuary fascinated me, perhaps it was the knowledge of "being so near and yet so far" so that when I eventually got stronger and was able to walk about the ward and then outside in the grounds - and never has fresh air seemed so wonderful - I searched until I found the mortuary, though it was locked, but I peeped through the key hole, saw the cross and the slab, and felt satisfied. Visitors were not allowed in the hospital, but spoke to us through the windows, and any letters we wrote were baked before being posted by the nurses, to kill any germs.

After six and a half weeks, and almost a record they told me, I was discharged and went to stay for a few days with some very kind friends in Folkestone. My nerves were all to pieces and I felt like a leper; everyone I saw would, I felt sure, avoid me because I had had diphtheria, but of course it was all imagination. From Folkestone I went to Herne Bay on convalescence, Mrs. Macdonald paying my expenses and also for a friend to come with me for company. We stayed at Herne Bay for a fortnight, and I felt much better for a breath of bracing sea air. During this fortnight, we decided one day to visit Canterbury as neither of us had been there before. It was a nice day, cold but sunny. On arrival, we decided to have coffee at a cafe and get our bearings, and we must have discussed what we would like to do and see quite loudly, because a gentleman having finished his coffee, came over to our table and asked us if we would like him to show us some of the interesting parts of the city. We hesitated, until he turned back the label of his coat and showed us his Official Guide badge. So we agreed to go with him, and it proved to be the most wonderful experience. First, he took us into a chemist's shop, lifted up a trap door in the floor, and we descended a flight of stone steps worn in places by the tread of feet over hundreds of years. We came out near the river, and viewed the scene from there, then he took us along more underground passages which ended under the Cathedral, then up more steps into the Cathedral itself. He told us the monks used these passages years ago. He took us over the Cathedral, explaining many things which would have been unnoticed by the average visitor, and being known to the vergier, our guide had access to the unusual parts. It was a wonderful day, and we were so pleased we had decided to accompany him on this tour, the like of which we should never have seen otherwise. He asked us if we would like to go back the way we had come, and we said 'yes', so back along the underground passages we went, till he came to the steps up to the trap door, lifted it, and we found ourselves back in the chemist shop again. One or two customers were amazed to see us emerge out of the floor, but the assistants knew all about it and took little or no notice.

We returned to London at the end of the fortnight, and felt much better for the rest and bracing sea air, though it took me many months before I felt my usual self again, but I was so happy to be back with the Macdonald family once more.

Not long after this, I became friendly with a Mother's help who lived in the same block of flats. She was an Irish girl, and we used to pram-push every afternoon, and walk miles in the process, sometimes across the Heath, and sometimes further afield. We varied our walks according to the weather, or on our own personal feelings, and this made the walks more interesting for the children as well as ourselves. Maureen and I often spent our off duty times together, afternoons only, as she had a boy friend with whom she spent the evenings. She spent money like water, though that was entirely her own affair. At the same



time, I was friendly with a Welsh nannie - Megan - who was engaged to be married, and therefore was careful with her money, and spending as wisely as she could. These two friends were extremes in almost every way, and I found them interesting and a novelty to watch their outlook on life. When I went out with Megan on my half day, we would walk everywhere, no bus riding, have two 'uncooked' crumpets for tea as they were a penny cheaper than cooked ones! and a cup of tea. Then to the News Theatre where the cheapest seats were sixpence, and then walk home, which from the West End was quite a distance. Our expenses were usually elevenpence each, and we really had enjoyed our day, pitting our wits against the odds. Of course there were always the big shops in Oxford Street to wander round in the afternoon to view, but not to buy - our elevenpence would not stretch to that!

With Maureen, it was the other extreme, we rode everywhere, either by bus or underground, had a lavish tea with cream buns etc., the best seats in the Cinema costing several shillings, and then riding home at night, so that what I spent with Maureen, I saved with Megan, and yet I enjoyed one as much as the other - it was really fun.

One day, Maureen decided she would like to visit her parents in Ireland, and as I have said, she spent her money like water, so the question was, how was she going to find the money for the trip? We discussed this at length, and finally, she asked me if I would save a part of her weekly salary, which she would hand over to me on pay day, but with strict instructions not to let her have it only for the Irish trip. I agreed to do this, and we kept an account of the amount passed over to me, and all went well until she had a few pounds saved up. Then suddenly she saw something she wanted, but did not need, and asked me for her money in order to buy it. I refused, and explained about the instructions she had given me about holding the money until she went to Ireland. She raved at me, lost her temper, and said it was her money and she could do what she liked with it - fair enough - but what about the Irish trip I asked? She didn't know, and she didn't care, all she wanted was the money to buy that which had taken her eye. I thought it best to sleep on it, and perhaps she would see reason, but no, the next day she started all over again, and I could see our friendship would suffer if I did not give in to her. So I gave her back the money, saying: "Here's your money, Maureen, but don't ever ask me to hold money for you again, because I won't do it." She signed the receipt and gave it to me, and our friendship continued until she left to get married. She went to Ireland some time later with her fiance, so no doubt he helped her with the expenses. Not long after this, Megan went back to Wales to be married, and for several years, we three girls corresponded.

When Helen was about a year old, the Macdonalds moved to a much larger flat, overlooking the White Stone Pond and Hampstead Heath. It was a super flat, and needed a full time staff to run it, plus a daily woman. It was a happy household. I had charge of the two children, who

were very dear to me. They were quite different in every respect, Gordon was dark, gentle and unselfish; Helen was fair, with blue eyes and clear skin, with a will of her own and not afraid to exercise it! She was, as a baby, the most beautiful little soul imagineably, but not so easy to rear as Gordon. However, I made no distinction between them.

During this time, I fell in love with Jock, who was tall, dark and handsome - a real Robert Taylor - but after a while, I realised my mistake when I compared him with Billy. His good looks belied his real self, and I cooled off. It was hard at the time, but common sense prevailed. For a life-long partner, one needs more than good looks, however fascinating they may be!

When Gordon was five, he started school, and I left the Macdonalds as the two children were being taken over by a long standing friend of theirs. I was very sad at leaving them, feeling the bottom had dropped out of my world. But Mrs. Macdonald recommended me to a friend of hers, who was a Naval Officer's wife, with one little girl, who lived near Fareham. She was a beautiful little baby, but much too fat, and I had to gradually reduce this by giving her the correct food. I was very happy with them, but it was country, and after London life, it seemed so quiet. However, I became friendly with a Norland Nannie who lived nearby and had one little boy to look after. We used to pram push together, and so did not notice the quietness so much. After about a year, this family moved to a quaint old world cottage near Chichester, and it was even more quiet than the previous one. I had no one here to pram push with, no one to spend my off duty hours with, and only a skeleton bus service to get anywhere. I was in despair! The house itself was fascinating, quite unlike anything I had ever seen, but when the daily woman who came from the village to work, said it was haunted - that did it! - I decided to move on, and did so. My next post was in Norfolk, but more about that later.

It was at about this time that Mother died. I was very sad about this, and felt the loss very much, as being the youngest of the family, and as yet unmarried, I felt I had no permanent home, though Louie said I could always make my home with her, and I did so for a long time, but she was constantly moving house, and I never knew where my next home would be. Often, it was in some outlandish place, miles from anywhere, and with no transport to get me to and from the Station when I went to stay with her for a few days or a holiday. So I decided to make my home with Bert and Anne at Ham Street. I was very happy staying with them, and they were so kind to me. Bert not only proved to be my favourite brother, but also my best friend, and when he died in 1964, I was desolate. In the intervening years, he was like the Rock of Gibraltar, always there, utterly reliable, ready to help in time of need, or great understanding and completely selfless, and I have never found a friend to equal him.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

As I have said previously, the Macdonald family went to Norfolk for their Autumn holiday, and it was on the last of these that I met John. As a holiday friend he was quite satisfactory, and as far as I was concerned that was the limit, but alas, not so with him, he took it very seriously, but I thought once I was back in London, he would soon forget me and find another companion. He asked if he could write to me, and quite frankly I could see no harm in this, as I had made my point quite clear, that it was only a holiday friendship, so for a time we wrote to each other occasionally, friendly letters of our activities etc. Then he decided to come up to London to see me, though I tried to dissuade him; I felt quite apprehensive about this, as I had no intention of taking the friendship further. Then an idea occurred to me:-

I asked another friend of mine, Audrey, to come with me when I met him. She was a very attractive girl who longed for a boy friend, but somehow never seemed to get one. I would be cold and casual with him, and she would be nice to him, hoping he would fall for her. She played her part very well, but it did not have the desired effect, and we girls were very disappointed, and I felt a little annoyed with him for passing Audrey over. However, we soon got over our disappointment when he went back and we resumed our usual way of life. Audrey and I belonged to the Baptist Church Bible Class, with quite a few other girls, and we enjoyed these classes very much. They were a mixed bag of girls, mostly from service of one form or other though there were two or three nurses there who were inclined to think they were superior to the rest of us - quite toffee-nosed they were! However, our two leaders made no distinction between us, and often invited us down to their homes after the evening service for a social evening. The boys from the Boys' Bible Class were often invited too, and we had some very pleasant evenings there. One or two couples paired off, and were eventually married. Perhaps that was the leaders' idea of inviting us!

As John and I were still corresponding, still on friendly terms, and by this time he really was getting serious, though I was still uncertain of my feelings, I kept judging every boy friend with Billy's standards, but of course no one ever reached that peak. So when I left the Naval Officer's family, I decided to get a post in Norfolk, near John, and so test my feelings, by seeing him often. I found a job with a farmer's wife with three children. The eldest was at Boarding School so I did not see much of him; the next child was at day school, so my chief duties were to take him to school and collect him in the afternoon. The youngest was a little girl of three, and still at home. I arrived during the sugar beet carrying season, and the roads were like mud tracks. I had never seen anything like it, and in fact it was months before I discovered there was a hard road

beneath all that mud.

Food was not one of their strong points, and for the first time in my life I knew what hunger was. I would eat anything I could find, and that wasn't much because the lady kept a strict eye on the store cupboard. We had porridge in the Nursery for breakfast, but the children hesitated to eat it as they had to have salt on it, and therefore it was not very tasty; as I had sugar on mine, I started putting sugar on theirs, and they ate it up with relish. I got told off by the "Management" for doing this, because the Scottish way of eating porridge is with salt, but I continued to put sugar on mine and the children's too, and at least they ate it - just as well, there was little to follow. All meals were the same, in short supply, just enough to set the digestive juices working, but not enough to satisfy the pangs of hunger. I was not particularly happy there, but decided to stay on so that I could see John more often on my half days, and so sound out my own feelings for him.

It was here that I met Elizabeth, a young girl who came from the village to work daily, and we struck up a friendship which has lasted to this day. A faithful little friend she proved to be, and she was the one bright spot in that job, like a ray of sunshine.

What with the isolation of the farm, mud everywhere, food in short supply, a reduction in salary, and still uncertain as regards John, I began to wonder what I had let myself in for. I think hunger was my biggest problem, with no shops near to buy extras or sweets. I remember on one occasion the "Management" had gone to market where they met other farmers to discuss livestock and compare notes etc. The children and I were left a macaroni-cheese for lunch - an insult to its name - hardly any cheese in it but plenty of breadcrumbs, and watered-down milk. It was horrible, absolutely unpalatable, and neither the children nor I could eat it, so I took it into the kitchen, tipped it into a saucepan, grated every bit of cheese I could find (though that wasn't much) into it, used more milk, not watered-down, and a good knob of butter (absolute sacrilege), heated it up and then put it back in the dish and popped it back in the oven to brown. We enjoyed that macaroni cheese and ate every scrap of it! When the "Management" came home and prepared supper, she looked for the cheese and could not find it. She came up to the Nursery and asked me if I knew where the cheese was. "Oh yes" I said, "I used it for baiting the mouse traps". Admitted, we were overrun with mice, but not to the extent of using up all that cheese, not that there was much in the first place, but more that half a dozen mouse traps needed baiting. I'm sure she did not believe me. It was the children I felt sorry for, because it was obvious they were not getting enough of the right kind of food to eat, not because it need be scarce as being on a farm, there was always milk in abundance. This was not for our consumption however, it was sent to the Milk Marketing Board, likewise fruit and vegetables. They grew acres of cauliflowers,

sprouts and soft fruits, but they all went to market. I was always ashamed of my appetite when I went over to John's family, though they understood. His family welcomed me with open arms, and I grew very fond of John, but did not love him as I felt I ought to. However, he was keen to become engaged, and we finally married and settled down, and by this time I felt I should never find anyone to equal Billy, so I agreed to become engaged to him. We exchanged rings in Norwich Cathedral and I vowed then that I would do all I could to make him happy, though at the back of my mind I had misgivings. My conscience seemed to be saying 'no' but I did not heed it, had I done so, it would have saved heartache for both of us later on when tragedy struck our home.

I left the farm in May, having been there six months, and went to live with Bert and Anne for a week or two before going into hospital to have my tonsils removed. I had been plagued with tonsillitis for so many years and decided to have them out before I got married. I had the operation and went down like a 'burst balloon' weak, unable to walk any distance, and always cold. It seemed impossible to get warm, and in spite of the heat-wave, I wore all my winter woollies, sat in front of a fire, and had a hot water bottle to go to bed with, and still shivered - weakness I suppose! It took me ages to gain strength and get a little warmth into my chilled body. Bert and Anne were very kind to me during this interim period, and looking back, I feel I must have been a problem to them.

Mid-August, I decided to try working again, and took a local temporary job; with the wedding arranged for October, I needed the extra money, and also to get from under Anne's feet in her small house. The job was a fiasco, or else it was I who couldn't cope with it, still feeling far from my usual self. I used to get so tired, and the work, which was housework, seemed so boring and monotonous, and unrewarding after looking after children. I left after about six weeks, and went back to Norfolk to put the finishing touches to our new home.

John and I were married on a cold October day in 1937. I was nearly frozen in my white wedding dress, and long embroidered veil. John seemed nervous too. We had two little bridesmaids, both nieces, dressed in turquoise dresses and carrying posies. The wedding reception was at Bert's house, and following that, we went straight back to our new home. We were buying our house and decided that was more important than spending the money on a honeymoon. We travelled by car, causing some amusement at Tilbury Ferry as we alighted to stretch our legs for a few minutes and masses of confetti tumbled out. It was short lived, as the Ferry doesn't take on long to cross over, and once on dry land, we were on our way again.

We settled down quite happily, though managing on a very limited income caused me many anxious moments. I had thirty shillings a week to pay for everything. I had no idea of the cost of food, always having it provided for me, and in most cases, living very well indeed. Our mortgage

on the house was twelve shillings a week, leaving eighteen shillings to cover everything - food, coal, gas, electricity, insurance - the lot! I had a horror of debt, and what John's money would not buy, we went without, until I in turn could add to the wage packet by taking in visitors. By and large, the first winter was a problem, trying to get sufficient food on what money we could spare. Soup was a great favourite, made with marrow bones and vegetables, plus dumplings to fill up. Rabbit was cheap too and often found its way to our table. I often went for long walks during the day to keep warm, and to save the coal for the evening fire. I was lonely too, all day on my own, and after the constant companionship of the children in my various jobs, I felt lonely indeed. I began to wonder what I had let myself in for, if this was married life, then give me single life, with a job and company. Fortunately, when I started taking in visitors, early the next summer, I was too occupied to be lonely, cold or homesick, but really enjoyed the hard work, and the company, and had more money to cope with. At first I let "Apartments" cook the food the visitors provided, until I in turn learned within reason, the kind of meals they preferred. After that I decided to do "Full Board" and this gave the visitors a more restful holiday, with no shopping to do daily. It was more interesting for me, as I could then plan my menus ahead.

The Norfolk people are not a friendly race at first, to be a visitor, they welcome you with open arms, but to go there to life, is quite different. I thought perhaps it was I that was at fault, perhaps there was something about me they did not like, or take to, until after about a year, a local retired doctor asked me how I found the Norfolk people. I asked him if he was a Norfolk man and he said "No", so I felt I could air my views quite frankly. I said "I find them unfriendly, detached, a hidden barrier you cannot penetrate, they don't seem to want to accept you." To my surprise, he agreed with me, and said he had found the same thing when he first came to Norfolk to live many years ago to take up a practice. Then he said "Don't worry, after you have been here for ten years, they will begin to accept you." So I replied, "If that is the case, then I don't think I shall be all that eager to accept them, after ten years." "Don't be too hard on them" he said, "It's something they have inherited and cannot help. H.V. Morton said in one of his books that Norfolk, being the nearest point to Denmark, when the Danes invaded England, they always treated strangers with suspicion and they have never really overcome that suspicion." This seems incredible after so many years. So I tried to be tolerant, and not worry too much over this. However, I did not have to wait ten years to be accepted, though I would rather have waited that long, even a lifetime, rather than "Find them" through the death of my little son, years later, which seemed to "down" all barriers. They really were magnificent to me then, no one could have done more, either by kindness or friendship, and many still remain my friends.

I used to look forward to the summer, bringing visitors, and to see

new faces brought new life to me. Most of the families who stayed with me had children, and much as I love children, it did grieve me at first to see them sliding on my beautifully polished floors, or abusing my lovely new furniture, but by and large, I grew to accept this as part of the holiday arrangements. I needed the money they paid to help tide us over the long winter months, when work for John was not always forthcoming. I gave them three good hot meals a day and early morning tea, and a packed tea to take on the beach. It made a lot of work for me single-handed, and often the families numbered eight or nine, and with John and I there was a houseful indeed. However, I was young, and active, and really enjoyed it. My busiest days were on Saturdays, when we had what we termed a "turnover" meaning one family leaving in the morning, and another coming in the afternoon. It was one mad rush, beds to change, rooms to turn out, shopping to see to, and all in a few hours, and be ready and smiling to welcome the newcomers. Of course the families differed, some nicer than others, and these were definitely in the majority. The others, I had for only that holiday, and if they wrote the following year to book up, I was always booked. This was a polite way of saying 'no'. The demand for my rooms was so great, I could pick and choose, and naturally I chose the nicer families, and those who appreciated my efforts. I had one family who came in a "Rolls" causing a great stir in the village, and comments to me like:- "My word, you are doing things in style!" or, "How do you find these people?" Well, recommendations were my only advertisement, and visitors came from all over England, France, Germany, India, China, Ireland, Northern Rhodesia, Kaleshad EG, South Africa and Singapore. The family with the Rolls were the nicest people imaginable, homely and friendly. It was the first time I had ever had the chance to ride in a Rolls, and it was a revelation. One evening they took us to a Show in town and after the performance, we got into the car to come home. I was completely mystified as to what the lights were that kept passing us. When I asked, I was told: "It's not the lights passing us, it's we who are passing the lights, the street lamps." I had no idea we were moving, no noise, or vibration, and I was told that "If a glass of wine was placed on the radiator, it would not spill while the car was in motion, so smooth was the running." This family came year after year, they had one daughter aged about ten when they first came to me, and I watched her grow up, become engaged, and eventually married. Her mother was a semi-invalid, but brave in accepting it. She found the bracing sea air a real tonic after the industrial area in which they lived. Her husband was knighted some few years ago.

Over a period of years, I had quite a number of clergymen and their families to stay with me. They usually arrived wearing their dog-collars, which "made my sins stick out a mile" or that is how I felt. But once these were discarded, and they donned their holiday outfit, I felt they were one of us, treading on the same plain so to speak, and just as human as we were, bent on enjoying their holiday like anyone else.

Once I had a Nun and her mother staying with me for a week; the Nun was allowed freedom in limitation for that week, but she surprised me by drinking cyder! Now why she shouldn't, I do not know, perhaps it was because I thought the Convent rules so strict. She spent a lot of time in prayer, and was a very sweet soul. Her mother told me how distressed she was when her daughter, an only child, decided to enter the Convent, but all her persuasions could not move her, and she had to accept the fact that if it was her daughter's calling, then she must give way, and pray that it would bring her happiness. It did, and from that day on, they never looked back.

One dear old gentleman came year after year, and he was almost blind. His wife, whom he adored, was in a hospital for incurables. He was wonderfully brave, and an example of courage in the face of distress and grief. Whenever he spoke of his wife, his lip would begin to tremble, and his eyes fill with tears, and then suddenly he would 'crack a joke' and so master his emotion with flippancy, rather than give way to sadness. How I admired his courage! He was the only visitor I had whose shoes I cleaned, and if sometimes they were only dusty, I would just rub the duster over them, but he knew they had not been cleaned properly, and when I asked him how he knew, he said he smelt them and would know at once if polish had been used or not. He was a great source of encouragement to me; after I lost my little son, I used to feel that if he could smile through his difficulties, then I must try to do the same. It helped tremendously, and believe me, I needed all the encouragement I could find. His daughter and son-in-law spent many holidays with me, and have remained firm and faithful friends ever since.

In 1939, when as we all know, war was declared, Gordon and Helen Macdonald were taken to Canada by a family friend. They sailed on the ship that preceded the "Athenia" that ill-fated ship the Germans torpedoed, full of children who, like the Macdonald children were being evacuated to Canada for safety. It was a harrowing time for the parents, and this cruel, senseless act of torpedoing this shipload of children, so incensed us and our Allies, that we decided, come what may, we would crush this beastly enemy. We did, but at great cost to millions of others. We were only too thankful that Gordon and Helen's ship arrived safely with its precious load. They stayed there until it was safe to return.

Once back in this country, they passed through their necessary schools. Gordon went to Clare College and later to Kelham to train for the ministry. He was later ordained at Southwark Cathedral by the Rev. Mervyn Stockwood, Bishop of Southwark. I was given an invitation to attend and did so, feeling sick with excitement that my once little charge should make such a wise choice of profession. After the service, and still as a guest of the Macdonald family, we all went to the famous "George Inn" at Southwark for lunch. The Bishop and other clergy in one room, and Gordon and his friends



and relations in another. With all those 'dog collars' around, I felt "my sins sticking out a mile" again. It was quite an experience for me. With us, was the Bishop of Ghana, as he was a great friend of the Gordons, the latter having spent many years in Ghana. The Bishop came over to London for the occasion, and when Gordon introduced me to him, he gave me a good handshake, and with a twinkle in his eye, said "How do you do, I am so pleased to meet you, but what a lot you have to answer for!" We both enjoyed the joke.

Helen was the first to marry, her fiance being a Scotsman. They were married at the famous Pont Street Presbyterian Church in London. I had an invitation and of course it was a great day for me too! On entering the Church, I met Gordon, who incidentally was organist at the Ceremony, so I said to him "Hello, Gordon, you are a very important person today, being organist, but don't put your foot on the wrong pedal!" "Oh, don't say that" he said, "if you only knew how easy it is to do so." He did not make a mistake, I didn't think he would, it was simply the first thing that came into my head! Helen looked beautiful in her long white wedding dress and veil, and so happy too. The reception followed at the Cadogan Hotel. It has proved a very happy marriage, blessed with four lovely children. I still see them all occasionally, and still feel "included".

It was several years later when Gordon married, whilst he was still in Ghana, though he came back to England for the wedding. We were delighted when he announced his engagement, as by this time he was in his thirties, and we felt it was high time he settled down! Needless to say, I had an invitation to the wedding, which was at Charlton, one of the Churches he had served as Curate, and also where he met his fiancée, a keen worker there. There was a grand reception to follow at an Hotel nearby, where Gordon amused us by starting his speech by saying "Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking"! This coming from a parson, preaching his way through life was funny indeed.

As with Helen, this has proved a very happy marriage, blessed with three children. They went back to Ghana for a time, but the climate proved unsuitable for Diana and the children, and eventually they came back to England to live.

CHAPTER FIVE

Three months after war broke out, my little son was born, no picnic I assure you, but a rich reward to hold my own little baby in my arms after holding so many other people's, happy though I had been to do so. My sister-in-law, Anne, and the District Nurse looked after me and the baby. He was only 6½ lbs and I had to feed him every three hours night and day for a week. I well remember thinking 'I have a little son now and I shall never have to hand him back' as was the case in my posts as Nannie. Of course John was thrilled that he had a little son, though I think he would have preferred a daughter which he wanted to name 'Prudence Mary'.

We spent Christmas that year with John's mother and sisters, and had a wonderful time. Of course Colin being the only grandchild of that side of the family, he was the 'star turn' but we were happy to know that everyone was sharing our happiness. He was christened at Easter, wearing a beautiful embroidered crepe-de-chine christening robe. It was quite a warm Easter so the new Easter bonnets of the ladies served a dual purpose! We had a christening party to follow.

It was a bitter cold winter that year, and a good many men in the building trade where John worked, were laid off. Unemployment benefit was very poor, and it was a constant source of worry to make ends meet, apart from being utterly soul-destroying and depressing to the men concerned. It was this I blamed for the sudden outburst of temper John had one day, which had I known of the mental instability in his mother's family, would have recognised as a 'brain storm' and not merely temper. I had never seen anyone's eyes blaze as his did, they were horrible, and I knew what fear was then. He picked up a chair, whether to hit me with it, or to crash it against the fireplace, I never knew. I do remember saying to him quietly: "John, don't be a fool, put it down", not because I was feeling cool, I was trembling violently, and had no voice to speak with. My first thoughts were of Colin, asleep in his cot upstairs, only two or three months old, so I went upstairs and stood at the top of the stairs thinking: "Only over my dead body do you get to Colin to injure him", though I was so terrified I could have put up little or no resistance had it been necessary. I did pray to God to give me help and wisdom to cope with the situation. Thankfully, John collapsed halfway up the stairs, and burst into tears, saying: "Oh, Kathy, I am so sorry I lost my temper with you, and I hope please God I shall never do it again." After that, he quietened down, and was his normal self once again, but for me it was an 'eye-opener' as to what could happen under adverse circumstances, and I took good care to avoid a similar incident. I did mention this episode to his mother and sisters, but they would not believe me, or said they didn't, and John of course denied all knowledge

of it. Whether at the time of such an attack, one's mind is a complete blank I do not know, nor did I probe too deeply into this, thinking of course it was just a terrible outburst of temper, and nothing more. Later in life, I discovered it was the mental instability in the family that had been passed on to him and which years later resulted in the terrible tragedy in our home. In many ways John was a kindly inoffensive kind of man as long as things went along normally, but he seemed unable to stand up to opposition, or make a definite decision, always relying on others, and not popular with men. I don't know how he fared in the Navy during the war, mixing with men. He was not a communicative man, yet always ready with a 'quip' which he had a store of. By and large, we were happy, as happy as the war would allow us to be, and he was not called up for about two years after war was declared.

Several babies were born about the same time as Colin in the village, and we mothers used to meet and compare notes, and show off our offsprings. It was interesting to note their progress or otherwise. One was born with a hare-lip and cleft palate, and later operated on successfully; one was much too fat; one was mentally retarded and unfortunately, his mother who had a business to run as well, had very little patience with him, and later he was put into a Home for mentally retarded children; one was a beautiful bonny boy, and Colin, my own dear little son, the best of the lot, and what mother doesn't think her child the best!

As the war progressed, so did our anxieties, and rationing was introduced, practically everything we needed was rationed, not only food, but clothing, coal, potatoes and household goods. Admitted it was the fairest way of distribution, when everything was in short supply, and one needed a ration book for everything. As is always the case, money will overcome many obstacles, and those who could afford exorbitant prices for meals at cafes and restaurants did so, thus easing the pressure of rations at home. To the poorer classes, we had to manage as best we could, and be grateful for small mercies. It was a problem I assure you!

I well remember one soldier's wife who was staying with me at one period, a very selfish self-opinionated woman who was too, and one whom I really did not like, but having been 'saddled' with her, I tried not to take too much notice of her faults, until one day at the tea table, she complained that the butter spread on Colin's bread was more liberally spread than ours. This remark, coming from her, caused me to 'froth up and bubble over' and I told her in no uncertain terms that "As Colin had only one slice of bread to spread it on, whereas she had four or five slices, naturally he could have more butter on his bread than the rest of us. If she thought that because there was a child in the house, she would get a little more than her rations, she had another think coming. I was not going to deprive my child of his rations, insufficient as they already were, just to give it to her or anyone else, and the sooner she realised that, the better".

She never stopped trying to get just a little more than was her due, and gave out some nasty remarks not only to me, but to other wives staying with me at the time. Eventually I had to ask her to go, and after a time she found other accommodation, where she tried the same antics, but without success, and after a short while there, she left the district.

When the bombs began to fall on different parts of the country, John, before he was called up, dug a huge hole in the garden and sunk a small wooden shed in it, where we could shelter during air raids. We made this as comfortable as possible, with deck chairs, blankets, food etc. This gave us a small measure of security. Later on, we were issued with Morrison shelters indoors, which had steel tops and supports, and wire mesh sides. We used to sleep in this all the time, and I felt quite safe, thinking 'Well, Hitler, you can do your worst now, but you can't hurt us'. Stupid, I know, for had he done so, I should not be writing this, thirty years later.

In 1941, John was called up, and he joined the Navy because his father had been a sailor. I had mixed feelings about this, relief and anxiety, the former because he had become such a burden, he seemed to be deteriorating in so many ways. I did not know then of the mental instability in his mother's family - one of her sisters and two nieces were in mental homes, and only a few years ago, the last remaining member of the family committed suicide by drowning at the age of 75\*. It was undoubtedly this mental instability he had inherited, forcing the decline, a tragedy in itself. The anxiety of course was for his safety in times of war. I dreaded the thought of him being wounded and suffering, and of possible death, and hoped the experience of naval life and mixing with men of his own age would improve his outlook on life. No doubt the war experiences did not help his mental condition, with all the horrors and near misses he had in the Navy, enough to unnerve even the strongest of characters, as unfortunately it did in many cases. So I discovered a changed John when he came home again after the war, and not for the better either, he was moody and withdrawn, and terribly jealous of Colin. I used to tell him that a mother's love was different from the love of a husband and wife, and that a mother's love is a protective love, but he didn't seem to be able to grasp it. He hated sharing me with anyone, even Colin, and told me so in so many words. He also told me (after we were married) that he used to feel jealous of his sisters' interest in me, when we were engaged, that I belonged to him, and him only! However, we all have our faults and good points, and no doubt I was not always the easiest person to live with, in fact I know I wasn't, but we seemed to get along reasonably well.

When Colin was about three years old, he threw a bottle in the sea with his name and address on it, and although we hoped it would be found and acknowledged, we did not anticipate too much, as it was only an ordinary medicine bottle tightly corked. Imagine our surprise when about three months later, we received a card from a Danish family, who were on holiday

in Fanø on the coast of Jutland, saying they had found the bottle, uncorked it and read the message inside, and asking us to correspond with them. They lived in Copenhagen, near the rear of the Royal Palace. We were all terribly excited about this, and I wrote at once to this family, and we have corresponded ever since. The lady could read and write English as she worked in the Danish Dairies Export Section. She was married, but had no children, so they adopted a little boy whom they called their foster son. We have never met, though have discussed the possibility many times, but with us both working, our holidays have never coincided, and we have been unable to do so. When Colin died, she sent flowers over in the Danish colours. I thought this a charming tribute, and was deeply touched.

Whilst John was away in the Navy, I had a number of soldiers wives staying with me, over the years. Their husbands were in camp near, and apart from the pleasure it gave those couples, it also helped me financially and was company for Colin and I. One very nice young couple, on honeymoon, were with me for a week, the only shadow on the horizon was that as soon as the honeymoon was over, the husband was due to go to France. He went, and was killed almost as soon as he stepped on to French soil. It was terribly sad, and I felt an overwhelming pity for that young bride. It seemed such a waste of a good man, with all his life before him. I was only too thankful that I was able to provide them with a few days of wedded bliss, and hoped that in time, that bride would find someone else to fill the aching void in her heart, and a measure of happiness.

After this, another nice young couple came to stay for a fortnight, and eventually stayed six months! At certain times in the year, a ban would come into force along the East Coast, and everyone who was not a resident, was compelled to leave the district, regardless of rank. Then when the ban was lifted, those who wanted to return could do so. Margaret came back a second time for several months, and then west back to her mother to have her first baby, a little girl, weighing 2½ lbs. Of course the baby was kept in hospital until she reached her normal weight, and soon after this her husband was sent abroad, and was in the Dunkirk evacuation. He survived the war, and we have remained friends ever since, and have spent many holidays together.

I must tell you about Jane! She was the fiancée of one of the Officers billeted in the village. She used to spend her weekends with me, and this gave her a chance to be with her fiancé, who was fair, blue-eyed and handsome. She was a very sweet girl, and I liked her enormously. All went well for several weekends, and I gave them the freedom of my home as was rightly permitted. One weekend, on going up to her room to draw the curtains and turn down the bed as usual, I discovered her wet clothes jangling all over the furniture, with puddles of water on the floor where it had drained out. There were all her clothes, undergarments, dress, stockings etc. I wondered what had happened, as it was a nice warm

summer's evening. I also felt a little annoyed at finding my furniture so rudely used, as the salt water left its mark and I was just a little house proud. However, I took the clothes down to the kitchen to dry; it was warm there with the Ideal boiler alight to heat the water, went upstairs and mopped up the water on the bedroom floor.

When Jane came in much later, I asked her what had happened, and she said she had fallen off the 'pipe line' into the sea. Now this was the long pipe which ran some distance out to sea, taking all the sewage from the village, and at low tide was visible for quite a long way, but at high tide was completely covered. At low tide, it was a source of pleasure for visitors and children to walk along, and apparently Jane had been walking on it that evening and either slipped off, or overbalanced and fell into the sea. Well, I accepted this as possible, as I don't suppose she was the first one to fall of and get a wetting! Her fiance was with her too, so no doubt they were 'sky-larking' or chasing each other when she fell. I told her I had her clothes drying in the kitchen, and she was very grateful, and we went off to our respective beds for the night. The Officer in question slept at camp, so I had only Jane there.

After she had left on Monday morning to return to work, some little distance away, I learned from one of the Officer's men friends that she had not fallen off the pipe line, but had thrown herself into the sea to commit suicide, because her fiance had wanted to break the relationship, and she did not. Whether she did this for effect, or to really commit suicide, I do not know, but I did discover that she was a married woman, the wife of an Army Captain, who later divorced her, and I unfortunately had to give evidence in Court. The husband was a very nice gentleman, and apologised to me for involving me in this unpleasant episode. I was very upset as I had never been to Court before, and could very well have done without the experience, but I had no choice in the matter, I was told to go, and that was that! It was a horrible experience, standing up in Court, giving evidence, with all eyes on me, and I wished the earth would open and swallow me up! My voice which sounded very loud to me must have been more like a whisper, because I was asked "to speak just a little louder please".

After leaving the Court, I think I was bordering on hysterics, as I just wanted to laugh and laugh and laugh! - no doubt with relief - but felt if I started, I should never stop, so I had to put a grip on myself. I had an hour to wait for a train back home and so decided to fill in the time by choosing a hat. Now I didn't want a hat, didn't need one, and hadn't the money to buy one, but I thought it would be fun to try on some of the fabulous ones. I went into one of the most exclusive shops and tried on some of the various hats, all very costly, but always finding some fault with them, to prevent having to buy one - very naughty I know! Eventually, I caught the train home, and on arriving broke down completely

and sobbed myself to the point of exhaustion. It eased the tension, though I felt like 'death warmed up' for some time afterwards.

Occasionally, I had difficult visitors to deal with, chiefly with the children, and I can assure you they came only that once! I was always booked the next year when they applied for my rooms. One family had two little boys, who were little horrors. The first night they were there, the mother gave them books and magazines to take up to bed to rip up - which I had supplied for the visitors' use. Having done this, they flung all the confetti-like bits of paper out of the window - what a mess, and a desecration of good books and magazines. I was furious, and threatened to clear out all such material from the rooms if this was repeated. They scribbled all over the walls, slashed the furniture, broke the chair seats, broke off the flower heads in the garden with sticks, trampled all over the flower beds, screamed and kicked if checked, spilt water or their drinks all over the table at every meal time; there seemed no end to their misbehaviour, and I was more than thankful when they went.

Another family had a little girl who had to have jam with everything she ate, whether it was bacon and egg, meat, fish, or a cheese dish; no matter what the menu was, she had to have jam with it. I used to feel quite sick at the thought of it! Imagine jam with fried fish or kippers, stirred in soup, or scrambled egg - ugh! One more I must mention:-

It was a man and his wife and little boy. The latter two were very nice, but the man was a question mark. He was most unusual, but I could never pin point anything. For one thing, he used to write numerous letters, though he received very few, and those he wrote were always posted late evening after the Post Office was closed and the final collection was made by the mail van from the nearest town. He used to go out a lot at night, and did the most extraordinary experiments. He was a chemist by profession, and a spiritualist, and always seemed to be preoccupied or vague. They were Quakers by religion. He used to give me the 'creeps' so much so that I asked a friend to come and live with me, which she did, but after a time, he scared her so much that she went back home. Eventually they moved to another district, and much later I heard that he had been arrested as a fifth columnist, and sent to prison. He had been found guilty of signalling out to sea from the Church tower, giving information to the enemy. We had a soldiers' camp a few miles away along the coast, so no doubt that was of some interest to the enemy.

We had several casualties in the family during the war - one nephew was killed at Dunkirk, and his brother taken prisoner at the same time, another nephew was killed in Crete, another one lost a leg and has to wear an artificial one, while the remaining one had a miraculous escape at the evacuation of Dunkirk. He saw the boats out to sea, and all who longed to escape plunged into the sea, swimming to reach the boats. Not all

succeeded, as the enemy was overhead, maching gunning the boats and the swimmers as we know "all Hell was let loose at Dunkirk". Jack was heading for the nearest boat, which was already overloaded with soldiers who had been lucky enough to reach it, and he was almost beside it when it began to draw away. He said he prayed as he had never prayed before, and was almost exhausted, when a helping hand dragged him into the boat and he was saved. This boat reached England's shores with its precious load.

Sometimes, during the war, I would take Colin down to Bert and Anne for a few days or a week. I did not stay too long as it was a dangerous area to be in, where the Battle of Britain was fought overhead. I used to be so lonely at home, for remember I was still a foreigner in Norfolk, not having completed my ten years' apprenticeship, as the doctor had warned me. Colin and Don, Bert's son, became great pals, and had lovely times together, he had no young friends at home. On one occasion when we had had a nice holiday there and it was time for us to return home, Colin cried bitterly, he wanted to stay with Don. However, this could not be, and we started back home. He cried and cried in the train, and no amount of talking or persuading seemed to stem his tears and I felt desperate. I simply could not face tears all the way to Norfolk and I told him that when we got out of this train at Charing Cross, we would get on another and go back to Don. His tears dried up immediately, and he seemed quite happy again. He was only about three years old. We got off the train at Charing Cross, and went to Liverpool Street, and boarded the "Norfolkman" train and all went well until we reached our destination and alighted there. He looked around, recognised it, and giving me the most accusing look said, "This is not Hamstreet, you promised me you would take me back to Don" - and if ever my conscience smote me, it did then, to see his little crestfallen face. I promised him I would take him back to Hamstreet soon, but I'm sure he did not believe me. He would not hold my hand as we walked home, or even walk beside me, quite frankly he wanted nothing to do with me. I had let him down, deceived him, and young as he was, he was deeply hurt. I vowed then that I would never again tell him a lie deliberate lie, the truth might hurt or disappoint at the time, but on reflection would be easier to bear. If he could not trust his mother, then who could he trust. He was an intelligent little boy, always asking questions which I answered to the best of my ability, but if it was something to which I did not know the answer, I simply said 'I don't know'. This brought the most incredulous look to his face, he obviously thought his mother knew everything! One day, after he had been running fast, he felt his heart beating, and asked me what it was moving inside him. I told him it was his heart, and that it would go on beating as long as he lived. A short time after, while he was in the bath, he felt his ribs and wanted to know what they were, so I explained them to him. This set off a series of wanting to know what else he had inside him, so I told him of his lungs, kidneys, tummy, bladder etc. "Well," said Colin, "why



don't these things fall down into my tummy when I run about?" I explained how they were attached inside him, and so remained in place and didn't slip about. We used to have long discussion on the workings of his body, he was always interested, and not always my choice of time either - often in bed! He was subject to cramp in his legs during the night, and I would take him into my warm bed and rub the cramp away. He would then ask me to tell him again, about his heart etc. and I would oblige until I grew tired and started giving him the wrong answers (which he already knew) then he would correct me and I would go on again until I faltered and eventually we would fall asleep. Our doctor told me he might have the makings of a doctor in him when he grew up, and always obliged Colin by letting him listen to his own heart through his stethoscope.

Colin started school when he was five. I naturally took him on the bus, and collected him in the afternoon, but after a week or two, he asked me not to collect him, but he would come home on the bus with the other children. I welcomed this show of independence, realising I was not the all important now - he was growing up and exerting his rights. Like all boys, he was keen on football, though it might only be an ordinary rubber ball he had to play with, being wartime, everything was in short supply or non-existent. I longed to get him a real football for his birthday, and managed to persuade one of the Sports Shops to get one for me. Oh what joy this brought to Colin, then for Christmas three weeks later I bought him his first real football boots. I took him one day to buy a new coat for myself. I tried on several, and was preening myself with what I thought was the right one, when a little voice called out "Oh Mummy, you can't wear that, you look like a half-opened umbrella!" It had pleats at the back, and my plumpness opened them out, hence the "half-opened umbrella"! I did not buy that one, but bought a more suitable one which he approved of and so did everyone else.

He was terribly interested in the skeleton in the Castle Museum in Norwich, he would gaze at it in wonder and ask what this was and that was, and I would tell him and point out where the organs were I had told him about, to give him a better idea of his inside. He seemed fascinated.

John was Anglican by religion, whilst I was a Methodist. However, we tried not to let this cause any friction, and decided to go to Church and Chapel alternately. The question was, which would Colin like best, and to send him to the appropriate Sunday School. He eventually went to the Church Sunday School with his best friend, and seemed quite happy there until one Sunday he came home and said "Mummy, you have told me a fib" and looked quite crestfallen as he said it. "I don't think so" I said. "Oh yes you did, you said there were no such things as ghosts, and they have been telling us about the 'Holy Ghost' at Sunday School." Well now, I ask you, how do you describe the Holy Ghost to a five year-old? putting it into a language they can understand - I couldn't, but did the best thing I could

to allay his fears of ghosts that the boys had teased him about.

When he was about seven and a half, he had a great longing to play the violin, and if a violin was playing on the radio, he would ask us to be quiet and would listen intently. After a time, when I felt he was really interested, I bought him a half size instrument, and he had lessons with a music teacher, herself a keen violinist. He was keen to learn, and enjoyed his lessons.

By this time, John was demobilized, the war being over, and he seemed, like so many service men to have difficulty in adjusting to civilian life again. He was restless for a considerable time, and also work wasn't very plentiful. He had his business on the beach with his deck chairs and bathing tents in the summer, but it was the cooler nine months of the year that was the testing time. We had the coldest winter that year, with the heaviest fall of snow that even the local residents could remember. Snow reached to the tops of the hedges, and many villages were completely cut off, so work was unobtainable. It is always cold on the East Coast in winter, because there is nothing but sea between that part of Norfolk and the North Pole. So with the icy winds and blizzards, the snow, once it was on the ground, froze and became icy. Accidents occurred with broken limbs etc due to falling down, and one only went out at all if one had to. Our road was a veritable death trap, being on an incline, and we needed the support of the fence both down the road and up again. Taps and pipes froze, as did water tanks, and only the main tap kept free, for which we were thankful. As late as May, the snow was still piled up along the roads, even though the sun was shining and the weather getting warmer. In the normal course of events, I love the snow, and make no secret of it, preferring to be out in it, rather than gaze on it from indoors, but that year I was glad to see the last of it! It was a bad winter for work of any description, disappointing for the men and their families alike, and it seemed to be endless, with the snow still laying about in May. Fortunately we had the summer to look forward to, John with his deck chairs and tents on the beach, and me with the summer visitors, so we soldiered on!

On two well spaced occasions, John had two terrible outbursts of temper - or so I thought they were - lack of work and disillusionment no doubt had something to do with it. He seemed so quiet and withdrawn all the time. It worried me, I can tell you, everything was too much trouble, he wouldn't wash if he could help it, and seemed to be slipping backwards in almost every way. Life became a nightmare, and I hated for Colin to see his father like this, and hoped he would pull himself together. Alas, it was not to be, he went down and down, and even the doctor could not help him although he tried.

Then, without warning, tragedy struck our home, John killed Colin with an axe, whilst I was out shopping, and it was into this terrible situation I walked when I got home. Colin was lying on the floor in a pool of blood, with the back of his head gashed in; he was unconscious, but

still breathing and it was the fact that he was still alive that saved my sanity, though I knew nothing short of a miracle could save him. He died in my arms a few minutes later. No words could describe my feelings, nor did I know who had done this ghastly deed. John was nowhere to be found in or around the house, he had given himself up to the police, though I did not know it then. I yelled to my neighbour to phone for the doctor, which she did, but I knew it was hopeless. He came soon afterwards, but of course it was too late, Colin was dead, and I wanted to die too. The neighbours were kindness itself, but what can one do at such times, the horror of the deed was almost paralysing. Then began the ordeal with the police, asking questions, the arrest of John, the trial and verdict two months later, when he was sent to Broadmoor to be detained during His Majesty's pleasure. The Church was packed at the funeral, and the Cub Scouts, of whom Colin was a member, formed a guard of honour, a very touching tribute, but a sad occasion for these young boys. What must they have felt as they stood there?

Bert and Anne came down to me the day after the tragedy, I had phoned and asked them to come, and without hesitation, they left everything and came. They were a tower of strength to me, my sister Alice and her son Bill also came to the funeral. The doctor advised me to go away, so I went back to Hamstreet with Bert and Anne the next day. My nerves were all to pieces, I couldn't speak properly, the words simply would not come out. I had terrible sobbing turns - not just crying but something deeper - which eased the pain in my chest, which later I learned was my heart. To bottle up my feelings trying to be brave and not distress people more than I could help was too big a strain on my heart, and the pain became almost unbearable, and only one of those sobbing turns eased the tension. The doctor told me not to be afraid to cry, it was Nature's way of overcoming tension, and that to bottle up my feelings following so great a shock, would affect my heart and weaken it. I felt so sorry for Bert and Anne and their two children, seeing me in such a distressing state. It must have been an ordeal for them, yet they never complained, but were wonderfully kind to me and understanding.

I did not go to the trial at Norwich, as I wasn't well enough to cope with the journey - a distance of two hundred odd miles - and the ordeal of giving evidence in Court. I felt I never wanted to see John again, so Bert went instead, and like me, was thankful John did not have to pay the extreme penalty of going to the scaffold. It was at the Trial that I learned of the mental instability in his mother's family, and this prevented him from having to suffer capital punishment. I am sure I should have been a mental case myself if he had, one horror in a life is one too many, without adding another. There was not only me suffering, there was his dear old mother, suffering as only a mother could suffer, knowing her son had done such a ghastly deed. My heart went out to her, and I longed to comfort

her, for she was the best mother-in-law in the world. I felt desperately sorry for his sisters, and my brothers and sisters, the children at school who were Colin's playfellows, his little friends, and oh so many who would be horrified and shocked at what had happened. The only consolation I have ever had over this ghastly business, was wondering if John would have passed on his mental instability to Colin, and if in time I might be in the same position as mother-in-law, suffering for what my own son had done.

Admitted, there were never any signs of mental disorder in Colin during his young life, he was a kindly, intelligent little boy, but then what mother looks for such things as mental trouble in her child, unless he or she shows signs of it, or has the knowledge that the family are afflicted with it, and I certainly did not know. Had I have known, I would have considered very carefully marrying John, and if I had taken the risk, would certainly never have had a child to risk passing on such an affliction.

On the day of the trial, which was at eleven o'clock, my friend suggested we should take our bicycles and go for a long ride out in the countryside, taking a picnic lunch. She thought if I was out of the house and fully occupied, with no watch to tell me the time, it would keep my mind off it a bit, a wonderfully kind and thoughtful gesture on her part. We rode out as far as Tenterden, talking of this and that on the way, found a sheltered spot where we had our picnic, and then went into the Church. We said a prayer, it was so peaceful I felt I never wanted to go out into the wicked world again ever. My friend really was a tower of strength to me that day. I used to dread going to sleep because of the awful waking up again. I can't really explain this feeling, it was crushing, a feeling that seemed to freeze and paralyse me for a few seconds, like waking from a nightmare, only to find it wasn't a nightmare, but real.

After about two months with Bert and Anne, I began to feel I was 'slipping' and that if I did not get 'my teeth' into something, I should go under. I must fight to survive, and the stiffest fight I could think of was to go back home and master that house. I gave myself two alternatives, I either master that house, or go under in the process - no half measures! The kind friend who was such a help to me on the day of the trial, came to Liverpool Street Station to see me on to the train, and I have never forgotten her parting words as the train drew out: "No one but you Kathy would have the courage to do it". Quite frankly, I did not feel a bit heroic, in fact I was terrified at the prospect, but it was a task I had set myself, and there was no drawing back now. I did have a sinking feeling as the train drew into the station, but fortunately my friend met me at the station, and advised me to spend a few days with her before attempting to go home, and believe me, I was only too thankful to do so. They were so kind to me, and helped me to fight the horror of entering my home again. I was petrified, and prayed earnestly to be given the strength and courage to overcome my fears. It was then that I 'found' the Norfolk people; no one could have been kinder, both with help and encouragement, and gradually I began to master my fears, and pick up the threads of life again. My

greatest test was the first night I slept there alone, it was terrifying, though I kept every light burning in the house all night, and I felt a complete wreck next morning. But at least I had done it, and that was some satisfaction. The next night wasn't quite so frightening, and each night my fears became less and less, but for years afterwards I had to sleep with a light on, no matter where I was.

When I was well enough to cope with life again, I resumed my former occupation of taking in summer visitors, and often managed to give someone a home for the winter months, usually elderly people who had no one else to care for them, and who were quite prepared to move out during the summer months so that I could use the rooms for the holiday folk, some who came year after year. Also, this brought me in a bigger income, and as I was completely dependant on what I could earn on the home, being my only source of income, I was forced to do it. I enjoyed having people share my home, and did my best to give them a good holiday in the summer, and a comfortable home to my winter guests. There were times when I longed for a little respite, but I knew in my heart of hearts, I was better occupied, and so keep sad thoughts at bay, and to sleep the sleep of exhaustion at night. However, in spite of my efforts, I would break down from time to time, but gradually each period between these bouts became longer, and so the distressing periods less frequent. Gradually I began to master life, but it took years. If however, I had no winter guests, I used to 'baby-sit' for the American Servicemen's families, who rented houses in the district and were the Servicemen serving on the Scunthorpe base. These few shillings helped my slender purse, and kept me above the bread line, but only just! Still, for all that, I was grateful for small mercies, and I would often find fruit and vegetables on my doorstep, left there by these kindly Norfolk people, an enormous help.

My only form of relaxation was to go for a long cycle ride up in the country, I loved this, and it was good for my nerves and so peaceful - and yet - on these same lonely roads, a few years later, a young teenaged girl completely disappeared and has never been found! Her bicycle was found tossed over the hedge, she had no money on her, and only the clothes she wore. There was a world-wide appeal for any information regarding her disappearance, but still no results to this day, no one knows what happened to her on that fateful journey. Having lost my own child, I knew only too well the anguish of her parents. A FEW YEARS LATER, another girl was found murdered a few miles away, laying in a ditch, by the driver of a Milk Marketing Board vehicle early one morning. Her assassin was never found. The people in the surrounding districts were naturally very alarmed at these terrible deeds, and began to be fearful in case it was someone who knew the area well, or worse still, a local person. Police investigations drew a complete blank.

The one bright spot in my life was my beautiful god-daughter Alison. She was born during the war, and spent a lot of time with me in her

formative years, and this helped to fill the aching void in my heart. Even as a very young child, she would come and stay with me, and when her baby brother was born, when she was four years old, she came to me for ten days. She wasn't very well at this period, and her little brother needed all the mother's attention, so I did what I could to help, by having her. The doctor came in every day to attend her and she finally recovered before going home again. There grew up a strong bond of affection between us, which has lasted all our lives. Four years later, I became god-mother to another baby girl, Georgina, who like Alison, has proved a real blessing to me. These two girls gave me something to live for, an interest in life, and an incentive to go on. Both grew up to be intelligent girls, both with dark hair, brown eyes, and a ready smile, and there was a great love between us.

## CHAPTER SIX

In 1953, we had the worst sea flooding on record the East Coast has everyknown. It was a Saturday night, and a North-West gale blew up. This is the worst direction for that part of the East Coast, as the tide comes in at a North-West angle. The cause of this was a hurricane which started in Canada, and swept across the Atlantic. It had been the very devil in the North Atlantic, but then it had crossed, and passed to the North of England, choking up the waters of the North Sea. The dykes of Holland were overwhelmed, and the waters had surged over East Anglia, bringing the worst weather disaster Europe had ever known. It was a terrific gale, the high seas had to be seen to be believed. An hour before high tide the sea was ten feet deep at the Cliffs, and it still had another hour to pound its way in. In the normal course of events, the tide seldom, if ever reached the cliffs at high tide, so you can imagine what it was like, with the sea battering the cliffs an hour before high tide, and with a gale force north-west wind driving the sea in mercilessly. It was a terrifying thought and sight, but worse was to come, for miles along the low-lying coast, i.e. Weybourne, Cley, Salthouse and Blakeney, the sea swept inland for a good half mile. Houses were flooded, people were rescued by boats from their bedroom windows and roofs. There were one or two deaths of old people, who could not help themselves, or cope with the sudden onrush of water. One woman told a newspaper reporter that she heard a roar, opened the door to investigate, and the water rushed in and knocked her over. Cattle and other animals were drowned, sewers and drains burst, telegraph poles blew down, electricity was cut off. Two pictures appeared in the daily papers a day or two later, taken by a photographer in a boat, of a sign post, half a mile inland, with only the fingers above the water, and another picture of a house, also half a mile inland, with the water up to the electric light switch. It was devastation complete!

As is always the case in a disaster, people rose to the occasion to help. The W.V.S worked wonders with hot meals etc. and friends and relatives in safe areas opened up their homes to the stranded families. Clothes for all ages poured in, given by those who could help in this way, since many had escaped in only what they wore at the time of the disaster, so sudden was the catastrophe.

When the gale blew itself out, and the water eventually subsided, the whole area was a complete shambles, miles of it. What buildings and houses remained were damaged, furniture which had been floating about in the water was saturated, and in many cases ruined, and piled up on top of each other. Sludge and filth from the burst sewers and drains covered everything, burst bags of flour and sugar adding their contribution to the chaos. Dead animals and chickens lying around, where they had been trapped, and the

whole scene was a nightmare. One was at a loss as to where to start the clearing up process, but they did, and many hands helped. The Army were wonderful in helping to dry out the houses with their special heaters, but carpets and bedding, furniture etc. had to be dried by the people concerned, helped by friends and relatives. A formidable job to say the least!

Sheringham and Cromer were badly hit too, even though the cliffs held back the onrush of water from flooding the towns. The promenades in both towns were smashed up, great chunks of concrete piled up as though they were children's toys. Hotels on the front were flooded, and in one Hotel in Cromer, the sea was splashing down the chimney. The two or three villages between these two towns were more fortunate, the high cliffs held back the sea, though they got badly broken in the process, and tons fell into the sea. A world-wide appeal went out for help, and great was the response, especially from America with clothes, bedding and other necessary articles. Eventually, and with perseverance, order was restored, but all this took time, and the land was unuseable for more than a year. Anything that grew the next season, and that was little indeed, was useless for its original purpose, and nothing was edible, due to the damaged soil after the floods subsided. All food for man and beast had to be brought in from a distance. In due course the land was treated and restored, and crops could be planted and harvested, but all this took time, a year or two at least.

As is often in the case of disaster, it brought many sight-seers to the area soon afterwards, some from a morbid curiosity, but some from genuine interest, the latter with a view to help if they could, either financially or otherwise. Among those, were two friends of mine from the Midlands, who, touring in that area, called on me unexpectedly, though to be fair, I don't think it was morbid curiosity with them, but they had never been in that area before, so why now? I was pleased to see them, up to a point, as I already had a house full of visitors, and this was a full time job, so with two extra, it was a bit of a problem. However, I prevailed on them to stay for a few days, and they were pleased to do so. With what time I could spare, we enjoyed recalling old memories, and catching up on the news of the intervening years, as we had not corresponded for a considerable time. Before leaving, they asked me to join them in a tour of North Wales later in the year, and of course I was delighted. They were going by car, and to follow their own instincts as to places of interest to see. When the time came, I travelled by train to join them at their home, and next morning we set out. It was a glorious morning, brilliant sunshine, and quite warm, and we were very excited at the prospect of an interesting tour, the first of its kind I had ever had. We headed for Llandudno where we stayed the first night. Next morning we went up the Great Orme by railway and had a panoramic view for miles around, then on to Carnarvon where we explored the Castle. On again round the Llanberis Pass, that beautiful horse-shoe shaped road, miles long, breathtakingly beautiful, and on across the Menai Bridge to Holyhead. We went right round the Island of Anglesey,



and then back again across the Menai Bridge to Bangor, a very disappointing place I thought, and I wondered why another friend of mine had named her house 'Bangor' maybe she saw more in it than I did! We were rewarded with our next port of call, the loveliest of places, Nefyn, with its beautiful bay, quite unspoilt by commercialisation. I felt it was here I would like to pitch my caravan when I retired. We stayed the night at Nefyn and were most comfortably housed. Next day we moved on to Abadaron, and after an hour or two sightseeing, travelled on to Barmouth where we stayed the night at a guest house, that seemed to be clinging to the mountainside. My bedroom window opened out right against the mountainside & I could touch the stone! and as such, no light ever penetrated that room, one needed electric light on all the time. On again next morning to Dolgelly, cruising along the shores of Bala Lake, so beautiful and peaceful, and then on to Aberystwyth where we stayed the night. It poured with rain that day at Aberystwyth, so we did not get the best impression of that town, however, we had comfortable rooms at the guest house, and once we donned macs and umbrellas and braved the elements though the landlady was not too pleased to see our wet clothes, but obliged us by drying them in her kitchen. We returned home via Shrewsbury, Whitchurch Bridgenorth and Chester, visiting the Cathedral en route, having had a wonderful holiday. I returned to my home next day.

Once more, I had to try and get a living of some sort, it was Autumn, and the last of my summer guests had gone before I went on holiday, so the question was, "what should I do?" Then I heard of an American lady who lived a few miles away, who wanted someone to be a companion to her, and her little adopted daughter for a few hours a day, so I thought I would try this and see how I fared. Admitted, she was an American, but with some Indian blood in her - her father was an Indian working on the railroad, and her mother had several children by him. She was married to an American Air Force Sergeant. She never dressed until the evening time, always sitting around in her dressing gown, drinking endless cups of coffee and talking, and my, how she could talk too!

The only meal they had was in the evening, when her husband came home. I felt desperately sorry for the little girl, Marylou, aged about three; she got ravenously hungry with nothing to eat all day, and implored for something to eat, but was told she must wait until the evening meal. I asked if I could get something to eat for her in the kitchen, but was firmly rebuked for interfering. Marylou had to keep quiet and interest herself in her toys and books, and not to make a mess, or interrupt her mother's talking. In the main, she obliged, she was too frightened to do otherwise, but occasionally she would be unable to keep still or quiet any longer, and start moving about and beginning to talk, then the poor little mite was punished, beaten with the back of a hair brush. I remonstrated with her mother for this cruel and senseless act, but was told "she herself was brought up with the horse-whip and she intended to mete out the same treatment to her child" - why, oh why did she ever adopt a child, I thought, it would have been kinder to have left Marylou in the Home with all the other children of similar circumstances,

than to uproot her and give her a life of hardship and loneliness as she was forced to endure. Perhaps she wanted someone on whom she could inflict her sadistic nature. It sickened me so much that I had to leave, although I wanted to stay and protect little Marylou.

Fortunately not all American women were like this, for my next 'brush' with an American family was just the reverse. They were a very happy couple with one little boy named Wayne. It was a joy to share this family life, and we had some happy times together. She asked me one day if I would teach her to knit, and also some of her friends, as they admired our knitted garments so much and would like to be able to knit some too. It was fun teaching them, though one wanted to start on making a knitted dress - something a lot of English people would hesitate to do - and she did not know how to put two knitting needles together, much less knit! However, they persevered and did make some nice little garments, enough to give them an idea of what to do, and to be able to read a knitting pattern, so I hope they made all they wanted to when they went back to the States.

This family went on a tour of Scotland for a week, and I took care of Wayne, and another time they took me to the American Base with them for the day, advising me not to speak if possible, because my English accent would immediately be recognised and they were not supposed to take English people there, only Americans allowed. We had a sumptuous lunch, which I tried to eat like the Americans, i.e. with a fork in the right hand! then we wandered through the stores, and went to a film show in the afternoon, and when at last we passed through the barrier and came out into old England again, I breathed a sigh of relief, as though suddenly let loose!

When eventually all the American families were withdrawn from that area, with them went my slender livelihood of baby-sitting or helping them, and as I had to earn my living at something else, and nothing was suitable in that area, I decided to close up the house for the winter, and get a post as Nannie in London. But before I took the plunge, I would try once more to get a job not too far from home, where I could still use my home, if only for weekends. So I took a temporary post as Nannie to one little girl, until her parents could get a permanent one. It was an enormous Hall, right out in the heart of the country, no railway station, buses or shops near. It was an unusual house too, long and thin, with all the windows facing the front and the hall inside, and landing upstairs stretching from one end of the house to the other at the back with no windows. The bedrooms had connecting doors, and unless the key was on your side of the door to lock it, you felt you had no privacy. There was what was termed a 'dead window' - nothing on the inside to show where it might be, or had been, till it was bricked up outside, with the glass still in it, but left to match the other windows which were symmetrical.

The parents spent a lot of time hunting, and it was quite a sight too, with all the horses and riders and hounds, who collected there at the start of the hunt. They also had two Alsatian dogs which I was a little afraid

of. The baby was sweet, but somehow I felt uneasy, and was glad when after six weeks a permanent Nannie arrived to take charge, and I could go home again.

So now the question was, should I get a post in London, or would I find it too difficult to settle down? Admitted there would be more life in London, than in the heart of the country as this one had been.

CHAPTER SEVEN

It was a big decision to make to close up my home and go out to work again. I weighed up the pros and cons carefully, but felt I had no alternative, I must hope for the best. So I set the idea in motion. I consulted The Lady for a week or two until I found what I thought would be a suitable situation, It was a lady doctor wanting a Nannie for her little boy of three months, with full charge, as she was a Hospital Doctor, and of course spent most of her day at the Hospital. So I wrote applying for the post, and had a favourable reply, asking me to go for an interview, which I did.

It was a big old house in North London, but very pleasantly situated. I liked Mrs. Marshall as soon as I saw her, she had a friendly open face, and I felt I should be happy working there. Christopher, the baby, was beautiful, fair hair and brown eyes, and came to me straight away, without tears, to nurse. After discussing the necessary items, i.e salary, off duty hours, and help in the home, she proceeded to show me the house, and with a half-sob in her voice as we went upstairs, she said:- "I know you won't come, though I feel you are just the right person to look after Christopher." "Why are you so sure?" I asked. "Because It's not what you have been used to" she said, "it's an old house, and with only daily help for the work." "Admitted" I replied, "it's not what I have been used to, but I would rather be happy here than a misfit in a palace." So the deed was done, I agreed to take the post in about a fortnight's time. She asked me to stay the night with them and meet her husband, and this I did, giving Christopher his bottle before going to bed, and tucking him up in his cot. Mr. Marshall was also very nice.

I went back home next morning and started making preparations for closing up the house, but for the winter only, in case I did not settle in London, and would then have my home to come back to. I joined the Marshall family a few days after Christmas, it was a big house with double doors at the front, which led into a small porch, and beyond was a frosted glass door which opened in to a large hall, with a richly tiled floor and ornate ceiling. There were three large rooms leading off the hall, dining room, lounge and nursery, also large kitchen and breakfast room, cloak room, and passage leading to an outside door - one of four outside doors! A wide staircase led to the upper rooms, was carpeted in a rich blue carpet, and the landing itself was large enough to hold furniture. Six bedrooms were on the first floor, plus bathroom and toilet. The attic rooms were never used.

The garden at the back was a child's Paradise, it was on two levels, the one nearest the house being the lower one, was big enough to play ball games on without fear of breaking windows. The top garden was approached by a flight of stone steps, very imposing, and the garden itself a tangle of

bushes and trees, ideal for playing hide and seek, and the trees for climbing. This was left in its natural state, though trimmed back periodically to prevent it becoming too crowded.

The house was being renovated inside, walls knocked down and rebuilt, floors removed because of dry rot, and new ones fitted. The hot water system modernised, and complete rewiring for electricity with new plugs fitted. There was always something being done by the workmen, but when it was finished and the rooms papered and painted, carpets laid and furniture arranged, what a transformation! it was a beautiful home, with a lovely friendly atmosphere. The four doors leading outside were a great source of pleasure to Christopher, when he was old enough to move around, and he started moving under his own steam at eleven months. He could go out of one door and in through another and ring the changes when he felt like it. Life was not restricted there, the house and garden were there to use and enjoy, but not to abuse, of course. Christopher had his little patch of ground, where he could dig to his heart's content. He had a sand pit and paddling pool, and later a swing.

I was very happy with the Marshall family, and Christopher was a little pet, and seemed to fill the aching void in my heart, for that motherly instinct was still very strong in me.

During my term of office in London, letters were pouring in from summer visitors, wanting to come to me for their summer holidays as usual. I had already told Mrs. Marshall when I came for the interview that I could only come for the winter months, because of my season with visitors whom I could not disappoint, and she seemed to understand, saying "I hope you will grow so fond of Christopher, you won't want to leave him" and that is exactly what happened. I grew to love him dearly, and felt torn between the two, my loyalty to my visitors, and my love for Christopher. However, we came to an understanding as the summer months approached and Mrs. Marshall decided to get a student to look after Christopher while I was away for those three months, and I would come back again when the season was over. I liked this student very much, she seemed such a nice sensible girl, and fond of children. I had about a week showing her how to cope with Christopher, as by this time he was moving around quite freely, and she seemed quite happy at being left in charge, whilst his mother was at the Hospital all day.

I went back home and opened up the house again, and prepared for the first onslaught of visitors! I had a very busy summer, but somehow it wasn't quite the same as before. No doubt London life had spoilt me for the quiet country life, and also I missed Christopher very much. So I decided once the season was over to let the house furnished, cancel all further summer visitors and go back to London and Christopher. This I did, and oh the joy of seeing him again - he had not completely forgotten me, so we gathered up the threads where we left off, the student having returned to her College. By and large, I was very happy with them for two years, until they went abroad, where the

husband was already working on a project.

Meantime, life went on quite happily, and in 1959 Christopher had a little sister, but before this, we all went up to Birkenhead to stay with the grandparents, Christopher and I to stay for a few weeks, but his mother returning to London after a few days, as she was needed at the Hospital. We had a lovely time, and by now he was old enough to take an interest in everything around him. He was a very intelligent little boy, always asking questions. We would go down to the Docks and watch the ships and feed the pigeons, sometimes going over to Liverpool on the ferry boat. He thought this was wonderful, a great adventure, he was travelling on a big ship, which even a ferry boat seemed to him. So I entered into the game of 'make believe' with him, and these trips were a roaring success.

Grandma, with whom we were staying, took me to Liverpool to see the Cathedral, not then fully completed. It is a beautiful building, with no arches or pillars inside to block anyone's view, at the services. The Bishop's chair was a sight to behold, beautiful, without being too ornate. We went to Birkenhead a second time, much later, and during the cold weather. They had a fall of snow while we were there, and Christopher and I had a glorious time out in it, snowballing, and making a snow man. Grandma and Grandpa watched us through the window, in the comfort of a nice warm room!

It was while I was with this family that I first went to hear Dr. Leslie Weatherhead preach. This was a wish fulfilled, as I had heard of his wonderful preaching and longed to hear him myself. The City Temple, his Church, had been badly damaged during the war, and so for a period, the City Temple congregation were worshipping at the Presbyterian Church in George Street, until the restoration of the City Temple was completed. This was eventually finished, and re-dedicated on October 30th, 1958, in the presence of H.M. Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, so at last the congregation and it's Minister moved back to their beloved Church on Holborn Viaduct. One had to hear Dr. Weatherhead preach to recognise the tremendous impact he had on his congregation, who came from miles around to hear him. He was truly an apostle of the Lord, great, yet humble, and his message went home to the people, and that's what they wanted. To me it was food and drink for the following week. The queue outside the City Temple on a Sunday had to be seen to be believed, they started queuing up a good hour before the services were due to start, morning and evening services alike. Buses emptied their precious cargo there, and once the doors opened, we flocked inside, and every seat would be occupied a good half-hour before the service commenced, not only the Church, but the Gallery, the big hall downstairs, and wherever the service was relayed to and there were chairs to sit on, there would be people. It was a fantastic experience, a full choir in their beautiful blue robes, and mortar boards for the ladies, and a wonderful organist. The Church itself was beautiful inside, with its wedgewood blue walls and woodwork of the Cedars of Lebanon; the massive organ which sometimes made the air vibrate, and the unusual pulpit which seemed to cling to the sides of the Church, no support being visible.

The rich blue carpet on the altar steps added dignity, and an open Bible was placed on the Communion Table five minutes before the service began, and as it was laid there, the electric light surrounding the empty cross would suddenly light up, making the cross seem to come alive. Above this was a round stained glass window, with a dove of peace. To go to the City Temple on a Sunday was the High light of my whole week, I could not get there quickly enough and was loath to leave at the end of the service.

One magnificent piece of news I must record:- Dr. Weatherhead made a lecture tour in the United States in 1954, to raise funds for the restoration of the City Temple. When through the generosity of American well-wishers, headed by Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, he brought back the never to be forgotten amount of £188,888. 18s and 8d! The Church Secretary was stunned when Dr. Weatherhead handed him this cheque, as was everybody else, but oh so thankful to God and Dr. Weatherhead, and those good friends in America, for this successful mission. Some years later, when Mr. and Mrs. John Rockefeller were visiting England, they came to the Church for the evening service and found all seats occupied, so they were given chairs in or near the kitchen, where the service was also being relayed. No one knew who they were, so they were not given preference. After the service was over, they asked one of the Deacons to introduce them to Dr. Weatherhead, and on asking their name, was told: "Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller from America"! The Deacon was all apologies that they could not find a seat in the Church, but the Rockefellers graciously understood the impossibility of being seated in Church when every seat was occupied. They were introduced to Dr. Weatherhead, who recognised them immediately, and apologised for any discomfort or disappointment caused by such an ignoble seat, as they had been forced to accept. The Rockefellers assured him that it was such a wonderful experience, seeing the Church so full, that they would never forget it, and would take the message back to the American people when they returned home again. It was the same every Sunday and every service, the Church packed to capacity, more and more buses laid on to take the people on their homeward journey.

When some years later, Dr. Weatherhead decided to retire, we, the congregation were very sad indeed, though realising only too clearly how much he deserved his well-earned retirement. Even with the most willing Deacons, Secretaries and all those who helped in the management of the Church, it was no light burden for its Minister, though seeing it so full Sunday after Sunday, year in and year out, must have been very rewarding in itself. But he gave credit to his Lord, himself being simply the mouth-piece. His message through his sermons have greatly enriched my life, and I am thankful for the privilege of hearing him preach and of meeting one of the greatest, yet humblest of Ministers. He retired to Bexhill to live, where a few years later his beloved wife died. Our hearts went out to him in his bereavement. He was created an O.B.E in 1959. After hearing him speak over the Radio one day during his retirement, I wrote to him, telling

him of the help and encouragement I had received from his sermons at the City Temple, also from some of his books. He graciously acknowledged my letter, and I felt very uplifted. He died early in 1976, and the world was sad.

Five months after Jean was born, Mrs. Marshall and her two children joined her husband abroad. I was very sad at the parting, as I had grown so fond of Christopher, now two years old. I went to Heathrow Airport to see them off; poor little mite, he was very upset, as the flight was delayed for several hours, and everything was so strange to him. He seemed to sense we were to be parted, and he clung to me and kept saying: "Nannie not leave Chris, Nannie not leave Chris." It was heartbreaking, like giving up my own child. By the time the plane left, he was in such a distressed state of mind that his mother had to hand the baby over to the stewardess to look after, and she herself had to concentrate on consoling Christopher, and this lasted throughout the entire flight.

Fortunately, memories are short with children, and he eventually settled down to life in Kowloon. After about two and a half years abroad, they returned to England, and it was such a joy to me to see them again, and I still visit them occasionally.

Once again, I went back home feeling utterly dejected, there seemed no stability in life at all, and I was at a loss to know what to do with myself. I knew I had to earn my living, but at what? I dreaded the thought of taking another post as Nannie, because of the awful wrench of giving the children up again - I seemed to get so involved with them, but what else was there to do? I had lost my contacts with the holiday folk when I let the house furnished, so there was nothing doing in that region.

After a couple of weeks debating, I decided there was nothing else for it, I must get another job in London, and concentrate on being happy with the children and not dwell on the awful parting at the end of my term of office. So once again I consulted 'The Lady' and discovered a post which appealed to me - one little baby boy of four months, and full charge as the parents were professionals and out all day, and in a very nice part of London too. I answered the advertisement, and had a favourable reply, and went for an interview.

It was a very nice, small, compact flat, and after the huge house where I had lived with the Marshall family, it seemed hat box size! I liked the lady on sight, and Alan the baby was beautiful, with golden curls 'a real bubbles! I felt instinctively that I could be happy there, sharing their home, and agreed to join the family soon after Christmas. So once again I went back home and prepared to let the house furnished, which I had no trouble in doing because houses are always scarce. Having completed that, and spending Christmas with mother-in-law, I joined the Kirby family and stayed with them for sixteen years! I was very happy, and Alan was the



dearest little fellow imaginable, seldom cried, and no trouble with his food. He suffered from conjunctivitis when I first took over, and later had styes on his eyes, so it meant a constant visit to the Clinic to get these cleared up, yet he never cried, though they must have been a little painful. He really was the sweetest little fellow for two years, and little did I realise that he would develop into a wilful, obstinate and often difficult child, yet for all his faults I loved him dearly, and I was firm but kind.

The flat was on the third floor, and had a lounge-dining room, two bedrooms, nursery, study, kitchen and bathroom and long straight hall, the latter papered in the most beautiful wedgewood blue patterned paper, and it was this that caught the eye when entering the front door. It was a beautifully furnished flat too, spotlessly clean, thanks to the efforts of a first class daily woman. There was no lift, so we had to use the stairs, and I used to put Alan's pram with him in it, out in the garden under the kitchen window, where I could keep an eye on him, also watch the weather in case it rained, as he had the hood down. Mr. Kirby was a barrister, and a gentleman to his finger tips!

One morning, while I was doing the washing at the sink (no washing machine!) it started to rain, so in my haste to get down to the baby to put up the hood and the pram apron on, I forgot to turn the taps off, and the plug was in the sink. By the time I had gone down three flights of stairs, out of the front door, along the pavement, round the back, covered him up with both hood and pram apron and got back up to the flat again, you can imagine the state of the kitchen! water, water, everywhere! After stepping through it and turning off the taps, I proceeded to bale out the water with dustpan and bucket, it was that deep! Then horror of horrors, the front door bell rang, and I felt I could not leave this mess to answer it, I was desperate to get the water cleared up. I ignored the bell, and apparently it was the people from the flat below to tell me the water was coming through their ceiling. Assuming there was no one in our flat as no one answered their ring, they contacted the porter, who, having a master key, was soon on the scene, and took in at a glance what the trouble was. He helped me to clear up the mess, and even joked about it, though it was no joke to the people in the flat below. I did go down to apologise to them, also to Mr. and Mrs. Kirby when they came home that night.

Another time, when Alan was about two, I had finished the washing, and put it in the spin dryer and set it in motion, when a strong smell of banana invaded the kitchen. I couldn't for the life of me think what it was, or where it was coming from, until I took the clothes out of the machine, and what a mess they were in, crushed banana all over them. Young Alan had dropped a banana into the machine wometime, skin and all, when playing around, and I had not noticed it when I put the clothes in. Needless to say, I had to do all that washing again. Another time he

dropped a potato in it, but this did not make the mess that the banana did, being firmer.

He was in his mother's bedroom one morning, while she was getting ready for the office, and she found him playing with her nail varnish remover. He had the top off, the bottle and she thought he had drunk some. She called me and seemed very upset about it, so I told her to ring the doctor and in the meantime I gave him a saline to make him sick. He drank it without batting an eyelid as though it was quite palatable, and we were dumbfounded, as it is a horrible thing to drink. However, he wasn't sick, and the doctor said when he came there was nothing else to do, only keep things out of his reach!

Now suppose we leave young Alan to carry on with the task of growing up for a moment, and concentrate on a few general items.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Until I came back to London to work, I never knew what it was to actually live, or that's what it seemed to me, though there may be plenty who would take a dim view of calling this 'living'. But to me it was such a joy too. To have a shilling in my pocket to spend, to be able to go to a cinema, or visit friends and relations at a distance and have the necessary fares, to be back in London, the hub of the universe, and see the sights, the huge shops, parks, theatres etc. to be a part of this great Metropolis, was sheer joy! Even to ride on the Underground was a novelty. I well remember standing in Piccadilly Circus one night with a friend, watching the beautiful illuminations and saying to her: "It's like Fairyland and I don't want to go home!" I was in the midst of things, people everywhere, some in evening dress on their way to the theatre. Oh, it was good to be alive!

I felt the same thrill when I joined the crowd around the Christmas tree in Trafalgar Square and every one singing to their heart's content and entering into the spirit of Christmas. It was sheer bliss! I didn't mind working hard whilst at work, if I could have a little freedom and enjoy the simple things of life. My life had consisted of hard work and too little fun to compensate it, and I grew up much too serious minded. Even when I lived in London in my single days, I made the mistake of allowing the long-standing friend of the family, who was a good thirty years older than me, to rule my life. Admitted, she chaperoned me when I first came up to London to work, in my teens, and for this I was very grateful, for although it was quite exciting to live and work in London, yet I laboured under the delusion that it was a bad, wicked city, and therefore I was glad of someone older than myself, as a source of protection. This friend opened up her home to me, and for that, if nothing else, I was more fortunate than many young girls working in London and away from home.

Free time consisted of one half day a week, and Sunday afternoon and evening. It became almost a ritual, Church on Sundays which I really enjoyed, and a walk on my half day. However, coming from a rigid home, I accepted this way of life, and it was not until years later, I discovered what I had missed.

On Armistice Sunday, we always went to the Alexandra Palace to the Armistice service, and this was a real treat. The Palace was packed to capacity, and the great organ literally vibrated the air with everyone singing. It was a wonderful experience, and one I looked forward to year after year. On one occasion I went up to the Cenotaph to the Remembrance Service, but I was so hemmed in with the crowds, I was quite frightened and never repeated it.

After years of this kind of life, I longed to 'kick over the traces' and decided to join the Girls' Bible Class at the Baptist Church, of which

we were already Church members, and so meet other girls of my own age - I did, but Susie, faithful Susie (the long-standing friend) joined too, in spite of her advanced age, so that put paid to my starting a friendship with any of the girls. She had become very possessive over the years. She never ceased to remind me how fortunate I was to have a home to come to on my half day, and quite frankly I did appreciate it, but at times I longed for a bit more fun in my life - a trip to the Zoo, or the Tower of London, the Museums, and a host of places I longed to see, even a visit to the cinema, but Susie, being a Londoner, had seen all these, and they did not hold the same attraction for her as they did for me. However, after several years of this kind of life, I did rebel, and made arrangements to go out with some of the girls - a picnic or sightseeing, and that was the beginning of my independence. I still remained friendly with Susie, and did not break away from her completely as I owed her some of my friendship for all she had done for me. I tried to explain to her that I was young, and needed someone my own age to go out with. After all, service was hard in those days, and we needed some fun to brighten our lives on our half days. We remained friends, until she died at the age of seventy-five.

Having settled in with Alan's family, I started to make a social life for myself at the weekends, when I was off-duty, all day Saturday and part of Sunday. I started visiting friends and relations, some distance from London, yet near enough to do the return journey in one day: i.e. Folkestone, Southsea, Rye, Hatfield, Bedford or Maidstone. I would start early in the morning and catch the first coach from Victoria Coach Station to wherever I was going. It became almost like second home to me so often was I there! If I went further afield such as Devon, Bexhill, Ipswich, or Port Talbot, I would make a weekend trip of it. I found these outings stimulating and a great source of pleasure. During the winter months I would visit places of interest in London or near. Exhibitions at Earls Court or Olympia, the Royal Tournament, Billy Graham Crusade, the Museums, the Art Galleries etc. each Saturday a different place. It widened my knowledge as well!

1960 proved a very exciting year one way or another, though not all connected with me. The most exciting was, Princess Margaret became engaged to Anthony Armstrong-Jones on February 26th, a surprise to all the world. They were married in Westminster Abbey on May 6th. Much as I would have loved to join the crowds to watch her pass on her way to the Abbey and back again to Buckingham Palace, I could not do, as I was on duty, but like millions of others, I watched it on television, and it was beautiful! However, the next day I did go into the Abbey to see the Register and the beautifully decorated Churhh. Oh, it was fun to live in London and become part of the sightseers of such grand occasions, however insignificant I might be!

After visiting the Abbey, I went down to Hudeford near Christchurch for the weekend, to see a friend of mine from the Norfolk days, who had taken a temporary post as Housekeeper to a couple there, prior to going to

Canada for six months. I had never been in that part of the country before, and found the journey by coach very interesting. It was a very nice house, large, and the garden ran down to the river. A beautiful spot to say the least. There, had two big dogs, but I did not see them, and the lady of the house knew I was there, though I did not see her. As no bedroom upstairs was available for me, I had to sleep downstairs. Admitted, I was bedded comfortably, but I felt a little uneasy and tried to put it down to a strange bed in a strange house. In spite of being dead tired, having travelled down from London that day, plus my visit to the Abbey before starting, I could not get to sleep. About mid-night or soon after, I heard the two dogs (as I thought) come downstairs, the staircase being the other side of the wall to my bed. I listened, hoping they would not push the connecting door open and find me, a stranger there! Nothing happened, but I felt very nervous, wondering what was going on on the other side of the wall. I still had that uneasy feeling, so I put the light on and kept it on all night, and did eventually drop off to sleep. Next morning, when my friend brought me a cup of tea, she asked if I had slept well. I said 'no' but put it down to a strange bed. Then I said quite casually: "I heard the dogs come downstairs during the night" and she replied "Oh, no, the dogs couldn't come downstairs because the door is always closed." "Well, did anyone else come downstairs?" I asked, "because I distinctly heard footsteps." She looked really alarmed then, and told me the room I slept in was used as a 'seance room' by the lady who was a spiritualist. I felt quite horrified and wondered who those footsteps did belong to, because I definitely heard them. Had I known about this spiritualist business, I would have made my visit a day trip and not a weekend, so there would have been no need to stay the night. I felt a little hurt and annoyed that she had not told me beforehand and decided to return to London that day instead of staying until the next day as arranged. One such experience was too many. My friend eventually went to Canada, and that was the last I saw or heard of her.

We had burglars in our block of flats thought not in our own flat, but the one opposite and the one below, both the same afternoon, when the owners were out. In the one below us, lived one of the dancers in the Black and White Minstrel Show, and such a pretty girl too. I happened to be on my own with Alan, as his parents were away on holiday. I must confess I felt a little apprehensive in case ours was the next flat to be burgled, but I did not want to spoil their holiday by telling them, so I waited until they came home before mentioning it. The lady whose flat opposite was burgled, called me in to see the chaos they had left, clothes strewn all over the floor, pictures off the wall, bed stripped back, drawers emptied, everything scattered all over the floor, it was a horrifying sight and one to unnerve anybody. Soon after this, the police arrived, and I hope they caught the offenders.

I was very uneasy after this, and asked to have a chain fitted on our front door as a safety measure, and I am sure this prevented our flat being

burgled not long afterwards. I always kept the chain on the door when answering it, and luckily for me I did, because one day on answering the door bell, a very suspicious looking man stood outside, with his hands up his coat sleeves (like a Chinese Mandarin) and he was leaning against the door, obviously with the idea that as the door opened, he would come in with it, before I had time to collect myself, would tap me on the head with whatever it was he held up his sleeve, and burgle the flat. He seemed confounded when the door opened only a little way, hesitated a second to think up an excuse I presume, and then asked if I needed the Hoover repaired. I said 'no', closed the door, then phoned the Hoover people to see if they had a representative in the area. They had not, and so I phoned the police. How I blessed that little chain!

When Alan was three years old, he started school at a Nursery School. I would take him in the mornings and collect him at lunch time. He used to ride his little 'chain driven' tricycle, which had a rod fitted to the back axle, so that I could help him up the hill and also act as a brake coming down, and at least I always had control of it, as he was inclined to be reckless on his own, and we had to use a busy main road, though of course using the pavement. He was very happy at the Nursery School with plenty of children to play with, but he singled out one special friend, Peter, and it was interesting to watch these two little boys. They did everything together, were absolutely inseparable, until something went wrong, then they would fight good and proper, fists flying, hair pulling, kicking, the lot, until the teacher separated them, Alan to sit on one side of the room and Peter the other. When they had cooled down, they were allowed to join the class again, and were as friendly as ever.

When Alan was five, he started at a Pre-Prep School, a first-class school, where the children had a good grounding, and seemed to advance in leaps and bounds, and were happy to do so. The only snag with Alan was that Peter went to a different school and this seemed to upset him. He said to me one day, "Nannie, will I never see Peter again?" "Yes dear" I said, "of course you will" you will both be going to "The Hall" later on, and then you will be together again. They did, and have remained friends ever since, though Alan eventually went to Bristol College and Peter to Westminster. Alan became a good swimmer at a very early age, he excelled in the breast stroke and won medals and prizes for his school. This was no easy task, as he had a cardiac murmur, and suffered much from tonsillitis, but the doctor told us not to curtail his activities, but to let him lead a normal life as much as possible, but if he showed signs of unnatural exhaustion, then get him to ease up a bit! Fortunately, over the years he has become stronger, and is a keen footballer, hockey player and cricketer, in fact a good allround sportsman.

It was about this time that Bert and Anne and myself went to Sidmouth for a holiday, Bert wasn't in good health, and I thought a holiday would do him good. We had a quiet, peaceful time, and a rest from the everyday

chores and anxieties. We would relax on the beach, or picnic on top of the cliffs during the day, and take a quiet stroll in the evening. We would get up early and get fresh mackerel off the boats as they came in, and take them to our landlady to cook for breakfast. After the first few days, when we concentrated on resting, we ventured further afield, going to Beer one day, and Dartmouth another. Everything and everywhere was a novelty to them, as they had never been so far from home before, and we all enjoyed that holiday and felt much better for it. The coach ride from London was exciting, passing through the countryside, and that part of England is very beautiful, the hills and valleys and scenery a tonic in themselves.

Two years later, we had another holiday together, this time at Eastbourne. Bert was a sick man by now, but he would not give in. The rest and change did him good, and the sea air worked wonders. It was good to see him come alive again, in fact it did us all good. The first few days we relaxed on the beach, or took a picnic up on the Lighthouse hills at Beachy Head, and soaked up the sun.

We had one more holiday together, this time it was Southsea, but by this time Bert was a sick man indeed, in fact he was dying on his feet. He did his best to enjoy it, and after a few days resting on the beach, we ventured further afield by coach trips, going to Arundel one day and viewing the Castle which was most interesting. Another day we went to Cheddar Gorge, a magnificent sight - how wonderful is Nature's handiwork! having to be seen to be believed. Bert couldn't manage to do the whole tour underground, but what he did see, he marvelled at. He waited at the entrance for us to complete the tour. On our way back to Southsea, we called at Wookey Hole. Now to me, this is absolutely wonderful, I felt spell bound as I wandered underground, it was like being in another world. The underground river is clear as crystal, and moves at a very slow rate, that one cannot see movement at all, but it does move. Another day, we took a trip round Portsmouth Harbour, having all the different ships explained to us. At this time there was a tug boat strike on at Southampton, and the Queen Elizabeth had to dock some distance out to sea, and we could see her clearly. The local boatmen always loath to miss an opportunity, ran trips out for sightseers to view the huge liner at close quarters. We went too, she was a sight indeed close up, our little boat seemed like a cockleshell in comparison. It was truly a wonderful holiday, but alas the last one Bert was to have, for he had to go into hospital a few weeks later for a cancer operation, and died soon afterwards. Although he was my favourite brother, he was also my best friend, and I felt desolate, and Anne never recovered from his loss. She lived for several years afterwards, but as a semi-invalid. Only three months before Bert died, my brother Fred died of cancer. It seemed the scourge of the family, as Tom had died of it, and Louie likewise a few years later. Our family was diminishing fast, too fast to be comfortable, and at the time of writing, only Bob and I remain of the original fourteen children.

During the last few years of his life, Bert became a local preacher in the Methodist Church, he had wanted to do this for years, and at last he answered the call. He was in great demand at the local chapels to take the afternoon services, and he responded happily. He would cycle for miles to conduct a service, even though he was a sick man. He was preaching at Warchorne Chapel one Sunday whilst I was staying with them on holiday, and I went to the service, and whilst I had the utmost admiration for his great faith and his sermons, so completely thought out and delivered, I felt greatly humbled myself and ashamed of my poor effort to lead a good Christian life. Admitted I tried, but failed miserably, and no one was more aware of this than I was. I would like to quote a tribute paid to Bert after he died, by one of the leading members of the Methodist Church, who knew Bert from A to Z!

#### A Tribute

Mr. Bert Wightwick was immediately recognised as a lovable man, because he loved and cared for others. I have never heard him say an unkind word about anybody, and I am sure an unkind thought was quite beyond him. Those who worked beside him over a period of many years have testified to his conscientious service. He took a great pride in his work, and always gave good measure, pressed down and running over, a labourer worthy of his hire. He was a craftsman, zealous and meticulous, he was a dependable man, if he undertook to do a job, it would certainly be done well. Whenever he was helping at any Church function, he could always be relied upon to be there on time. A man of humble education, he was nevertheless an advanced scholar in the school of his Lord and Master. His faith was simple, but so sure and certain. His experience was deep, he had indeed drunk of the waters of life freely. Two of his most treasured possessions were his Bible and Hymnbook. He saw God in everything and everywhere in creation. In his latter days, he felt the call to preach the gospel, and to his everlasting credit, he obeyed that call. Too modest and self-effacing to allow his name to appear on the plan, yet many congregations were grateful for his ministrations in place of a Community service. We thank God for his witness and example.

"And in the morn those angel faces smile  
Which I have loved long since and lost awhile."

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If, at the end of my life I could qualify for a quarter of such a tribute, I should feel I had done well, but alas, I fear I should fall very short indeed, but Bert qualified for every word of that tribute.

I lost another dear and faithful friend soon after Bert died. She had been a wonderful friend to me for years, and was a great source of comfort to me when I lost Colin, and for years afterwards. Her son when small, spent a lot of time at our home, and was a good influence on Colin having been disciplined well by his parents, his manners and appearance



were a credit to them. I missed her dreadfully, and felt death was robbing me of far too many of those I loved.

I have always made a practice of visiting John's mother and sister, they were always so kind to me, but last year his mother died at the age of 99. I missed her terribly at first, but still continue to visit his sister, who is very dear to me. If only John had been like her, how happy we could have been. She has never married, but looked after her mother after that awful tragedy, bringing her what comfort she could, and love in abundance to try to ease the pain in her heart.

The following Easter, I decided to visit my friends in Port Talbot. David was a Methodist Minister, and I had known Mary his wife from childhood, and when in the latter years of her school life she became organist at our local chapel, and continued to do so until she was married. She then went with her husband to live at Port Talbot. I travelled down by coach, it was a glorious ride, and all strange ground to me.

On reaching Port Talbot, I was agreeably surprised, as I had heard conflicting stories about it, chiefly I think, because of the huge steel works there. The town seems to be sandwiched between the sea and the mountains, and whether this had something to do with the beautiful cloud formation there, I do not know, but they certainly are a picture.

David and Mary were really loved by their congregation, not surprising as they were young, friendly and jolly, and heart and soul in their work, and various organisations in the district. They enjoyed barbecues on the beach with the younger folk, often in the evenings on warm summer nights. On Sundays, it was a sensation indeed, people simply poured out of the houses and on to the buses, which filled in no time, and emptied at the various churches. The singing - as only the Welsh can sing - was a revelation and the services a source of pleasure, and not merely a duty to attend. Their flat faced the mountains, and I longed to go up a little way, purely for the novelty and for the view. I did so, and was rewarded, though I did not climb far. The height was deceptive. It was a lovely little flat, compact and new, and they were very happy there. While David was dark with brown eyes, Mary was fair, with beautiful corn-coloured hair, naturally curly, with blue eyes, which always seemed to be smiling. They are a wonderful couple, now blessed with two sons and still doing good work, though not at Port Talbot.

Not long after this, I decided to 'live out' if I could find a furnished room, suitable for my needs and my pocket! I had 'lived in' with the Kirby family for several years, and the novelty of having no overhead expenses was wearing thin. I felt once again I would like to be independent, even though it meant more expense to me, but still working for the Kirbys daily. After searching diligently for several weeks, and what an eye-opener it was visiting some of the various rooms, some with the barest of necessities, some so small one could hardly turn round in

them. I found a large furnished room, barely furnished I admit, but I felt I could make it comfortable and did so, and lived there for four years. It had a lovely deep red paper on the walls, and although this sounds pretty grim, it had the reverse effect, warm and cosy, and being a large room, it showed off this dark paper to an advantage. It had a huge bay window, one which was difficult to reach the top, even with a pair of steps.

The landlady was a very sweet woman, a retired school-teacher, living alone in this huge house, and so after providing herself with enough rooms to make a comfortable flat to live in, she let the other rooms to lady tenants. The room I had, had housed the old nannie for a number of years, until she dies, and I heard of this vacant room, applied for it, and got it. I was very happy there, and much as I loved Alan, it was nice at times to get away for a few hours and relax. My employers took a dim view of my show of independence, but after a time came to realise that the advantages of having their home to themselves sometimes outweighed the disadvantages of not always having me on the premises to call on if necessary. The flat - which I called my room - was only a short walking distance from work, which was very convenient.

As the years passed, and I was nearing retiring age, I realised that happy as I was in this furnished room, it would not be suitable to retire in, for one thing it had no cooker, only a gas ring which I had been able to manage with at weekends having all my meals at work during the week. It also had no water laid on, all water I needed had to be brought down from upstairs in a bucket, though there was a lavatory on the same floor. I never minded this inconvenience at the time, I was so thankful to have a room and a nice landlady, but I knew that as I grew older and possibly less agile, it would be a burden, so I decided to look for a more convenient flat to retire in, self-contained if possible with all the amenities necessary.

After what seemed a long time, about eighteen months, I found the flat I needed, and in the area I longed to live in - self-contained in a block of flats i.e. bedsitter with kitchen and bathroom, and with a rent suitable for my purse! I could hardly believe my luck, and my joy knew no bounds, it was everything I had dreamed of, near the shops, buses and underground, and this was necessary for travelling to and from work, which was several miles away now. It was without doubt the best Christmas box I had ever had, having been allocated it a few days before Christmas. I had it completely redecorated, and set about buying carpets and furniture, curtains and all the things to make a home. It was great fun. I tried to make it more like a sitting room than a bedroom, and chose my furniture accordingly. I bought a folding-up bed, so that I should have more space to move around in, a bureau-bookcase, an oak chest for spare blankets etc., a polished oak folding table, an unusual chest of drawers which does not look like a chest of drawers, but rather like a cabinet,

with a lid opening to reveal a deep recess for keeping all toiletries, and a mirror fitted to the inside of the lid, and when the lid is closed down the top can be used for ornaments, photographs or similar. Two Parker Knoll wing back chairs, and one dining room chair, standard lamp with green shade to match the coloured walls and chairs, bedside table, coffee table, green pouffe, television, 'fridge, magazine rack, and all the small things that make a home. I am very proud of my pictures, so have quite a few on the walls, plus a full length mirror, and a smaller one, rich ruby-red velvet curtains from ceiling to floor, and a beautiful patterned carpet. I am a lover of flowers and plants, so I am never without them. All told, it is my little bit of heaven, and I hope it will be my last resting place until I am carried out feet first!

The following summer, I 'did' a tour of Devon and Cornwall. I had never been to Cornwall, though I had made several visits to Devon to stay with friends i.e. that young soldier and his wife who stayed with me during the war, and had the tiny baby mentioned earlier.

We boarded the coach at Victoria on a beautiful sunny morning, and we were all very excited at the prospect of a lovely holiday. Our first stop en route was at Bagshot, where we had coffee, very welcome this, because we had all made a very early start, some coming from a distance outside London, then on to Salisbury for lunch and time to explore the City and Cathedral. What a lovely setting Salisbury Cathedral has, with its green sward, smooth as a billiard table. Refreshed, we travelled on to Ilminster, and then on to Exeter, where we stayed the night at the Rangemont Hotel. After a comfortable night, we proceeded on to Dunster for lunch at the "Rest and be thankful" then on to the Merton Hotel at Minehead for the night. Next day, we travelled down that very steep hill into Lymouth, I think the steepest hill I have ever travelled on, though the one in to Lyme Regis is very steep too - the coach seemed almost perpendicular! We stayed at the Valley of Rocks Hotel, situated to give visitors a splendid view from every window. We were most comfortably housed there, with good food as well. The hills in that area are so steep, it's not surprising Lymouth was flooded several years before, during a torrential downpour of rain which burst the banks of the river, and flooded the village nestling in the valley below.

I had a very nice, interesting seating companion, for which I was thankful, as this can make or mar a whole holiday. Next day we travelled on to Lanes End, and this intrigued me enormously with its rugged beauty, and Nature's handiwork was beyond description. With another passenger, I scrambled over the rocks like young gazelles, or so we fancied ourselves! I wish we could have had longer there, but we had to press on, and our next port of call was Falmouth, where we stayed three nights at the Bay Hotel. The trip to the Scilly Isles which was booked for the next day had to be cancelled, due to fog over the islands, so we had a trip down the river Fal to St. Mawes. It was quite cold on the boat, and after the warm coach

we noticed this, especially those who were only lightly clad. In the afternoon, we walked up to Pendennis Castle, and refreshed ourselves with a cup of tea, and viewed the scenery from up there. Falmouth Bay is very impressive, and such a hive of activity too. I had developed an awful sunburn rash on my face from the sun shining through the coach window; it was quite painful too and really unsightly, so I bought some cream from the chemist to put on it, and to relieve the irritation. From Falmouth we travelled on to Plymouth, and was taken by boat up the river to Plymouth Harbour, the coach going round inland and meeting us where we landed. The Harbour was a wonderful sight, with its two aircraft carriers, cruiser, several submarines, a destroyer and supply ships anchored there, also a Spanish trading ship, one of only six in circulation. We saw Lady Astor's house, and the Island where Napoleon was imprisoned. We visited the Cathedral, and altogether was impressed by Plymouth, with its wide streets and modern buildings rebuilt after the war. Leaving Plymouth, we saw the Tamar Bridge, opened by the Queen Mother five weeks later, on through Crediton to Taunton where we spent our last night of the tour at the County Hotel, then back to London the following day. A most enjoyable tour!

When Alan was six years old, the Kirby family moved to a much larger flat, because a baby was expected, and the present flat was not large enough for a growing family. The day we moved, it poured with rain, and the beds etc. got very wet in the transit, so I took young Alan down to my flat to sleep for several nights, until the beds were dried out and ready for use. I thought this a great adventure. This new flat was enormous, or so it seemed after the compact one we had vacated. It had large rooms with high ornate ceilings, seven main rooms plus utility room, a big larder, two cloakrooms, a bathroom, a fifty foot hall which was to prove later on ideal for playing football or other games for the two boys! It had fourteen windows, which made several hours work cleaning inside and out, but they had a man to do this, and a daily woman to do the house work. It was no easy task for me to bring up two high-spirited boys in a home where perfection was the rule, and with no garden in which to use up their energies. It was a constant headache, and I felt bitter about it sometimes. Children need some freedom to use up their energies, restriction in excess is bad for them, and perhaps this had something to do with the difficult time I had with Alan, after Geoffrey was born. It was more than difficult, it was sheer misery with him for two years. Admitted, he was terribly jealous of his little brother, and of all the attention the baby demanded, after being the only child for six years and having all the attention. However, I tried to overcome this by allowing him to help with the bathing of the baby, and to share our attention, in fact at times I often gave him more attention than I did the baby, but that seed of jealousy was there. I had to watch him closely, hoping he would not notice it. One morning he took the baby out of his pram when he was only a few weeks old, tucked him under his arm, and ran into the kitchen with him, where I happened to be at that moment. All he had to do was to lift his arm, and the baby would have

fallon to the floor. Fortunately, I managed to take the baby before this happened, and asked him not to do it again, and tried to get the message over to him by explaining how he could hurt his little brother. He did, about a fortnight later, by taking him out of his pram, tucking him under his arm, running the length of the fifty foot hall, and into his mother's bedroom. Thankfully, I managed to rescue the baby before any harm was done, once again remonstrating with him. All went well for a time, and then one day he tipped the pram up with the baby in it, handles upwards. It was in the kitchen as I had to take the pram everywhere with me in that flat for safety reasons. I dare not leave Geoffrey alone, it was too risky and too big a responsibility. This time I took Alan to task, and gave his bottom a good hard smacking. I felt if he would not learn the easy way, then he must learn the hard way, and yet I loved him. It was due to this worry that I decided two months later that I could not accept the responsibility any longer, and asked his mother to replace me. She seemed stunned and begged me to reconsider my decision. She felt that life had become rather an upheaval for Alan with a new home, a new school (he was moving up from the Junior school to the Senior) a new baby, and if it meant a new nannie, she dreaded what the result might be. I said I would slippe on it, and seeing her point of view I decided to stay on and hope for the best. How I survived those next two years I shall never know, it was a constant source of worry on top of the extra work it entailed. Walking a good mile every day with the baby in the pram to collect Alan from school, and walking that mile back in all weathers, summer and winter, plus visits to the Clinic with the baby, the shopping, extra washing and ironing, cooking their meals, plus disturbed nights, I felt at times that I would 'go round the bend'. It was only because I was so fond of Alan in spite of his being difficult, that I soldiered on. I have never regretted it; over the years there has grown a strong bond of affection between us, and I stayed with them for sixteen years. He has grown into a very nice lad, so perhaps he has now got this unfortunate trait out of his system. After the first few years of Geoffrey's life, they became very good friends, occasionally scrapping like all boys do, but it was shortlived. They were extremes in every way, Alan was fair, very good looking, big and broad for his age, shy and withdrawn, and not a good mixer. Geoffrey was dark, slender and small for his age, very alert, aristocratic looking and very popular with other children. I had no favourites, I treated them both alike, and needless to say, I loved them dearly, they were like my own boys.

In the summer of 1965, we had a French au pair to help me, during the school holiday, I was by this time, finding the long school holidays totally exhausting, with all I had to do, plus taking them out for a couple of hours every afternoon, either to the Park, or sight-seeing. It was fast becoming a nightmare, so Elizabeth came to help, if only to take the boys out. As long as I can remember, I have always hated the heat; I

literally wilted, and everything was a burden. Give me as much frost and snow as you like and I would revel in it, and feel abundantly energetic, and life good to live, but heat, no! perhaps it was because I am fair-skinned. Anyway, I was more than thankful when Elizabeth came to help. She was born in Algiers of French parents, and lived in Lourdes, and loved the heat, so it was no hardship for her to take the boys out in the hot weather. She was a student, and an extremely nice girl in her late teens, dark, and a definite "eye-catcher!" This was her first visit to England, she wanted to learn our language as she wanted to be an International Courier eventually. So what with learning a strange language, our customs, living with a strange family, and finding her way around London, life could not have been all that easy for her, but she never complained, and soldiered on heroically and cheerful in the process. I grew very fond of her, and we had some good laughs together over the language problem. It was the pronunciation she found difficult, placing the emphasis in the right place, so I was able to help her with this, and she in her turn taught me a little French! At first, I took her around sight-seeing on my day off, and to show her the various routes to travel on her own. She was quick to learn and a pleasure to be with. She stayed with us for two months, then went back to France to resume her studies. She came again the following year, and of course everything was easier all round. She knew us as a family, knew London better, and enough English to be an enormous help. She was a real joy to have in the home, pleasant, helpful, and we became good friends and have remained so ever since. She married the following year, and sent me an invitation, but unfortunately I could not go, it was just before Christmas.

During Elizabeth's second year with us, Geoffrey had the misfortune to cut his head badly on the radiator, and I had to take him to the University College Hospital to have it stitched. He was very brave, as it was a deep cut. He was very proud of his head that had had to be stitched up! It healed nicely, and he seemed none the worse for it. Some time later, he had another accident, this time whilst his mother was in charge of him. She had taken both the boys, plus a few more little friends up to Parliament Hill, with Alan's go-cart for the boys to take turns in riding down this steep hill and see which one could go the fastest. Apart from Geoffrey, they were much about the same size and age. Geoffrey was younger and smaller, but in his way, was as big as the rest! All went well until it came to Geoffrey's turn, and he started off down the hill, but the speed was too great for him to control, and the go-cart overturned, dragging Geoffrey with it. Poor little fellow, he was a very sorry sight indeed, gravel rash on his face, hands and arms, legs and knees, and blood everywhere. His mother took him straight to the Hospital, where they cleaned him up and saw the damage was superficial, but told her to watch points when they got home, in case he showed signs of lassitude, and if so, to take him back to the Hospital straight away for x-ray. Fortunately none showed, but his face

and arms were in an awful mess with grazes, narrowly missing his eyelid, and he would carry some of the marks for life. A sad end to what started out to be an exciting afternoon! During the cooler weather, I used to take the boys out sight-seeing. The Post Office Tower was a 'must' and a great thrill to all of us, and we went several times. The Pajamara view from the viewing platform was superb, one could wander all round it and see London from every angle. The Natural History Museum was a great favourite of theirs, as also was the Science Museum, so many times did we go. The Commonwealth Institute at Kensington was also a great attraction - Madame Tausauds, The Tower of London, the Changing of the Guards at Buckingham Palace and the Horse Guards Parade, Trips down the River, Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, St. Martin's in the Fields (where incidentally Geoffrey was christened), the Zoo many times, the Football Hall of Fame, the National Gallery, the Victoria & Albert Museum, which had a personal touch that day, though we did not know this when we went. They were giving a demonstration on how they make the 'Royal Doulton' China, and also showing a film to illustrate this. It was during the film, when a tea party was in progress on the screen, that Geoffrey called out "Look, Nannie, there's your tea set" and it was, or one exactly like it, and oh, we were pleased, it made all the difference to that film, and to the whole afternoon's outing. Incidentally, my tea set was a present from the Kirbys. Another place of interest was H.M.S Discovery, anchored on the Thames - how they loved it! The brasses and woodwork were so polished you could see your face in them. Later, I took Geoffrey over H.M.S Belfast, anchored near Tower Bridge. He was greatly intrigued with this, up and down ladders like a young sprite, and I had to follow, though not so spritely, but I got there! Along the decks, peering at the huge guns, then plunging down into the bowels of the ship to investigate there, there seemed no end to explore, then up and down ladders again, and only once did the ladders balk me, and that one was flush to the side of the ship, and the only one Geoffrey so far had not climbed. It was all right for him, but I could not get a toe hold, so I told him to go up on his own, and I would wait for him at the foot of the ladder. All went well until he wanted to descend, and then found he couldn't, there were no rails there for him to hold on to, and he had to be rescued by one of the sailors on board. That made his day, to have to be rescued was a thrill indeed, and oh how his little eyes shone when he was relating his adventure to his parents that night.

Young Geoffrey was always curious to know how old I was, and when he asked me, I would say "Over twenty-one dear" - he seemed to accept this, until one day, after his older half-brother had just celebrated his twenty-first birthday with much ceremony at home. He said quite suddenly to me "Nannie, you look older than twenty-one!" "Do I dear" I said, "well how old do you think I look?" He scrutinized me, and said "About thirty-two" (I was 60 then). "Does that seem very old to you, Geoff?" I asked,

"Yes Nannie, it does, well are you?" he persisted, "Well shall we just leave it at that" I said. "Oh," said Geoffrey in exasperation, "I think you and Mum are stupid, not telling me how old you are, I know how old Dad is, and Alan too, so why don't you tell me how old you are?" "Well you see Geoff, ladies don't usually tell their ages, it just isn't done" He sniffed at this and said "Well, when I grow up, I'm not going to tell you and Mum how old I am, so there!" "Oh Geoff" I said, "you wouldn't be so unkind, would you?" (smiling to myself). "Yes, I would, I'll leave you guessing, and see how you like it" with righteous indignation written all over his face - he was about five at this stage. He was ten years old when he eventually discovered my age, and the shock was too much, he simply could not believe his ears, the incredible look on his face was apparent to all.

Decimalisation was introduced in this country in the late 1960s causing much confusion, especially amongst the older generation, who were very loath to accept the change, and I was as loath as anyone, old customs die hard with some people, and I, like thousands more, bitterly resented having our customs altered simply to fit in with the European Continent.



CHAPTER NINE

It was that summer that John's sister and I had a coach tour of Scotland, it was a wonderful tour, and we saw scenery we never dreamed possible.

I joined her at Cambridge, where the tour started, she having come from Norfolk and I from London. The sun was very hot when we started, but after a time the clouds formed and we had a little rain.

We stopped at Oatham for lunch at the Crown Hotel, a gorgeous lunch and one which we were ready for having made an early start that morning. Then on to Newark where we had a little time to view the town and refresh ourselves with a cup of tea. Then on to Doncaster where we stayed the night at the Donum Hotel, and after an excellent dinner we had a walk around the town before going to bed. We woke refreshed next morning and after a good breakfast, we headed for York. I was surprised at the flatness of the countryside through which we passed. Arriving at York, we had an hour's freedom, and made our way to the Minster, a beautiful Cathedral where a few years later the Duke of Kent married Katherine Worsley. What a lovely city York is, and how we wished we could have spent a whole day there, but alas it was not to be, and we had to press on. We had our coffee in the form of ice-cream!

On through Darlington, and I noticed how much more attractive the countryside was now, less flat and more interesting. Then through Durham and Newcastle, and Wooller for tea at the Cottage Hotel. After this, it was a hard gallop for two hours to Edinburgh, passing through Kelrose, Galashiels, the centre of the Scottish Tweed Industry, making a grand total of 250 miles from Doncaster. What a welcome we had, a real Scottish welcome to the skirl of pipos at the Learmouth Hotel. Tartan carpets on the floor, tartan bedspreads on the beds, and the most comfortable bedrooms. But what is this I hear from the diningroom? Haggis, real Scottish haggis! We must try it, and henceforth be able to speak from experience. It was delicious, not a bit what I had expected. Oh blessed haggis, that you could find your way on to the menu for we two foreigners! My room was No. 13, so if strange noises resounded from its depths during the night, blame it on to haggis! or the room being No. 13! We took a stroll after dinner to stretch our legs after that long ride, it was a beautiful evening, but I noticed a difference in the temperature, it was decidedly cooler.

After a comfortable night's rest and a good breakfast, we went on a sight seeing tour of Edinburgh, the three main items of interest were St. Giles's Cathedral, the Thistle Chapel where the Queen worships when she is in Edinburgh. It is a beautiful Chapel, and how proud the Scots are of it, and the Castle. We had a magnificent view from the Castle. The Palace of Holyrood House is very beautiful, and so interesting. The

Scottish War Memorial is something, having seen, one could never forget. Surely it must be the finest in the world.

We had an excellent courier, who coupled interest with humour, and thus made the tour a pleasant and a memorable one. The afternoon we were free to wander round the shops etc., which we did chiefly in Princes Street. After dinner, a stroll to Leith Harbour, and so another day passed.

Up again next morning, with cases packed ready to start by 9 a.m. On to the Forth Bridge, the new one was not completed then, it was opened by the Queen a few weeks later. It's a magnificent piece of engineering work, though said to say cost the lives of two men in the building of it. We stopped at Stirling Castle cafe for coffee and then on to that magnificent ride through the Trossachs, breathtakingly beautiful, with the lochs as well, Loch Katrina seven miles long and half a mile wide. At Callender we stopped for lunch, fresh salmon and salad, then onto Crieff, an inland holiday resort, where we had tea, and then to Perth where we stayed the night at the Salutation Hotel. Next day we were on our way to Braemar, via The Spittal of Glenshee. What magnificent scenery here, the very road seems to cling to the mountainside, around the Devil's Elbow, which is 5,199 feet above sea level, the highest point in the country. The hills purple with heather, horned sheep and highland cattle, and quite a number of people camping at different beauty spots. How lovely and clear the water was, and oh, how cold too, I never seemed to have enough! Then on to the Fife Arms Hotel for lunch and on to Balmoral, where we saw the Castle, and at that time the Queen was in residence. We stopped for an hour and visited Crathie Church where the Queen worships when she is at Balmoral; it is small but beautifully kept. Pressing on, we came to Banchory, then back to Perth via Kirremuer (Sir James Barrie's birthplace) Forfar and Glamis, and after a delicious dinner, we were ready for bed.

Leaving Perth next morning to the sound of the bells ringing 'Ye banks and braes of Bonny Doone' we proceeded along the driver's own route to Pitlochry to see the salmon controlled stations and water power station which was very interesting. Then on to Kingsgussie, where we had lunch at The Duke of Gordon Hotel, with its fascinating pictures of witches everywhere. We took a detour round the countryside to Inverness and Beaulieu where we stayed the night. The following day was wet, and so the clouds hung low over the mountains as we passed between them, then along the shores of Loch Ness which is 24 miles long. The scenery had to be seen to be believed! Needless to say, we saw no monster!

We had a short stop at Fort Augustus to stretch our legs, and have a cup of tea, and then through magnificent scenery to Invercarron and Spean, where the unusual War Memorial stands to the soldiers who trained as Commandos in the last war, and gave their lives. Mountains and lochs all the way to Fort William, where Ben Nevis guards the 'Gateway to the Fort'. This is the highest mountain in Britain. We had lunch at the Station Hotel

then proceeded along the shores of Loch Leven which is 15 miles long. We travelled both sides of it to Ballachulish, what a beautiful spot, no wonder it is a popular holiday resort, one of the loveliest I have ever seen. On across Rannoch Moor, as desolate as the other was beautiful, but flanked by Ben Dorian in the distance. Leaving this, we went along the shores of Loch Tulla, and down into Oban, the gem of the West Highlands, where we stayed at the Royal Hotel, an enormous place, my bedroom was No. 235! We had the next day sight-seeing in and around that area by ourselves. We explored the shops, and climbed to the top of Pulpit Hill, and had a wonderful panoramic view for miles around. Later, we went to Seal Island by Coach, and saw Barbara Cartland's lovely house, and the remains of an ancient house built on stilts in the middle of the Loch, where people used to live safely from the wolves that lived in the surrounding hills. One bridge we came across was built in 1790, and still going strong, and so back to Oban where we stayed a second night. After dinner, we attended a show entitled "This is Scotland" comprising of Scottish music and dancing. Two young girls danced the sword dance and did the "Highland Fling" to the tune of the bagpipes. We were piped from the Hall as we left.

We left Oban next morning, very reluctantly, but carrying with us very happy memories. What blissful country we passed through, towering mountains and endless channels of water cascading down the mountainside, and the air so pure and clear. We stopped at Lochgephead and then pressed on along the shores of Loch Gelp and Loch Fyne, noted for its herrings. The road was literally clinging to the side of the mountain, on the left they towered above us, and on the right a sheer drop of hundreds of feet, but thanks to a good driver, we were able to enjoy, rather than fear the journey. At one place we were so hemmed in by mountains, that it was much darker, even the trees seemed a darker green. Eventually we came to Inveraray, and were taken up to the Castle, the home of the Duke of Argyll, a lovely spot, overlooking Loch and mountains. On through Tarbet, the finest Loch of all Loch Lomond, the longest inland loch in Britain. I gazed in awe at this magnificent sight, and felt sad at having to leave such beauty behind to face the industrial towns of Dumbarton and Glasgow, where we stayed the night at the Grand Hotel. In spite of its name, it proved the most disappointing of all the Hotels we had stayed at, food substandard, and I had a 'musical bed' putting it mildly! it squeaked at every movement, thus giving me a disturbed night. We were not sorry to leave Glasgow next morning, and headed for Hamilton and Moffatt, a lovely little country village of fair size, and on to Gretna Green, stopping at the Forge. Suddenly a voice called out: 'Now here's your last chance to get married if you want to' I nudged my sister-in-law for fun, who was a well-developed spinster, with a wonderful sense of humour, and looked across at one of the gentleman passengers, who had stuck out like a 'sore thumb' throughout the whole tour, though why, I don't know. He was small, slight of build, and always seemed pre-occupied, not a good mixer, though charming when spoken to, and I am

sure he enjoyed the tour. He had the most beautiful hands, long, tapering fingers, and studying him, I classed him as a musician - he was - he told us at the dinner table one evening in a sudden burst of conversation, that music was his sole interest in life. After that, I looked scornfully at some of the passengers who were inclined to ridicule him behind his back, and even myself who had enjoyed a few jokes about him. We bought a few things as souvenirs, and had a good wander round, and found it very interesting. We crossed the border by the bridge, and though I felt a little sad at leaving bonny Scotland, yet I did experience a thrill at being back in old England again.

On through Carlisle, and into the Lake District at Bassenthwaite Lake the third longest of the lakes, a truly beautiful sight with mountains towering in the background. We travelled along its shores for some miles, then on to Keswick, where we stopped for tea, and had a good look round the town. On to Thirlmere, the lake about four miles long, which furnishes the water supply for Manchester, and finally on to Grasmere, to the most comfortable Prince of Wales Hotel, overlooking the lake, a glorious spot and so peaceful too. This Hotel left nothing to be desired and that, coupled with Nature's handiwork outside, was a perfect holiday resort. After dinner, we walked along the shores of the lake, and marvelled at such beauty. If only we could have stayed there for a couple of days or even longer, but alas it was not to be. After an excellent night's sleep in this delightful Hotel, we were up next morning at 6.15, alert and eager to enjoy to the full, the beautiful scenery outside. The lake was like a sheet of glass, no wind, not even a ripple on the water, and a perfect reflection of the mountains behind and the brightly coloured tents of some campers on its shores. The peacefulness and wonders of Nature's handiwork had us almost spellbound. We were all agreed on one point; if only we could have stayed there, and for the first time en route, we were twenty minutes late in starting, and no one minded, in fact, we all boarded the coach very reluctantly.

It was a lovely ride through the Lake District, Lake Windermere being the longest, and on to Settle where we had lunch at the Ashfield Hotel, approached through an archway in a high surrounding wall, which our driver very cleverly and effectively negotiated with very little room to spare.

Now came the worst and dreariest ride of the whole tour, through Burnley and Rochdale and Oldham. I felt really depressed at the squalor of Burnley, to me it was completely soul-destroying and I was more than thankful when we reached the Derbyshire Peaks with green fields and valleys and fresh air! It was really noticeable how the land was divided into sections by stone walls, instead of the usual hedges, and fences found elsewhere in the country.

About five miles from Buxton where we were due to spend the last night of the tour, our coach began to cause trouble, by smoking heavily in the

rear, an awful smell of burning rubber, and on investigating, the driver seemed quite unconcerned, in fact he joked about it, which prevented some of the passengers from panicking. We stayed at the St. Anne's Hotel, a huge place shaped like a crescent, and very comfortable. A beautiful morning greeted us on our last day of the tour, and we were up and packed by 8 o'clock, and after a good breakfast, we headed for Bakewell and Chatsworth Park, home of the Duke of Devonshire. It was a glorious ride through extensive Park land, with no boundary fences and the cattle roaming at leisure. On through Matlock, Derby and Melbourne to Ashby-de-la-Zouch where we stayed for lunch at the Highlands Hotel, tastefully decorated in an unusual way - a star-spangled ceiling and rock like paper on the walls. The seats were like high backed church pews. The sun was very hot and it made the countryside look delightfully attractive as we journeyed towards Leicester and Peterborough. Time prevented us from visiting the Cathedral, which we would like to have done. On again to Huntingdon and Cambridge, our terminal. The tour was over, but what a lot we had packed in to those few days. I said good-bye to our party and the driver, and a fond farewell to my sister-in-law, and went down to Cambridge Station to catch the train back to London. The tour from start to finish covered 1,691 miles.

One cannot recall the happenings of 1969 without mentioning that which was the most advanced, world-wide, exciting adventure in history: the first moon landing by Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrich! The world stood still and held its breath as we watched on television that historic moment when man set foot on the moon. Millions of eyes from every part of the world were glued to their television sets, but I feel it was the older generation who were the most moved by it, having looked upon the moon from time immemorial as a 'light to lighten our darkness' and then for man to walk on it was almost unbelievable, yet there it was before our very eyes! The younger generation, though thrilled by this wonderful breakthrough in science, did not seem quite so overwhelmed as we of the older generation. They had seen advancement in so many fields in quick succession, that it was yet another one added to the long list. So much has happened since then, as we all know!

In the following year, Alan went to France with some more boys his own age, for a holiday, meeting up with a similar number of French boys about the same age group, and going to Corsica with their families. It was a great success. Alan bought a snorkel outfit, and being a good swimmer, had a wonderful time with it. One day, while deep sea-diving, he saw a lady's wristlet watch lying on the bottom, and went to investigate, and to his amazement, found it was still going, so it had not been in the water very long. He told the other boys of his find, and put it with his clothes, ready to take to the Police Station (though I think they are called Gendarmes) when he was dressed. However, a little later on, a lady and her daughter, seeing Alan's outfit, asked if they would look out for her daughter's wristlet watch, which she had lost that morning while swimming.

Imagine their surprise when Alan produced this watch he had found, and they said it was the lost one. It was a good watch, and had sentimental value too. They were overjoyed, and gave Alan a good reward, and insisted that he accepted it. This paid for his snorkel outfit, or rather replaced the money he had spent on it, and being quite expensive, it had run him short of pocket money. When the holiday was over, the three French boys came back to England with our group of boys, two with the other boys and Eric to us for ten days. They enjoyed sight-seeing in London, and the Provinces, and I noticed Alan's French had improved, being with the French family, and we hoped Eric's English had improved too.

We had the coldest June day on record that year, it was bitterly cold, the coldest since records started in 1873, and it was also during June that the Duke of Windsor's funeral took place at Windsor.

About this time, the Tutankhaman Exhibition was opened at the British Museum in London. A wonderful sight which brought people from all over the country to see it. Thousands queued up for hours to see this, including myself, Geoffrey and his little friend, but it was well worth it.

For my birthday present that year, Alan took me to my first ever football match at Highbury, to see Arsenal play Ipswich Town. He was terribly keen on football. I was a bit apprehensive being in such a crowd, 39,000, because not long before, a serious accident had occurred at a Scottish football match; the barriers had given way under pressure, and over a hundred people were injured, some seriously, but nothing untoward happened at Highbury, only that my team lost!

The Post Office made history too that year, by going on strike for two months. Life for the public during this time was very difficult, but somehow we survived, but how!

In May 1971, Alan was taken to Coppets Wood Isolation Hospital with a suspected virus infection. He was very ill, and was there for six weeks. Poor Alan had quite a distressing time, though the Doctors and Nurses were very good to him, but illness in a child is always irksome. We made a point of visiting him every day, either his parents or myself, though it was quite a distance to travel. His ward had windows on all sides, but with curtains to draw for privacy if necessary. We, the visitors, had to put on long white sterile overalls before entering the ward, and dispose of them when we came out to be sterilized again. Fortunately, he recovered, and I hope it has left no after effects, but it was a worrying time for us all while it lasted.

Starting that December and continuing every year since, was the great joy of attending the "Festival of Christmas Music" at the De La Warr Pavilion at Bexhill. It is a magnificent performance, the music and choir have to be heard to understand the impact it has on the audience. The sheer joy of it always brings tears to my eyes, and on leaving one performance, I look forward to the next in a year's time.

For my summer holiday the following year, I decided to visit a few places

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For my summer holiday the following year, I decided to visit a few places

of interest, travelling out daily from my flat. There were quite a few places I wanted to see, and never seemed to get the time to do so, so now was the opportunity. My first on the list was Coventry Cathedral. I went with an open mind, as I had heard 'fors and against' the design. To me, it was beautiful indeed, I felt spellbound, quite the loveliest Cathedral I had ever seen, and an unusual one too. Graham Sutherland's tapistry, which I was prepared to dislike, having seen pictures of it, was a revelation, a masterpiece, likewise the beautiful windows, which, having gleaned information concerning the Artist's ideas from books and leaflets on sale there, one could enter in to the beauty of these windows and understand their meaning, likewise, the architecture of the entire building. Even the coach ride there and back was interesting.

Next on the list, was Woburn Abbey, and by far the loveliest and most interesting of all the Stately Homes in Britain, to me, and I have seen most of them. It was far beyond anything I had imagined, or seen before, one could spend a whole day there and still not see it all.

Then followed Polesden Lacey, that beautiful house and Park land in Surrey, where the Queen Mother spent the first part of her honeymoon, a truly gorgeous place. The only snag was the two mile walk from the main road, and a lonely walk too, but well worth the effort when once there.

I had always wanted to see the Chelsea Royal Hospital, which is the home of the Chelsea Pensioners, and is also open to the public. It is a beautifully kept place, both inside and out, brasses gleaming bright and furniture polished like mirrors.

I thought a complete change would do me good, so I went to Goodwood Race Course, considered the finest in Britain, no races that day, but that did not bother me! After this, a few days at Southsea to see my long standing friend, and after a restful day on the beach, we decided to pay a visit to the Isle of Wight the following day. We crossed over from Portsmouth to Ryde by Hovercraft, a novelty in itself, then took a coach ride right round the Island, this being the easiest way of seeing as much as possible. After a few miles, the driver asked us if we would like to see the "Queen Mary" and of course we all said "Yes". Well, a little further along, he stopped the coach and pointed to a garden where there was a box hedge shaped like the Queen Mary! a masterpiece surely. The house and garden belonged to one of her retired Captains. We passed a wood further on where there were no birds at all, no one knows why, but it was a fact. It seemed strange as at a glance one would assume it to be a veritable birds' Paradise - I wonder why?

We stopped at Black Gang Chine, quite a beauty spot in spite of its name, but I was given to understand a lot of smuggling went on there years ago, hence its name! It is a very popular place and heavily commercialised. On through Ventnor and Alum Bay with its coloured sands, past Osborne House, where Queen Victoria spent so many years before and after Prince Albert died, and so back to Ryde. We travelled back to Portsmouth by boat, preferring to do so than by Hovercraft. It was a very full and wonderful day, especially for my



friend who was then 80 years of age, but she said she had enjoyed every minute of it, and so had I - I returned to London the next day.

On the last day of my holiday, I decided to have a trip down the River Thames. It was a lovely sunny morning, ideal for being on or near the water. I boarded a launch at Westminster Pier, heading for Kew. It was packed with sightseers who, like myself, were interested in having buildings and places of interest pointed out to us as we went along. "You may be interested to know we have two seas in the River Thames" said our informant, "separated only by a bridge" He paused for a few minutes and we were puzzled as to what he meant. Then again his voice came through the loud speaker: "To those of you who do not know the names of the two seas, it is Battersea and Chelsea, the division being the bridge we have just passed under" so now we knew!

CHAPTER TEN

Two years later proved a difficult year for me as early in the New Year, I was seriously ill and had to be rushed into hospital. I was in such pain I was almost frantic, having an accumulation of eight things wrong with me all at once, 'flu and bronchitis, sciatica, infection in the blood stream, fluid in my feet and legs which caused them to swell to an enormous size, inflammation of the tissues, gout and arthritis - I began to wonder what next they would find! My feet and legs were causing me great pain, and I had to have a cradle over them to keep the bed clothes off, and the foot of my bed raised. I seemed to be living on tablets, but this I did not mind, if it eased the pain by getting rid of the fluid. The doctors and nurses were very kind to me, and Sister gave me a lovely fur rug to lie on and fur muffs for my heels, to prevent soreness - it was as soft as a cloud!

I was in hospital a month, but that illness has left its mark, leaving a weakness which only daily tablets keeps at bay.

One thing did surprise me:- the Doctor said my leg trouble, caused by fluid collecting in them, was no doubt caused through my having had diphtheria years before. This always leaves a weakness, and a tendency to create trouble in the years ahead, no matter how long the delay, it builds up on one, and eventually strikes at its victim when he or she is at their lowest ebb. I had not felt well for some considerable time, but put it down to the busy life I led and on my feet all day, and as I had the boys to consider, with their parents out all day, I simply soldiered on and hoped for the best, but alas, it caught up with me and laid me low.

After leaving hospital, I went on convalescence for ten days, but it was months before I felt really well again, and I had to walk with a stick for weeks. I felt I had joined the "army of creepers" so slow was I at walking. But time is a wonderful healer, and eventually I got back my brisk walk again and was thankful to do so.

About a year after my discharge from hospital, the new West Hampstead Police Station was opened to the public for inspection, so I took Geoffrey and we found it most interesting. The policemen were most helpful with explanations and displays, showing us how they took finger prints with any who desired to experiment, and then destroying them immediately, much to the relief of the participants, mostly children, but quite a few adults - they obviously had a clear conscience! Then the process of taking down details of suspects or other information. They showed us the cells which I thought were quite luxurious compared with what I had imagined them to be, with bed, blankets, flush toilet and wash basin. I felt that all they needed was a bowl of flowers to complete the welcome! The burglar-proof lock they advocated as the best was like the one on my flat door, no credit to me, as it was there when I took the flat - but I was pleased, none the less.

Then it was the turn of the policewomen and traffic wardens to explain how they worked, rules and restrictions to be observed at all times. Then out into the stables, where about a dozen beautiful horses were stabled. Being under cover, they seemed enormous to me, and my imagination began to run riot with me, not being fond of animals at close quarters. So I was quite relieved when Geoffrey had finished asking questions and we moved out into the yard, where the police cars were kept. Geoffrey was full of it on the way home, and explained it in detail to his father and mother later that evening. I was so impressed I wrote a letter of appreciation to the Superintendent, and was very pleased to receive a reply of thanks.

By this time, the boys were growing up fast, and Alan was away at Bristol School, so we only saw him at holiday times. We missed him very much, especially Geoffrey, who was now on his own at home, yet having all the attention to compensate him! He was still at day school, was popular with the boys, and quick to learn. The only thing these two boys had in common was 'football' and we had this for breakfast, dinner and tea! I knew nothing about this game, until I joined the Kirby family, but by the time I retired, I was almost an authority on it!

Alan was very enthusiastic about football, and played with his school team, goalkeeper, and the same when he left school and went out to work. In spite of the "cardiac murmur" he had as a child, he was able to lead a sporting life. Geoffrey too, played in his school team, both cricket and football. As I have said, our fifty foot hall was very useful for the boys to play football or cricket in, although the ball might be a tennis ball or a fairly soft one. One day, they were having a 'whale of a time' playing football there, I kept warning them not to get too excited and to keep the ball down. They heeded this for some time, then young Geoffrey scored a 'bull's eye' right into a conclave mirror, which was hanging on the wall at the end of the hall. It smashed into a thousand pieces, and there was dead silence, and the horror of what they had done clearly showed in their faces. I too was horrified, and between us we cleared up the pieces. I said that when Dad came in we must all apologise for this accident. I would apologise for allowing them to play football in the hall, Alan to apologise for playing, and Geoffrey for his part in scoring a 'bull's eye'. When Mr. Kirby came in, we met him in the hall, myself with all the fragments of glass piled up on the unbroken gilt frame, and the boys behind me, all of us feeling sick with apprehension. "I'm terribly sorry" I said, "but you see what has happened" "Playing football I suppose" he said, and I said "yes". "All right Nannie, it can't be helped". Then Alan stepped forward "Sorry Dad for what's happened, I was as much to blame as Geoff" . Dad looked at Geoffrey, who then took Alan's place. Poor little boy, he looked quite scared, and was pink about the ears. "Sorry Dad" he almost whispered, "it was me who broke the mirror by kicking the ball into it, I didn't mean to". Dad was very understanding about it, but it would not have been surprising if he had been angry, because the boys had broken so many lampshades in

the hall playing football, and there were four hanging lights there. But Mr. Kirby never minded so much if the offender apologised for an accident, but he hated to find things damaged or broken without being told.

I feel I ought to mention some of the "daily's" I worked with during my term of office with this family. When I joined them, they had a small, dark-haired Irish woman, a widow in her mid-fifties, who came in every day. She was a first class cleaner, quick and methodical, not always the easiest person to work with, since she was "Lord of her domain" and took a great pride in her work, so I had to be sure to be out of the rooms by the time she needed to clean them - fair enough. The kitchen was the biggest problem as I had to do the washing by hand, and if I got held up with the baby, it was difficult sometimes to get this done before she was ready to come into the kitchen to clean it. However, we got on very well, I did not interfere with her work, nor she with mine, we each knew what we had to do and got on with it. Mrs. Kircy was at home the first week I was there, no doubt to see how I managed the baby before going back to the Office. Well, the first day I was on my own, Emily the daily said she would do her own washing when I had finished - she had brought this to work with her - This struck me as being strange, as she had not done this the previous week when Mrs. Kirby was there, but I said nothing, as I wasn't sure of the routine. However, the next day, she brought another pile of her own washing which she said she would do when I had finished mine, so I said quite casually: "Oh, Emily, do you always bring your washing here to do?" She looked at me sharply and said "Why?" "Well" I said, "it's nothing to do with me what you do, but I wouldn't like us to be doing anything that Mrs. Kirby would not like, and I just wondered, that's all." "Oh well" she said, in a very hoity-toity voice, "I needn't bring any more, I can be quite independent." I felt awful as I did not want to upset her, yet had a feeling Mrs. Kirby did not know about this, so was glad I had 'nipped it in the bud'. I said nothing to anyone, as I didn't want to be classed as a common informer, and it 'died a natural death'. Soon after this, things started disappearing, food from the store cupboard which was never locked, and electric iron (a spare one) but chiefly petty things, then she started coming back to the flat after I had gone out with the baby in the afternoon, unbeknown to us, but the porter saw her and she had a key, so he did not take too much notice, he had seen her come to work in the mornings, and assumed she was doing extra work for us, and happened to mention it to us in the course of conversation.

Then one day, Emily asked me to lend her £30. "£30" I said quite aghast at the amount. "Yes" said she, "I need £30." "What for" I asked, "It doesn't matter what for, I need £30." "No" I said, "I can't lend you that much money, my motto is, neither a borrower nor a lender be." She snorted at this. "Well, will you ask Mr. Kircy if he will lend it to me?" "Good gracious, what do you take me for, you ask him yourself" I said. But she didn't, instead she asked a friend of hers who also went out daily to work, to ask her boss to lend her the money, which he did, but her friend had to work six months with no pay, until it was repaid. She must have

needed that money badly. Eventually she was told to go, and that was that.

The next one was an elderly woman, a widow in her seventies, who was almost as good as nothing. She was tired before she arrived, having done another job earlier, and as our flat was always neat and tidy, it was no incentive for her to pull it to pieces to turn it out, so she dusted round the things, but she was honest, and I liked her. Her work did not suit Mrs. Kirby so she left and in a way I was sorry to see her go, and I wondered what the next one would be like. She was a nice little woman, vest pocket size, but a good worker, and she stayed with us for nine years until she retired. We got on very well together, and have remained friends ever since.

Next on the list was a small, dark-haired woman, who always brought her black poodle with her, which she took along to each room she was cleaning, attaching the lead to the door handle. The dog was quiet and no trouble, and we did not mind. Then her husband became ill, and she left in order to nurse him.

Soon after this, Dorothy came, she also was a widow nearing retiring age, but wanting a light job for occupation. A splendid worker, and I liked her very much, but after a time she had to go into hospital for a major operation, which put her out of action for some considerable time.

The last one was the nicest of all, kindly, cheerful, a first class worker, tall and very smart in appearance, and almost a 'double' to Lee Renwick the actress. I used to look forward to her coming, she was like a ray of sunshine. The boys liked her too, and so did Mr. and Mrs. Kirby, in fact she was a treasure.

I got on all right with all of them, though naturally I liked some better than others, but dishonesty is something I dislike intensely, and to work with one who is light-fingered is a worry not to be tolerated.

I often spent Christmas with Margaret and Andrew (or Andy as we called him) my niece and nephew, and we had such wonderful times together, they were young compared to me, and full of life, and Christmas was a great joy to them, and to all who were lucky enough to spend it with them. There was always a houseful, nothing too much trouble, food in abundance beautifully cooked and served, a Christmas tree with a present on it for everyone, in fact they left nothing to be desired. It was a treat to look forward to every year.

One year, having spent one of these lovely Christmases with them, I discovered to my dismay the night before my return to London the following day, that I had lost my return ticket together with my concessionary ticket, which tickets are issued to the elderly (over sixty!) in London for free travel on the buses at certain hours of the day during the week and all day on Saturdays and Sundays and Bank Holidays. Both these tickets I had put in a sealed envelope in my handbag for safety. I searched my handbag again thoroughly, not there, then my case, under the bed and furniture, the bed clothes in case it had dropped out. Still no tickets could I find. I was i

despair, feeling I should have to pay my fare back to London again, and worse still, if I could not produce my ticket, would they allow me a seat on the coach, having only my word for it that I had already paid, and therefore a seat would have been reserved for me. And then my concessionary ticket without which I could find the crippling fares in London almost impossible to cope with, having to travel to and from work. I had little or no sleep that night, and when Margaret called me next morning with a cup of tea, I told her my little tale of woe. "You've been dreaming" said Margaret, but I said "Alas no, it was no dream, but a stark reality." Then she too became worried, and wanted to know where I had lost it. Well, quite frankly, I didn't know, I thought it was still in my handbag, until I went to check up on it the night before. However, she told me not to worry too much, Andy would take me to Ashford in the car, and we would state at the Office what had happened, and see what they had to suggest. So we hoped as we sped along the road to Ashford. I saw the Inspector at the Bus Station and explained the situation to him. He asked where I had lost it and I said I had no idea. He asked where I had been during the holiday, so I said "to Dymchurch on the Saturday and Ruckinge on the Sunday." Then he said "well, as a matter of fact, a ticket has been handed in to me, but don't get too excited about it as it may not be yours" and much as I hoped it would be, I felt, Oh no it can't be, those sort of things only happen in fairy tales. He then produced the torn envelope, which I recognised as mine, and he asked me what my name was, so I told him "Yes, this is your ticket and your concessionary ticket too" he said, "they were found at Dymchurch, and the envelope having no name and address on it was opened by the finder, and he realised how important these tickets were to the person concerned. He promptly took them up to Ashford, a good ten or twelve miles away, and handed them in at the bus station." I could hardly believe my ears and eyes, I was so overjoyed at having them back. The Inspector did not know the name of the finder, and I tried in various ways to find out who it was, but without success. I only wish he could know my joy and relief at having both those tickets again. I could almost believe in miracles now!

The following Christmas was also a memorable one, spent with Margaret and Andy, with the usual good will everywhere, and twelve sat down to Christmas dinner and fifteen on Boxing Day! On Boxing morning, Margaret's son took me to the Recording Studio in Ashford, where he was chief recorder, and was on duty that morning. He thought I would like to see how the recording is done. He had won a silver cup only a few weeks before, for the best performance. It was an education in itself, knobs, switches and lights everywhere, plus tape recorders, two record players, ear phones, this to switch on, that to switch off, his eye on the clock to tell the time over the air, he needed eyes, ears and hands everywhere at the same time, plus a cheerful voice over the air. I marvelled at the ease and dexterity with which he operated it all, but I suppose practice makes perfect, and he had been doing this for several years. I came out of that studio a much wiser woman than I went in!

Not long afterwards, I had a glorious surprise one morning, when, on opening a letter, found a cheque for £1,000 from the MacDonald family. I could hardly believe my eyes, and thought it must be a dream, but no, it was a wonderful reality. There was a covering letter explaining why they had done this; they felt that as I was nearing retiring age, it would help to make life a little easier for me, as a pension, though a great help and much appreciated, was really insufficient to cover all expenses. I was beside myself with happiness and gratitude for such a wonderful gesture, and the future looked a lot more rosy than it had done five minutes before. Needless to say, I wrote a letter of thanks there and then, and also phoned to give a verbal 'thank you'. It has proved an enormous help one way and another, to have something in the Bank to draw on and eke out my slender resources.

I was not able to buy myself a transistor, something I had wanted for years and felt I could never afford. I had already got an all mains radio, which was proving unsatisfactory, having been in use for many years, but a transistor would provide clearer hearing as I use a hearing aid. This clarifies sound so much that I could always hear a humming sound with all electrical things such as all mains radio, television, clocks and fires, and this is inclined to distort the programme on radio and television, but I got a transistor. This hum is apparently unheard by the normal ear, even those with keen hearing.

This hearing aid happens to be one of my most treasured possessions, enabling me to be part of the hearing world, as without it I would feel partly cut off from human conversation, in spite of the fact that I taught myself to lip-read in the 1920s, when I had good hearing. I did this because so many members of the family were partially deaf as they grew older, and I realised how difficult life could be for them at times, and of course hearing aids had not been invented then, or if they had, they never came our way! It took me years to master the art of lip-reading, but it has proved an enormous help to me throughout the latter years of my life, when I in turn became partially deaf, so with the help of these two, I can lead a normal life.

I retired in 1974, having lived with the Kirby family for sixteen years. The boys were growing up and not needing a Nannie as such, Alan was away at Boarding School and Geoffrey at day school. I used to get so desperately tired doing a full week's work plus the journey to and from work, and I felt I had reached a point of no return and decided to retire as I was 66+. It was a great hardship giving up my boys and I was desperately unhappy for a time, but it was not the end of the world for us. Love is never wasted, and there is a strong bond of affection between us. We see quite a lot of each other, they come over to me during the school holidays and I go over to them, in fact I am considered a friend of the family now! For years I had dreaded the idea of retirement, feeling that once I had done so, and had a rest and felt fit again, I should be bored

to tears with nothing to do. Not so, and far from it, I am still as busy as ever, though of a different nature. It's self-inflicted, which does make a difference.

If I have a day when I feel a bit 'off-colour' I simply have a rest, but I am far happier being occupied in some form or other.

I am a keen reader, a luxury I never had time to indulge in during my working years, even though now, through failing eyesight, I have had to resort to the large print books.

Yes, life is still good!