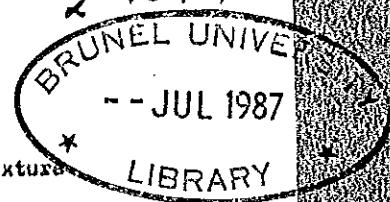


"NUTS IN MAY". By Verbera Brighton

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Chapter 1.

Gura was a funny old house, built in the late 17th century, of wattle and daub, which we were told was a mixture of cow dung and clay. It was once a farm house, but was later divided to make two cottages. It stood all alone at the top of what seemed to us children a very steep hill, and was surrounded by beautiful common land, whereon grew the finest grass cropped by the horses and cows of the neighbouring farmers. The thatched roof of the old house was owned solely and completely by sparrows, and without their continuous chirping nothing would have been the same. They were quite a part of our life, and though the thatch had on occasions been netted, "them blasted sparrows" still managed to hold on to their domain. The bedrooms had low ceilings, and were of most peculiar shapes, beams and balks ran in all directions and looked for all the world as if a branch had been sawn from a tree and just plonked amongst the plaster. One piece stuck out in such a way as to serve as a sort of rail for discarded clothes at bed time, and another piece reared itself out of the floor ready to trip up any unobservant adult, and the younger children amused themselves by crawling under and pulling themselves up. Needless to say, this piece of 'furniture' was worn shiny by so many little hands.

The windows of the bedrooms were almost on the floor, and to gaze across at the wonderful stretch of arable land, beyond which were the glorious sunsets, we had to lie on our stomachs. There were two downstairs rooms in each cottage, the kitchen and the other room which we called the Best room, this room was used only on great occasions such as Christmas and Company. The beams and the balks were again all on 'the crook' as we called it, just pieces of roughly hacked wood. The walls, very uneven, were held together by layers of wallpaper, and during Spring-cleaning, if too many layers were removed, a lump of plaster would loosen and mother would fill up the gaping hole with a wad of wet newspaper which when dry was as good as cement.

All the chairs in this Best room were hard and straight backed, and slippery with the application of so much bee's wax, turpentine and elbow grease, and shone fit to "taarke yer eye out". We with our short legs, unable to dig our toes into the carpet to get a grip, were forever sliding off the seats, and so mother, to save this continuous embarrassment when we had company, had a long form made by the village carpenter, which stood the length of the table and kept four little bottoms in order, and our little legs awing with delight like a lamb's tail as we were handed some tasty morsel for Sunday tea. The floors of wall-worn uneven brick were covered with several layers of mother's

home made shred carpets, which, when they began to get shabby were demoted to the kitchen, and on the weight of these works of art. Each week they had to be 'lugged' outside, along over the clothes line and beaten with a stick, the dust flew out in clouds and we gradually learnt the art of not standing facing the wind 'or du we would ha bin a-champin' o' dust for days after'

All the furniture, well practically everything had belonged to a dear deceased person. 'They were your por ow' Granny Brighton's, 'that was your Aunt Kate's'. 'Poor ow' Barret give me that, just afore he died'. 'Your por ow' Uncle Fred painted that'. 'Du yu be careful o' that, that was yer por ow' Aunt Susannah's, no I tell a lie, that was Hannah give me that when she got married' and so on. There were photographs of various members of the family adorning the walls, a large coloured one of my brother who had just joined H. M. S. Ganges, a larger one of the members of his ship, both of which we were very proud. Father would point out to all who came into the Best room. 'These my boy Joe what d'ye think o' him'.

The kitchen was beautifully sunny, there was a dresser the whole length of one wall, which was scrubbed snowy white by mother every Friday. On the top shelf were lined up all the beautiful brown pots with lids, containing salt, flour, dried fruit, dried peas, cocoa coupons, everything imaginable, and at

the and stood father's shaving mug, strop, and cut throat razor, never to be touched by anyone except himself. Underneath the shelf hung the brass, copper and aluminium saucepan lids, frying pans and one warming pan, all brilliant with brass and much rubbing. At one end of the dresser stood a large sack of flour, and at the other, two pails of water. The cupboards underneath were absolutely bunged full of everyday necessities. The end one held the boots and shoes, button boots and lace ups, all shapes and sizes of shoes which were handed down from one child to the next, until there was no more wear left in them, and a button hook hung on a nail just inside the door. Very often this door had to be forced shut and equally often did it burst open scattering the footwear far and wide.

The middle cupboard held the saucepans, iron ones and a large iron boiler which mother used for cooking her spotted dicks. These saucepans were all used on the open fire, and the soot was just swept off and the inside washed out and left to dry in the sun to 'sweeten it'. The end cupboard held the cleaning materials. A large bath-brick with a cleave board whereseon we cleaned the knives on a Saturday. Lumps of blacklead which were softened with water and used for shining the grate, blacklead

brushes, one for putting on and one for taking off, blue bags, brass and various rags for various cleanings and not to forget the wonderful smell of bees-wax and turpentine.

A shed adjoined the kitchen and above it was a loft where many years ago the house boy slept. It was approachable only by a set of wooden steps and entered by a hole just big enough to crawl through, but this was forbidden territory to us as father feared that we would put a foot through the ceiling, with a threat that if we damaged the house there would be no where to live and we would all have to go to Fulham Workhouse.

The garden was planted every year, the same things in the same places. Potatoes opposite the back door, usually a purple variety which when boiled turned very white, a wonderful flavour they had. Then there were rows and rows of broad beans, kidney beans and shallots. Hardly ever cabbages, lettuces or anything which needed a lot of washing was grown, as water was scarce.

There was always a good crop of potatoes with sufficient for seed for the following year, in spite of the fact that all used water was broadcast with one swish over the garden outside the back door. We loved the young green raw broad beans, and being

short could conveniently creep between the rows and help ourselves. Suddenly a clod would come flying across the garden and land near enough to startle us and father knowing full well what was going on would say 'Them ow' bads are at my beans agin'.

There was not much of a flower garden. A small plot at the back of the house was all we had, in the centre of which grew a large clump of Madonna Lilies, I believe the only flower that mother would have in the house. Wallflowers repeated themselves year after year, Phlox grew to a large shrub, and pansies yellow and brown never failed to come up. The buying of seeds was unheard of and yet as the seasons came round the same flowers appeared. The dark brown wallflowers crowded over the paths, and after a good rain drenched our stockings as we picked our way to the closet. The only double daffodils battled against the winds, their heavy heads bowed with the rain.

The primroses of all colours grew in the ditch, and what a sight they were, planted by father about forty years previously those gay little flowers still bloomed merrily year after year, and were a joy to many who came to the door.

The poplars shed their red catkins in the spring, and we regularly as children brought them indoors, and as regularly mother had to pretend to think they were caterpillars. As these

catkins matured the seed pods burst and covered the ground with beautiful white silken fluff, which we collected and left in heaps for the birds to build in. Fruit trees abounded. There were the little plums, the big plums, the black plums, the greengages, none ever saw a pruning hook and yet they bore fruit in abundance year after year. The apple trees of no known varieties were named after my sisters. There was May's apple, Olivia's apple, Vida's apple and Ivy's apple, and we spoke of them as of a Cox or Blenheim. The walnut tree was planted by father when my brother was born and year after year father would say 'Blast, I cant think why we dont git no nuts', until someone told him to cut the tap root and after that the nuts began to appear and from then on never looked back.

Chapter 2.

Oh I shant forget the day that I was born
 It was a cold and frosty winter's morn
 The doctor said I was a chubby chap
 and then the nurse she put me on her lap.
 Oh she washed me all over I remember
 And after powder puffing me you see
 She laid me in the cradle by the window
 in a little shirt my mother made for me.

The youngest daughter of a family of twelve, I was born in 1915 and my first vivid recollection was of the flu epidemic which struck nearly every family in the village. Mother was laid low, and feeling very poorly with about five children all whining and snuffling and I remember howling with all my might for a jam tart. Father was nearly beside himself, he was the only one on his feet but no idea where to find anything, as he never had occasion to go into the larder. However, after much searching he managed to unearth the said jam tart and brought it up to me. I straightway fell asleep with the tart enveloped in my hair. When I eventually awoke I greatly resembled head-wise the old cockerel who kept a family of hens in order next door. My poor mother not in the best of moods set about me in a pretty rough manner and great was the pain and loud the screaming as she endeavoured to sort out the unpleasant mass of jam and long hair.

Another early memory was of Peace Day. These were celebrations at Gissing Hall in the beautifully kept park and gardens. Everyone was there including Father with his Cocker Stall. A gramophone with a large horn bellowed forth 'The Minstrel Boy', fireworks exploded in all directions and a donkey who evidently objected to giving rides to children opened his mouth and displaying yellow teeth let out a war cry which so terrified

me that I had to be brought home and put to bed.

The children who lived next door were our only companions, and as they were the same age as ourselves we shared whatever little tit bits came our way and spent many happy hours in the meadow with its beautifully cropped grass and the masses of buttercups and daisies. We rolled down the bank, we paddled in the pit when the horses were not using it, in fact we made use of everything that was there for the asking.

We loved baking days, mother would have been up at crack of dawn, and the smell of yeast would have ascended the stairs and the bread set to 'prove' before we came down to our breakfast of very sweet cocoa and bread and milk, or if luck was in dripping toast. Then the oven had to be lighted. The oven was in the wall beside the kitchen grate, it had a blackleaded door with a brass knob and bits of ornamental iron work decorated it. Underneath the oven was the fire, which had a most horrible habit of smoking, and so to clear the flue mother would set a match to a little gun-powder which had been wrapped in a screw of paper, hold the door shut with the tweezers, and 'Woomph', if that didn't do the trick nothing would. With a satisfactory 'Thase a-bannin' she would proceed to put in more sticks and shuff, so

she called all the tiny bits of wood chippings from around the chopping block, and topped it up with cake.

The dough would be rising in a very large tin pan which was placed as near to the fire as possible, and every now and then she would just touch the rising bulge through the cloth which covered it. When the breakfast things were washed up, the dough would be ready for kneading, and she, having floured a large cooking board would pull out elastic lumps cut them to the right size, and with a rhythm which shook the table legs, A-dam-de-dyke, A-dam-de-dyke, the dough would be kneaded and placed in their respective tins, and with three pokes of the finger on each blob, these works of art were left to rise again.

Then there would be those deliciously nutmeggy fouraea cakes with their shiny tops, the date pies, the pink buns, the rag short cakes which were a type of puff pastry but when cooked resembled little books and we ate them leaf by leaf, toffee tarts, shiny buns and if we were having company, a rich fruit cake. There was only one day for baking and every bit of use had to be made of the heat. Very large rice puddings and rhubarb pies were put in the oven as it was cooling off, and during the fruit season some cooking pears would be washed, cut in quarters, the skin left on and placed in one of mother's shiny brown jars with sugar, cloves and very little water. Cooked slowly they were absolutely delicious, crunchy yet

soft, almost the texture of crystallised fruit. After the cooking bowls had been finished with we scraped the sides, bread and cake moulded together into a most wonderful grayish black blob which we put into a cocoa tin lid and when cooked ate with relish.

After the oven had cooled down the wacks washing was wrapped in newspaper and placed in it to air. Economy was a matter of course, a virtue but also a great necessity. My sister could read and write long before she went to school and tried to cram some of her knowledge into my unwilling head, getting me lined up with a most weird assortment of dolls, one with hair made of binder string, one with a head made of a rubber ball, feet missing, arms missing, one came from Wombly or some exhibition and was made in one piece as an ornament but had real hair with real hair pins. There was a beautiful doll named Marion who could do no wrong, and a gollywog. Each doll had a pencil and tiny book, and each doll was given lessons in arithmetic and writing but try as I could to be top of the class I could grasp nothing.

Chapter 3.

A bit about Father

He had an amazing sense of humour - my father. Much older than mother, he had sat her on his knee as a child. His wants were

very few, a pint of beer, sitting in his pony cart smoking a clay pipe, listening to the birds, noting the different flowers as they appeared, and a rattling good laugh. Outside the back door there stood the old chair which he had made out of a hollow trunk of a tree, and amazingly comfortable it was too. There he would sit contentedly for hours with his shirt sleeves rolled up, puffing away at his clay pipe filled with Juggler Tobacco, sevenpence an ounce, listening to the blackbird or the mavis in the poplar tree, watching the martins as they flew to and fro building their nests under the eaves, and throwing crumbs to his little pet spink which every day came and asked for food on the door-step. The tom-tite would build in the chaff house, and his fury knew no bounds if anyone interfered with a bird's nest.

We seldom saw him angry except when his tools had been used and not returned. He was not a religious man and had no time for sanctimonious people, he could put up with a sinner as long as he was not a miserable one. Sitting quietly, he would suddenly break into song, I remember one day hearing what I thought to be a new hymn. 'Allalulia Yadanjulia', until I realized that Ted was the sexton and Julia his good wife, and mother would say 'Walter behave yourself!' Being so much older than mother, we as tiny children were rather afraid of him,

and would stand like ram-rode wishing him 'Many Happy-Turns of the day' or if on an occasion when we had a new dress 'Please father, mother said, Do you like my new dress?' He would pick us up and give us a kiss and no doubt wished that we were more at ease with him.

Before I went to school he would take me for rides in the pony cart. I would be perched up beside him on a plank with a sack over it to help to ease things a bit, and as we went along at a slow jog not a thing was left unnoticed. The first swallow, the cuckoo, a wild rose, and oh the smell of the sweet briar with the rain on it, and the fields of horse beans! He knew everyone and always found time to talk and most invariably left people laughing.

Someone would say 'Woe that yer little gal?' and he would say 'Yia thass my little mawther' lifting me down from the cart 'There what d'ye think of her' ? He would stop for 'refreshment' at one of the many public houses which are now no more, tie up the pony to specially provided staples in the wall, along with various types of four-legged transport, set me up with a packet of crisps and I would crunch away as I listened to the sound of laughter coming from the tap-room, but itching to be away.

When I was very young after the first war, father worked on the roads for a time, it was a very poorly paid job but he had the

birds and the flowers and above all people to talk to. All the stones for the mending of the roads had to be broken with a small hammer and there he would sit wearing a pair of goggles, astraddle-legged on a sack astride a stone heap hammering away. One day the Rector's wife came along and as always full of pleasant remarks, 'Good Morning, Mr. Brighton' 'how fortunate you are to have such a job on this lovely day', Father's reply 'Well theres nothin' to stop you from jinin' me mazz'.

Another time when he was wending his way to the Chequers Inn he met the same good lady. "Hello Mr. Brighton and where are you off to?"

"I'M gorn to see my doctor Maam"

"And who is your doctor Mr. Brighton"

"Dr. Reeve Maam at the Chequers, he's the only doctor I know"

He would get into trouble for being late home for dinner, but he would always make up for it by regaling mother with all the latest news, always plenty of amusing anecdotes, and his laugh could be heard as he later sat on the old tree trunk in the meadow with his next door neighbour, legs apart, hands on knees, puffing away at his old clay pipe. As a younger fellow he was asked to repair one of the church towers in the vicinity. According to him he filled the hole with barrow loads of old tins and bags of chickens muck, plastered up the gap and covered it with flints and to this day it stands.

His powers of observation were incredible, not a twisted stocking escaped his eye, he would imitate anyone and he was mother's only means of entertainment as she herself hardly ever went out.

The last thing he did was to crawl out of bed to listen to the sparrows.

Chapter 4. - Father's ponies

Father's ponies were never to be forgotten. Old Tom, the first I remember would never deign to give an elderly female a ride. He would cast his eye round and having ascertained that he was seeing aright and that there was an old girl in the cart would with ears back proceed to make every attempt to back the cart into the ditch. Sometimes he got it as far as hanging over the side, but father always sat tight and if Tom did not manage it, with ears laid flat on his head he would go up the road "hall for leather", hoping to unseat the female that way. Another time two ladies in the village asked to borrow Tom and the cart as they had an appointment with the dentist at Diss. They mounted the cart, tucked themselves in with a rug, and hopefully set off. But Tom was having none of it and all the persuading in the world would make him do no more than a crawl until he came to a dead halt and would not budge an inch. There was nothing for it but to turn back and as soon as Tom knew he was heading for home he broke into a brisk trot and the appointment had to be put off.

Then there came Fanny, a pretty little brown pony who would always knock on her stable door at five in the morning. Father used to say "Blarst! that pony", but nevertheless would always get up straight away and feed her, and anyway it was no hardship to him to be out with the dawn chorus. Fanny was frisky and pretty unpredictable about getting started, in the mornings. She would lay back her ears, roll her eyes, toss her head and pull at the reins. Father would sit on his hard seat, "Whoa me little Fanny, whoa me little colt", and then his patience exhausted, "What-the-Hell-are-ye-axter!"

Chapter 5. - Starting School.

At the age of five I very reluctantly went to school with my elder brother and two sisters. Dressed in a little mauve coat with a fur collar, a grey frock, white pinafore, thick black stockings, which, either because I had lost a garter or the elastic had worn too loose would not stay up, black boots which were laced half way up, and then criss-crossed over hocks and double knotted at the top. Looking round at some of the other little ones and examining their articles of clothing, I was quite convinced that their boots were made of iron, and well they might have been considering the miles and miles that the poor little things had to walk in a day and in all weathers.

There were two rooms in the school - and a lobby. In the

corner of the lobby stood a chipped enamel pail of water which smelt like rust. To the handle was tied a tin mug from which we all drank. It was vile tasting water from a well, in the school mistress's garden and each morning it was the head boy's job to see that this pail was newly filled. There was a little room and a big room. We all congregated in the big room for prayers and a hymn before lessons, and I can so well remember the old school master with beaming face twirling the cane he always carried, and poking me in the tummy as I sang most heartily "Count your blessings name them one by one" a hymn of many which I had learnt from mother who had a lovely little voice, having no idea what was meant by "When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed", but appreciating it all much later.

Very soon after my starting school, the school master and his wife retired and I was chosen with a boy of the same age to present a small bag of money as a farewell gift. I wriggled and giggled nervously, and blushed as I held Freddie's hand all conscious of my new dress, as between us we handed over the village collection of coins which must have been very small as no one earned more than 25/- or 30/- a week, and we both were rewarded with a cuddle and a kiss, and young as I was I noticed a tear in the old school master's eye.

Chapter 6. - New Teachers

After the retirement and departure of the school master and his wife, came two delightful women teachers, both were of Norfolk origin so they had no difficulty in understanding our most peculiar language. The youngest teacher who was in charge of the little ones in the little room lived at the Post Office and we always ran the first half mile down the hill in order to be there when she came out of the gate, to hold her hand for the remainder of the walk to school. In this little room, with endless patience we were taught how to count, read, write, draw and sing with the harmonium for accompaniment. The school room windows were always full of flowers, sheeps parsley, buttercups, kingcups, birds eyes, cowslips. Anything that a child brought was most graciously accepted and placed in a Viroi jar of which there were many. It was a cosy little room with an open fire and a guard on which we sometimes dried our coats, and on one occasion in impossible weather when only three of us had turned up we sat in our dresses only, there were three little patticeats and bloomers hanging up to dry, with three pairs of boots at the side of the fire, and gloriously warm they were when the time came to go home.

When we moved into Standard 2 and the Big room life was different, we missed the occasional individual attention but at the same time we gained a little self importance. We had to share very long desks which seated six boys and girls. Real ink wells we had and real pens with crossed nibs which spattered ink in all directions.

The ink wells were invariably half bunged up with bits of blotting paper, and as we dipped in the pen out came a blob stuck to the nib which, until we were able to make pen wipers, we cleaned on our stockings. The desks were bespattered with ink of the age, boys names were carved along the edges. Words had been written and pencilled out in the course of a composition lesson - useful things desks.

We elbowed and pushed one another along the forms as we spread out our elbows thinking that the more room we took the better our writing would be, and many a kick did we give and take under cover of the desk. The headmistress taught Standards 2 to 7, and how well she managed it. Religious instruction, History, Geography, Arithmetic, English, Botany, Needlework, Basket work, Painting and drawing for the boys - well everything that was necessary.

The singing lessons always passed too quickly, as the seasons came round we were taught songs appropriate to that time.

To have the children divided into three lots and singing around was a great treat, and one particularly stays in my mind:-
 If I were a cobbler I'd make it my pride
 The best of all cobblers to be
 If I were a tinker, no tinker beside
 should mend an old kettle like me.
 But whether a tinker, a cobbler or Lord,
 whatever my portion may be,

In school I would aim
 for the top of the class,
 In life for the top of the tree.
 Let who will be second
 the first I'm determined to be.

Those who couldn't sing either mimed or made a noise like the droning of bees, but most of it was deadened by the strumming on the piano, while the head mistress stood on her toes peering over the top of the upright instrument, as there were always a few who would find something else to do beside the work in hand.

Our raffia work was something to be quite proud of, but many a queer shape of basket was invented unintentionally. The raffia needles had a habit of disappearing, lost, stolen, or strayed, and as the shortage became more acute, the head boy decided to manufacture some for ha'penny each. He cut up pieces of wire, turned one end over and twisted it round to form an eye, but sadly enough he hadn't the art of filing and those who had the money to purchase this invention were disappointed as the rough ends tore at the raffia and so the project fell through.

As we plied our needles Miss England, the headmistress, would read aloud a book or snatches from the daily paper. How we loved to hear the doings of Pip and Squeak in the Daily Mirror. The paper would be handed round, carefully folded so that we had no chance of seeing anything that we ought not to see. The children took the opportunity of making plenty of noise. "Coo' Oh, Ah Jest you look at that! My hat! Please Miss he want let me see. How much longer are you gorn to be?" until we had all seen and the paper was handed back to the headmistress.

The books read to us were nearly all of a sad variety, with little weak children dying in garrats with very cruel parents, but occasionally we would be treated to something really lively, and it

was a great conquest if we could bring one of our favourite books from home to be read to the class. At the end of the session we would shout "Thank you Miss. Thank you, Miss" until we were told "That is sufficient children".

The Headmistress lived in a house adjoining the school and as she was unable to leave the schoolroom to prepare herself a meal we would be treated to the smell of asparagus or cabbage as it boiled gaily on a little oil stove which she had set up in the school room, and there were twitching of nostrils and pinching of noses as we pretended that we were quite unused to any smell which was not of the sweetest quality, though passing a good old muck heap caused us not to turn a hair.

Chapter 7. -- lunch time

We lived a mile away from school so we started off by taking our dinners which we ate, when wet, in the little room and when fine under the dear old elm tree whose roots formed perfect little seats for children to straddle across with their backs to the trunk. We usually started off with bread and butter and a two-penny packet of potato crisps divided between the four of us. I hated bread and butter and if there happened to be a piece of butter stuck in a hole I quickly whipped it out and disposed of it. We ate the tiny shoots from the hawthorn hedge which grew around the church yard, and the suck-sours which we picked in the meadow not giving a thought as to whether a cow had paused nearby. The bread and butter was usually followed by a date pie or a pink bun, and oh how enviously we looked upon a fat over fed girl who daily produced a great quantity of cakes and pastries which she gorged greedily until we noticed that they were wrapped in newspaper. This filled us with horror as mother was very particular with the wrapping of food in crisp greaseproof paper and from then ended our temptation to envy.

Another delightful/^{boy} produced a most beautiful sponge cake and placed it on the desk, his absent minded brother promptly sat on it with his little corduroy trousers. We expected to see it squashed out of all recognition but were amazed, and collapsed with laughter as we watched it gradually rise and return to it's former shape.

After dinner there was plenty of time for play, and we made good use of it, we would shout above each other as to which game it should be, the child with the best lungs would have the choice. Night's Lodgings was a great favourite of one boy. He would turn his top jacket - he wore several - inside out. The rest of the children stood in a closely packed line to form a wall. The boy pretended to knock on a door.

Boy Knock Knock

Reply Who's there

Boy On'y me

Reply What d'ye want

Boy I want a night's lodging

Reply Well ye can't come in

Boy I will if I hatter knock the wall in

With that the scuffle started, and if the boy managed to break through the wall of children without losing all his jackets he had won the game.

Another favourite was Sheep Sheep come home. One boy would

be the shepherd. Another with his coat on back to front would be the wolf, and the remaining children would huddle together as a flock of sheep.

The shepherd "Sheep Sheep come home"

Sheep "We're afraid"

The shepherd "What of?"

Sheep "The Wolf"

The Shepherd "The Wolf has gone to Davonshire, and won't be back for seven year. Sheep Sheep come home"

With that the sheep ran helter skelter to the other end of the playground. The wolf growling and clawing sprang from his hiding place, catching as many children as he could and those who reached home in safety took the important parts in the next game.

When we were tired of such rowdiness we indulged in a rather unkind game as follows:- There were two very vicious young six year old girls who absolutely loathed each other. A boy would arouse their touchy tempers by telling one that the other had called her names. It never failed to work and the fighting began tooth and nail. Every one egged them on. "Go it, Go it!" and we lay on the lovely patch of grass opposite the Crown Inn at the top of the school lane, helpless with laughter, until we realized that things were getting out of hand and one of the tougher older children stepped between them and called a halt.

Next to the school playground was a most beautiful meadow and by courtesy of the farmer we were allowed to play there providing the cattle were elsewhere. The beck even in summer seemed to sparkle with gloriously clear water tumbling over the little stones. We made dams and built bridges and tetered on the knobbly parts crossing from one side to the other. We hunted for ducks eggs for which we were given a ha'penny bar of chocolate if we took them to the Crown, we picked the beautiful kingcups down in the muddy part and lay on the well eaten grass. We washed our handkies in the water and dried them on the trees, and often a pair of stockings would be hanging there as well, if some unfortunate child had missed his or her footing in the beck, but we never split.

Plenty of trees to climb, our favourite being an old elm whose boughs dipped to the ground and were stripped of bark and worn shiny by the passage of so many little bottoms. One day a boy whizzing down the branch failed to stop in time and shot off the end into a large cow pat, we onlookers collapsed with laughter and then saw the serious side of it. What were we to do? Freddy ran into the school to call Miss England, who came running out with an armful of newspapers, but didn't quite know how to start the mopping up operation. Then up spoke dependable John. "Leave 'im ter me Miss, I'll see arter him". With that he seized the unfortunate boy by the heels and dragged him seat downwards over lumps and bumps, mole hills, rest harrow, nettles, buttercups and daisies, up hill and down went he, until the boy's trousers

shone like a pair of well polished shoes and smelt as sweet as new mown hay.

Chapter 8. - Afternoon at school

Very often during the hot afternoons of summer, we were taken out to sit under the beech tree in the church yard for our sewing lessons. Our sticky hands struggling to push the needle through the material. The cotton a dirty grey as we endeavoured to make a good job of hem stitching a camisole or a magyar chemise. While the teacher's voice droned on, our minds wandered to different sounds, the humming of the bees, the goats cropping the grass around the graves, and we looked up at the beautiful creation under which we were sitting and were very very happy.

Then back into school for another lesson, we kept an eye on the clock as we always longed to be out in the open, and it was always a relief to hear the teacher clap her hands, "Books and work away children". With much scuffling and shuffling the work would be passed to the end of the row, collected by the two oldest children and packed into the already over filled cupboards. The doors were slightly warped with age, and very often Crump thump, out fell a mass of books, paper, needlework, raffia, once more to be forced back again. When all was settled and quiet and we were sitting on our hands, we were given the order "Stand up. Hands together. Eyes closed. Our Father whichart in Heaven...." We then filed out into the lobby where our coats were piled three and four on a hook, many of them had fallen on to the

floor being trampled on by the children making a wild rush for the door, "Where's my hat", "Please Miss he's got my coat on" "I'm gorn to tell your mother when you git home" "Don't care" "Don't care was made to care, don't care was hung, Don't care was put in a pot and boiled till he was done". "I've got a ha'penny, I'm gorn to buy some sherbert" Give me the lic'rice and I'll give you a gob stopper" "Do you want a toffee?" "See me eat it," and alas would go a toffee paper on the unfortunate child's eye, "Where's my hat", Oh blow, the lastic's broke".

After all this hullebaloo we would gaily trip along up the school lane all hungry for tea and all the best of friends.

Chapter 9. - Off Home

As we wended our way home, dragging our dinner bag along the ground, we would stop to examine some little thing of interest, a bird's nest, a flower, rabbits in the meadow, water trickling along a ditch pushing the grasses with it, the flocks of starlings rising and falling, or maybe the rooks flying home for the night.

The farm labourers went by with their frail baskets slung over one shoulder and out of which poked an empty bottle. In the morning it had contained cold sweet tea, the only drink they knew in winter or summer. These men walked at the same pace they had kept up all day in the fields, hobbling over the ploughed furrows, drilling, hoeing, "Goodnight me dears, dont be laate in the morning".

Tea was always ready and mother was always at home, but before we could think of sitting down we had to change into our playing clothes. After tea, and having with luck escaped washing up, I, the unfortunate one with straight hair had to put it into curlers. This was done by first dampening the hair with cold tea, and then winding a strand round a piece of rag, up and up until it touched the head, it was then twisted into what we called a dodmanod, the reason being that it fairly well resembled a snail when tied securely. About a dozen of these adorned my head each night and what agony to sleep on these lumps, especially if a few stray hairs were tighter than the rest. And woe betide me if in the morning my head was not a mass of corkscrew curls.

And then to play, which must have a chapter on its own.

At seven o'clock a quick wash in a handcup and to bed. On one occasion, an elder sister who was home on holiday came up-stairs as the four of us were kneeling by the bed saying our prayers. Spotting a black pair of feet she quickly slipped down stairs and just as quickly appeared with a bowl of water and thrust it under the offending objects, the non sufferers enjoyed the joke tremendously. Into bed, three of the youngest together, but not until we had made sure there were no spiders hiding in the many cracks in the ceiling. This was the time for story telling but as I was not very brilliant at thinking things out, it remained for me to listen. Mother would come along and recite a poem which we always enjoyed. My very

favourite being:-

Merrily, danced the quakers wife and merrily danced the quaker

The quaker fell down and broke his nose and wrapped it up in paper

As I was walking along the street, I picked up a piece of paper

And what do you think I found inside, why, the crooked old nose
of the quaker,

Finally we were all asleep, the leaves on the poplar trees

rustled, the sparrows shuffled in the thatch, and mother cleaned out
the grate ready for the morning singing to herself hymns that she had
learnt at Tibenham Chapel.

On Friday night mother believed in giving us a dose of medicine.

Out came the rhubarb jam and out came the beechams pills. These
were wrapped in little wraps of paper, four at a time, and sold
separately or else a whole box could be bought, dear little round
wooden boxes they were, beautifully made but no matter what we did
the peculiar smell of the pills hung to the box, but that did not deter
us from using it for a few sweets to keep in bed.

Well, the rhubarb jam would be spooned out, two or three pills
hidden in it, according to the size of the child, and into our mouth
it went. Down went the jam but ugh! there remained the pills by now
turned black still in the mouth. Mother would have to nip the nose
to make them go down and with much coughing and spluttering, at long
last they would disappear.

Chester 10 - Saturday

On Saturdays we had our various jobs to do. There was water to be fetched, cupboards to be scrubbed, windows cleaned, grass to be pulled for the hens, wood to be picked up, and when all was done, a visit to the shop.

The drinking water came from the village pump half a mile away, and at a very tender age we were sent forth with two buckets and a square to fetch this very precious commodity. The square was a piece of wood in the shape of a picture frame, and having stepped inside it we lifted it so that the full buckets rested against the wood, thus preventing them from dangling against our legs and giving a better balance. And so we struggled up the hill trying to keep our backs straight with this terrific weight on our arms. The water slopped as we reced to see how far we could go without resting. Was betide us if we played on the road during the operation or stopped to speak with any other children. In the winter - Oh joy, the water came sparkling from a spring at the side of a ditch where the prieroses grew. This was a very sacred place and carefully tended and well covered in case someone should come and in a reckless mood spoil our little secret. What a relief and joy it was to run home and tell mother that the drain was running - this beautiful clear cool water. It meant Goodbye to those long tiring treks to the street.

After dinner when all the work was done it was bath time.

"Now your father is out of the way" mother would say. The water had to be brought from the pit, where grew the forget-me-nots, Jenny creepers, bull-rushes and water-cress, and in the spring thousands of little frogs and tiddley-bats, as we called the tiny fish. In the summer we bathed under the apple trees out of the sight of anyone. The water being heated in a large boiler over an open fire. It was also hair washing day, and usually a teaspoon of Joyes was added to the water "just in case", and after we had dried and put on our clean "garments" as mother modestly called our under clothes, we had to run up and down the road to get the wind into our hair, which gave us a most wonderful feeling.

Having been cleaned and tidied the next thing was a visit to the shop which was in the lower street and about a mile from our house. We enjoyed this little trip carrying the lop-sided basket with a piece of clean paper at the bottom. There were always plenty of children to meet, always something interesting to look at and plenty to laugh about. Our first stop was at the arch under which ran beautifully clear water, where we floated sticks, and watched them swirling away out of sight. In the summer we used the arch as a house with a lovely sandy floor and plenty of old tins as cooking utensils. Wild strawberries grew on the banks, and nuts and apples fell from a neighbouring garden.

Bearing in mind that we must not hang about too long, off we went past the carpenter's shop with the blacksmith's adjoining, then round the Post Office corner through the plantation and up the New Road, past the Oaken Timber, the biggest tree in Glasning, round the Chapel corner to the shop.

The door bell hung on a piece of steel and went ding-ding as we opened the door, and ding-ding as we shut it again. From out the sitting room came the shopkeeper singing away, hobbling with painful arthritis but never a complaint. Our basket would be lifted on to the counter containing a red pochette in which was a carefully written list with the price beside each item, and £1 to pay for them.

"Hallo my deare, what can I get for you"

And our order was duly given, American cheese, boot laces, candles, matches, clothes pegs, currants, everything was in that shop and a special journey seemed to have to be made for each item. The sugars, dried fruits, split peas, etc., were kept loose in drawers, and all had to be weighed and paper bags made out of sheets of blue paper. It was a work of art, these deftly made packages were, so folded that never a grain of rice or a currant escaped. Rolled up tight a sausage roll they were, turned up on their ends, one side tucked in, a quick flick over and the other end treated the same. White conical bags were made for shalwort, ground rice, pepper, mixed spices, all powdery things and sweets. A number of white paper squares

dangled from a piece of string at one side of the counter, and with a quick pull, a flick of the wrist and a sharp twist at the pointed end and a marvellous fool proof little bag was produced. In went the goods and with a quick fold over and a head over heels turn, the top was made secure.

When all the provisions had been carefully packed in our lopsided basket, the change and the bill placed in the pochette in a secure place, we thanked the shop-keeper and prepared to go. But a last minute thought "Please, mother said have you got any tins or boxes?" "Tins or boxes? tra-la-la-la, I'll go and see", and off the dear soul hobbled to look in the store room. Back she came with a few broken biscuits in one, a liquorice all-sort stuck to the side of another, a few toffee chips, a few hundreds and thousands - what riches! It wasn't enough to give us the boxes, they had to be carefully tied with string so that we could manage them. Having said "Thank you" many times, we gaily set forth for homewith our load, but it was not unusual to go back once more. My brother once remembered that father had given him a ha'penny for finding a swarm of bees so we three all trundled into the shop once more. It took some time to decide how best to spend this precious coin, and belonging to my brother, he had to make the decision. "Please can I have a Hap'oth of locust beans. "Locust beans dear, I'll just go and see", and off the good lady hobbled to the store room once more. Back she came carrying

a large bag full of locust beans and broken wafers, what a feast! She graciously took the ha'penny and once more we said "Thank you and Goodbye". The shop was the place where everyone heard the news, birth marriages and deaths, private conversations, confidences and scandal were all exchanged in that little shop and as we grew older mother would ask us if we had heard any news, but while we were young the gossips stopped talking as we entered the shop.

On our arrival home mother would check the shopping and divide out the twopence-a-quarter sweets which were our weekly treat.

The next job was to fetch the butter from the farm just down the hill. The lopsided basket was wiped out, a clean piece of grease-proof paper lined the bottom, then in it was placed a pie dish with blue and white flowers on it and covered with a white cloth. We would arrive at the farm house door having run down the hill past the little bridge over the ditch where the periwinkles grow - and still do grow - past the pond where the horses drank and the frogs croaked at dusk, up the farm yard and through a gate which was weighed down by a great stone with a hole in the middle, through which was passed a chain. The gate always fascinated us as it clanked shut without human assistance and even the latch seemed to have an unseen hand to help it. On we walked up the cobbled path to the back door. Half doors they were opening top and bottom. After a knock or two the latch would fly up, and the top half would open.

"Hello my dears, come inside"

"Please may we have a pound of butter," and we would stand by the door while the very yellow butter on which was stamped a rabbit or cow, was placed in the pie-dish, the wrap of paper taken out containing one and sixpence and the cloth replaced.

"Now be you careful an' dont fall down, Goodbye dears and thenkyo' ", and off we went with our lopsided basket, walking through the buttercups with the pollen yellow on our boots, and sniffing with relish the herrings which were being fried for tea, wondering which half we would get.

On Saturday evenings we had to make sure our boots - later shoes - were clean, black stockings free from holes, hair specially curled, and the Collect for the following Sunday learned by heart. Mother would ask us to recite it which made us feel very embarrassed,

Almighty and Everlasting God - - - - -

Chapter 11 - Sunday

Sunday was always a busy day, and an exciting one. We would wake to hear mother lighting the fire with the black kettle hanging on the hook above, singing her favourite hymns. She would be wearing her clothes kept specially for the Sabbath - she seldom had new ones, a clean Sunday overall and a very Sunday look. The beef dumpling would have been made the night before from half-a-crown's worth of meat, and would already be boiling on the hob when we came down to breakfast. There would be no house-work done, and no sewing or any kind of manual labour except perhaps the scraping of new potatoes, as father would never dig them until they were needed.

Sunday School was at 10 o'clock, the Rector and his wife were in charge of the older children and two goodly souls took care of the youngsters, who were taught the children's hymns and told Bible stories, while the elder ones had to recite the Catechism from beginning to end, and of course the Collect each Sunday, followed by a questioning session on the Gospel and Epistle of the day.

At 10.45 we set off for the Church which was at the top of the School Lane, for Morning Prayer. If old enough to be in the Choir we entered the Church by the side door, where we had to be pretty nippy as bats had a habit of hibernating between the top of the door and the stone work, and there they hung upside down until we opened the door, and then "plop". We passed through the Kemp Chapel into a small cubicle where we put on our linen caps and capes. Sir Kenneth and his Lady Henrietta, whose family had lived in Gissing since the 13th century, would attend Church if they were in residence at Gissing Hall. The Lady always wore an ankle length drab brown dress with a very very small waist and leg of mutton sleeves, very old fashioned even in those days, but she was a very beautiful lady. We felt honoured that she should be sitting just behind us. We lined up behind our little curtain, and the nearest one listened for the Rector in the boy's Vestry to start the prayer but we never managed to hear what he said.

Then all came to life - The organ blower started to pump,
the Rector's life started to play, swaying from side to side
as she did so, in we filed and the service began.

Dearly beloved brethren . . .

We were a medley choir, some with good voices and some
with bad, but all made a merry noise. We could not understand
what everything meant, and one of my sisters in the Creed used
to say "Vinegar of vinegar, Salt of salt," instead of "Very God
of Very God, Begotten not made". However, we gradually under-
stood more and more and were thankful for it.

The sermons were long and trying, and as youngsters we
spent our time counting the number of hymns we knew, and reading
the poems which wayward children and grownups had written in the
spare pages of the Psalter and Hymn Books.

If this book should care to roam
Box it's ears and send it home.

While Shepherds watched their kidney beans,
All boiling in the pot,
a lump of soot came tumbling down
and spoilt the blooming lot.

Would some good kind inventive person
An onion make to sell,
An onion, with an onion taste
But with a violet smell.

Many more, most beautifully written, entertained us during the
long twenty minutes sermon, then with a jerk we were brought back
to life.

And now to God the Father

We all said 'Amen', the organ blower put away his comic, and started pumping like fury, the organ played and the final hymn was sung, as we thought of our coming dinner, meat dumpling or pea-soup and light dumplings. We walked home on the grass to preserve our boots or shoes, and what lovely smells greeted us. We fought in a friendly way to clean out the pea soup saucapan or scrape the meat dumpling cloth, without cutting it. Mother with her Sunday face would ask us the text of the sermon, and with any luck we could remember something, having managed to listen for a few minutes before sinking into "poetry reading" or lesser thoughts.

After dinner, off again to children's services, a mile each way, where we sang lovely hymns and received instruction from the Rector, who always seemed to be clearing his throat and especially if he was trying to attract the attention of a child whose mind had wandered on other things.

Back home for tea which was always ready, with the smell of sliced cucumber in the summer and tinned salmon in the winter. We spread it thinly on the bread and butter and made it last, and then mopped up the remaining vinegar with bread and butter until the plates were shiny bright. The forks we had used were

then pushed into the garden to remove the smell and it always worked.

At 6 o'clock came hail rain blow or snow we were ready to start off for Evensong. In the Summer there would be a stream of people wending their way up the New Road to the Church, these good people, mostly widows, who once in black never got out of it, from a distance reminded us of a column of black bustles. We loved the Evening Psalms and Hymns, but found it difficult to stay awake during the sermon, and snuggled together during the winter to keep warm, as there was no heating in the Chancel, but down the aisle, the heat coming from the grating was sufficient to burn the soles off your boots. At Evensong we always sang a verse of an evening hymn which we called Vespers.

Saviour breathe an evening Blessing
Ere repose our spirits seal.

My very favourite was this:

Thus may we abide in union
With each other and the Lord
And possess in sweet communion
Joys which earth cannot afford.

After the choir had disrobed each child was given a very small well worn ticket, pretty little things they were with birds and flowers and a little text painted on each one. This choir ticket was worth a ha'penny, and we carefully tucked them into our gloves and on arrival home put them away in a little tin box. Once a year these tickets were exchanged by the Rector for money which we spent at the Choir Outing.

On our way home from Church, and especially in the winter, we boys and girls would all link arms and stretch the whole width of the road, and invariably one or the other at the end of the row would be walking with one foot in the ditch. The roads were pitchy black, trees and high hedges everywhere, and the only glimmer of light was from the cracks in closed blinds. Round the Chapel corner we went, along the new road to the Post Office corner. We would often catch up with a few men heading for the Chaquera, and perchance, nearly get run over by a cyclist whose carbide lamp had gone out. We turned left at the Post Office corner, past the Bakers and the Chaquera to escort our friends to the end of Chestnut Avenue where was the gamekeepers cottage and Marlens Farm. Back again, while the owls hooted, and we sang to keep ourselves company, and having delivered a few more friends in the street, over the arch, past the farm where we bought the butter, up the hill, which was so dark and frightening in the winter, and so beautiful in the summer. Through the blackness we could see the candle that mother always placed in the window, and there we were within sound of the dear old poplar trees and their ever trembling leaves.

We blinked and squinted as we opened the door, after being out in the blackness of the night. The best oil lamp was burning, the one with the large pink globe with dragon flies on it.

Father would be reading John Bull, and mother writing letters to her beloved son and daughters, the pen nib scratching away as with a sigh she thought of her dear son in some foreign land.

Chapter 12 - The Seasons.

January - February - March.

Old Mother Holl is plucking her geese
Selling her feathers a penny a piece.

The beautiful, beautiful snow - how many hours we sat with our noses pressed against the window pane, watching the flakes fall and peering to see the different sizes and shapes as we had been taught at school. No sleep at night as we hopped out of bed to see how deep it was, and no rest through the day until we were out in it. Looking like mummies with an old pair of father's socks over our boots to help keep our feet dry, a scarf crossed over our chest and tied at the back, and hands tucked in sleeves, we seldom had gloves. Hats pulled over our ears so that we could hardly see out of our eyes, we kicked the snow, we rolled in it, we threw it at each other, our joy was unbounded. For once we were anxious to oblige in running any errand. Could we go and meet the postman? Did mother want anything from the shop? Life was so beautiful with the rime frost on the trees and thank goodness we had a mile to walk to school. The pit had to be tested each morning for thickness of ice, we might be warned that it was only duck ice which was white and unsafe. When it was black and clear then we knew it was all right for sliding on.

It would be no trouble to get us out of bed on these mornings, and with luck we could manage half an hour's sliding before going to school. The boys with their hobnail boots would cut figures of eight and great white candles just to show off, which the girls very much resented as we thought it spoilt the beauty of the ice. However, we were careful not to say too much on the matter as there was a chance of having a handful of snow pushed down our backs or being sent flying out of control the length of the slide. A most exciting time of the year, birthdays to come, then there was St. Valentine's Day.

One year we were given a party by the local baker. There was to be fancy dress for the children with games and a tea. All went merrily until refreshment time drew nigh. The tables were laid, with everyone helping and getting in the way, a few of the officials proceeded to the little room to make the lemonade and tea and to serve the food. But, oh calamity! Someone whispered in the teacher's ear. She looked extremely distressed, clasped her hands and wished to make an announcement. There was a hush, as if war had broken out. The dreaded announcement came, someone had broken into the little room and stolen the buns! We felt as if the bottom had fallen out of the world, as we always had looked forward to those special buns, and apart from that, as far as we knew no one ever stole anything in our village, except a few turnips out of a field, or maybe with luck

knocking off a phaanant. However, we survived without them, the policeman was called in as he rode round the pariah on his bike, but it was never discovered who had taken them, and ever after, all windows and doors were securely fastened when there was food about. I rather doubt if the offender ever wanted to face a bun again.

The roads dried up after the snow and the rains and out came our spinning tops, marbles, hoops, and skipping ropes. Our spinning tops were usually associated with the beginning of Lent, when nights were lengthening. These tops had been hidden away in a very private cranny in the shed all through the winter where no one else would have thought of looking, and were just as privately brought into the light for another season's enjoyment. There were the tops which we called jam jars, these were a sort of conical shape, but a bit more chubby, and then there were the mushroom shaped ones, each type had to have a hobnail hammered into the sherp end, no doubt to give it balance, and then all was ready for action. We selected a nice straight green stick from the hedge, cut a groove about a half inch from one end, and then began to search for a suitable piece of string for the ~~stick~~ ^{string}. Mother had a marvellous string bag which had once been the inner part of a football and was always bursting with pieces, but we never helped ourselves without a conference being called, as she was such a wonderful mother for sending parcels of fruit to her children, and needed every bit of string that could be

used and so we often had to try elsewhere. A dear old man from the village who passed by our home every day on his three and a half mile walk to work would often be asked "Please have you got a piece of string for my top?" and he would untie the piece which held his corduroys up under the knee and give it to us smilingly watching as we wound the string round the top ready for the spin. Whirr! it went and crack went the whip and rushing along we caught it up and whipped it again away down the hill and on the way to school.

The game of marbles was guaranteed to wear the toes out of any boots or shoes. We each had a bag in which we kept these precious coloured treasures with a few glass 'pops' which had once been the stoppers in threepenny pop bottles, and an ally or two. The allies were the aristocrats of the marble family, and if we could sport one or two of these we were very important.

There were many ways of playing marbles, but the one which suited us best was rolling one along the gutter and then the opposition had to roll one also to try and hit it and if this was done, claim both marbles. Our bags were swiftly filled or emptied, but being friends we usually shared them out again. An enterprising boy at school with an eye to business thought of making marbles out of the clay from his pit. He moulded and baked them but sadly as soon as they came in contact with

something a bit harder they cracked and so another disappointment for a prospective millionaire.

Hopps gave us a tremendous uplift, as we ran along we felt we were flying. Seldom was there a properly made one to be had and so we used the bands of iron from worn out water tubs which of course were always bigger at the rim on one side than the other, causing the hoop always to tend to turn the corner or run on the skew. However, that was a minor trouble and we quickly learnt the gentle art of keeping it more or less straight, and the speed at which we travelled was almost unbelievable, and the thing getting out of control would turn the corner and jump the hedge., it all made life the brighter and we lived on our own imagination which was so much better than having amusement organized for us.

Skipping ropes were made of anything we could lay hands on. We found binder string a little too light but were lucky in picking up bits of rope which had fallen off market wagons and a few knots made no difference. We skipped away with all our various rhymes helping us along.

Cups and saucers, plates and dishes,
 Here comes Sally with calico breeches,
 How many stitches in her breeches
 One, two, three, four

Skipping gave us endless pleasure which carried us on through the summer, but our footwear had to be considered and so it was mostly left for nights when we could wear our old shoes.

With Lent came the extra church services. Starting with Ash Wednesday, the Service of Communion which is now quite ignored. We waded through all the "Cursed Be's" and were reminded of what would happen if we removed our "Neighbour's landmark", it didn't do us any harm. The extra Wednesday night services we always enjoyed, with a different preacher each week and as every village had its own rectory there was plenty of variety, and the parsons would cycle from parish to parish quite enjoying the change. One parson was an excellent organist and we always looked out for his name in the magazine as we knew that on that night after the service there would be an organ recital.

During the latter part of Lent, on a Saturday, mother took us to buy our new shoes for Easter Day. The money had been saved by paying into the shoe club which was collected by the Rector before Sunday School once a month. And a halfcrown interest added to it at the end of the year. This was a very big day for us. Up at the crack of dawn all bathed and clean - no holes in our stockings. Mother would pack egg sandwiches, which we ate by Diss Here when hunger seized us. Off we sprinted on our five mile walk, which was our only means of getting there. Mother was an excellent walker, and we came behind almost at a gallop

with no time to admire the primroses and violets in the ditches. Half way there mother would buy us each a penny bar of chocolate, and if the fields were dry, we would take the footpath which helped to shorten the way, but we usually had to scramble through a ditch or two, and the footpaths very often ran over ploughed fields, so it was not all gain.

On our arrival at Diss we walked on pavements what a luxury - lovely level roads with tar on them, horses and carts clip clopping past, butchers and bakers carts, lovely smells of bakerys and saddlers, we gazed at the shop windows and then had to run to catch up with mother, and silently walked into the church to have a little rest, after that down to the Mare, to eat our sandwiches and watch the water-hens in the swaying reeds.

Then the highlight of the day - the excitement of the shoe shop! There we were all lined up on seats and mother asking to see shoes or boots for the children. Off came our shoes, but oh horrors, I once wore a hole in one of my stockings and how embarrassed mother was, and how she apologised to the assistant, and what a criminal I felt, but after a five mile walk what else could be expected. Our feet were poked and prodded as we tried on the strapped and buckled shoes, our legs dangling in the air, and after much consideration we were all set up with a brand new black underneath, pair of footwear.

Next came the visit to Miss Philpott, she was a tiny little lady who kept a shop in Nicholas Street. Two very small windows were bunged full of every necessity of life, and everything higgledy-piggledy in the window. There were awasts, pinnyes, shoe laces, skipping ropes, saucepans, kettles, pudding basins, clothes, spinning tops, soap, crockery, cottons, haberdashery of every kind - just name it and it was there., and a child's greatest pleasure was to ask for something from under this unbelievable mass, and lo and behold Miss Philpott would find it.

We then moved on to Aldrich & Bryant the high-class grocers with the strong smell of bacon and tea - mother had known the assistants for many years, they were gray haired and extremely polite, and we peered over the counter watching the bacon cutter slicing through half a pound of best back.

Then to see Cousin Charlie at the Coffee Tavern - where were well cooked homely meals - he was always so kind and insisted that we should have at least one cream horn which gave us great delight and caused some blushing as we couldn't pick up the last of the delicious crumbs and couldn't bear to leave them on our plates.

After this, with many goodbyes, kisses and hugs, we started for home - each with great pride carrying our footwear package. Our poor feet ached and we stuffed leaves into our shoes to cool them

off, then took the loaves out to make room for our feet.

We gradually got slower and slower, and mother relieved us of our packages, and oh the joy as we turned the last Chequers Lane bend and hit the straight road for home, with the thought that very soon we would be trying on our twelve and elevenpenny shoes and then packing them away until Easter Sunday.

Good Friday was a very solemn day for us, we took the Seasons very seriously. There would of course be the Morning Service but no choir robes were worn, they were probably soaking in the wash tub ready for Easter Day. The Rector's wife would be clad in purple with a veil, and there would be very little music except for the hymns. "O come and mourn with me awhile", and "The Royal Banner forward go". The Rector would be heard to sniff and we would feel the sadness of the occasion. On the way home from church the smell of hot cross buns would fill the air as we passed by the Duke office and home to some of mother's own making and a quick dinner, we had a very busy afternoon ahead. Dressed in our old clothes, we set forth with our friend the leaved basket and the children next door to pick primroses for the decoration of the church on Easter Sunday. Father would be in the garden more often than not, preparing the ground for the potato planting, the next door neighbour doing the same thing, and we would hear the click of the stones on the spade and the sound

of rowdy laughter as we wended our straddle legged way along the ditches, slipping and sliding, getting scratched and stung as we stretched for the longest stalked primroses. We wandered in all the farmers fields and no one ever complained about it, we knew all the gaps and made use of them, we were plastered with mud and washed our footwear in the ditches, and when we had filled our basket - and not before - did we start for home. Mother would pick out the primroses one by one and tie them in bunches with black wool and stand them in a bowl of soft water to freshen up for the morning.

Holy Saturday was a very exciting day, for one thing our brother in the Navy would be coming home on leave if he was in England, and also we were going to help decorate the church. Setting forth with the children next door and our large basket of primroses, we excitedly joined the throng of decorators. We were allowed to do the windowills to our own individual taste, and there we were with great lumps of moss full of sticks and insects, trails of ivy and "barbery" trying to cover up the stone work before laying the primroses in patterns or texts. Water was splashing as the children refilled the heavy aluminium pails from the well at the Sexton's house - we fell over each other to help and were quite sorry to be told there was no more to be done. We tripped home longing for to-morrow and wondering if by any chance we would get an Easter egg.

Easter Sunday, and up we were with a whole boiled egg and camp coffee for breakfast. The time dragged as we waited to put on our new stockings and shoes, and "Was it going to rain?" At last we with the children next door would all be tripping down the road, stopping to polish our shoes as we went and hoping they wouldn't stop squeaking. One of the bullying boys would try to stamp on the toe, to "Christen them" so he said - or was it envy? and then Gissing Church packed with daffodils and primroses, our clean choir caps and capes, the thrill beyond measure to hear the Rector announce the first hymn "Alleluia! The strife is o'er! " how we sang. And later the beautiful Anthem "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the Feast!" Every minute of it we loved, and how happily did we make our way home, polishing our shoes on the back of our stockings, checking up on all the new three and elevenpenny hats of the congregation as they hobbled along, and wondering what special thing we would have for dinner.

A fortnight's holiday to come and the chance to earn a little money by stone picking, singling beet or pulling docks. The stone picking was the most enjoyable but hard. We walked up and down the fields in a straight line collecting most conscientiously every stone that was big enough to pick up and when the pail was full, lugged it along to the side of the field with the help of another child and so started a heap.

Sometimes much to mother's annoyance we turned our coats back to front thus making a marvellous apron or mantle but the weight of the stones made such a tall tale bulge that in the end we had to resort to the pails once more. The piles of stones grew very very slowly and the more we tipped them out of the pail the more they seemed to sink into the ground. However we had such happy moments out in the fields with larks for company, and plenty to laugh about, and having come to the end of a row we would lie on the beautiful dark green grass on the brow of the field, watch the clouds skimming by, resting our aching backs, and dreaming of that wonderful day the school outing, a trip to Yarmouth.

We would run down to the farm as it late at night to report that we had finished the field and could hardly wait for the day to come when the stones would be shovelled into a tumbrel and carted off to repair a road and we would be given the handsome sum of fifteen shillings a tumbrel load to be divided between four or five of us.

The dock pulling was not so pleasant but very rewarding as we could see where we had been. Walking up the rows of young corn we would pull every dock within sight. They grew at a tremendous rate and sometimes the roots would be a foot long under-ground, and in the dry weather the tops would break off, but undaunted we scratched and scraped with stained and blistered hands until we could get a grip

and then one child behind the other would pull and out came the dock with the conquerors landing one on top of the other in a heap of merriment. The clouds became more and more heavy on our feet but we plodded on until dusk, and as the corn grew so did our pride as there was not a single dock to be seen. The pay was about five shillings an acre but it kept us out of mischief and when our work had finished then the frolics began when we pushed each other into ditches playing "I'm the king of the castle, and you're the datty ow rascal", nothing mattered we had our old clothes on. We watched with great interest the fields and could almost tell what was due to be grown in them and knew that as the seasons came round all would be sampled by us.

Chapter 13 - April, May and June

"Winter has gone and the Springtime is here
 Whispering gently to the tall trees
 Buds are unfolding to greet the glad time
 and leaves banding to the breeze".

Low Sunday we found rather depressing, the flowers in the church looked very much the worse for wear and we felt that Easter was over for another year. On the Monday the Sexton and his wife would barrow out all the moss and flowers, pack away all the Vicol and potted plant jars, put the honesty back in its niche in the Kemp Chapel for another year and sweep and scrub the

church floor, they might have been paid an extra shilling or two for this. We knew where the flowers were thrown and scratched about finding those likely to last a day or two longer to put in a cocoa tin and keep in our private little pl y house at home.

The country was never dull for long, April soon passed and May Day was upon us. Small things gave us such happiness and we looked forward with great preparations to this day. Our village carpenter made a beautiful Maypole, all striped it was - for thirty shillings, which we kept in the corner of the big room. Streamers of horse braid of all colours hung from two revolving discs at the top of the pole, and at the bottom were two thick cross-crossed pieces of wood on which children sat to keep it steady. Many hours were spent in the practising of the Maypole and country dancing as the mothers would be invited to come and watch their offspring, and great was the disappointment if a mum said she could not come.

The day dawned at last, and after prayers and a hymn volunteers were called to carry out the Maypole to the school meadow. "Please Miss! Please Miss!" thumbs and fingers would be clicked to draw attention to the teacher, and those who could not click their fingers would stand on tip-toe or get on top of the form. This irregular behaviour was overlooked on such occasions as it was all meant well and four hefty boys were chosen to do the job.

The Maypole was seized willy nilly, twisted and turned in all directions, perilously pointing at the window, swerving round, knocking a geranium off the ledge, until at last it was heading in the right direction. The boys marched through the door as if with a battering ram only to stop with a dead jerk as the bottom supports stuck in the doorway. With much shuffling and backing and instructions from the teacher and others "Boys do be careful" "Cor its on my toe!" "Lift it up you great fule", after much manouevring it was at last released and on its way to the meadow, a clean and fairly level patch chosen, the maypole reared up and held into its place with stones.

Then came the time for the piano to be moved, this was a major operation as the piano was heavy, and one leg liable to give out at any minute. About eight boys were chosen, and these stalwarts heaved pushed and pulled. Creak, Groan, Wham! went the piano while the mistress looked on full of anxiety. "Boys be careful of that leg". "Dont push so hard Fred!" "Be careful of the step" "Git off my toe ye fule" "Well how was I to know your toe was there", and with much sweating and blowing the boys would at last have the instrument through the door, across the lumpy playground, through the wicket gate and into the meadow at a reasonable distance from the maypole.

Out trooped the children full of life and happiness longing to show off in front of their mothers. A May Queen had been chosen

by vote, and dressed in white with her hair prettily curled she came forward to be crowned and then took up her position under the maypole.

The Maypole dancers tripped along to take up their positions, the piano struck up a very loud chord, "Ready Children?"

One, two, three four.

See the day the welcome day is dawning
 Cloudless the sky this happy mayday morning
 Wake now wake! the group you must be joining
 Out on the green to dance this bright mayday.

and there was nothing, no nothing that could make country children happier than to be dancing and singing amongst the buttercups and daisies. Having finished the song the dancers each seized a braid with much changing over and whistling, "You're got my braid" "These twisted" "You're in the wrong place" At last all was still and waiting for the chord and off the children tripped, weaving their way in and out, the teacher's face red with anxiety as over the top of the piano she watched a small muddle growing into a big one. At the change of music we reversed and with luck and ingenuity disantangled ourselves and dancing as lightly as boots and shoes would allow, arrived at the end in fairly good shape.

Then perhaps another song - there were so many to choose from - "I love to roam in the morning when all is smiles around". More country dancing. Jenny Pluckpoars, Gathering Peascods, Shepherds hay, Sallengers round - well we could have gone on for ever, life was so full of joy. Many remarks were passed by the proud parents.

"I never knew John could dance so" "Didn't she do her part well"

"Dare little ow' owl", and after all the applause we were treated to a scramble for sweets all amongst the grass and with luck we all managed to find a few.

On these glorious May evenings our happiness ran away with us. Having done our various jobs we would all go out to play on the common, where we picked armfuls of sheeps parsley and buttercups, and with an old piece of curtain a child was transformed into a bride, and a bridegroom chosen. The outline of the church had been made with stones from the Depwade stone heap, tins full of flowers stood everywhere, a child took up her position at a box as an imaginary organ, and with the strains of "Here comes the bride" the procession began, met by the parson who conducted the service with great solemnity. Being members of the choir we knew the procedure, and the wedding went off without a hitch. The congregation carried branches of may and shook the blossom over the happy couple, and beautiful it was to see these lovely white petals falling as the pair moved on up the common to another little stone-made house where was to be the reception. Our parents would stand at a distance and watch the proceedings, thoroughly enjoying the entertainment - and then it was time for bed.

And then at the end of May, Ascension Day, the day when we had a holiday from school. It was quite an understood thing that the Rector and the Headmistress did not agree on this Holy Day being taken as a

holiday, but there was no outward sign of the disagreement and it was never mentioned.

We woke up all excited, "Mother what shall we wear" "father is it going to rain?" "Well you'd better take your coats" "Oh blow!" but at half past nine off we ran to be in time for the 10 o'clock service in church. The hymns were so full of joyfulness. "See the Conqueror mounts in triumph", "Thou art gone up on high, to mansions in the sky". My father once remarked that if every one had a mansion in the sky, who was going to do the cleaning?!

We had a short address but were all on the fidget for the next move. After the Blessing and the Rector had disrobed, we followed him in procession to the rectory, many of us carrying branches of lilac supplied by one of the farmer's sons. There was much bleating as we imitated the shepherd and his sheep, and we called to John Colman, "The Hermit" as we passed by his little smoke filled hut. Uncle George the cobbler, all twenty stone of him would be standing at his gate as we turned the corner into the rectory garden. The lawns were smooth as velvet surrounded by beds of flowers - games of every kind were there for our use, plenty of balls and skipping ropes, dolls and a doll's pram, tiny wheel barrows, battle-dome and shuttlecock, and a tennis court was at our disposal all marked out but none of us dared to put a foot on it. The garden was alive with children, and we made enormous circles as we played

"Nuts 'n May, Sir Roger is dead, Poor Mary sits a weeping, The farmers in his den". What a luxury and honour when the Rector's wife joined us with her cool hands holding our horribly sticky ones. The time flew and all too quickly the bell sounded which meant that time had come to go home. We said a prayer, gave three cheers for the Rector and in single file collected a gift of an orange, a little pink bag of hazelnut creams and a bun which we hungrily ate. The rest of the day apart from Evensong was our own.

The Sunday after Ascension Day was to us a lovely day, with the special hymn, A and M, No.506, "Know ye the Lord hath borne away your master from your head to-day" These two lines were sung by the Rector and the local builder, and then the remainder of the choir joined in.

Yea we know it, yet we raise
Songs of thankfulness and praise
He is gone but not before
all his earthly work is o'er.

Alleluia.

and we were very joyful and this joy never left us.

Only a week to Whit Sunday. The frilly white dresses had to be fished out of the clothes box, tucks let down, lace ironed. The smell of lavender filled the air. Petticoats were let down to correspond with the length of the frock. Hats with wire in the brim were straightened out, linings examined and elastic repaired, and new flowers adorned the crown. Straw hats for the elder ones with streamers down the back, when outgrown were handed down to the

younger members of the family, and when they started getting a poke in the top were taken on for school.

Well, we know that the Holy Ghost came down on Whit-Sunday, not quite sure what it meant, but it was a special occasion, and off we tripped all in white to sing with great joy.

COME HOLY GHOST

Chapter 14 -

Sweet notes from blackbird, thrush, and wren
The swallows dart through sky
and the squirrel chipping by his den
the wild bee humming by.

O I love to roam in the morning when all is smiles around.

Summer was here, and no coats to carry to school, thin gingham dresses and shoes instead of boots. The martins building under the eaves, the swallows in the Street, the cuckoo in the planter^{ed} - all help^{ed} to make life daily more exciting. The first wild rose would have to be taken to school, the first robin's pin cushion, cuckoo flowers, bull daisies, shiver grass, all wilted in our hot hands as we ran to school where jar upon jar lined the window sills.

Our head mistress would have shed her winter wear, including knitted drawers with a frill below the knee, we knew she wore them because we knitted them. The woollen jumper with the pockets stretched almost to her knees with the weight of chalks, scissors, cottons, confiscated sweets, would be exchanged for a most beautifully crocheted artificial silk jumper which would swing as she walked and daily appeared to put on a couple of inches owing to the weightiness

of the material, until it was far far below her behind. The knitted woollen stockings which had been so often re-heeled and re-footed by us were put away in moth balls, and out came the seamed artificial silk variety also made by the children as they rose to standards six and seven.

Well, now was the time to think about our annual school outing to the sea-side. There were only two sea-sides as far as we knew - Yarmouth and Lowestoft. Well, the first thing to do was to fix the date. We would all be assembled in the big room for the announcement to be made, and the atmosphere of excitement was tremendous, quite unbelievable in these days of so many luxuries. Where would we like to go? It was our special day and so we had the choice. "Please Miss, Yarmouth" "Lowestoft Please Miss" "Dont be soft we went there last year an' these all pebbles at Lowestoft". "Yaxmouth, Yaxmouth, these where they've got Noahs Ark and the Ghost Train" "Well Lowestoft's best for Woolworths". As the shouting became unbearable the teacher called us to order. "Now children put up your hands those who would like to go to Yaxmouth" and more often than not Yarmouth it was. The next decision - bus or train - and off we went again. "Please Miss Bus" "Train Miss" BUS BUS TRAIN - the teacher grew redder in the face as she tried to sort things out. At last all was more or less settled, and notes were sent to the parents informing them of date, time, place and fare.

Being one of the highlights of the year, we thought and spoke of very little else, we lay on the common all amongst the buttercups with the great cart horses munching at the grass near by, and our knees up in the air, gazing at the blue sky and thinking the day would never come. Mother was already wondering what we should wear, as our Sunday clothes must not be spoilt, the sewing machine worked overtime turning out little cotton dresses and bloomers to match so that we could with modesty paddle and not get our clothes wet. Pennies were continually being counted, and amounts of money compared with that of other children. There was the money left over from our work in the fields, a few ha'pennies that we had earned from father. Half-a-crown that Cousin George had given us for cleaning his shoes, a threepenny bit from our birthday, all helped to swell the funds and we counted it almost daily. We each had a little bag to hold our money, a handkerchief and any bits of shopping.

Dawned the day, and as soon as it was light, we were enquiring of father the state of the weather, and more often than not, having consulted his glass the answer would be "There a tannin' warm". We could almost tell the time by the rooks flying to work and knew that we would soon be on the way. If by bus we would congregate at the church. The Rector would be there to see us off with a prayer and "Now every morning is the love", and right on the dot from Norwich came the coaches - The tops would be opened and in we scrambled.

Off we sped all along the country roads with the dust flying behind us. We waved and cheered and sang through every village, and felt we were the most important people in the world, to have a coach specially provided for us. Handkerchiefs flapped and hats blew off, one or two children felt sick, some were being slapped for not behaving, but taken on the whole it was a most exciting time.

The trip by train seemed to bring more excitement, first there was the problem of getting to Tivoteshall station and this was solved by a kind farmer who offered the use of his horses and wagons.

We of course would be waiting at the door with eyes and ears at the ready, watching and waiting for the sound and sight of those dear horses all decked with brasses and bawls pulling up the hill the wagons full of children and parents. At last they were coming - the first two would pass the gate, the third would come to a halt. Mother had been up very early cutting egg sandwiches with plenty of salt and pepper and I can smell them to this day, and there she stood with her Yaxmouth bag and clustered around her the children trembling with excitement. "Have you got everything?" "Have you been down the yard?" Well we had, and while this conversation was going on the farmer was letting down the steps for the grown-ups to climb into the wagon - the children preferred to be lifted over the side when they immediately started looking for horse-beans

which might have slipped into the cracks during the previous harvest. The steps were pulled up, the back of the wag' hitched up and chained, we waved handkerchiefs and father said he would have the kittle 'illin' when we came home. With a "git up there Charlie" off we started with more cheers and felt that the dear horses knew exactly where they were going.

The three and a half mile journey brought us to Tivetshall Station which was then an extremely busy junction. On arrival we were counted once more, there was never any surty that one or two might have fallen off the wagon, and then we all crowded on to the Branch Line platform. Dead on time the train from Bungay would draw in, settle in the siding and wait for the train to Norwich. Porters were pushing barrows loaded with newspapers, fish, racing ~~signs~~. Engines were hissing, goods trains shunting - there was such a lot to see. In came the Norwich train and out came the Station Master. "Tivetshall Junction Change here for the Pulham, Harleston, Kazham, Bungay and Beccles, all stations to Yarmouth. Change at Beccles for Lowestoft. Waveney Valley, all stations to Yarmouth. hurry along please". We were already in, the doors would be locked and there we were peering out of the windows as we steamed on to Yarmouth.

Then came the "Mother I'm hungry" "You cant be you've only just had your breakfast." but the thought of these egg sandwiches

was almost more than we could bear. However, our minds were quickly occupied by other subjects, the wonderful scenery, there was so much to see. The fields full of poppies, which year after year we remembered to look for, the cows in the fields, the valley, the lovely green grass, the clear water running along the beck. Leaning on the windows, catching all the snuts we counted the windmills "Coo theres another" "How many is that?" "Did you see that one?" "Mather, we've counted fifteen". "Git your hid out of the way I want see" "Charlie said he feels sick" "Theres another windmill, thats twenty". We knew exactly how many stations and at last the train began to slow down and we filled the corridors as the porter walked along unlocking the carriage doors and we all tumbled out onto the platform!

Mothers looked anxiously to make sure that their offspring were in one piece. We simply could not contain ourselves, the smell of the sea, of blottars and crabs, the spades and buckets, the sun hats, ice cream cartel and the first glimpses of the sea. "Coo, isn't that lovely, are you comin' in? "Mother will you hold my bag?" "Now dont you git coud children" "What time is dinner?" "Theres'a Tonies ice-cream cart, can we have a ha'penny cornet?" "Oh this water's coud, don't keep a-splashin'." "What have you got for dinner?" Oh how wonderful to paddle with the miles of golden sandy we went up to our knees but that was high enough. One year an elder sister thought we ought to go

right in and so she hired bathing costumes at sixpence a time, and took us to the bathing hut. We re-appeared looking like nothing on earth in these navy blue garments, four times too big. The low necks draped down to our middles. The legs about eight inches long went far below the knees and we stood there like four waxworks never having been so much on view before. We entered the water and came out, we were sent back again and I started to shiver and dudder as I stood in that cold wet bathing suit, not knowing how to get myself warm. I shivered like a newly turned out park-cheese with a mass of goose flush, and the only thing my sister could do was to wrap me in a towel. The sun was kind but still I duddled, and as far as I can remember continued to do so for the rest of the day.

The mothers were always contented to stay on the beach, chiefly because they had little money to spend, but after we had all hungrily eaten our egg sandwiches with their sprinkling of sand, we all set forth for the Amusement Park, there for threepence to be terrified on the Ghost train, whizzed up and down on the Scenic Railway, shaken to death on the Noah's Ark, and thoroughly embarrassed with our clothes blowing over our heads at the exit - what a bargain - all for threepence a time. Then to Woolworths where we stared in amazement at all the things which could be bought for sixpence and under. Wooden scooters, sixpence each

piece, a whole scooter for a shilling. Teapots sixpence, lids threepence, gigantic sticks of rock threepence, and glorious ice-creams. Well it was time to take a last fond look at the sea, and then set off to find the rest of the herd wending their way to the station. What a wonderful day it had been and how sadly we left it all behind. Tired and irritable we boarded the train, balloons of every shape and size we shoved through the carriage doors, uncooked dolls won at the fun-fair, shrimping nets, large sticks of rock, empty purses! Yarmouth blasters.

We had to be careful of our behaviour on the way home, as everyone was a bit touchy and elaps were plentiful. "You wait till you get home Madam" meant that mother had had enough, and was beside us if we put a foot out of place after that. We leaned on the windows as the train drew out of Southtown Station and waved to the porters with grubby handkerchiefs, but of course, there was still a lovely train journey and a wagon ride to come. Father and the next door neighbour would be waiting on the road to unload us, the kettle boiling, with luck, and after telling all the events of the day we gladly went to bed.

Chapter 13 - July August and September

And then the harvest holidays - only six five four three two one more day, and then we break up. On the last day it became a ritual that we should have a good tidy up in all the cupboards, and we joyfully busied ourselves sorting out books, tidying up the sewing box

scrubbing the desks and cleaning out the ink-walls. It was an uncontrollable day when we couldn't settle and so we sang harvest songs and did quite a lot of country dancing, the day ending with a scramble for sweets which were supplied by the shop-keeper.

The older children stood at one end of the playground and the little ones by themselves so that everyone had a fair chance of picking up a few. After the teachers had wished us a happy holiday, we replying "Thankye Miss' and the same to you". We gave three cheers said "Goodbye" and off we tripped up the lane, when well out of earshot we chanted, "No more lessons, no more books, no more teachers ugly looks". It was not true because we loved our teachers, but other children had sung it before us and so the tradition must be maintained. In the evening as we sat on the field gate mending our school stockings we were on the look out for the little Austin Seven as it climbed the hill with a suit case strapped to the top, taking away the youngest teacher to her home in another part of Norfolk. A wave and a cheer and the holidays had really begun.

The first few weeks we spent in anticipation of the real harvest. We played on the common, we picked the rushes and with a very small stick pushed out the pith and made little flowers by folding it over and tying to twigs and most effective they were. We made butchers baskets from grasses and plaited cats tails grasses and made them into trees. We pushed each other down the grassy slope into which we called the hollow place and made swings on the hornbeam trees.

Occasionally a family of gipsies with a beautifully ornate caravan would pass through the village, the little children wearing no shoes, but bedecked with ear-rings and bracelets of gold coversigns. We were rather nervous of them and peered at a distance as they called at each house selling clothes pegs and frightening the life out of people of the village who had refused to buy any. A small dog always walked under the caravan, never appearing to move from its place, but proving no doubt a useful animal if there was a rabbit or hare to be poached.

We spent hours in the lanes, the Back Lane, the Narrow Lane, Slough Lane, Wash Lane, each had their own different characters. We burrowed through the long grass, made lovely bowers between the bushes. We knew where to look for bee orchids and where to find a water hen's nest.

The boys had their own particular game - Red Indians - and fortunate we considered ourselves if we, the girls, were invited to be Squaws. Perfect shaped wigwams were made with long poles draped with sacks, there was never a shortage of them, and a few chickens feathers poking out of the top. The Braves built fires of stones and bricks and the Squaws found old tins and made themselves busy cooking the meals which consisted only of boiled water, while the Braves armed with home made bows and a cocoa tin of home made arrows hanging from the waist set forth to do a day's hunting. Their aim

was extremely good with these home-made weapons, but we saw no sign of anything to cook and were content to have a few nuts or blackberries, and of course a good Squaw never complained. We stuck to the rules and only eat down when the Braves had finished eating and were playing tunes on their home made whistles and tin drums.

Only one child in the village had a bicycle when we were young, and so the only thing we could do was to make our own. We sat straddle legged over a gate, one behind the other, each holding a bent stick for handlebars. We slung a piece of binder string over the gate and tied one end to each foot. Gaily did we see-saw one foot then the other in unison and many a happy hour did we spend peddling away on our bicycle made for five. The binderstring wore out and off we went to seek fresh employment.

We did enjoy a birds funeral and great care was taken. A proper sized hole was poked out of the common with a stick. The little body placed in a tin and lowered into the hole - Ashes to ashes - dust to dust. The hole was filled in and a little mound made, then we cut a turf. We knew how to do this as we had so often watched the sexton helping himself from the common, neat rolls just like green swiss rolls they were, all the same size. Ours was not so good as we had no tools but we shovelled what we could with our hands and carried it gently to cover the little

mound. We solemnly laid down our little bunches of tiny flowers -

we had seen it all done at Church - and then the epitaph,

One I remember:

"Beneath this grave there lieth at rest
little cock robin of all birds the best"

My brother who was home on holiday added to my disgust.

"And Spicky Sparrow who couldn't wheel a barrow
His bones were too narrow".

We played shops in the ditches, the long grass we used as elastic and ribbon, bundles of sticks were sold for brooms, everything had a use and many a happy hour did we spend in bartering. We posted letters to the children next door placing them in a crack in an elder stump which formed part of the hedge dividing the two gardens, and then returned later for an answer. We had 'parties' in our little secret house with a bent cocoa tin as a tea-pot, and once on a rare occasion we tucked a few licquorice allsorts away to use as sandwiches but much to our disgust two of the younger boys found them and that put an end to our little tea party. We had many a squabble and fight but it was all very soon forgotten.

Children are always hungry, and we were no exception, and as the plums and apples ripened we looked longingly at the trees and as we were not allowed to take the fruit we had to hope for a high wind. One year we made up a little song which stood us in good stead.

"Please Mister Wind, blow an apple down
Just blow an apple down, blow an apple down".

As we chanted away so we looked and hoped for miracles and sometimes one would fall or we would discover a few overlooked before in the long grass. After a windy night there would be such a rush to be first one dressed and down we scampered to the best tree to pick up the rosy shiny apples which peeped at us as if saying "Here I am". We packed as many as we could into our laps and then gliding past the back door headed for the hay stack, wherein different cavities we hid the delicious fruit, fervently hoping that father would not choose to feed the pony from that particular bit of stack. My brother and the boy next door had a set of pram wheels to which they tied a fish box, and having sliced apples and spread the slices with plums they proceeded to push the barrow up and down the road, shouting "Ice creams and they are lovely" Needless to say they did not sell many but it was all tremendous fun and when the wasps began to congregate they ditched the lot and thought of something else to do. Those old pram wheels provided us with endless pleasure, they took us for rides, carried home hogweed for the rabbits, collected wood, horse-muck and mole's muck for the garden, hay, grass for the chickens, and the funniest thing was to be pushed over the lobbly common and then to be sent sliding down a grassy slope into the dry pit where the lizards ran and the forgetmenots grew. Just killing time we were until the harvest should begin. Always hungry we sought for food. Those beautiful horse beans, I can still smell them, from the time they flowered until they turned

black. Greenish black they were at their best. We slithered into the fields, filling our laps leaving just a few on a stalk and being careful not to trample them down. We climbed one of a row of willow trees, bunking each other up and the last one would be hauled up by the arms having a pretty rough time. One of these trees was very special it had a hollow centre and was shaped like an open umbrella upside down. There was plenty of room for six children to perch between the branches, their legs dangling in the hollow place and the feast began. The rate at which we ate those beans would have beaten any marathon, husks flew in all directions and when we had had our fill we clambered down the tree moved on to another field and started on the glorious ears of wheat. We rubbed the ears in our hands as we sat on the gate and blew away the husks and threw into our mouths the handful of grains. The ground would be strewn with the empty husks and ears, and one day a very old farmer walking with nose and knees together came up to us, looked round, and mumbled "There he' bin a rare lot o' ow sparrers round here".

"All among the barley, who would not be blythe,
 When the free and happy barley is smiling on the scythe.
 After what seemed an eternity the harvest really did look like
 beginning - well so we thought. First the binder would be heard
 to come squeaking up the road, rattling and groaning as it was

being pulled up the hill by two horses with many a "cubby weesh!" and "Gee up", it was maneuvered through the field gate. This was only a prelude, as for the next week or so the farmer would be lying under the binder tapping, oiling, screwing and unscrewing, grunting and swearing until we thought "will he never start". But at last more promising signs. Two men came along with scythes slung over their shoulders, the blades wrapped in sacking and pointing downwards. Dressed in their striped shirts with a red spotted handkerchief tied round their necks, corduroy trousers tied under the knees, hobnail boots and shabby old sweat stained straw hats, they were ready for anything. The scythe was stripped of its sacking, the hone produced from a belt strapped round the waist, the men spat on their hands and proceeded to sharpen, "Shirrah - shurrah!, shirrah - shurrah!" and having run the thumb up and down the blade the hone was put away and all was ready for action. The men straightened their backs, got their bodies into position and then with most wonderful rhythm the scythes were swung, and to what was music to our ears, the corn began to fall in perfect layers round the edge of the field. Two men walked behind and as the corn fell so it was gathered into armfuls bound round with a cord of straw, a quick twist and a tuck in, and there was a perfect sheaf which was pushed as near to the brow as possible to make room for the horses. The scything was

extremely hot work, and the men for harvest time were supplied with two bottles of cold sweet tea which they frequently sipped.

At last all the head-land was cleared, and the long awaited moment was upon us. The horseman taking the nose-bags off his beloved animals with several "Oha!" and "Aha!" mounted the binder, settled himself in the hard springless seat and the harvest had begun! The binder bumped and jolted over the uneven field, the corn bent under the binder's sails, the field mice wondered what was going on and the rabbits trembled, and the sheaves were being thrown out from the side of the binder while two men with great speed collected and stacked them into wigwams to allow the sun and wind to dry them off. We children crept inside these little wigwams and ate corn or a few stray horse-beans.

Suddenly a shout and a poor little terrified rabbit ran out of the narrowing length of corn, heading for the nearest ditch, being chased by children, or, with a shout to stand clear, was shot by the game-keeper. These rabbits were all tossed in a heap and at the end of the day divided amongst the workers and what riches, when the following day we had smelt rabbit stew for dinner.

Father used to help with the harvest when it was possible to get work, as a little more money could be earned, with a bonus of \$5 at the end of the month, and it was our duty to take his dinner. Out came the lop-sided basket and in it was carefully placed the pie-dish with a large helping of meat and potato dumpling at one side and beans at the other, and covered with a clean cloth, together with a can of mother's home brewed beer. We sometimes had to walk miles with this repast and it was necessary to leave home very early in order to arrive at the harvest field on the stroke of noon. We tramped along the brows of the fields, jumped ditches, dilled and dallied, picked dewberries and pulled at the hazel branches for nuts, though a bit unripe they were something to eat. At the final lap we usually had to break into a trot to be there on time. The horses were given their nose bags, sacks laid on their backs and twigs of alder stuck in their bridles to keep away the flies. Harvesting was heavy work for them and so they were not allowed to work all day and with a bit of luck we would get a ride on the ones who were to be relieved of their duties. The men sat down on sacks or a pile of sheaves, flies buzzing round, a few wasps and maybe a hornet but they did not appear to take much notice, - if we didn't interfere with them they would not interfere with us.

Out came the various gems of cookery which were by then cold, and all got down to the business of supplying the inner man. Everything eaten outside tasted so much nicer, and there was never a complaint. After dinner, time for a smoke, and even time to teach us children how to make corn dollies - what heavenly days they were and seemed to last for ever. We wandered home again with the empty dishes and nothing to think of but the beauty all around us.

'All accordin' to the weather' the corn dried and then the time for carting began. The two younger boys of our families, as soon as they heard a wheeze that the corn was dry would be at the farm almost at crack of dawn, helping to harness the horses. They had no fear of these beautiful animals and could do anything with them. Though they could only just about reach the creature's nose, there they were pushing the bit into their mouths, pulling their great heads down to get their ears through the bridle, walking under their bellies with the straps, pulling their tails through a sort of leather loop and heaving the gigantic leather collars over their dear gentle heads. Then to be fixed to the wagon with its painted wheels, two or three pitch forks thrown in, a few sacks and nose bags and the frail baskets. Into the wagon climbed the workers, the two boys riding on the backs of the horses, and the horses seemed to know which way to go - what didn't they know?

The sheaves were pitched into the wagon and another experienced hand laid them in position, everything seemed to be done to perfect rhythm. Then just another "Git up", and the horses moved on to the next lot of shocks, shaking their dear heads and brushing their tails to keep away the tormenting flies.

The stacks were an absolute work of art, they were sometimes built on four stones like giant mushrooms to enable the air to get underneath. Every sheaf was laid in the exact position, otherwise the stack would loose its shape and the whole village would be alive with criticism and "They're made a rum mess of ow' So-an-So's stack". Then the thatchers came to work, and though it was only a stack, a wonderful job was made of it, and a few vents were left at the very top, with a bunch of corn sticking up for decoration and this was to prevent overheating.

When the field had been cleared, came the woman to do a bit o' gleanin', and enough corn was gathered to keep a few ow' hens for quite a long time. There were still some grains not to be wasted, and up the road squeaking and rattling would come a hen house drawn by a horse, the old hens spluttering and cackling. How contented they were - those old hens - some of them were put in separate coops with their

little chicks and we loved to see them almost hidden in the stubble as they scratched for tiny insects, and ran to their mother as she pointed out some tasty morsel - a hen didn't know the meaning of being enclosed fifty years ago.

The men worked until the dew began to fall, during the harvest weeks, and the moon was full, they came home so tired but loved the harvest, plus a drink of cyder, which as they were not used to it went to their heads and caused them to walk home in a corkscrew fashion.

After the harvest, a new pair of hobnail boots for the men and well they needed them, out in all weathers, rain, snow, mud and only a pair of buskins to keep their legs dry. The farmers wives, to earn a little pocket money reared turkeys, daily chopping up boiled eggs and nettles to 'bring them along', and these also lived on the fields when they were old enough to be allowed to roam. Hundreds of them, there would be, with red bobbles on their necks, their tails spread out fan wise, all gobbling away at once. Seldom are they now seen in the Norfolk fields and life cannot be so happy for them.

Chapter 15 - Harvest festival

All being safely gathered in came the wonderful festival of Harvest Thanksgiving. Great sheaves of corn were delivered to the church door. The hedges almost stripped of old mans beard, hips, haws and hops. Michaelmas daisies by the armful were cut

from the cottage gardens, marrow on which had been scratched a text when young were now fully grown with the text plain for all to see. Beetroots, apples, turnips, eggs, cabbages, all were dumped in the church porch and what excitement as we arranged the apples round the font, balanced a marrow here, a bunch of hops there, draped old mans beard over the window sills, laid a few rolling plums round the pulpit and tied bunches of corn at every pew end; Bunches of grapes from Gissing Hall adorned the Altar, with a loaf of bread made by the local baker. The first service was held on Thursday night at 8 o'clock, and people who never set foot in the church at any other time turned up in their best. Our choir caps and capes had been starched for the occasion, many of the tapes were broken as we tried to gather the caps to fit our heads and we waded with fear that we would not be ready in time. The rough ends of the capes scratched our necks and we fumbled for the button-holes and the linen buttons which had been flattened against the material, but as the good lady was paid about three shillings and sixpence for turning us all out spotlessly white, we had no right to complain.

We filed into the church with happy faces singing "Come ye thankful people come", and with half an eye viewed the congregation which filled the church to overflowing. The oil lamps flickered on the brass ware, the farmers with their clean shaven rosy cheeks

stood in their thick tweed suits, brown boots, and buskins, the bettermost in the front, the common herd at the back. Everywhere you looked could be seen a little offering for the harvest. All thanked the Lord with cheerful voice and the collection bags bulged. The Rector smiled benignly on all, announced the Blessing and the congregation made a move. Outside the church there was much shaking of hands, we never spoke in the church, and each departed his own way, some to walk two miles home to their little cottages and a few men to call at the Crown to enjoy the produce of malt and hops. It was always arranged that the Methodist chapel festival should not collide with that of the parish church, and so several of us for a special treat were allowed to attend the chapel on that day of the year. The singing was always loud and hearty, the Minister said the prayers in his own particular style and there were sounds of "Amen" "Alleluia" "hear hear" "praise the Lord Amen" and heads nodded in silent agreement as the Lord was thanked for all his blessings. The sermon was always enjoyed, with never a note the preacher spoke simply and clearly with a few little amusing bits thrown in.

The following Monday was the day when the produce from the chapel was sold in aid of the chapel funds. This meant another outing for us. We tracked down the road with all the other families, as the church goers enjoyed this little get together.

We sang the Wesleyan hymns, said a prayer or two and then the auctioneering began. Everything was stripped of its decoration and went under the hammer, and the mothers trailed home in the dusk with their bags bulging with red beet, carrots, onions, flowers, jam, apples, cabbages, bull rushes, such an assortment of the wonderful God given fruits of the earth.

The nights were drawing in and on our way from school we would watch the clouds of starlings as they rose and fall in such numbers darkening the sky with the wonderful whistling sound that only starlings can make. They cleared the fields of any remaining corn and then flew up to settle for the night on a tree blackening the branches against the beautiful sunsets for which Norfolk is noted. A slight wind would get up and we knew that in the morning there would be acorns to pick up which we sold to the farmer for his pigs.

And this was the time of year for pop-guns - the boys very favourite game. A very straight piece of young elder, about a foot long, was cut from the hedge, the pithy centre being removed by pushing through it mother's borrowed poker or some other piece of straight iron, and the outer bark peeled off. Then an equally straight piece of Hazel was selected which was the length of the elder with about two inches to spare. This Hazel stick was with the greatest care whittled down until it just, and only just fitted into the hollowed out piece of elder.

This was an absolute work of art as it had to be perfectly rounded and dead straight, and exactly the right length of the elder, with the remaining thick end used as the handle. The tip of the shaved end was then tapped against a stone in order to give it a slight brush effect. Then came the search for ammunition and that's where the acorns came in. Bitten in half, one piece was pushed into the end of the elder tube, and it had to fit perfectly, the hazel stick was then inserted in the other end and pushed half way up the tube, then a firm press against the stomach, up travelled the hazel stick and out shot the acorn, sometimes with terrifying force and was beside you if you happened to be in the firing line. Many a sore tummy there was during the pop-gun season.

The apples were now at their best, we would pick out the ripest and sweetest, polish it up and continue to polish until with great pride we handed it over to our favourite teacher who never failed to show great delight. One little girl would fill her bloomers legs with apples and pears and a funny little object she looked as she ran to school with the fruit jiggling up and down. The boys would often bring a special girl the choicest apple they could find and there would be exchanges made in the secrecy of cupboard doors. One day "Spritey" rolled his favourite girl an apple along the floor under the

deaks, his intentions were good but the idea not so good, as the rumble and the bumps as the apple jumped the knobs in the uneven wooden floor caused much embarrassment as the teacher peered over her glasses and asked that awful question "Stand up, who was responsible for that noise".

Cooking pears and William pears changed hands, hard apples which never softened or became edible were somehow or other chewed through and swallowed. Doctor Harveys were packed away in boxes for Christmas, and jelly made out of the crab apples.

Then oh then, the time came for extracting the honey and what a palaver that was. Father first smoked the bees with a piece of smouldering brown paper, then he took out the great sections of dark brown comb and poor mother had to do the rest. The comb was cut into small pieces and the doubtful bits put on one side and the rest strained through a cloth into a large brown crock. Mother was never in the best of moods during this operation. The bees and the wasps flew in all directions, and the sun blazed through the kitchen window. We pestered for our meals, my brother came in and said something cheeky and "thwack" went the honey-sticky dishcloth round his ears, the wasps joined in the fun and my brother dipping his head in the soft water

tub vowed never to be a nuisance again. When the honey was all strained and the well polished jars filled, the remaining comb was put into a wine crock with a little water and left to "work" for Mead. The smell filled the house for weeks and after the fermentation was completed and the mead drained off, the residue was thrown under the bullace tree where the wasps and the bees would swarm around and much to father's enjoyment, get themselves into a state of intoxication.

The pots of honey were sold at a shillings pound, but a little kept back for our own needs, honey and vinegar for sore throats. The comb which was not filled was melted down and purified until it was the colour of toffee, and then poured into little moulds and set into solid lumps for waxing thread, the bigger pieces mixed with turpentine, the result of which was our highly polished furniture.

Chapter 16 - October, November, December

We'll up and begone to the woodland fields
 And gather the treasure that Autumn yields
 For October has come, and the fruit hangs free
 And sure there is plenty for you and me.

Autumn here, blackberries picked, the last nut fished out of the ditch, leaves turning into their most wonderful colours, the larch trees in the plantation in all its golden glory. The beech trees by the arch shedding their little fat triple-aided nuts which we picked up and toasted in a dustpan.

The chestnut Avenue ablaze with colour and the conkers leaving their prickly husks and clonking to the ground in their small leathery roundness. We picked up these beautiful creations, and made dolls chairs and stools. The old mans beard which had escaped the onslaught of Harvest Festival looked a bit the worse for wear but was brightened by the shiny black berries of the privet and the hips and haws all aglow. The Autumn sun shone in its dreaminess across the stubble fields, and the robins whispered their little songs. No matter what the season, there was always something to which to look forward.

The threepenny hops were always popular. Once a week they were held in the Church Hall, all the village girls and boys turned up at these dances, walking for miles along the pitchy black roads, many a bit of courting was done outside the door and inside, during the dance was whispered "Can I see you home?".

The band consisted of a piano, a banjo and a drum, and what fun we had as we clomped around the hall, treading on each others toes and getting fits of the giggles as some Romeo tried to show off a new step to impress the girl of the moment.

Or maybe a Magic Lantern entertainment, our first taste of the cinema. These were held in the school and they attracted quite a crowd. The Mothermost always had the best seats reserved, they were the school managers and the farmers wives though nobody paid

more than twopence for a seat. We had to be settled in good time as of course all the oil lamps had to be put out. What a performance it was to get the necessary equipment roared up. The lantern slide operator stood with his head under a black cloth and only his behind and legs sticking out. Each slide was described in detail "This is a camel" when perhaps only the back parts were visible. "This is an African woman" with great long meat skewers stuck through her nose who could mistake her! However we enjoyed it all and a vote of thanks proposed and hopes that there would be more to follow, sent us on our way home.

Threshing

Between harvest and Christmas, and it always seemed to us to be when there was most mud about, the threshing, or 'troshing' had to be done. The 'ingin' had to be booked many weeks in advance as there were not many of them about. This little machine with its great tall chimney, wide iron wheels and shining brass would come up the road belching black smoke, and we only knew the engine driver as being black. Chug-chugging it turned into the field pulling the threshing machine behind it. With the little fire still red, the other parts were covered with a tilt overnight, and the next morning preparation began very early for the day's threshing, every hole and corner was greased and the fire stoked. Gallon bottles of beer were produced

to quench the thirst of the extra hands. The machine started up, the sheaves travelled up a kind of moving staircase, the grain poured into sacks and the dust flew, the rats in their hundreds scampered for cover but most of them came to a sad end, what with the game-keeper and dogs. The sacks of corn were carted to the barns, later to be taken to the maltings or to the mill, and the chaff used as feed for the horses in the winter.

Firework night

This kept us talking for weeks before the event. There was not much money to be had at that time of the year, and so we were glad to earn a penny here and a ha'penny there to spend on fire-works. Picking up potatoes were one of the most disliked jobs, and as soon as we saw the garden fork being borne towards the potato patch there was a general exodus of children. "Here, come here maw' an' pick up these here taters an' du yu pick up the little uns too, they're allus the swatest, you know damn well I can't stoop, there's two beside your feet. Blast! this is a good root, there must be nigh on a peil full, I'll hatter show these to George" and the next door neighbour was called over to view the crop. "Now you go an' take a ha' penny off the copper".

Another job for which a handsome sum was paid was washing father's feet, let there be just a murmur as to a kettle of water

and a bowl, and every body would alither off 'down the closet'. Four of them crowdad in at once, and I beaing alow on the uptake was left to get on with the job. "Dont be afraid of 'em Maw, I'd do 'em myself if I could stopp, thass lovely, thank you me dear", and for that another ha'panny and a handful of nuts.

The third money making job was helping father with the fish, the herrings came by train fresh out of the sea in salt and ice and arrived at Tivetshall station very early in the morning. Father was always up with the lark shouting his wares and many people had fresh fish for breakfast. "Are they fresh Colly?" "Damn it Maw while you were a gittin' up they were a-wriggling in the sea".

He would tramp miles with the box of fish balanced on his head, across fields and commons - perhaps to be told - "not to-day, thank you". One box of herrings would be kept back for smoking. The herrings were washed with mother's help, and threaded through the gills on to long sticks called 'spates', each herring the same distance apart. A coke fire was lit in a brazier, and when it was burning clear a log of oak was laid on the top and placed under the rows and rows of herrings which had been arranged so that they hung about six feet from the fire. The oak smoke rose into the air and curled itself around the herrings and when they were thoroughly dried were removed from the spates and placed in boxes, large and small laid separately, all as neat as a pin.

This is where my ha'penny came in, it was my job to hold the spates as father laid out the fish, and then put them away tidily for the next day.

The village shop would weeks before November the fifth have displays of sparklers, catharine wheels, roman candles, jumping jacks, coloured matches, all at a ha'penny each, and a very few rockets as there were few children who could afford to buy them. Our money would be counted and re-counted, and lists made of what we could afford, and the day at last came when off we went to the shop to spend our precious money.

It was one year 'given out' at school that we had been invited to a farm about two miles away to share a bonfire and firework display - the match would be struck at six o'clock.

We galloped home from school, gobbled our tea, got into our old clothes in case we got fire to ourselves, grabbed our small bags of fireworks and off we ran on the two mile journey to the farm. With great excitement we caught up with the other children going in the same direction. Most of the village went, pitchy black it was and that was an excuse to strike a few coloured matches. Boys jumped out from behind trees frightening the life out of us with their carbide tins. These were prepared by boring a hole through a tin on which was a very well fitting lid, a

treacle tin was best. The tin was then partly filled with carbide slightly moist and the lid very tightly placed. A lighted match was then put to the hole as the tin lay on the ground, and a terrific 'Woomph' sent the lid flying yards up the road - hitting any victim in the ankle with very great force. We were petrified of these missiles and the boys knew it, and took advantage of it for the only night in the year.

At last we arrived at the farm and through the darkness could see unknown figures wandering around in a field with a great pile of something in the centre. Milling around in the mud we gradually got used to our bearings and found ourselves close to a huge bonfire with a guy perched in the centre. At last the hour of six was upon us and on the dot came the farmer with a lighted torch of oiled wood, the flames rushed skyward as did the cheers, as we watched the poor guy doubling up under the heat. Conkers popped, fireworks whizzed in all directions. Shouts of anxious mothers whose children were missing. "John, where ha' ye got tu?" "He ha' pinched my sparkler" "Look out Mrs. your coat's on fire!" "Damn the mud, I'm up to me A---"

Round and round the children rushed "You watch this beauty, I kept it till last" "Cor, look at that rocket, that must ha' cost a buffen". At last all was spent, the children plastered with mud, mothers worn out with looking for them, the bonfire a heap of ashes and an invitation to the farm for cocoa and cakes. Home again

along the dark roads with much to relate to mother and father.

November passed with its fogs, rime frosts, beautiful swades found on the roads, having rolled off a tumbrel which we took home and ate in alican after tea, and turnips mashed with potato, pea soup and bannocks.

Chapter 17 - THE SCHOOL CONCERT

One of the highlights of the year - our school concert.

So much discussion had to take place. Teachers cycling from village to village discussing cantatas and plays and possibilities, and most of all a suitable date which would not collide with other activities. The children must all be given a part, otherwise there would be a rift between teachers and parents, and the most important thing was co-operation at a time such as this. A tremendous amount of time was spent in these early preparations, and after much heart searching the day at last came when the children were given their parts. Who could sing, who could recite, who could dance, most of all, who could memorise and who were capable of being stage managers. Then there was the question as to whose mothers would be good at making fancy dress. It was a trying time for the teachers, but suited some of us down to the ground as it disrupted our lessons.

Well the cantata, poems, dances, sketches decided, we were then given our parts, and as there was usually only one book we

all had to take turns in burrowing it and copying out the different acts. The music was drawn on the blackboard and the songs we learnt by repetition; the first days of practice were badlam, gazing up at the ceiling as stiff as ramrods we sought for help from above - not a word would come, each enjoying the others discomfort, but not so when it came to our turn, the boot was on the other foot. The teacher was nearly out of her mind for the time being, and having finished with us through the day would ask as many as could to return to school at night for extra practice. This to us was marvellous, there was something wonderful about the night so long as we had plenty of companions, the owls hooted, the rain fell or the frost gleamed but it was all good to us, and as we walked arm in arm through the plantation we sang the songs that we were to sing on the Big Night, and the carols which we were learning in preparation for Christmas. The school lights which of course were oil lamps shone brightly through the windows, there was a lovely fire to greet us and the air was thick with excitement. We clod-hopped along through the country dances, for the boys to dance in hobnails was no easy thing and it was a mystery how the floor stood up to the wear. A few of the brighter ones carried the dull along, and we gradually all fell into some sort of shape, learnt our parts more or less, and quite looked forward to the rehearsals. Meanwhile, mother at home was racking her brains as to what to use for our fancy dress.

She had an old box upstairs which always seemed to be well filled with all sorts of material and we recited our parts to give her an idea as to what we would be expected to wear. She was a wonderful woman and never failed to produce a most beautiful costume, be it for the North wind, Mrs. Jarley's waxworks or piccaninnys.

At school life grew more and more exciting while the teachers worked overtime to make dresses for children whose parents were not capable of it. Craps paper lay everywhere, glue, silver paper and cardboard. Stars, crowns, fairy wings, angels halos, wands, witches brooms, wire, drawing pins, great rolls of paper which reached across the stage, "Wishing you all a Merry Christmas", all this and more seemed to fill every spare hole and corner, and still the seventy six children managed to crowd in as well.

At last after weeks of preparation all was more or less ready and the great day nearly upon us when the platform would be erected. This was kept in the Church Hall and brought by the village carpenter in his pony and cart, and how we revelled in the moving up of desks, the shuffling and the muddle, as we made room for this wonderful stage standing on two or three trestles with a gap in the middle. The stage curtains of green baize, full of moth holes and holes made by tiny fingers were unfolded and with the help of the shop ladder were hung in position. The piano 'minding the wonky leg' was pushed into position, the stage steps pushed under the platform in readiness. The scenery for the opening chorus arranged,

and while we the school crowded into the remaining part of the big room and loved every minute of it, we endeavoured to write out the tickets.

A CONCERT WILL BE GIVEN BY
THE CHILDREN OF GISSING BOARD SCHOOL
ON FRIDAY NOVEMBER 20TH AT 7.30PM.

ADMISSION 1/- BACK SEATS 6d.

We all took about five to sell and were delighted if we could get rid of them all.

Oh dear what a tense time it was, the week before the concert, Will the children all come? Will we get the flu? Will it rain? Well, there it was, the day before the concert. We were all bathed in front of the fire, my hair put into dodmanods, we recited our pieces and sang our songs to father who would not be coming, and to bed we went, to talk and dream of to-morrow.

This was one of mother's few nights out, and dressed in her best with her children flapping and skipping around her, she set forth in good time to get a seat - having paid a shilling.

The two front rows were always reserved for the Rector and his wife, the school Managers and the Bettermost, those who lived in bigger houses than the common herd. This always caused a bit of annoyance amongst the rest of the audience as 'our shilling' is as good as theirs. However all was forgotten when at last the stage curtains were drawn aside, the lamps were turned up, the applause had died down and the children sang an opening song of welcome.

Most of the parents managed to afford this evening out, admiring their offspring and gave them a special clap as they mounted the stage, walked to the front and stiffly gave a bow, then backed into a straight line full of self consciousness to make room for others.

The little room was like a jumble sale. Piccaninnies with their faces blacked with burnt cork, and their necks and hands still white, jostled with fairies, witches and angels. Wings got caught up in the doorway and fell off, to be speedily pinned on. Swords poked in all directions lifting off a Prince's crown or tearing the sleeves off a crape paper dress. A little one would cry with fright, another jiggled about with crossed legs wanted to go outside, and so matches had to be found, the child disrobed of its paper dress and taken with much speed down the garden. After what seemed an eternity the children were lined up and ready to get started. The music struck up, the curtains parted once more, and four little stage managers legs could be seen under each curtain, running along hoping not to be noticed - and the concert was now really in full swing. There was clapping from the front, whistling from the 'sixpennys' and those who were standing and did not have to pay. The audience craned their necks over the two front rows of 'nobs', and the sixpennys stood up to see above the front ones - and the standing ones Boo-ed. Never mind - it was a happy throng, we sang, acted, danced and bowed with eyes

on our parents to make sure that they approved. The pretty children wriggled with self importance, the bold ones shouted, and the nervous ones whispered and forgot their lines. Back stage we pushed and shoved in that tiny little room, and took each others 'props', helped each other to dress, it was such a huffer-muffer of good and bad but we all wanted the concert to go off well, and it usually did. Finally a vote of thanks from the Rector followed by one from a School Manager who nearly always said the same thing, the piano sounded the chord for God Save the King to which we all stood with absolute silence and sincerity. And then home to bed.

Chapter 10 - CHRISTMAS

And Christmas was less than a month away. What exquisite joy to practice those beautiful carols, our hearts nearly burst with excitement and we could think of nothing else day or night. The Christmas puddings were made fairly late as mother had to save up to buy the materials. A great lump of beef suet was bought from the butcher to be chopped with great gusto, I remember that it was almost a shell pink. Large pieces of peel full of lovely sugar were being finely elicid as we sat chin in hands waiting for any cast offs, and a lump of citron, a generous lump it was in those days, was always included. The raisins had to be carefully stoned, the currants and sultanas washed and left in the oven to dry. And then the

mixing, the stirring and the wishing, and last of all the licking out of the bowl - and Oh joy, the fire was lit in the best room so that the puddings could be boiling all night - and the smell as we came down to breakfast. Oh.

The cake was made in a loaf shaped tin, and a flavoursome mixture it was. Almond icing could not be afforded but most delicious lemony icing was poured over the cake and ran down the sides just like Mrs. Bruins Christmas pudding in the Rainbow. Hundreds and thousands were sprinkled over the top, while the icing was still wet and we waited for a few to roll off the plate, and saw no more of the cake until Christmas tea time.

The shop was crowded out with most exciting things. Dolls of all types, toys which we could never hope to have, but what immense joy they gave us just to stand away from the counter and gaze at them. Coloured balls, canvas stockings, jack in the box's, glorious tinselly decorations, chinese lanterns. Boxes of figs and dates made our mouths water, sour oranges and chestnuts, it was indeed a paradise, all crammed in to the little shop on top of the necessities of every day.

About two weeks before Christmas the postman would begin to arrive late, due to the overpowering mass of mail at Dias. It was our job morning and evening to run down to the village and meet the postman, in that way mother had her letters about three hours earlier than she would otherwise have done. He was one of the nicest people

imaginable, and we could almost tell the time by his whistle as he cycled up the new road with his great bag of letters on his back, and parcels galore strapped to the front carrier. Through fair weather or foul he came always smiling, always whistling, at the stroke of 8 am and 5 pm. Round the corner and 'Hello Smiler, nothin' for you today' and then with a grin he clipped one or two from out a rubber band. 'There ye are me ow' beauty' and with many thanks off we would run up the hill in time to turn back for school.

Well, at Christmas, he arrived later and later as his bicycle became more and more loaded with sacks of letters and parcels, until in the end he had to resort to a pony and cart. In the evenings, we would again have to meet the postman, it was no trial to us at Christmas time, trundling down the road with a lantern, fighting over who was going to carry it, splashing through the rain or stumbling in and out of the frozen ruts made by the tumble carting turnips and swedes. How we loved to get into the Post Office and gaze at all the fascinating little bits and pieces, cleverly home-made dolls, lovely Christmas cards, Christmas tree decorations. Everything was so dainty in the Post Office, and there was so much to make a child happy. Occasionally a man would be having a three-penny hair cut, but we took very little notice, and there was the newspaper on the floor collecting the bits. Gamagees catalogue always arrived very early, and many many hours did we spend turning the hundreds of pages which were packed with breath-taking wonder. There was

everything in that catalogue, and though we knew that nothing out of it would come our way, we lay on the floor with chin in hands, for hours and hours and hours in a most wonderful fairyland of make-believe.

Parcels posted in London on one day were sure to arrive the following morning, and for one shilling, thirteen pounds weight could be sent. "Can ye manage it me dear" said the postman - well we always could, and so we struggled up the hill, the lantern swinging and the string of the parcel cutting our fingers. Breathless with excitement we threw open the door blinking in the bright light. "Mother, there's a parcel!" But the joy of seeing inside was not for us we were shut in the kitchen as mother and an elder sister with much rustling of paper and mysterious whispering unpacked and hid away biscuits, chocolates, crackers, ham, gifts for all, coloured balls, tinsel, tobacco for father, sweets, oh dear, how kind our elder sisters and aunts were to us! Though we almost stood on our heads to peer through a hole at the bottom of the door, we never saw so much as a sign of a bit of wrapping paper but we kept a check on where the parcel had come from as we knew the writing. Aunt Rose's parcels could be detected as we carried them home, they always smelt of a brand of the very best tea, and the tell tale fact was that the next day a beautifully hard basin shaped lump of

dripping with brown at the bottom would appear and we had
dripping toast for tea - what riches!

Every day became more unbearable as the excitement mounted,
at school we couldn't concentrate, all we could think of was
Santa Clause and the holidays, and at last they came, those lovely
days when we seemed to do nothing but sing carols and listen to
Christmass stories, and then to wish our teachers a happy Christmass,
a rush up the school lane to press our noses once more to the
shop window, a race up the New Road and another look at the
treasures in the Post Office, and home to write letters to Santa
Clause.

We were put into the Best Room to play for those few days
before Christmass. There was my sister with her row of dolls,
telling them that Christmass was coming. My brother and I walk-
ing on all fours gave each other rides on our backs and then
flattened out on the floor with hilarious laughter. We did the
fox trot - with his feet on top of mine we wandered round the
room just like a couple of puppets. We played tea parties under
the table and we wrote to Santa Clause. The wind whistled down the
chimney and we felt how cold he must be perched up there amongst
the soot with no fire.

Dear Santa Clause,

I hope you are alright. I am sorry I took some of father's
nuts and wont do it again. We are all being good and we hope you

will come.

With love from
Daphne.

We each wrote our private messages and folded them carefully and were told to leave the room in case Santa Claus should be nervous. The letters were lodged on a brick up the chimney by my sister who then allowed us to come back and sit still until we heard shufflings in the chimney. Of course we did sooner or later, and my sister feeling up the chimney dislodged a grubby piece of paper with unfamiliar writing.

Dear children,

I will come on Christmas eve, but put your stockings in the same place with the names on them. Its a bit cold up here.

With love from,
Santa Claus.

Please sing some carols.

We sat and sang with all our might about the sleigh bells ringing and had no doubt as to the reality of Santa Claus in those happy days, everything was fairyland.

The Grocer sent a Christmas box, the baker and the butcher a calender, and at long last it was Christmas Eve.

CHAPTER 19 - CHRISTMAS EVE

THE DAY WE HAD BEEN WAITING FOR.

When the sun is hidden and the sky is grey
Robin sings so sweetly on the leafless spray
"Listen all you wild birds, listen and believe
Jesus Christ is coming, it is Christmas eve,
Jesus Christ is coming, it is Christmas eve"

Oh the bathing and the washing of hair, the labelling
of stockings and the careful pinning on to the same nail
as last year. Father would go outside, take a look round
and gaze at the sky. "Thess a rummun, I've just ain
somebody a-lookin' out o' the chimney". Eyes grew bigger
and hearts pounded - this was the moment we had waited so
long for. "Father will you call up the chimney". We
trembled with excitement as he shouted "Ara ye up there,
can ye hear me?" Down came an unknown voice in reply.
"Yee I'm here, there ain't much room, are the children
good? here's a few coppers for them" and by some most
peculiar trick and father's slight of hand, down fell
a handful of coppers into the hearth to be divided among
us. This was a yearly occurrence while we were young
enough to believe in Santa Claus.

We couldn't get to bed fast enough, not to sleep but
to listen. Then the crackling of paper and whispering
started once more, and how we envied our elder sister who
would know all before the morning. The little silver bells

tinkled, the paper decorations which mother had used for thirty years were carefully unfolded, and hung on the nails which had been there for donkey years. The Christmas baugh of fir or holly was reared up in the corner. The Santa Clause frieze was pinned the length of one wall, paper fans hung here, chinese lanterns, festoons of paper leaves, tinsel, glass balls, all were very old but all were each year very new. The mantle piece was cleared of all its ornaments and replaced by pretty little dishes of nuts and sweets, boxes of dates and figs.

We upstairs lay with eyes wide open, listening, waiting; Sleep entirely out of the question we, one or two at a time, crept out of bed, the old floor boards creaked and mother shouted "What are you children doing up there, get you into bed before I come after you". But we were not in bed for long, silently did we miss the creaking floor board and reached the bannister to hang upside down and peer through the useful half inch crack at the top of the door, where we carried on a running commentary. In silence we pinched each other to move up and let someone else have a turn. At last we could hear father making a move to go to bed, so hastily we slipped away and pretended to be asleep. It was always after midnight when mother had finished the preparations, but at last she came to bed very tired indeed.

At three o'clock in the morning, there we were all eager to get up. We lay in bed counting up to sixties, which meant another

minute gone - until we could stand no more of it, and there we were asking "Can we get up?" Father would be heard to say "Damn them children," and mother said "No dears you cant get up yet, du yu sing some carols till five o'clock" So with our little piping voices, like birds in a nest, we struck up -

List our merry carol on this Blessed Morn
For our loving Saviour, on Christmas Day was born.

Then in the excitement of carol singing the time went quickly, and at last we were given permission to go down in our nightgowns, and see if Santa Claus had been - of course he had, and to add to the proof there was an empty wineglass and crumbs in the newly swept hearth. What a fairyland, this Christmas morning, the branch in the corner hung with decorations, coloured candles, handkerchiefs and personal parcels. Monkey nuts were threaded on strings, and hung on the balks. A new Chatter box had the highest place on the side table where were our other books which we had out only at Christmas time, and our special games. But joy of all joys, our black stockings full of mysterious jobs and pokes, with an apple, orange, nuts and two pennies in the foot. I remember shedding a tear as I thought how kind Santa Claus had been to bring me a box of pencils. Mother was such a wonderful woman and any present that she was given was always something that could be divided amongst us all. After the excitement of unpacking and repacking our

stockings, feeling of parcels hanging on the branch, guessing what was in them, rushing up and downstairs to show mother, hardly knowing what we were doing for excitement, we put on our best clothes and clean pinafores and by that time the breakfast was cooking. Sausages for breakfast on Christmas Day - the best in England, made by our butcher, the flavour out of this world - and Camp coffee, what a treat on top of everything else.

We tripped off to Church so keen to tell and to hear of each others gifts, to sing the beautiful carols, the church was so much a part of our lives, and then home to a beautifully cooked dinner of Roast Leg of Pork, Brussel Sprouts, Potatoes baked in their skins, batter pudding and the most delicious gravy that ever was. And then the plum pudding with the sixpences hidden in it, these had been sent by Cousin George.

After dinner and the washing up done and the hearth tidied up, we were allowed to open one parcel each, while mother counted out a few chestnuts, four or five each which we ate raw or toasted in the tiny opening under the old fashioned fire. And then it was time to go off to the Church hall to collect our Sunday School Prizes. We usually managed to get one which was a mercy. There was always a pile of old childrens magazines for those who had not won a prize, and so that every child had something to take home, and in those days, everything was a luxury.

Gaily we trotted home to admire the Christmas Cake with the icing all running down the sides and lying in blobs on the plates underneath. The best white damask table cloth shone under the lamp with the pink globe. We had jelly on Christmas Day and biscuits, but whatever luxury tempted the eye, bread and butter must be eaten first, and if we did not feel hungry enough for that we certainly did not feel hungry enough for a piece of the cake crust where all the icing had stuck, and so we gallantly ploughed through and were rewarded. How we loved that piece of cake with the hundreds and thousands and the silver balls. We went round our plates with our fingers mopping up the crumbs, our legs swinging with delight as we sat on the long stool. After we had tasted of those wonderful luxuries and all was cleared away and the fire-place once more tidied, and the fire heated up to roasting point, out came the games, the special games that only saw the light of day at Christmas - our favourite one being the fishing game. This had been given to our family years ago and it was then second hand but still looked new. First there was a square container open top and bottom which was gaily bedecked with lovely water scenes, it stood about a foot high and was placed in the middle of the table. Then there were lots of most beautifully coloured paper fishes of all shapes and sizes. Each fish was numbered, the bigger the fish the higher the number, and each had a piece

of wire attached, these fish were placed inside the container and stirred up by mother. Out came the little fishing rods, a stick with a piece of string from which dangled a magnet, and these we dangled in turn over the container with eyes shut, until we felt a bite. Great was the excitement as we draw out a fish as the numbers were all counted and the highest scorer won a sweet. We never tired of this game, it was so simple and yet gave us so much pleasure, and each time it was carefully folded with greatest affection and placed in its special box.

A few more chestnuts were divided equally, pricked and placed in the little compartment under the fire where we also used to toast our cheese and red herrings - and when they were cooked were fished out with a pair of tweezers and handed round.

Then out came the Port bottle, father was always given one by the fish wholesaler from Norwich and couldn't wait until it was opened. We children were allowed a half full egg cup of this delicious drink and had with it a water biscuit sent by one of our sisters, which we nibbled and made to last for such a long time. Our eyes gradually closed and opened, closed and opened "Come children its time for you to go to bed" "Oh not yet mother, we're not tired" "You'll do as you're told, I dont want any tantrums to-morrow. Now go you down the yard all of you and you can take the chinese lantern",

It was no trouble to get us to get off, and from the hook was lifted one of the chinese lanterns, and inside a dear little candle. We pressed the lantern down like a concertina to get at the minute candle with a match, this was usually father's job, and then off we went clustered round this dear little light trying to keep the wind from blowing it out. Very often the children next door would be going on the same errand, and with four in our side and four next door shouting through the wall we had a whole of a time. Back again into the heat of the best room, and with one sweet apiece we climbed upstairs to bed and that Santa Claus would not come for another year.

CHAPTER 20 - BOXING DAY.

Boxing Day saw my brother going off to Gissing Hall.

There was always a shoot held on that day and the boys were paid a shilling each with a free dinner to help with the brushing or beating as it is called today. The rest of us were sent to take the air as mother thought it would be good for us after yesterday's feasting. We had cold pork and cold plum pudding for dinner, still raking for the remaining sixpences, and after dinner were allowed to each open another parcel. Then came the letter writing which was always a trial but had to be done.

"I don't know what to put" "How do you spell....."

"Stop jerking my hand" "Mother he's copying" "Oh blow I've made a blot, he's got the best pen anyway" "I'm going to write that we

had monkey nuts on the balk so don't you" "Ah well, these done"

With love from Daphne X X

Father said he liked his

bacca. "Now may I read the Playbox Annual?" Out came the Playbox Annuale, large fat books they were, year after year we read the same old stories which we never tired of, down on the floor we went with the book flat on the carpet to protect the back. Mrs. Bruin and Tiger Tim came back to us as old friends and we carefully turned the pages and enjoyed every word, with chin in hands and feet dangling in the air. And then mother carefully opened a box of chocolates, which had been sent her for Christmas, gently she did it so as not to spoil the box as it would later be used for bits of lace or handkerchiefs. "Now children you can take three each and no more to-day", we carefully studied each shape and size and took our pick, some liked the hard and some the soft centres and we nibbled away at them and tried to make them last longer than the others.

Boxing night, and the cracking of nuts, which mother had carefully counted out, one brazil, three hazels, two walnuts, three monkey nuts, everything was divided and mother usually came off worst.

Our strong little teeth pinned into the hazels and father would crack the walnuts in his hands and the only pair of nut-

crackers was passed round for the brezils, how luxurious was everything, with a lovely fire roaring up the chimney and the wind blowing outside.

"Mother may we have the gramophone on?" This was a big occasion for us. First the best table must be covered with mother's ironing blanket, and then from under the couch was heaved a great heavy box which was a gramophone. In another piece of cloth was wrapped a large pink horn which was fixed into a socket on the gramophone and held into position by the tea tin, otherwise it would have over balanced. Then the records - there were many so carefully packed in a wicker box with a lid, each record in its paper sleeve, and as each one was removed it was dusted in the grain with a piece of silk. The sound box was fixed, the needle tested for sharpness and 'crank-click' 'crank-'click' went the winder with the turn-table ready to be off. "Now du yu be careful not to scratch them there records", they were all very old and to us very special.

Father always chooses the Scottish songs, mother the Sankey and Moody Hymns, and we, well we had a wide range of likes.

"In a German Recruiting Station" "The Goose Step"

"The last Zuppelin", were the remains of the 14-18 war.

Then there was "The whistler and his dog" and "When father papered the parlour" and "The Caliph of Baghdad". We loved our old gramophone and never tired of listening with chins on hands and sitting on our long form.

Suddenly, a knock on the wall, it was the children next door, and after we had replied by knocking back we listened at the thin part of the wall. "Please can the children come round?" Mother said "Yes, but do you behave yourselves" so off we scampered to find our boots and father lit the Chinese lantern, and away we went round the corner and over the stile and up the cobbled yard, into the cosy little beautifully decorated boat room next door. "Please, mother said we've got to get home at seven" and we sat ourselves down round the table with the pretty little next door children as their gramophone played "The sinking of the Titanic", and joined in the song "Every man at his post", "Christians awake" was always a favourite, and "Lo He comes with clouds descending". How quickly the time went in that happy little room, with a plate of cheese cakes handed round we knew that 7 o'clock was approaching, and on went our boots which we had left at the door. Good night, to everyone, and thank you for having us and mother said "may the children come round to-morrow?". The Lantern lit back we went over the stile all huddled together,

into the Gooseberry we stumbled, round the corner to our own back door, the lantern casting most creepy shadows across the garden and up the cart shed walls. Into the house -- and from mother, "Now du yu go down the garden now you're out, and then git rididy for bed" -- and so ended another happy day. Each day, one more parcel was taken from the tree and each day the agony of letter writing, but there was no way out and we learnt the gentle art of writing in large letters so as to fill up the page in double quick time, plus many hugs and kisses. The chocolate box dwindled, the fig and date boxes emptied, the nuts were finished and the Christmas bough was clear of all parcels, and Twelfth Day arrived. Not until the Feast of the Epiphany were the decorations removed, this was a major operation and a very sad one. Each piece was carefully unhooked, each piece was more than carefully straightened out, folded and tied securely in a neat little bundle and placed in a box. So beautifully were the little rows of fans made which had belonged to mother's granny, and so difficult to fold, but was betide us if there was a crease left in them. Any remaining box of sweets was put away until Easter. The monkey nuts were unthreaded from the string and ate, the remaining oranges straggled on the mantelpiece, the beams and the balke were bare once more, and there we all were, a little bit older but ready for another year of ups and downs

but continuous change, continuous excitement.

CHAPTER 21 - THE VILLAGE

Like all Norfolk villages, it was quite usual to walk a mile or more and not see a house or a light. Our village began on the Long Row, a straight road, and the only good one we knew, it seemed to us so very wide as two waggons could pass without one going into the ditch. It came under the Depwade District Council and was kept in condition by two roadmen. D.R.D.C. was stamped on all the tools and I once asked what it meant - the answer "My dear that mean Dig Right Deep Colliel " The district surveyor who was nicknamed 'Gay stockings' would cover the whole of the Depwade R.D.C. on a bicycle, and as soon as he was spotted paddling round the corner the roadmen would be working at double strength, slashing at the hedges with their reep hooks, digging out the gromps, filling up the pot holes, scything the verges. After a few words and questions Gay Stockings would mount his bike, and after touching of forelocks, this surveyor started off to view another village.

The men breathed a sigh of relief, downed tools, sat down on the brow, had a drink of cold tea, and "Thaes the ind o' that ow! B-----for a time!".

Across the very wide common land, running almost the length of the Long Row were four cottages where lived the farm labourers.

There was no path leading to these cottages, and through all weathers the inhabitants and trades people had to plod through mud and grass. The postman bumped over the tufts of grass on his bike like a clown at a circus, always whistling. The paper girl skidding and sliding on Smith & Sons red bike, and the baker and the butcher delivering their small orders found it best to go by foot. The little houses with no water or electricity were clean and warm, all tied cottages, nearly all full of children, the gardens were bright with flowers and the turkeys gobbled by the pit where the eels were in an adjoining meadow.

At the other end of the Long Row was the Horse Shoes Public House, and next to that another cottage, which though quite a portion of it had fallen down, was occupied by a Horseman and his wife. Horsemen were the good man's life, he was so kind, was Uncle Tom, with the longest pair of legs we ever saw. Father said they finished at his neck, we, as children tried to fathom it out but couldn't really make sense of it, however, we accepted it as one of father's specials, and never mentioned it outside the house. Uncle Tom died and the little old lady bravely stayed on in that broken down old house, tending her garden and loving to talk about it. She had an amazing sense of the weather, and would be petrified of a thunder-storm, and as we stood at our gate, there she came

down the hill like a little speck wending her way to her sister-in-law, there to spend the night. As she passed by carrying her long bag in which was an alarm clock and her night clothes, she wiped her continuously weeping eyes and said "That fare right tempestuous, I thought I'd better come and stop with Alice", and mother would say "Come you an' eat down for a little while" which would usually hang out for a few hours. Sure enough that night there would be a tempest, and the next morning everything smelling like Heaven, the little old lady would once more appear on her way home, carrying her long bag with the alarm clock.

Turning from the Long Row to the Gissing Road, we passed along common land on both sides of the road, where grew the rhives, grass, miniature pansies and the lovely little flowers with which we made posies. There was a little piece of ground which was called "Dada Yard", which grew the grass which father used to cut for hay. He would take me in his pony cart and be so happy making the hay cocks. It may have been a garden at one time, as a most beautiful Maidens Blush Rose grew in the hedge and father would say "Jest you look at that maw, there ain't nothin' to touch that for beauty".

Further down the road in a little one up and one down house which was called Uncle Tom's Cabin, lived Mrs. Rose-an-Nelly, we, as children, took it as all one word, though they were really mother and daughter. Spotlessly clean this little house and garden

was, and you could eat off the floor of the coal shed.

Regularly every Monday, come wet or fine, the washing was hung on the line. Feather stitched calico drawers flew in the wind looking like the special sort of flags on an aerodrome, and snowy white sheets and pillowcases would have brought shame to anyone with a washing machine.

Further on lived the only shepherd with his kindly wife and some. Such a kindly soul she was and never an unkind word did she say of anyone. Her large family kept her busy and there was always a smell of dumplings on the boil, pork-and-apple or beef, as we approached the house. In the garden grew an enormous pear tree, a William Pear it was, and there was always one to be spared for any child that happened to pass by.

Wherever there were sheep there was mud, it covered the roads, and the meadows were like quagmires. The shepherd wrapped himself in sacks from head to foot to keep dry and warm as he sat on the brow with his two dogs beside him in all weathers. He could neither read nor write but that was no drawback to him, he was an excellent shepherd. A passing photographer looking for a suitable picture for Armistice Day spotted him with crook in hand, surrounded by sheep, and it was the talk of the village for weeks after that 'Ow shepherd had got his name in the paper'.

Past our house, past the farm where we bought our butter, and over the arch on the right lived the carpenter, and next door to him the Blacksmith. The carpenter's shop faced the road, and as we passed on our way to school we would pick up the shavings all curly which blew up the street, and fix them to our hair. There was plenty of work of every kind for the carpenter and his 'prentice'. Off he went in the morning in his pony cart loaded with planks rattling along the very stony roads. A large family of very pretty children he had, faces always shiny, always clean and it was a sight to behold them all sitting round a meal table.

Coffin making was one of the carpenter's specialities, came a death in the family the carpenter was sent for under cover of darkness, the body always remained in the house, and the measuring up, decision of linings, and type of wood being completed, the operation commenced. All through the night the carpenter and his 'prentice' worked hammering, sawing, planing with the light shining out into the darkness from under the door.

In the morning on our way to school we walked by quietly, knowing that something had 'bin a-gorn on' owing to all the piles of shavings which lay so curly along the gutters, and another sign was that one of the doors of the carpenter's shop was shut, so as not to have the coffin in view of the passers by. The brass plates were screwed on, handles fitted and the coffin loaded onto the cart

to await the darkness, when once more the house of mourning would be visited. Not a chink of light showed through the blinds, not a window open, everyone was draped in black which they had 'kupt by them', and no one spoke above a whisper.

The body was placed in the coffin which usually laid on the table, and many a remark after "The por ow' B-----had wassted away to nothin', there warn't a mite o' flesh on im". The hearse was brought out from the bank of the building, the horse had an extra rub down and on the day the carpenter did all the honours. The mourners all in black walked behind the hearse with much weeping, and at the end of the ceremony, the bill was settled with a shilling for a drink.

Opposite the carpenter lived two of the dearest little people, Aunt Julia and Aunt Polly as they were known to many. Aunt Julia was very delicate and spent quite a lot of time resting on a couch in the neatest little room you ever saw. The little glass door was artistically decorated with pressed grasses, ferns and flowers. The tiny garden bursting at the seams with every old fashioned bloom imaginable, and little Aunt Polly in her gray dress and white collar would lean over the gate as she waited for her two little charges from Dr. Bernardo's Home, to appear round the Post Office corner holding hands. She gave happiness to many a little home child, and sad

they were to leave her.

Through the street and up the Chestnut Avenue, and under a spreading chestnut tree was the Blacksmith's shop - the smithy adjoined the Chequers Inn which was very handy for those who brought a horse to be shod - Neighbour Reeve as he was called, was a very gentle man, and there he stood at the Smithy door in his leather apron, his handsome face amused with smoke, smiling away and always ready for a gossip. The yard was full of binders, harrows, hurdles, ploughs, old bits of iron, and the whole place smelt of horses' hooves.

The horses were driven into the shed adjoining the forge, each given a nose bag, and Mr. Reeve standing to one side of the horse, "Come on, git up" and the horse lifted its foot to be examined, resting it on the Blacksmith's knee. Having pulled off the old shoe and prised out the spare nails, he then worked the bellows, the fire grew radder and hotter, in went the bar of iron and when it was "fit" out it came to be hammered into shape on the anvil. 'Ping!' - Tap! , Ping! - Tap! ' The sparks flew. After this it was plunged into a copper full of cold water 'to cure off a bit' and then with a sizzling

sound and a smell of hot horn and a 'Hup' the horses
 foot was raised and the shoe tried for size. The same
 procedure on the other foot. Within the Chequers there
 would be plenty of laughter, the men sitting on the
 settle with their mugs of beer at four pence a pint,
 and a few ponies tethered with their carts to the rail
 outside specially erected for the purpose; Dealers,
 farmers, rag and bone men, hawkers and occasionally a
 most beautiful stallion decked with brasses braids and
 ribbons tied to the back of a cart, we knew it came from
 somewhere nearby but why, we never asked and never knew.

And there from the window "God strike me dead if I'm
 tellin a lie" "Wh Blaast" "They tell me ow so an' so ha'
 gotter git out o' his house cum Michaelmas, well he
 'ont taake a lot o' movin', haren't got no more 'n a
 cart full o' fanniture, they say he lay rough most o' the
 time, Gatter go to the Union accordin' to what I can hear"
 and so the talk went on, all amounting to nothing, but a
 very pleasant way of spending an hour.

About two miles from our house as the crow flies we
 could see the top of Gissing Mill, the old aeils grinding
 away on windy days. Mother bought her flour in ten stone
 sacks, as did quite a number of people. The miller was a very

tall man and as tiny children we thought he must be a giant. The flour was delivered by horse and cart and Harris, Miller, Gissing, was printed on the side. With the sack on his back he would open the back door and plunk the flour on the dresser, a cloud of fine dust arose on the impact. "There you are ma'am. " and he would lean his arm on the top of the door and tell mother the news of his family. As soon as he had gone mother would get up on a stool and with her whole body shaking sift enough flour for the next baking, as "You never know what git into it" said mother.

CHAPTER 22. - UNCLE GEORGE.

Though we took great care of our footwear and changed it as soon as we reached home, the very rough roads of fifty years ago very quickly wore out the soles, and so we had to make regular visits to Uncle George, otherwise 'Shindy Cooper' the shoemaker. Mother gave us instructions as to what was to be done, a patch here, a new toecap, a few brads and hobnails, a tip on the heel, and "Du you be careful how you speak and keep yourselves tidy" said mother. We set off for school with a bag of footwear being swung round and trailed on the grass, and quite looked forward to seeing Uncle George. After school off we trundled to the other end of the village,

stopping on the way to pick white violets, or admire the beautiful king cups which grew in the wet part of the school meadow - or during the season picking eloes and nuts which grew just over the "Walkers Arch", and past Liza Wright's cottage. Uncle George and Aunt Phyllis lived in a cottage opposite the rectory. Everything was perfect in that front garden, first the neat little gate always carefully shut, and then an uphill path beside which grew the finest box hedge we had ever seen, it was so high and about two feet thick, and perfectly trimmed, and as we walked along we gently shook it and from one end to the other it shivered like a jelly. Round the corner we went and there was Uncle George's shop at the end of the cottage. There were half doors and the top half was usually open, and by standing on our toes we could peer over the bottom half. There sat all twenty stone of Uncle George on a hard old bench, with a last between his knees, surrounded by his tools of trade. On his hands he wore thick leather guards to protect them from being cut by the waxed threads, as he sewed the soles and the patches by hand. At his feet was a three legged coddron in which he soaked pieces of leather, and on a shelf drying off would be a row of newly made or repaired boots and shoes. A lemon a day was brought to him by Aunt Phyllis, and this Uncle George would suck at intervals. He was such a happy man and would sit

hammering away, his mouth full of nails, and never a miss hit, or else, when his mouth was empty, singing 'Disposer Supreme' - and then look up to see those faces peering over the door. "Hello Hello, Lordy, Lordy, look whose here, all Collie's gals, come on in!" (My father was known as 'Collie Brighton')

"Please Uncle George, Mother said will you mend these, and please can we have that pair by Saturday night?" "Well now, let's have a look, set you down a minute!" and after we had repeated mother's instructions there would surely be a mallow apple, perhaps so big that with his hands he would break it into four. Uncle George's apples would seem to last until the following season.

Then along came Aunt Phyllis so kindly, with her offers of red beet, cabbages, lettuces for Aunt Ettie, "And I've rinsed them so they won't take too much water, and would you like a bunch of flowers?" Of course we would, and how happily we went home with all these lovely goodies, and how happily mother fetched water from the pit for washing the vegetables. Dear Uncle George was very special, as were so many others in our little village, kindly, happy, contented, on occasions a bit of scandal, but the best place in the world to live as a child.

And in the last sixty years have disappeared the Horroshoes

and the Chequers Inn, the Blacksmith, the Carpenter, the Miller
the Cobler, the Post Office and the shop.

AND AS THE YEARS ROLL BY,

WITH JOINTS RHEUMATICY -

FOR YOUTHFUL DAYS WE SIGH

UPON THE GRASS TO LIE

A-GAZING AT THE SKY.

T H E E N D.

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SwA 16.7.85