THIS IS MINE

The Recollections and Reflections

of

C. D. SMITH

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms;
Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like a furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the canon's mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lin'd,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances,
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose, well sav'd, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice
Turning again towards childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion;
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans every thing."

".... the infant .... in the nurse's arms "

CHAPTER ONE

It has been said there is the material for a book in the life story of every one of us: this is mine.

I was born on the 30th January 1904. My parents then occupied a flat over a shop in Meads Street, Eastbourne, and this was my birthplace.

My father's family were Somersetshire folk. My grandfather, Frederick Smith, came from Five Head near Taunton. He was a farm labourer. He married a girl - my grandmother was called Polly - in domestic service in the neighbourhood and they went to live in Curry Rivel. Ten of their eleven children were born there. The family then moved to a cottage called Haywards Way situated just outside Drayton on the road to Muchelney. This cottage was a "pegged cottage": the farmer pegged out a piece of waste land and, after waiting a certain time, built the house for his labourer, my grandfather. There were no deeds to the property and when my uncle Jack, many years later, bought the cottage so that my grandparents could continue in their home there, documents had to be prepared.

My youngest aunt, Kathleen, was born in Haywards Way and lived the whole of her long life there. She went to Drayton school, became a pupil-teacher there and then spent her life as a teacher at Drayton, Muchelney and Hambridge schools.

My grandfather's job was, largely, care of the horses. I still have some of the brasses that decorated the harness. Between Drayton and Muchelney there is a railway line, now disused. The bridge over the road was low and provision for high loads was made by having a raised side road and a level crossing. The gates of this crossing were operated by a railwayman's wife

who was, most unfortunately, very deaf. My grandfather was crossing the line with his team when an unsignalled train ploughed into it. Grandfather was unhurt but was so shocked at the death of the horses that he was ill for some time.

In those days there were among the rural communities organisations called clubs. These guilds were part social, part mutual benefit societies. My grandfather was a dignitary of his: I still have the brass ornament that topped his staff of office.

Grandfather's working clothes were of corduroy and, I believe, so sturdy that they lasted a lifetime. In wet weather he fastened a sack round his shoulders and had another as a hood over his head and down his back. I know, however, that his best clothes did last his lifetime. They included a low crowned, wide-brimmed felt hat and black frock coat. His weekly wage was about twelve shillings. I recollect the last time I saw my grandfather. I stood at a gate watching his gnarled figure on the skyline, bent to the task of stooking field beans.

My grandmother was at once quite ordinary and quite excellent. She presided over and cared for her family. She was skilled in all the country crafts. She had a considerable knowledge of the medicinal properties of the flowers and plants in the hedgerows. The cottage industry she took part in was the preparation of willow wands for basket making. In the low lying country round about Sedgemoor osiers or willows or, as they were called locally, withies are cultivated. Quantities of these wands were distributed to the cottagers. In the cottage gardens a stake held two springy steel flat rods. The willow wands were pulled through between the rods and the soft bark peeled off on each side. The name of the folk dance, strip the willow,

is exactly descriptive. The wands were left out on the hedgerows to dry and were later collected by the basket makers.

My grandmother survived my grandfather by a few years.

Some members of my grandfather's family went with sheep to New Zealand where the descendants of those sheep now populate the Canterbury plains. The men stayed to farm. An uncle of mine, Burt, returned to this country during the First World War with the Anzacs. He visited us in Eastbourne and such was the resemblance to my father that people wondered how my father got himself into Anzac uniform.

My aunt, Bessie, married the son of the next door neighbour in Drayton - next door being half a mile away - before going off to New Zealand. I remember the wedding feast. It was taken, picnic fashion, in the field opposite Haywards Way.

Grandfather's youngest son, Herbert, lived at home and worked as a labourer till he joined the army to fight in France in 1915. He was very strong, able to carry two hundredweight of lime when working at a lime kiln. He, as well as the New Zealander, Burt, were both killed in France. Herbert was married while on leave and his wife bore my cousin, Clarence, who died recently.

My father's eldest sister, Alice, married a cousin, Bill Smith, a picturesque scamp, a Boer War veteran who had served with Baden Powell in South Africa. His nickname was Cocktail !

Another uncle, Jack, was butler and general factotum to a family in Weybridge, Mr and Mrs de Vere Wheeler of Weybridge Towers. The Towers was a remarkable place. The nucleus of it was a small house built in the style of a ship of Nelson's time and, indeed, was the home of Nelson's friend Hardy.

A much bigger, grander house was added to the small one. It included a great hall, a staircase and a billiard room. On to that was added a big conservatory and, alongside it, a ballroom with a stage. This ballroom was often lent for functions to local organisations. Uncle Jack was joined from time to time by two of my aunts, Daisy and Mabel, as cook and housemaid. I went many times to stay at Weybridge Towers. I have a dim recollection of going, very grandly, in a carriage with Mrs Wheeler when she went to open a fete in Shepperton. I remember, too, being sent to the bottom of the big garden to practise on my bugle ! Many, many years later the Wheelers' daughter, in very reduced circumstances, would visit Uncle Jack, then living at Haywards Way, for loans of money: an odd change of roles. Mr Wheeler derived his wealth from property he owned at Eastbourne.

My father, Harry Smith, was the eldest of Fred and Polly Smith's family. After leaving school at Curry Rivel he entered the service of the vicar there, a wealthy gentleman whose name I forget, as stable boy and later coachman. My father sang in the church choir and spoke of singing in the Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester Cathedral. Years later, on a visit to Curry Rivel church, I saw his name in the vestry where his cassock had been hung. Of the tales of his boyhood I recollect a few. One related to the regular flooding of Sedgemoor. He with others had to take supplies by rowboat to the stranded villagers in Athelney, Chedzoy, Middlezoy and other villages. The '-ey' suffix to the village names, meaning island, points to the low-lying often water-covered nature of the land there. The letter 'z' occurring in the place names is, I take it, the cartographers way of reproducing the Somerset pronunciation of 's'.

My father also told of the prank of driving a cow to the top of Burton

Monument. This monument, standing on a bluff above the moor, is a landmark for miles around. It commemorates a byegone battle or person. It is not effective as a memorial: no one seems to remember why it is there !

My father moved with his employers to a parish near Bournemouth. Then he left this employment and, in the 1890s, went to Eastbourne to take a job as gardener at a girls' private school. My father told of a very vivid recollection of his at this time. He was, in 1902, able to watch the teams of 20 horses hauling the great blocks of masonry with which Beachy Head lighthouse was built. The sections of the building were taken to a point on Beachy Head and slung down on a system of wires to the rocks on which the lighthouse now stands. A notable local worthy, a builder named Hazeldean weighing around 20 stone, was said to be the first to be sent down the wire from the cliff top to sea level, 575 feet below.

At the girls' school my father became a sort of majordomo, dealing with traders, builders, the fire drill as well as gardening. He, then aged 30, married the school matron who was 12 years his senior. They were a very good-looking couple, my mother having beautiful golden hair. The proprietress of the school was a very autocratic, aristocratic lady, a Mrs de la Mothe. When she was told of her matron's and gardener's intention of marrying, she asked if a child was expected. My mother was speechless with fury, she told me.

My mother, Sarah Isabella Shackle, was said to come of a family of Scandinavian origin connected with the timber trade into Hull. She spent her early life in Chepstow. Grandfather Shackle was then a traveller for a brewery. Photographs show him, in early life, a sailor and skipper of private yachts. He married twice. Of my maternal grandmother I know little

beyond the fact that she had a large family. Some of these aunts and uncles I knew slightly. One, the eldest Bessie, I shall mention later. Others emigrated to New Zealand. I have, therefore, many New Zealand relatives on both sides of my family. Some of them I met down the years when they visited this country. My mother's sister, Alice, was an influence in my life. She was very pretty, very smart, very lively and was the leading figure in the family.

Grandfather Shackle married again: this time to his deceased wife's sister. At the time this was illegal but since then the law has changed. The daughter of this marriage was my aunt Nancy of whom I saw much during my life. Around the turn of the century Aunt Alice Shackle was joined by Aunt Cissie Ashman. How this came about I do not know but they were lifelong friends and companions. Together they acquired a small hotel called Quaintan House, just off the sea front at Weston-super-Mare. Later the two adjoining houses were added and the whole became the York Hotel. This very pleasant hotel flourished for many years until the deaths of, first, Aunt Alice and then of Aunt Cis. Some time in those early years Aunt Alice met and married Uncle Joseph and became Mrs Thorn-Evans. Mr Thorn-Evans spent the few years of married life at the York. Aunt Cis remained there, too, continuing to help with the management.

The four ladies, my mother, Aunt Alice, Aunt Cis and Aunt Nance would go off separately or together to call on a lady living in Weston who they called Lanny. She was a fortune teller but I never heard if her prophecies were either momentous or accurate. Uncle Harry Ashman and Aunt Nance were married from Quaintan House as, also, a little later, were my parents.

My parents moved into their flat, called Downs View, in Meads, Eastbourne.

Here, after about a year, I was born. My mother was then 43 years of age and the birth was a difficult one. The struggle to save her life was hard and my survival was rather incidental. My father's third youngest sister, Daisy, joined the household and for the early months of my life was my nurse.

For the first seven years of my life I suffered very badly from asthma. A recollection of this is of the smell of the fumes of Potter's Asthma Powder which I used constantly to relieve the difficulty of breathing. The only later effects of asthma is a faint discomfort at hay fever time if I walk in or near a crop of buttercups. In those years, too, I had diptheria and spent a week or two in the isolation hospital in Old Town, Eastbourne.

At this time a number of 6-bedroom, semi-detached houses were built in Beachy Head Road, just opposite a row of old flint cottages. My parents bought one, called it Beachy Rise and ran it as a small boarding house from 1905 to 1921. My very earliest recollection is of living there and of being put into trousers for the first time. At that time the custom was for infants to wear frocks: I suppose this was to make changing easier until they were "dry".

Eastbourne is, I think, the finest of all the south coast towns. The dukes of Devonshire were landlords of much of the ground on which the town stands and had a big house there called Compton Place. The seventh duke presided over the design and building of a big proportion of the town. The result is an orderly arrangement of wide, tree-lined roads and a splendid seafront with spacious flower-decorated lawns and gardens.

The district of Meads lies under the easternmost slopes of the South Downs, sheltered from the prevailing south west winds and comfortably distanced from the rest of the town. In my young days Meads had a strong

spirit of place, genius loci. Life there was focussed on the church, the school, the village hall, the working men's club and the two public houses. There were a great many private schools for the sons and daughters of the wealthy: one might describe the existence of these schools as the local industry.

An early photograph shows the district dominated by All Saints Anglo-Catholic Convalescent Home. A group of small houses at Holywell were said to have been the homes of fishermen and, possibly, smugglers. A row of them stood on what is now the car park of the Pilot public house. Here in a little shop in a front room we bought sweets - liquorice strips and small bags of sherbert. Meads Street was the shopping centre. The Ship public house faced the fire station. The fire pump was hand-drawn and stood in the space under the flat occupied by the fireman, Coombes, and his family. It was claimed that the Meads fire engine, pulled by volunteers, was always first at any fire in Eastbourne.

Just off Meads Street is Meads Village, a group of forty small houses with no back gardens but ranged in a square with their vegetable plots in the middle - a very picturesque plan. Backing on to one side of this square with its front in Beachy Head Road was our house. I remember the last farm worker to live in the cottages opposite Beachy Rise. He was a shepherd, bearded, very silent with a faraway look in his eyes as he moved slowly up on to the Downs to herd his flocks.

On the corner of Meads Street was the village hall which was, probably, originally the school. Nearby was Meads Place, originally the farm. This is a lovely building. My father worked there some years later as gardener and I worked there as a boy, cleaning shoes and knives and helping in house and

garden. I remember the place for its chintzes, dark polished woodwork, stables and greenhouses. For years I longed to return to Eastbourne and possess the property. Happily that longing faded !

A short distance away stood the church of St John the Evangelist. In it I was christened, in it I sang in the choir for six years, in it I was confirmed and in it, in 1930, I was married. It was, I used to think, a handsome, rather austere building. On its tower stood a graceful steeple. The church was badly damaged by bombs from German sneak raiders during the 1939 war and, when repaired, the squat tower was left without its steeple.

Once at St John's during the service the collection was made with the congregation standing. As each person made his or her contribution, they knelt. This was an unusual procedure. I with another boy had no money and so were left standing. I still squirm with embarrassment when I recall the incident !

There was a gloomy row of little old houses behind the Ship public house in Meads Street and behind them a gymnasium, scene of some village functions and of my efforts as a gymnast.

The village school was the last building westward under the slopes of the Downs. I attended it till 1916. The school is in what we children called the first valley. The second and third valleys were created by a road, called Dukes Drive, winding up on to the Downs, carefully graded and having three or four acute-angled bends. A tunnel ran from one valley to the next. Boys would, occasionally, crawl through this tunnel and return to school, smelling horribly. In a corner of the playground shallow depressions in a certain pattern had been left in the asphalt for use in the game of marbles, or mivvies as we called them. Marble playing is a distinctively Sussex game

and we played it along the streets to and from school while the craze for doing so was on.

I recall other games which took their turn in the crazes for playing them. There was "horses", in which a child tied a cord to the arms of a companion and went through the motions of driving a horse. Hoops were universal. Some were of wood and some of iron. These latter often broke and were taken to a blacksmith for repair. I vaguely remember that the blacksmith's shop was in South Street down in the town of Eastbourne. Tops came in a number of styles, the most exciting being the flying top, shaped rather like a mushroom and, when struck with its whip, flew considerable distances, sometimes through windows.

There were sheds in the school playground for use in bad weather where many traditional games were played. One of these I have never seen described although I had a brief glimpse of it on a piece of very old film. Two teams of boys were involved. A line of boys bent over and grasped the seat of the lad in front of him. From the other team a boy hurled himself as far as he could up the line of bent backs, followed by his teammates. If the line did not collapse before all were clinging on to it, the boys yelled, "Hi cockalorum, chick, chick, chick," as many times as possible before all the players fell in a heap.

Cricket and football took the traditional places in the lives of the boys. In Meads we were in an extremely fortunate position in that many private schools in the district had splendid playing fields and the village children had free use of them. We played matches against the private school boys at both games and spent hours in the nets on summer evenings. In St Andrew's school field nearest to Meads school, we were given small sums of money for

time spent weeding the turf.

One girls' school, Clovelly Kepplestone, had a field near the seafront where the girls played lacrosse. The village boys watched - and, possibly, gave wolf whistles - I expect I was among them. Many years later one of these girls was to be the mother of my son-in-law.

Oddly, the boys and young men of Meads had a period of playing baseball. During the first war Canadian troops were quartered in All Saints Hospital and played their national game in the Warren Hill school field. The local lads joined them and were seen walking about with baseball bats and catchers' gloves. I am glad to have been able to learn what a splendid game baseball is.

CHAPTER TWO

I recollect very well my first bewildering day at Meads Church School. The teacher's name was Miss Smith and one of the boys in that infant class was Arthur Smith. Years later I was best man at his wedding and, in 1976, with my wife I attended the celebration of his golden wedding.

The headmaster of that time was Mr Capon who lived with his family in a small house in the corner of the playground of the school. I remember little of my studies at that school but - autobiography cannot be modest - I have kept a report in which Mr Capon describes me as the best of his time !

Children from the farms on the Downs and from Beachy Head coastguard station used to walk the several miles over the Downs to attend the school. Some of them were poorly dressed and had only meagre midday meals which they ate sitting in the cloakrooms. These cloakrooms were almost unheated and seemed to me to always smell of damp clothing and carbolic soap.

Memory returns of life in the small Meads community. The local baker, Hammicks, sold off, early every morning, to the children the cakes left from the previous day: we called these "stale dead 'uns". Bread was delivered by a very dignified Mr Bannister from an enormous handcart which we used to help push up the hills when the cart was full. Milk was delivered 'loose' from shining churns of steel and brass carried in crank-axle carts. On one occasion we naughty children turned on the tap of the churn and fled, leaving Denton Road flowing with milk. Butchers' deliveries were made in a rather elegant horse drawn vehicle. It consisted of a flat box with rear opening doors mounted on the axle between two very big wheels. The driver's seat was on top of the box.

Many children's activities could be carried on in the streets, the traffic being very light and almost entirely horse drawn. Many of us were encouraged by our vegetable-growing fathers to take our box-carts-on-pram-wheels to collect the considerable amount of horse droppings. I reflect that, up to that time, the vast amount of horse manure and stable straw from the great horse population in this country must have been far better for agriculture than the modern dependence on artificial fertilisers. All the roads in the district were of chalk and flint, the best road surface for providing a grip for the horses' hooves. All my playmates had scarred knees, the result of falls on the sharp flints. I think there can have been no buses in my early days because I have a clear recollection of a very big, very beautiful horse chestnut tree occupying half the width of Meads Street.

The practice, used occasionally then and never now seen, was of spreading straw on the road outside of a house wherein a person lay ill. The purpose was to deaden the noise of passing traffic. I think this was done only near the homes of the better off.

I remember from my boyhood a number of examples of things never seen nowadays. Many women, my mother among them, used veils when wearing their best hats. It was necessary for them to roll the veil up to their noses when so dressed to allow them to drink. Spats were much worn by men: I had a pair myself. They are now seen only on the ankles of soldiers in Highland uniform.

I recollect, too, the van boys who rode in the backs of the horse carts used for delivery of goods from stores and railway stations. The boys guarded the load and used a short length of rope hanging from the cover of the vehicle to swing up into it.

My mother possessed a household device the like of which I have never seen elsewhere. All the windows of the houses, as was the custom of the time, had lace curtains. They were washed and starched frequently. To dry them they were stretched on a frame made of wooden battens with hundreds of nails protruding. The size of the frame was altered to fit the curtains to be dried by clamping the battens in different positions. The edges of the curtains were pressed on to the nails at intervals of about an inch. The frame held several curtains at a time. The laborious process of hitching the curtains to the nails occupied several members of the household.

The uniforms of postmen of that time were of rough blue serge with red piping. The hats were kepis made of cork, flat on the top with a narrow brim shorter in the front than at the back. Policemen's uniforms were of smooth serge, the tunics buttoned to the neck and full skirted. On the leather belt was threaded a rectangle of leather against which was carried an oil lamp. Part of the uniform was a short cape which, when not worn, was carried rolled into what looked like a stout cudgel: perhaps it was sometimes used as one.

The first time I really noticed a motor car was on an occasion when I was walking in the country with my father and a group of friends. We came on a motorist with a broken down car. A young man in our party was able to rectify a fault and was given a golden sovereign in gratitude.

In those days Eastbourne had a small fishing fleet. Occasionally on Sunday mornings we would go down to the fishing station near the pier to buy, very cheaply, quantities of sprats. Fresh from the sea, they made a delicious breakfast. Eastbourne still has, I think, a big fleet of pleasure boats - rowing, sailing, fishing and excursion. "Any more for the Skylark - a trip

round the lighthouse 5/- " was a phrase used quite certainly by the boatmen on Eastbourne beach. Before the First World War Campbell's paddle steamers plied along the south coast calling at all the various piers. The steamers were laid up in the winter and it was a pleasant voyage to go in them round Lands End to their home port, Bristol, and return by rail.

There were a number of activities in Meads connected with the church and school which were run by or helped by or visited by members of the better-off families in the neighbourhood. I know there was a big element of patronage in this but it also made for a broadly based community. There were Sunday schools and, for the choir boys, a Bible class in the Vicarage before morning service. There was another Christian group, the Young People's Union. All these had summer outings and Christmas parties. I remember little singing, apart from the church choir, and no dancing at all.

The school had a cadet corps, commanded by Mr Capon, which was loosely attached to the Kings Royal Rifle Corps. The K.R.R.C. was a light infantry regiment and, therefore, had green facings on the uniform. The modern light infantry regiment is the Greenjackets. Historically the reason for the green uniform comes from the suitability of the colour for the clothes of the soldiers fighting the Indians in the forests of Canada. Our cadet corps had a band in which I blew a bugle. It was on this bugle that I was sent to practise in the garden at Weybridge Towers when on holiday there !

Recollection comes to me of a number of personalities I knew when a boy. Mr Dolby was a coachman who lived in the Village and passed our house on his way to work. He wore top boots, buckskin breeches, a squat top hat with a cockade and looked exactly like the representation of John Bull except that his waistcoat was not a Union Jack. I remember, too, Mr Delves the

lamplighter - and, of course, the lamp putter-outer. The street lamps were gas lit, had a cupboard at the base of the standard for the meter and an arm on which to rest a ladder. I always thought of the arm as the one from which aristoes were hung when sent *a la lanterne*.

The vicar of that time, the Rev. Mr Salwey, was quite a character. He was a keen climber and went to the Alps every summer. He must have been a member of the group of British climbers, many of them clerics, who made the latter part of the last century a golden age of Alpine climbing. The Rev. Salwey was very proud of his ancestry: he had his family tree on an illustration in the hall of the Vicarage. He had much to do with the wealthy schools in Meads and tended to patronise the villagers. During one of my illnesses in infancy he sent my mother a jar of calves foot jelly. She, fiercely independent, promptly sent it back.

I remember the barber where we boys went to get our hair cut. The poor man was afflicted by having no roof to his mouth. We cruel boys mimicked the sound he made when talking and called him M'yap M'yap. He had in his shop a device never now seen. It was a revolving two handled brush, the drive for which was a strap from a shaft running along the ceiling. It certainly removed the cut hair from our cropped heads.

Mr Holstock, the drill sergeant at Warren Hill School, a little up the hill from Beachy Rise, would accompany the boys as they streamed past our house to church. The boys wore the short Eton jackets which we called bum freezers. Mr Holstock would be dressed in his best uniform - green tight trousers, many buttoned short jacket, pill box hat on the side of his head and a swagger cane under his arm. Arriving at church he left his boys and went back to join my father at the Ship public house. It was noticeable that

the boys from the schools moved about the village in disorderly groups but the girls did so in neat "crocodiles", two by two.

At Meads the seashore is reached by steep paths and steps to a point where the cliffs end and the long Eastbourne brick promenade begins. In my day there was little there but nowadays there is a most attractive cafe and well built bathing chalets.

There is another way down to the sea at Holywell near the Pilot public house. A very steep path is cut in the chalk down to the cliff top which is here only about 50 feet from the beach. Then there are steps to the beach, either cut in the cliff or made of various kinds of wooden structure. They are constantly destroyed by the winter storms and need to be renewed. The approach to this cliff path is by a bridle track passing, first, on the right, St Bedes School where George Orwell was an unhappy pupil, then, on the left, a cottage perched on the cliff edge and owned by a London actress named Winifred Barnes. On a visit to Meads in about 1977 I asked if Miss Barnes' home, Weircombe Cottage, was in danger of going over the cliff. To my astonishment I was told that it was still occupied - by Miss Barnes !

Further down this track in a hollow above the lower cliff top was a water pumping station kept, in my day, as a standby for a newer waterworks and reservoir elsewhere.

Between Holywell and Beachy Head there are more of these hollows, like great scoops in the hillside. Their names are Whitbread Hollow and Francis Bottom. Going inland from Beachy Head in a line all the way to Lewes is a series of these combes (or cwms or corries or cirques). They form the eastern escarpment of the South Downs. In the one at Wilmington there is,

cut in the chalk, the Long Man, a great outlined figure of a naked man supporting himself with, it has been suggested, surveyor's rods, one in each hand. There is near Lewes a shapely hill called Caeburn with, on its top, a depression known as the Frying Pan. In my young days the custom of having a bonfire and firework display in November on Caeburn was still carried on. For a time the custom was stopped because behaviour became too rough and dangerous. The custom has been revived in recent years.

The writer H.J. Massingham remarked that the South Downs have all the attributes of mountains except height. Firle Beacon is about 900 feet high.

In imagination I will climb Firle Beacon from the village of that name and then continue the glorious three mile walk, all downhill, to Exceat where the Cuckmere river enters the sea. Then between Exceat and Birling Gap I will skirt an area of downland, high and flat, which was used as an emergency landing field during the Second World War. Pilots, after fighting over the Channel, could bring in their damaged, perhaps engineless, planes to this convenient place. Continuing my walk I will pass below Belle Tout lighthouse and go on to Beachy Head and down again to Holywell.

There had been attempts to keep fishing boats at Holywell. About sixty yards out from the beach there is a reef of rocks. A gap had been blown in it, marked with a post, to allow the boats in and out over longer times between tides. However it was found there is too little room on the beach for boats at Holywell.

I and my playmates spent endless hours on the beach. We had a great deal of bathing. I recollect that the very first time I went to bathe in the sea I fell on the rocks, spraining my ankle. My parents forbade me to go again

till, I suppose, the next year. When we became strong swimmers, as most of us did, we gloried in bathing in rough seas.

There is always flotsam and jetsam on the beach between Holywell and Beachy Head. Unhappily perhaps, it was there in profusion during the 14/18 war. A great deal of wood came ashore and was collected for firewood by boys and men. Some of the timber from the sunken vessels, such as teak and mahogany, was too good to burn and could be used for joinery. I can remember butter washing up together with other miscellany. On one occasion crates of oranges were given up by the sea. These oranges were good eating if not kept too long. Mines and, more rarely, torpedoes were found on the beach and had to be reported to the police. Once in a while, alas, one found the body of a drowned person. The girl, later to be my wife, came upon one such body.

Catching prawns occupied children and adults. For this we poked about in the rock pools at low water with a hand net or we set nets to be covered at high tide and collected on the ebb. I recall sand line fishing. A line was stretched between two boulders with baited hooks on it at intervals. When the tide ebbed the catch, usually dog fish, were there for the taking. One of my small apocryphal tales is that when my dog barked at the fish jumping about on the line the dog fish barked back.

Occasionally we boys would go too far round the headland, stay too long and get ourselves cut off by the spring tides. We had, perforce, to wait for the ebb and arrive home very late to our worrying parents.

The coast from Eastbourne round to Seaford is subject to much sea erosion. Oddly this is the opposite process to that seen further eastwards. Pevensey Castle was, in Roman times, on the seashore but is now three miles back from Pevensey Bay. As I have mentioned, the flights of steps at Holywell are

washed away time after time in the winter. The same thing happens to the chalk steps at Cow Gap, a mile or so westwards and the next point where one can get down to the beach.

Immediately opposite the lighthouse at Beachy Head, a small square chamber had been cut in the cliff and was intended to be a shelter for shipwrecked mariners. This had been the work of Parson Darby of East Dean - hence Darby's Hole. We boys entered it: I never heard of anyone else using it. It is now buried beneath great falls of chalk.

At the very tip of the headland, at sea level, a line of rocks, many of them a curious mushroom shape, extend into the sea and trap a beautiful spit of sand from the eastward set of the currents. This sand is known as Fallen Sands (or possibly Forlorn Sands) and as one stands there one can see Beachy Head in sharply magnificent profile with its hundreds of horizontal black lines in the white chalk and the shapely lighthouse at its foot. It is one of the finest views I know. It really is wonderful: one wonders at the aeons of time through which these flint floors of successive ocean beds had been laid down and now form the lines in the cliff face.

Continuing westwards from Fallen Sands the next point where one can get down to the beach is at Birling Gap. There is an extremely strong set to the sea currents here. The various kinds of steps to the beach have to be rebuilt time after time. During the 14/18 war a small steamer was driven on to the beach just west of Birling Gap and leant against the cliff there. At the end of the war a number of surrendered German submarines were being towed up the Channel. They broke loose in a storm and one of them fetched up leaning against the wrecked steamer. We boys played about on these wrecks and photographed them.

The cliff at Birling Gap has, in my lifetime, receded by many yards. I can recall the top being well beyond the garden of the coastguard station. That garden and its wall are now in the sea. There is a line of bungalows alongside the Birling Gap Hotel and in 1930 or 1931 there was room between them and the cliff top to allow my wife and me to spend a night or two camping there in our tent. Nowadays there is no room to walk between the bungalows and the cliff top.

The next point to the west of Birling Gap where the cliff top sinks to sea level is where the Cuckmere river enters the sea a little downstream from Exceat. In between are the Seven Sisters so called because the top of the white cliffs make a wavy line which rises and falls seven times. The view of this stretch of cliff seen from the sea or from Seaford Head is very fine. It is true that the beach cannot be reached today from along the line of the Seven Sisters but, in my boyhood, there was at Crowlink, one of the valleys in about the middle of these cliffs, a coastguard station and the men in those days reached the beach in several contrived ways such as rope ladders. That coastguard cottage has now disappeared, no vestige of it remains.

Once, on one early morning when staying at Beachy Head, as I was admiring the view from there - and it is a very admirable view - I had my telescope trained on to Seaford Head at the very moment a big cliff fall occurred. A great cloud of chalk dust hung in the air for some minutes.

Behind Birling Gap Hotel and belonging to it used to be a nine hole golf course. For a year or two in my early twenties I had a spell of golf enthusiasm. I had what must have been an extremely flukey hole-in-one at the first hole. The great pleasure of this golf course was, however, the lovely views of the Downs and sea one got from the greens.

It has been said that the last oxen used as draught animals in this country were those on the farm between Birling Gap and East Dean. Oxen are very efficient farm draught animals. In relation to their weight and strength their feet are small and so do little to pack down the earth as they pace over the ploughed ground. The enormous farm machines of today tend to compact the earth and so interfere with root growth and drainage.

CHAPTER THREE

The fine stretch of Downland from Birling Gap to Eastbourne is publicly owned by Eastbourne Corporation. I remember how this came about. A journalist I met years later when we worked together on the Daily Herald had, in his early years, been on the staff of the Eastbourne Gazette. He, he claimed, thought of and launched a campaign to collect money to purchase the land. At one point, to help the campaign, Sir Alan Cobham the aviator, flew in and landed just below Belle Tout lighthouse. I happened to be walking there at the time.

Belle Tout was built in 1832, replacing a temporary light, and found to be less than useful. Its light was so often shrouded in mist and cloud as to be invisible from sea level. So it became necessary to build a new lighthouse on the rocks immediately below Beachy Head. Belle Tout passed into private ownership and between the wars was extensively and expensively made into a summer home by a wealthy surgeon, Purves Stewart. During the second war the hill on which the lighthouse stands was used to carry targets for gunnery practice by troops in training. By accident or purposely the lighthouse was shot almost to pieces. It was restored yet again in 1955.

Between this point and the town are three farms called Odicombe, Bullock Down and Black Robin. The Downs are, ideally, sheep country but big areas are now ploughed - I think unwisely. The Corporation used to own a flock of sheep: I do not know if it still does. I understand that the sheep population of this country would be much bigger were it not for the vast number of pet dogs we allow ourselves to be plagued with. There are two features of these Downland farms which belong to former years. In many

fields there are chalk pits. These provided lime for the fields before the processed form was available. Secondly there are the dew ponds, round shallow bowls, about 20 yards across often situated, surprisingly, on the top of hills. They used to be made of clay laid on straw: concrete is now used. I never learned the scientific reason for the fact they are always full of water.

I was fortunate in having had as a boy this glorious stretch of the South Downs for my playground. I and my companions roamed the Downs, playing our gang games; making "camps"; puffing at lighted bits of wild clematis which we called "jack tobacco"; making whistle pipes by removing the skin from a small length of ash wood, cutting slots and holes in it and replacing the skin. The Downs, with their smooth slopes, are perfect for tobogganing when they are snow covered. On Boxing Day we walked over to Birling Gap or to East Dean where the hunt met. The windswept Downs are perfect, too, for kite flying. We always ran, for no reason I can recall, from the Duke's "cossy". (This word I take to be a corruption of "copper" or policeman.) This kindly one-armed man so described was the agent of the Duke of Devonshire who, in those days, owned part of the Downs. I can recall the exhilaration caused by stinging rain on our faces when we had been caught in a storm.

Blackberries were plentiful and we picked them. Mushrooms we gathered at dawn: the skyscape and landscape are very beautiful at that hour. There was a profusion of wild flowers - cowslips, orchids, scabious and harebells in the Downland turf and, on the cliffs where the earth had not been scoured by chalk falls, vetches, valerian, vipers bugloss and many others. Now, alas the cowslip is a dying race and the bee orchid has disappeared.

In the Cuckmere valley where there is as rich a variety of wild life as

anywhere in the country, I saw, for the only time in my life, the sedge warbler. I can recall lying on the sun-warmed turf by Pashley dew pond, the air heavy with the scent of gorse in bloom, the larks singing overhead, and thinking how much I enjoyed my life in that place.

My parents' boarding house, Beachy Rise, continued to flourish. The guests were usually long-staying. Indeed in the very early days we had a "permanent" guest, a Miss M.A. Woods. She was a great scholar, a University graduate and had one of our rooms arranged as a library. She was influential in the Suffragette movement and had important visitors from time to time, notably Mrs Despard, a prominent radical of those days. Every Sunday afternoon after tea, I went in to Miss Woods' room and had read to me Grimms' fairy tales. I still have a copy of them she gave me. One day she came on me examining a broken-backed volume of Shakespeare: this she had rebound and I still have it. She also brought back from a visit to Germany a musical box which I regret I have no longer.

My mother had to help her run the boarding house a maid called Hilda. She lived with us. She came from the village of East Hoathly about 13 miles from Eastbourne and I used to visit and sometimes stay with her parents there. On one occasion I stayed long enough to attend the village school for a while. A member of this household, I remember, kept ferrets. Encouraged to handle these curious creatures I was duly bitten. Another memory of East Hoathly is of the village general store. Foodstuffs stood around in stacks, there was a stand for transparent topped biscuit tins, sugar was taken from a loaf and put into blue paper twisted into cones. Money travelled from counter to cash desk by being shot in a cylinder along a small overhead railway. All this

was in the style of a byegone age and I am glad to have seen it.

Came a time when our friend Hilda died. She was followed by a succession of young women. In the Asian 'flu epidemic of 1918 the maid of that time died of it. I was ill at the time and remember looking from my bedroom window to see her being carried from the house. She is buried at Langney Cemetery, unknown and unremembered.

On several occasions I stayed at Haywards Way during school term time and attended Drayton village school where Aunt Kathleen was a teacher. My Uncle Herbert was a great favourite and took me on cycle rides round about. He made mysterious calls on people who, I now suppose, were his girl friends.

Haywards Way was, originally, thatched and had a pretty yellow rose tree climbing over the walls and round the windows. We have a photograph of it as it was and others of it at later stages when the roof was tiled, rooms added and windows enlarged. The original cottage had a box staircase with latched doors. This was later replaced by a flight of stairs, for which a bedroom was sacrificed. There was a privy at the end of the garden, known locally as a dunigan. Its earth buckets were covered by a wooden seat - with two holes in it !

Water came from the well just outside the front - no, the only door. We lifted water out with a bucket on a chain, removing the snails and such like as necessary. I disliked the taste of the water and, for drinking, added lemonade crystals. This well never ran dry and the water in it never froze. In the very severe weather of, I think, 1963 when water systems all around were frozen, folk came to the cottage for the water. In later years an electric pump brought the water into the house.

When Grandfather and Uncle Herbert were working in fields near the cottage I took out to them bread, cheese, pickles and sometimes cider but more often cold tea. The cider was carried in "bottles" which were miniature wooden barrels. I still have one of them.

I went out into the fields with the boys from the village at hay making time, turning the hay with hand forks for drying and later loading it on to the wagons. We were present, if not quite helping, at the corn harvest. The grain was cut by a machine called a self-binder. When cut the sheaves had to be stooked, left to dry for a while and were then carried to the rick to await the thrashing process. The whole operation, requiring many hands and being rather enjoyable, is now carried out by combine harvester driven by one man listening to radio on headphones. All the men in the village joined in the carrying - till dark, if the weather was fine. The whole thing was great fun as, indeed, were many farm activities. On one occasion my father and the other men, excited by much cider drinking, decided to load the wagon with special care. When scarcely half full it became so heavy that another team of horses had to be hitched up to pull it out of the earth into which it had sunk to the axles. The boys rode these unhitched, standby teams.

I helped with the rabbit catching when the creatures fled from the last small area of uncut corn. I also learned how to snare rabbits and paunch them. I went eel clotting in the river Parrett. This involved tying to the end of a pole a bundle of worms which, when nibbled by the eels, was jerked into a bath floating alongside.

I watched the ploughing. Sometimes it was done with a horse-drawn plough. I led the loose horse to be hitched to the team when a difficult piece of land required it. Sometimes the ploughing was done with steam tackle. The

engines at the ends of the furrows drew a plough back and forth between them.

Many, even most, farm tasks are not enjoyable. I found that one of the most tedious and tiring is the thinning and hoeing of mangold wurzel plants. The worst job of all, I am told, is picking brussel sprouts in frosty weather.

I went with Grandmother when she went, with others, to the fields to glean. We collected the scraps of grain that had been left on the ground after the harvest was in to feed our small flock of poultry. She would clap carelessly on to her head the traditional white many-tucked linen bonnet: we still have this bonnet.

I went swimming with the boys in the river Parrett. This river flows slowly as it traverses the flat lands of Sedgemoor. Before my time it was used commercially to carry goods to and from Bridgwater. The towpath is, in many places, on raised banks which would, in other lands, be called levees. The floods came up, as they say, every year. Aunt Kathleen when teaching at Muchelney had to be fetched from home in a horse drawn cart along the flooded road. I have seen the field in front of the cottage flooded and covered with water-fowl including swans. The water never quite reached to the house. Once, having to stop on the road from Muchelney to Huish Episcopi to clear the mud from the wheels of my motorcycle, I looked through the hedge to see floods stretching as far as I could see. The lock at Mildenay was a splendid swimming place. It is so to this day but the lockkeeper's cottage has disappeared and the site is used for a rather elaborate pumping station by which the floods over Sedgemoor can now be controlled.

When I was a very small boy I was taken outside the cottage to meet Joe as

he walked past on his way from work. Joe was a deaf mute and, although wishing to show his love of children, his exaggerated gestures and the curious sounds he made frightened me not a little.

The clubs - I have told that Grandfather was a leader of the Drayton one - had, annually, a club night. These gatherings had, in a lowly form, all the fun of the fair. My particular recollection of them is of the purchase of a sweetmeat called parkin and of having water squirted at me - and squirting back - from a container like a tooth paste tube.

There is across the fields from Haywards Way a heronry and it was not unusual to have one of these birds standing by the stream, known as the ditch, at the bottom of the garden. In my early days I had an impression of the country there being heavily wooded. Gradually the great elms have been removed for timber and the saplings are never allowed to grow in the hedgerows because of the practice of cutting the hedges by machinery. I used to be rather scared of the owls which screeched in the twilight. Once one of these birds got itself down the chimney of the cottage. The mess it created in its frantic attempts to escape was appalling.

One of the great pleasures of the holidays at Haywards Way was to go on family outings in a hired horse-drawn waggonette visiting friends and relatives in neighbouring towns and villages. We had relations at Chard named Burt. The uncle there had what I always thought was a curious name, Burt Burt.

Another of my horse recollections was of riding on the bare back of the enormous cart horses when accompanying Grandfather or Uncle Herbert on their way home from work. My legs went only part way over the horses back and I bumped up and down, painfully, on the hard back bone.

Every year, in the right season, mares needed impregnating for the next generation of foals. A man would lead a stallion round the farms needing the horse's services. With his kit on the horse's back, the man would walk, leading his charge. The round completed - and not till then - the groom would mount and ride home. The breed of draught horses for farm work was the big, possibly shire horse and the stallions were splendid creatures. Smaller breeds were used, of course, for pulling the pony traps and small carts.

Another country activity never now seen was stone breaking. The surface of most of the roads was of small stones, giving good drainage and a good grip to the horses' hooves. Bigger stones were left in piles at intervals along the roadside. A man, sack on lap and hammer in hand, squatted by his pile of stones and cracked them down to the right size. This task was used as outdoor relief for workless labourers.

An extra enjoyment of these holidays was the long train journey to and from Eastbourne. Rail travel in those days, with the more frequent stops at busy stations where big staffs of railwaymen bustled about and goods sidings were noisy with great activity, was something to look forward to. I recollect that on one of these journeys home to Eastbourne I was taking a goldfish in its globe-shaped container. I had won it at a stall on the Old Pier at Weston-super-Mare where there were all sorts of amusements, including a great chute down which one rushed in a boat into a water splash. I had been taken to the pier on an outing during a visit to my family in Weston. The goldfish bowl had been placed under the seat in the railway compartment and someone's heel had broken it. Almost at once, however, the train stopped at a station. We jumped out and put the gasping fish into a fire bucket hanging in the row of such buckets as were always found at

stations. Then we begged a jam jar, retrieved the goldfish and continued our journey.

My visits to my family at Haywards Way extended over the first seventyfive years of my life.

" ... the ... schoolboy with ... shining morning face "

CHAPTER FOUR

Several of my boyhood playmates remained my friends down the years. I have told of my long friendship with Arthur Smith. Arthur's father, Jehu, was a gardener at the Vicarage and verger at St John's church. Reg Harmer, son of the coachman of a wealthy family, became a Metropolitan policeman and later a farmer in Cornwall. He died some years ago. Ernest Fuller, a fine cricketer and a candidate for the Sussex County side, was badly crippled with arthritis contracted as a result of a fall out of a tree in his gardening days. He died in 1980. Eric Yates, brought up by his uncle, an antique dealer in Meads Street, joined the merchant navy backed by the influence of Sir John Ellerman, the shipping magnate who lived in Meads. He later worked for a travel agency and shared lodgings with me in the 1920s. We still meet from time to time. Ronald Martin (known to us as Bunt) lived with his grandmother in Meads Street. Our lives ran parallel for a time but a few years after his marriage he stopped writing to us and the friendship ceased. In after years I met a number of old Eastbourne friends and schoolfellows but friendship throughout life held with the men whose names I have mentioned.

My closest friend of those early years and later to be my brother-in-law was James Downer. He came with his parents and sister to live at Meads Institute in 1912, his father taking the job of caretaker at that working men's club. Jim went, of course, to the village school and joined the gang of village boys.

During my schooldays and for some years afterwards I paid visits of varying lengths of time to Weybridge Towers while my uncle and my aunts were

in service there. During one school holiday I bicycled from Eastbourne to Weybridge and back with a school friend. On another occasion Aunt Mabel and I set off on bicycles from the Towers to ride to Eastbourne but gave up at Uckfield, finishing the journey by train. The last visit I paid to Weybridge Towers was in 1934 at the end of my aunts' time there when I took my newly born elder daughter for Aunt Mabel to see. Shortly afterwards the Towers was demolished and smaller houses built on the site.

I find I have considerable difficulty in relating my recollections of my early days with events in the larger world. My memory of the celebration of King George V's coronation is of going with the rest of the Meads school children, in pouring rain, to Gildredge Park, to engage in some activity I have forgotten and to receive my coronation mug. On the day the 1914 war started I had been with a family party to spend the day at Hampden Park, a very pleasant pleasure garden a few miles out of Eastbourne. Returning by bus to the centre of Eastbourne, we found the streets thronged with excited crowds, apparently overjoyed that war had been declared. The joy, we now know, was very inappropriate.

Very soon after the outbreak of the 1914 war a battalion of the Border Regiment was brought to Meads and billetted in the houses there while receiving their early training. Most of the men were Durham miners. At Beachy Rise we had a section of six, all miners, with their corporal, a fisherman. They were kitted out in rather shapeless blue serge uniforms and had almost no equipment. Several things about these men struck the small boy I then was. First was their northern accents: then the way every miner wore a neckcloth knotted at the throat with the ends of the cloth passed through

the trouser braces and brought back to be knotted again.

All the men loved gambling. My mother, martinet as she was, would not allow gambling in the house. The men, therefore, spent much time, crouched low as only miners can, over the back door mat playing the game called pitch and toss.

The battalion moved away to Seaford and returned shortly afterwards fully equipped and wearing khaki. Then the battalion left for France, where, I grieve to say, most of its members died.

The young men of Eastbourne, in many cases, went to war either in the Sussex Yeomanry, a mounted territorial army unit, or in the Royal Sussex Regiment. The Meads men almost all went into a unit called Lowther's Lambs. This was a Royal Sussex battalion raised in an earlier style of recruitment by a member of a local landowning family. Oddly again, I came across an example in the 1939 war of a privately raised army unit of which I shall tell later on. A further reflection on the custom of all the young men of a community entering the fighting services as a group (which probably makes for good discipline as well as for mutual comfort) came on an occasion when I visited East Boldre church in Hampshire, from which village my wife's family came. I noticed memorials to many young men who died on the same date. I realised they all perished when the big ship, I think the Anson, in which they were serving was sunk.

My father spent two periods away from home during the 1914 war. He went for a time back to Drayton to work on the farms there. Later, when Kitchener raised an army by calling up men of 42 years of age, my father joined the Norfolk Regiment and was posted to East Dereham. However he developed a disease in an eye and was discharged after only a few months.

Looking back I now realise that I joined my father in very many activities. He took me on the many visits to Drayton. I helped him as garden boy at home, in our allotment garden and at his places of work. I am a little surprised that I did not, boylike, grudge the time spent working in this way. I enjoyed it and I certainly learned a great deal about gardening. Potatoes were planted on Good Friday; parsnips should be planted on the longest day of the year and taken up on the shortest; it is best to plant while the moon is waxing - I picked up these and many other bits of country learning.

Well before the 1914 war my father took me every week to the old Electric Palace cinema in Seaside Road. After the show he would go into the Prince of Wales public house and send me to a small shop nearby to buy hot sarsaparilla. I cannot remember any of the films I saw at this time: I think they must have included the early Theda Bara and Pearl White series.

My father and I went on bicycle rides into the country often accompanied by Jim Downer or others of our little gang of Meads boys. My father, all his life, smoked a cheap black shag tobacco. He sent me for it to a tobacconist in Grove Road and if I could not get it Jim went instead. Another of our joint activities was "wooding" round the beach from Cow Gap.

In 1916 I, and Jim, came to secondary school age and went off to the Eastbourne Municipal Secondary School, known to us then as the Muni. We went as fee paying pupils: this was a sacrifice by both Smith and Downer families. In the middle of my time at the school I won the annually awarded scholarship for selected pupils. Some years later the school became the Eastbourne Grammar School.

The school had started in small premises in Grove Road but soon moved into

the middle floor rooms of the Technical Institute opposite Eastbourne railway station. Above the middle floor was the art school, below was public library, museum, gymnasium and woodwork shop. Many years later, during the 1939 war, at a time when Eastbourne was subject to "sneak raids" by the Luftwaffe, the Institute was bombed and demolished. These raids were made by the Germans when they occupied Northern France. A light aircraft, carrying two small bombs, would be flown over the Channel at about 5 feet and below the level at which the radar on Beachy Head could detect it. (At this time radar was still known as radio location.) The plane would come in at Birling Gap and fly over the town with machine guns blazing, drop its bombs near the railway and then turn for base by way of Pevensey. On one occasion I was staying with my parents-in-law who were then living in Meads Village. I heard the rattle of the guns and put my head under the bedclothes, it being about 8 am on a Sunday morning. Militarily the raids were ridiculous.

I remember my first day at the Muni. I sat in the front row of desks during an English lesson. The verse being read started: "Old Tubal Cain was a man of might in the days when earth was young." I never came across the words again and I will forbear from looking them up. The boy behind me bullied me for a day or two. He proved to be, however, a minor character. I became, in the next four years, less of a minor character. I was Smith VI when I joined the school and Smith I, a prefect and first eleven (cricket and football) member when I left.

Three or four other Meads boys attended the Muni. Meads is about 2½ miles from Eastbourne station and we bicycled to school, returning at midday for a meal. During my time the school grew and moved to new premises in a big house called Eversley Lodge in the Ocklynge area of the town. This doubled

the length of our journeys - but we still went home to dinner. The school's playing fields were at Hampden Park, a good six miles from Meads, and to them we bicycled on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons. I think of these journeys when I hear of parents nowadays finding it necessary to take their children to school by car a few hundred yards away. When Jim's bicycle or mine punctured we took the other on the bar of his bicycle. When that punctured we borrowed my father's machine, the "super bike" a wonderful old machine, the brake of which operated by plunging down on to the front tyre ! The road down from Eversley Lodge is steep and then had a flint surface. Once, carrying two footballs, I collided with someone at a cross road. I went over the handlebars and broke my nose. My left profile is a little different from my right !

The ample pocket money Jim and I earned at our morning jobs made it possible for us to treat ourselves to lavish ice cream at a swagger tea shop on our way from school. We could buy, too, the wonderful hot steaming jammy doughnuts, brought over the road to the school from the Scotch Bakery by Mr Brooks, the caretaker, during morning break. All my life I have tried to taste doughnuts like the ones of my schooldays but have never succeeded.

I enjoyed my schooldays and I recollect that I knew at the time that I did so. I took a full part in all school activities. I remember the very noisy swimming sessions at Old Town baths; I remember playing in the first XI cricket and football against neighbouring schools, Hastings and Brighton; I remember keeping goal in a team including some masters against Eastbourne Police. The masters regularly played cricket and football with the senior boys. When my favourite master, A.J. Platt, played football with us, the trick was to tackle him vigorously whereupon his pince nez spectacles fell

off, leaving him groping in the mud for them ! I once knocked up seven against Eastbourne College. I also performed in a gym squad at the College.

Another schooldays recollection is of how, when there was cricket on the Saffrons, sometimes when the County side was playing there, we rushed from school and lined the high flint wall alongside Meads Road to watch the game. Apocryphally, we once secured a successful LBW decision when none of the players said a word ! Nowadays when watching tennis at Devonshire Park on television one can hear the chimes of Eastbourne's Town Hall clock. Nostalgia then floods over me !

A very treasured memory of my schooldays is of my friendship with Eric Ravilious. He was quiet, gentle and polite - unlike many schoolboys perhaps. He played right back to my left back in the football team. He later became one of this country's leading artists. He designed a cover for Wisden, a coronation mug and, very importantly indeed, with Bawden, the splendid mural paintings at Morley College, London. These murals were known and admired world wide. They were destroyed by enemy action in 1940. It is a major tragedy that Eric Ravilious was lost when on a sortie with the R.A.F. with whom he was flying as a war artist.

Many of the Grammar (Muni in my day) school boys were the sons of the town's traders and business men. For example, Sidney Caffyn was a member of the family concerned with the big motor firm which bears his name. He entered local politics soon after leaving school and became a very young alderman. I read later that Alderman Caffyn resisted the idea of awarding places at Eastbourne College to Grammar schoolboys, believing it is a bad thing to cream off the best pupils of one school to send to another. I share this view. Years later, Sir Sidney, as he became, took a leading part in

founding Sussex University. His younger brother, Edward, with whom I was on close terms at school, became a soldier and received a knighthood for, I believe, work on the staff of General Montgomery.

Jim Downer was a close school friend of one of the Ford brothers whose family firm covers the south of England as hardware merchants. Another of my close schoolmates was Ray Lamb, son of the Eastbourne pawnbroker. My friendship with Ray had an influence on my life, He was to go into the old Eastern Telegraph Company as had his elder brother. In the absence of any other clear idea of what work I might do after school leaving, I decided also to become a cable operator. When the time came my father knew someone who had a certain influence in the Western Union Cable Company and, not realising the difference betweeen the two companies, I joined the Western Union, the American company.

During the school summer holidays in the war years, the school cadet corps went on a working camp to the Kent hopfields. To secure a place in these parties I had to transfer from the Meads K.R.R.C. cadets to the school cadets. These were attached to the Royal Sussex Regiment. At the work camps we were quartered in Sissinghurst Castle near Cranbrook. The headmaster, Mr Blackburn, was the commanding officer and lived with his family in the castle. We occupied farm cottages. The whole place was very neglected. Years later Sissinghurst Castle was acquired by Vita Sackville West and her husband Harold Nicholson and made into the lovely show place it is today.

Our work at the camp consisted of hoeing in the hopfields, thrashing and grinding corn in a vast machine housed in an old chapel and cleaning and whitewashing the huts in the hopfields in preparation for their accomodation of German prisoners of war. These rows of huts had been used by London East

End families when they moved, in whole communities, into the hopfields to gather the hops. This had been a long tradition.

The school cadet corps made up half a battalion: the other half comprised boys from the town. The whole battalion went from time to time for training weekends to Firle near Lewes. The officers in our case the masters, stayed at the Ram. The boys were quartered in barns. There was a small degree of ill feeling between town and school and at night mangold wurzles were flung about the barn. I cannot remember anyone being damaged. One morning while we boys were bathing in the open air pool on what is now the Glyndebourne estate, the drill sergeant (he was also the gymnastics instructor at school) announced he had just heard that Alcock and Brown had flown the Atlantic and had landed in Ireland. I recall another incident relating to this same drill sergeant. At a gym display he gave a demonstration of sabre swinging. As was so likely, he cut himself but continued, with blood running down his face !

Several older boys, on leaving school, went straight from the cadet corps into the army. One, Bags Newman, after a few weeks and the armistice having been signed, returned to finish his schooling and became battalion sergeant major, resplendent in his former regiment's uniform, the hodden grey kilt of the London Scottish. I recall that when bicycling the kilt hung down on to the mudguard !

I remember little of school academically. I went up through the forms, taking home goodish end-of-term reports and usually finding myself in one of the top three places. A very clever boy named French was always top. Towards the end of my time the lady teachers of the war years gave way to the returning masters. The leaving examinations of those days were the Oxford Senior Local and the Cambridge Senior Local. For some reason I cannot now

recall Jim and I and a boy named Markwick took the Oxford because it was set a term earlier. In preparation for this, A.J. Platt the English master, made me read through Barnaby Rudge three times during a holiday. I also committed to memory about thirty trigonometrical formulae: I cannot now remember one ! We three just scraped through the examination.

During the last year at school I helped another school friend, Baldwin, build a canoe of tarred canvas on a wood frame. We trundled the canoe down to the sea on pram wheels. Baldwin's grandfather had had the early hackney carriage business in Meads: it later became a garage.

Another Meads Muni boy, Billy Bloggs (of all names) later became headmaster of the village school at Shere, Surrey, with which village, half a century later, I had a good deal to do.

CHAPTER FIVE

Life in the Meads community was somewhat apart from that of the town. I and my group of friends spent a great deal of time together. We had, relatively, plenty of money. We all had "morning jobs". We were errand boys for the shops, we delivered newspapers and we spent an hour or so before breakfast in the schools and the big houses cleaning shoes and knives and so on. Knives in those days were all of steel and were kept sharp and clean by being rubbed on a board sprinkled with an abrasive powder. One job I had in the Milnthorpe Road (many of the roads in Meads had Lake District names) was to clean the riding habits of the daughters of the house. These ladies rode side-saddle and the vast skirt that was part of the costume was given to me to clean, splashed with the chalky mud from the Downs.

We attended the cinema very frequently. I must have seen many of the early films but can remember very few. I do remember, however, the early short films of Charlie Chaplin. Chaplin became a cult figure among us. Another curious passion we boys developed was for reading and attempting to copy the figures in the stories of Frank Richards in the boys' magazines, Magnet and Gem. One of the boys really did resemble the drawing of the Greyfriars school character, Billy Bunter: so Ronald Martin was always called Bunt Martin.

There was in Terminus Road a small cinema, the name of which I have forgotten, where some of the seating lined the walls and the viewer was, therefore, sideways on to the screen. At the matinees cups of tea were supplied. The theatre on Eastbourne pier was sometimes given over to seasons of notable films. Here it was I saw "Intolerance" and "Birth of a Nation."

One of the halls of Devonshire Park became a cinema from time to time and we, now growing into quite big schoolboys, attended and sat in the front row from whence we joked with and teased the young ladies in the small orchestra playing for the then silent films.

An odd little amusement in another of the Devonshire Park halls was, for a time, a shooting gallery. Films were shown and one shot at figures on the screen. The film stopped briefly after each shot so that one could see what one had hit.

Eastbourne was very rich in theatre. I saw a number of pre-London showings of plays at the Devonshire Park theatre. At the Pier theatre I remember seeing a production of the "Arcadians." I recall seeing Adele Astaire in a show at the Winter Garden. If her brother Fred was with her then, he made no impression on my memory.

I had a special fondness for the concert party type of entertainment and Eastbourne was, in some degree, the home of such shows. I am glad to recall that I saw the Brownies with their principal, Charles Heslop, and the Fol-de-Rols, with, among others, Eric Barker and Cyril Fletcher. Felgate King had a long running show on the pier at its Pavilion. I believe Sandy Powell followed with another long running show until the building was burned down. A party, aiming to be very superior, which I saw briefly, was led by an actor called McLaine of Lochbuie.

In the latter half of the 1914 war there was at Summerdown Road a very big convalescent camp for wounded service men. Theatre folk among the convalescents formed a very successful concert party and wore, on stage, a smart version of the normally shapeless hospital blue.

In due course we boys took to joining the "monkey parade" along Eastbourne

seafront on summer evenings. We also started to go dancing. The dancing lessons were given in a shop in, I think, South Street. Here it was that my lifelong interest in and love of dancing in its various forms began.

I am told that on some of the expeditions of the Meads boys Jim's young sister, Babs, came along. I have little recollection of this.

I well recall the Armistice Day in 1918. It rained heavily. I borrowed, for some forgotten reason, a bicycle from the girl next door and rode about the town among the crowds of celebrating people. I joined Ray Lamb and went with him to call on his father who gave us wine in which to toast victory. I was 14 then and wine drinking was a new experience.

A year or two before I left Eastbourne a Scout troop was started. Jim and I and a number of Meads boys joined. It was called the 7th (Meads) Eastbourne troop. The uniform consisted of the old-style wide-brimmed hat, blue shirt and blue shorts: I still possess my scout shirt with its cords and badges. My interest in scouting loomed large for the next few years. Soon after the start of the troop a new curate came to St John's, the Rev. Farnsworth and he became the scoutmaster. He too was a colourful character and involved himself closely in all the Meads activities. He rode one of the earliest motor scooters.

Our camping on the Downs became more organised and regular. Occasionally we pushed our trek cart and camping gear over the Downland miles to Jevington where we slept in a barn on the estate of Mr Michalinos, a Greek millionaire race horse owner. He had much of the woodwork on his estate - gateposts, fences and so on - painted blue and white, his racing colours. A story is told of the times when his racehorses were "walked" over to Lewes races. Calling at a pub on his way home, the groom was asked why he had not

backed his charge which had won its race. He replied that he did not do so because he could not find the horse's name in the midday newspaper list of "arrivals".

At some time during my schooldays my mother's eldest sister, Aunt Bessie, turned up as cook in the Eastbourne hotel, the Clifton. She was a married lady and her family lived in Hull. How she came to be employed in Eastbourne I never knew. We called on one another and there came a moment when she gave me a puppy. It was a miniature smooth haired fox terrier and we called it Tiny Tig. When not roaming the Downs with me and my friends it accompanied my father. We have a snapshot of Tiny sitting outside the Ship public house waiting for its master. Our back gate had a square stone pillar: Tiny would sit on top of it watching for me to return from school.

Some years later the Downers acquired another bigger, noisier terrier and gave it the name Tig after my pet. This one, also, became a character. It was known that when courting its ladylove at the other end of the town it would board the bus to Meads at Terminus Road and join anyone who recognised it for a ride home. Later Jim and I both had Douglas motor cycles, the engines of which made a very distinctive sound being horizontally opposed twin cylinder machines. Tig, hearing these machines, would rush out of the house and jump on the tank between our arms. It hoped to be taken for a run on the Downs, as we did so frequently.

Jim's father, Sidney, later to be my father-in-law, was also a very colourful character. I once tried to write his story but I regret I did not persevere. He came from Lymington in Hampshire where his family, legend has it, owned considerable property on the Boldre side of the harbour but "drank it away".

I loved to listen to Sidney's stories. His wife would say, "Stop stuffing the boy with such nonsense, Sidney." Some of his Navy words and phrases I like to use to this day. The floor is the deck and upstairs is topsides. Jack's hard lump is the bundle in a red handkerchief in which, traditionally, a seaman carried his few possessions. To part brass rags means two men have quarrelled: in the old Navy men worked in couples and shared cleaning materials. A seaman's tiddly suit was his best uniform and it was creased in squares showing it had been neatly stowed. Square rig was the peaked cap, double breasted jacket, straight trousered version of a seaman's uniform.

Sidney ran away to sea, as was the tradition among the boys of the Hampshire villages. He went in company with one, Dashwood, on a coaling vessel to Newcastle. They returned by train from that port ! Many years later I met and danced the morris with Peter Dashwood, grandson of Sidney's companion. Sidney joined the Royal Navy and had a hundred tales to tell of his experiences. He had the gruelling training in the old Britannia (up the rigging and down again - last boy down to be beaten with a rope's end) and then served long spells in the Pacific Ocean and in the China Seas. He was aboard the last man-of-war to sail under its own canvas into Hong Kong harbour. As a signaller he spent some time in the lookout post at the top of Hong Kong's famous Peak. Another tale he told was of himself as Empire builder. The Navy, he said, put a round or two into an island to scare the natives into the bush. Then two men, one of them a signaller (Sid), were put ashore and picked up some days later. Thereafter the island was coloured red on the map ! Sidney knew Captain Scott, the explorer, having served in the same ship with him for a time.

Sidney, on one of his furloughs, spent with his relatives in Bournemouth, met a member of the household, a nursemaid Bessie (though always called Bim) and married her. She was to become my mother-in-law. These Bournemouth relatives were named Poose and had a cycle shop which grew into a motor car business. They had one of the first motor cars in the town, a famous one, a de Dion Bouton or some such.

Sidney finished his service afloat and joined the coastguard service. The United Kingdom was ringed with coastguard stations. They dated from Napoleonic times as do the Martello towers along the south coast. The stations were spaced so that a man could leave his own and walk to a point halfway to the next. Here he would "make a meeting" with a comrade and return. On the Downs at Beachy Head the path cut in the white chalk can still be see (where it has not fallen away by erosion) which helped the coastguards find their way in foggy weather.

The coastguards and their families were constantly moving from one station to another and Sidney served in a fair number of them. He was, for example, at Niton, Isle of Wight, when his broken arm was badly set by a drunken surgeon. He was on Guernsey when his son, James, was born there. He was on his annual six weeks course at sea when his daughter, Ethel (invariably called Babs) was born at Osmington Mills near Weymouth. The family went later to Hastings and Eastbourne. While there Sidney left the service and took a job as caretaker at the Working Men's institute at Meads. He remained a reservist.

I recall an odd fact about these coastguard children. The Dungeness station was built entirely on the shingle and to move out of the houses everyone used back-stays or pattens, a primitive ski. When the children

moved on to their next home, they used a curious forward-leaning gait, having learnt to walk on the pattens.

At the outbreak of the 1914 war Sidney was called up. His first posting was, happily to the Beachy Head coastguard station. He was to be "dressed as a seaman", the official description of the bell-bottom trouser uniform of the Royal Navy.

On Beachy Head a small hexagonal watch room had been built by Trinity House from which the passage of vessels up and down the Channel could be observed and reported. It was called the Watch Tower although it was by no means a tower: our family referred to it as the Hut. The watching and reporting service was handed over to the coastguards when Beachy Head station was built a few yards away. Beachy Head coastguard station so became one of the busiest and best known in the service. The building was a row of three-storied houses buffetted by all the winds of heaven. Its commanding officer was always an elderly Navy man. Navy commissioned rank is indicated on the uniform by rings of braid, the top ring with a curl, worn on the lower sleeves. It was unusual to see a man of about 45 years of age wearing only one ring and a curl and he would probably be a coastguard officer.

Sidney's family lived on at the Institute during the 1914 war years. Mrs Downer carried on the caretaker's duties while her husband was posted away. Sidney spent a period of some months at the Cape Wrath station. This station is in the far north west of Scotland and is so remote and life there so difficult that the crew was changed frequently. Many years later, on a camping holiday with brother-in-law Jim, I visited the Cape Wrath station which is also a lighthouse. We had planned to walk the 11 mile track to Cape Wrath from Durness but were turned back by sentries: the Royal Navy was

having firing practice from the Pentland Firth into the glens. Leaving Jim at Durness I made a wide circuit over the moors to reach the station. I arrived pretty well exhausted. The lighthousemen gave me food and drink and during the long, long June evening I enjoyed the walk back. I listened to a chorus of cuckoos and, when I reached the high bridle track above Durness Firth, I drank in the beauty of the scene before rejoining Jim at the tent.

Sidney's wife, Bim, was one of a pair of twins and came of a family of 19. Her father worked on a number of estates in the west country but, being a man of outspoken radical views, was often out of work. I remember his widow, who, although comparatively young, looked, in shawl and bonnet, very old indeed.

Bim had a sister, Ethel, who with her family figured largely from time to time in our lives. Their name is Spranklin. They emigrated to Australia but returned. Before taking over the licence of the Pilot public house in Meads, they all, numbering seven or eight, had to be accomodated in the Institute. One of the boys went with us to the Muni. The Spranklin's next venture was running a small cinema in Lewes. Uncle Charlie operated the machine, Aunt Ethel took the money at the box office, Cousin Ethel played the piano and Cousin Rosie was usherette. Often the film broke and Uncle would call out from the operating room, "Hang on, folks, I sha'nt be a minute," or "Sorry, folks, money back or come to see the finish tomorrow." Later still, the family went to the Channel Islands where Uncle Charlie then ran a licenced cafe.

CHAPTER SIX

In 1920 Jim and I left school. Jim secured a post in the office of the Borough Surveyor of Eastbourne and continued to live at home for some years. I was accepted as a student by the Western Union Cable Company. I left home and Meads very, very sadly. My mother saw me off at Eastbourne station.

That summer I had made the acquaintance of the Clarke family. Mr Clarke was a telegraphist in the London office of the Liverpool Post. Ted, his son, was a keen scout. Mr Clarke met me at Victoria station and took me to lodgings in West Ealing which he had found for me. Here I lived for the next three years and for the first weeks and months was very homesick.

For six months I attended the Western Union training school in a big house in Maida Vale. I remember my first day there. Not realising I could reach the school by tube train to Warwick Avenue, I walked in the rain from Paddington station. I spent the day in uncomfortably wet clothes. I found I had no natural aptitude for the skills of a telegraphist but eventually, after years, I managed to make myself into a good operator. At the school I learned to send and receive in the morse code, to use a stick perforator (a rather primitive device for punching holes, arranged in a certain way, in paper tape), to touch-type in order to operate the various keyboard machines and to go further in the study of magnetism and electricity as applied to telegraphy.

After six months I became an established student and, for a year, spent alternate weeks at the school in Maida Vale and at the company's head office and cable station in Great Winchester Street in the City. At Great Winchester Street I started working on shift systems which were to be the

pattern for the rest of my working life. At first my duties were mainly administrative, that is to say, those of an office boy. Then I worked on the multiplex systems to Paris, Brussels and Antwerp. Then at last I was allowed to work on the transatlantic cables.

The W.U. had a branch office in Liverpool from whence were sent, in morse, reports of the Liverpool cotton stock market. The operator in Liverpool, named Harrison, was reputed to be the fastest morse man in the company. Once, passing the "LV" circuit I heard a message being offered and gave it "G". I heard a stream of morse far too fast for me to read a word ! I had to write out laboriously the message from the inked slip of the recording machine which fortunately I had switched on. Another remarkable cable operator, named Winberg, could give the distant operator "G" and then settle himself leisurely into his chair, put paper into his typewriter and then get the message down keeping a great many words behind the sender.

The morse code is, of course, made up of dots and dashes which when written are short and long marks. When listened to they are short and long sounds. The version used over the cables was different. Dot and dash are of equal length but of different notes. When listened to use has to be made of two sounders instead of one. Symbols came over the cables by means of a line being drawn on a moving tape by ink flowing through a siphon, the dot being a deflection above a centre line and the dash a deflection below it. The cables were referred to by the date when they were laid on the ocean bed - '94, '96 and so on. Signals did not go directly from London over the cables to North America: they were sent over land lines to stations in western Ireland where large staffs of operators transmitted them into the ocean cables.

The staffs at these Irish cable stations, Valencia and Ballinskelligs, had, by all accounts, a wonderful life. They fished and swam, sailed and played tennis and football, attended local dances and had wild parties. This was the time of the troubles in Ireland. The Black and Tans waged war on the Irish. An attack on the Valencia station put it out of action for some weeks. The operators had a great, lazy time, spiced a little by the danger of being shot at as, indeed, some of them were.

We students looked forward to "passing out" as operators and having our turn at these excitements. However within weeks of becoming an operator, new electrical relays were installed at the Irish stations, making manual retransmission unnecessary. I was made redundant as were a couple of hundred operators.

The Western Union, a very big American organisation, had absorbed a number of smaller companies. One was the Direct United States company. Another was one referred to by us as the old Anglo and which was operated from Liverpool. Among the operators made redundant from it was a man named Crowley who joined the Press Association and, years later, moved to the Daily Herald where he became my boss.

Two other men from the old Anglo joined the Post Office telegraph department in Liverpool. Their names were Littlewood and Moores. Together they launched a gambling scheme related to football match results. Littlewood withdrew from the venture after a short time and left Moores as the proprietor. As head of Littlewoods Pools, Cyril Moores became a very wealthy man.

A week or two after leaving the W.U. I received the offer of a job from another W.U. subsiduary, the Direct Spanish company working to Cuba. I was,

however, settled in a new job and turned down the opportunity to go to Havana.

After moving from home at Eastbourne to live in West Ealing I came to terms with life there chiefly because I joined Ted Clarke in the 3rd Ealing scout troop. I changed my blue shirt for a blue jersey. This troop was quite unusually active and enterprising. I became close friends with the members of the Rover Crew to which I belonged and took part in a wide range of activities under the leadership of a most engaging scoutmaster, J.P. Sudbury. He was a Canadian who had lost a leg in the 1914 war. His artificial leg was operated by a leather thong. Sometimes this thong snapped and J.P. would have a couple of scouts to walk with him and operate the leg ! I went with J.P. to what I think must have been the first service to be held at the Cenotaph in Whitehall. We Rovers went constantly to weekend camps in the Northolt area, quite rural then but now entirely built over. I recall walking back in pouring rain the 13 miles from Denham to Ealing pushing the trek cart. We Rovers designed and built our Rover Den. I recall walking one night from my lodgings to the Den through a small public park. I became for a while completely lost, disorientated and panic stricken in a pea soup fog: London was still having these dense fogs in the early 20s.

The Rovers entered sporting tournaments. I recall taking part in a race on a track at the Brentford Football Club ground. We had a football team, playing on a hired pitch on Ealing Common. I, obstinately, always wore my old Muni first XI shirt, quartered blue and yellow. One evening we were at football practice in a field, now covered with houses, at Castle Bar, when I heard a shout of "Up the Muni !" It was from a passer by, Bernard Joy, at

school with me and later a sports writer in Fleet Street. The Rovers attended and also organised dances.

After the first miserable weeks, I had, in addition to my studies at the training school and my scouting activities, an increasingly full and interesting life. I visited my parents at Beachy Rise a few times in the months before they left Eastbourne. On one occasion I took with me a W.U. friend: on another my Ealing landlady and her husband accompanied me. On this visit, I recall, my parents and visitors hired a horse and carriage from a stand on Eastbourne seafront for a day's drive over to Hastings.

My old friend Arthur Smith joined me in my lodgings from time to time and off we went to London theatres. I regularly called on my aunts at Weybridge Towers where we walked on the Surrey commons and had river outings on the Wey in hired boats or punts. I also attended the motor race meetings at Brooklands motor track near the Towers. I saw there a driver named Dixon break the speed record for motorcycle and sidecar.

My aunts from Weston-super-Mare, Alice and Cissie, with sometimes Aunt Nance and Cousin Dorothy, came to stay at the Regents Palace Hotel and I would accompany them on their visits to the theatre. My aunts had friends in Thornton Heath and I was often their guest at dances and dinner parties. Two well remembered parties were at the Waldorf in Aldwych the day it was opened and another at the old Hotel Cecil off the Strand before it was demolished.

There was a certain amount of social life with my fellow students at the school and the young operators in Great Winchester Street. We had a series of dances at the Cripplegate Institute and another at the old Shaftesbury Hotel in Soho. There was another young man from Eastbourne at the school. He had attended Roborough College there. After a few months he left the W.U. to

return to Roborough as a master.

During these months I with one or two others embarked on a course of study at the Regent Street Polytechnic. For a reason I cannot recall I did not finish the course and, therefore, did not take its examination. A year or two later, when working in Bristol, I tried again. This time it was with the picturesquely named Merchant Venturers and there I succeeded in getting a first class pass in telegraphy.

In 1921 my parents sold the boarding house, Beachy Rise, and Arthur Smith, by now working for an Eastbourne house agent, acted in the transaction. (In 1981, he was still working, part time in the house agency business !) My parents moved back, as my father had always wanted, to the West country. After many inquiries and visits my father found and bought the small house and market garden of two acres called Stobo. It was in a splendid situation just outside Portishead in Somerset on the south facing side of the valley running down to Clevedon. This became home and my father's livelihood for the next 31 years. Soon after the move I visited them. Having travelled by train to Portishead station I was taken out to Stobo, three or four miles away, in a horse-drawn carriage or growler.

The house, a roomy three bedroomed one, stood almost alone at the top of the garden which sloped gently down to the road. Behind the house were fields and an extensive woodland. The view across the valley was lovely. The garden contained 500 apple tres, a great deal of soft fruit and two greenhouses, one of which was planted with a fine stock of arum lilies. My father was a very successful gardener and he had special skills in certain directions. This has always puzzled me because, as far as I know, he never

had any formal training. When working in Eastbourne he was called on to tend the vines which were grown in some of the big houses there. At Stobo he sold half his arum lily stock to a Dutch grower for breeding purposes. He also relaid Portishead cricket pitch. He knew and used the botanical names for most plants and trees although he often, amusingly, mispronounced them.

My father sold his produce to visiting buyers, to Bristol market and to my aunts' hotel in Weston-super-Mare. At that time Portishead was connected through Clevedon to Weston by a light railway called the Weston, Clevedon and Portishead Light Railway. If you remarked you were going on the W.C. & P. you would have made a little joke. The railway's main function was to carry the tar macadam made at the Black Rock quarries a mile or two down the valley. It was a delightful railway. It traversed a lovely countryside and, ao the story went, the crew would pause in their leisurely journey to gather mushrooms, to visit their rabbit snares and to pick up passengers at points where the railway crossed a road. My father took his produce in a hand truck to the train-stopping-place and despatched his goods to Weston.

I loved to visit Stobo in those early days. I gave some help to my father. I walked the woods at the back of the house which were, in springtime, lovely with a carpet of bluebells. I walked across the valley, jumping the reams which provided drainage in the valley floor and explored the woodlands on the opposite side. A mile or two along the crest of the hill opposite Stobo is situated Cadbury Camp, a little known hill fort and fine viewpoint. Typical of those walks was one where I emerged from the trees into the dapple-shaded bee-loud glade surrounding the church at Clapton-in-Gordano. I stood for a while in the sunshine at the open door of the church and listened to the service. Then I went the few yards further on to the Black

Horse pub. Often I, and later my young family, went over the hill to bathe in the waters of the Bristol Channel at a spot called the Loaf Rock.

Stobo was just outside the Portishead boundary and in the parish of Weston-in-Gordano. My parents worshipped in the church of that village. My father was a member of the parochial church council and a trustee of its funds.

On one occasion, while still with the Western Union, I became ill and went off duty sick. I went straight away to Stobo but remembered nothing of the journey there till the following day. Many members of our family, many old Eastbourne friends and others came to stay at Stobo. My parents were very hospitable, the house was comfortable, the situation splendid and the countryside around very fine. Arthur Smith spent several holidays there, alone at first, later with his wife. Reg Harmer, who sustained Potts' fractures while skating twice in successive years, recuperated there. Arthur Copp, next door neighbour at Beachy Rise and fellow Muni-boy, visited. My recollection of Arthur Copp at school was of a fool accepting a challenge to drink ink from the desk inkwell. His family moved to Porthkerry near Cardiff where, years later, I stayed with them on my duty visits to the South Wales newspapers.

In the 1970s I went back to Portishead on a visit. The changes I found were dire. Bristol Corporation had bought the area in which the Stobo property stood and built there what I think is a mean and cramped housing estate. Council houses crowd round the old house within feet of the back door. A road has been cut through the fields between Stobo and the woodland beyond. Bristol has also spread some of its overspill population over the coastward side of "our" hills. The beautiful hillside on the Clapton slopes

has been altered vastly to carry a great shelf along which runs the M5 motorway. Near Clevedon a huge chunk has been cut out of the hill to allow the motorway to go through on its way to Bridgwater.

After my parents moved to Somerset I continued to visit Meads to spend time with Jim Downer and other friends there. At first I stayed with my father's friends, Mr and Mrs Sparrow (Mrs Sparrow lived on in Eastbourne to well over 100 years of age) but later Mrs Downer invited me to stay with the family at the Institute. We called the Institute, affectionately, the 'Stute. My weekend visits to the Downers continued for years and became more and more frequent. Babs was, at first, Jim's young sister but my relationship with her became closer.

When Jim, after leaving school and having joined the surveyor's department at Eastbourne Town Hall, had worked in his office for some time he met Hilda Dann. She was a few years older then he. Jim rose in his profession as a road surveyor and engineer and had jobs, first at Woodbridge in Suffolk and, later, in South Bedfordshire. He and Hilda were married from her home in Heathfield and took a house in Caddington, Beds.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I left the Western Union at the end of 1922. I went to Fleet Street to call on my friend Mr Clarke, then chief telegraphist at the Liverpool Post. He had no job for me but took me over to the Press Association where, after interview and test, I was immediately employed. I started work in this agency in the first week in 1923.

The Press Association is a news gathering and emanating agency which had private telegraph lines to almost all the morning, evening and weekend newspapers in the towns in the United Kingdon. The P.A. telegraph system had been organised just after the war and was being greatly extended. The apparatus used was almost entirely secondhand P.O. equipment, the staffs were ex-P.O. men and a few women and there were a few operators from South Africa. The 200 or so ex-W.U. operators almost all joined the P.A. This was a most fortunate thing for the P.A. because it could then staff its.offices - some of them one-man offices - with young, skilful operators able to keep the ancient equipment in good order. London was the head office but groups of the more distant provincial offices were supplied from two centres, one at Manchester and one at Bristol.

News of all kinds - general, political, sporting and financial - came into the office. In the wire room, using a machine called a Kleinschmidt having a keyboard like a typewriter, copy was, so to speak, put on to a holed tape and passed through a transmitter at high speed sending signals to a receiver at the distant end. Here a tape, exactly like the one at the sending end, was put through a printer. The printer produced the original letters and figures. Remarks between operators over the line were, of course, by morse

key and sounder. The P.A. had a line into its London office from the Press Gallery at the House of Commons. I did my stint at HMK, as was its telegraphic code name. The Press Asssociation dealt with traffic in news within the United Kingdom. It worked in conjunction with Reuter's News Agency whose business was to collect news from abroad. Racing and other specialist services were supplied by the Exchange Telegraph Company. Extelco supplied racing information to its customers many of whom were the bookmakers. It did so by means of ticker-tape. This was produced by machines sending, rather slowly, a stream of letters and figures on to a moving tape. The working parts of the machines were covered by a glass dome and the transmitting keyboards were rather like piano keyboards. These machines were so widely used in New York that miles of tape were produced and when torn up and thrown out of the office windows, gave New York its traditional way of giving its heroes a ticker-tape welcome.

The move from the W.U. to the P.A. made little difference to my social life. I continued my scouting, football, dancing and the many visits to the cinema and theatre. Arthur Smith stayed with me occasionally. I visited Mrs Buchanan, my aunts' friend in Thornton Heath, playing tennis and attending parties.

I recall that during this time I met a girl and for a few days could not eat and at night could not sleep. However she "took up with" another of the Rovers and I recovered. For my pride's sake I will add that she sought me out a little later but I found myself no longer interested. I am glad to have had this experience. I bracket it with the purchase of my first razor which happened at about the same time. This razor was the open "cut-throat"

type. I think safety razors cannot have been available then or I would have bought one. I never learnt to strop my razor and cut to pieces several strops !

At some time during the summer of 1923 I applied for and secured a transfer to the Bristol Centre of the Press Association. I became one of the staff of four and we worked a telegraph network to papers in Exeter, South Wales, Gloucester, Bath and Swindon. We shared office quarters with the staff of the Bristol paper, the Western Morning Press. I went to live with my parents at Stobo. I bought a Raleigh motor cycle and rode the 12 miles between Portishead and my work at Bristol.

Apart from the comfort and pleasure of living at home and also enjoying the beauty of the countryside, my life became rather duller than it had been in London. My connection with the Scout movement came to an end. I took no part in any social life in Portishead or Bristol. Cinema and theatre visits were difficult. My visits to my aunts and Cousin Dorothy at the York in Weston-super-Mare became very frequent. I visited Uncle Harry and Aunt Nance (Ashman) also.

Uncle Harry, my aunt and cousin had, many years previously, emigrated to Vancouver, British Columbia. They stayed only a few years during which time Dorothy and I wrote to one another frequently. It was a cousinly affaire by correspondence. The family returned to this country and lived in Bristol. Then Dorothy moved into the York to help the aunts. She remained there, except for a brief married life, till the hotel was sold after the aunts' deaths. Dorothy returned from Canada with, naturally, a Canadian accent. Aunt Alice, who ruled her household and most of our family, had the accent

removed by lessons in elocution ! Uncle Harry and Aunt Nance moved into a very picturesque but uncomfortable cottage at Claverham and later to a house in Yatton. I spent many Sundays with them and Dorothy and Alan. Alan Broderick was the son, so to speak, of a cloth firm in Bristol. He and I became friendly. He cut out and made me several suits and other garments including a very fine leather motor cycling coat, a gift to me from Aunt Alice. I still have it.

In due course Alan and Dorothy were married, went to live in Bristol and had two children. Came a time when the Broderick firm went out of busines and Alan became a salesman for another cloth merchant. This was not a success nor, unhappily, was the marriage. Alan took to drinking too much and went off with "another woman". Aunt Alice insisted on divorce, far too quickly in my opinion, and Dorothy moved back to the York. Many years later, in 1942, I had an urgent message from Dorothy to say Alan was in hospital at St Heliers, Wimbledon. I went to see him several times and found him very ill and lonely. He recovered then but soon afterwards I heard of his death. After the sale of the York Dorothy took a house in Weston and lives there to this day.

My duties as a press telegraphist required that I worked shifts at various times but while at Bristol I had most Sundays off. I often went with my parents to evensong. We would walk through the fields to Weston-in-Gordano church and, after the service, wait for my father while he had a beer in the White Hart. At that time there was on the seaward facing slope of "our" hills the Nautical School, an establishment for training, along Navy lines, delinquent youths. We would go over the hill to attend the service in the

school chapel. It was interesting to see the boys in their seamen's uniforms at drill. Occasionally one or two boys would run away from the school and get up to mischief in the neighbourhood.

These walks on the hills overlooking the Bristol Channel were enjoyable. The sunsets over the waters of the Channel, with the Welsh hills faintly visible in the distance, were often very beautiful.

My daily motor cycle rides between home and Bristol during the winter months proved more and more uncomfortable, even dangerous. I slithered about on the muddy roads as yet unmacadamised. I was constantly wet through and the journey included the notorious Rownham Hill. I therefore decided to take lodgings in Bristol. The first were in Cotham, then in Whiteladies Road and finally in City Road.

I continued my round of visits - to Stobo, to the York, to friends in Ealing and Eastbourne. Some of these trips were adventurous. Once I came to grief at night in some road works and reached journey's end covered in mud. Next morning, going through Tooting to Eastbourne I paused to ask directions of a policeman. He noticed the number plate of my machine was bent (the result of the spill of the previous night) and reported it. Later I was fined. On one occasion I was caught in a police speed trap and again fined. Yet again, returning from Eastbourne, I was dogged with persistent tyre trouble and had to sleep out, continuing the journey at first light. In the next few years I must have ridden many thousands of miles on the three motor cycles I owned, successively.

Many of these miles I travelled in the course of my duties at the Bristol Centre. Most of "our" offices were evening papers only and the wire rooms were staffed by one telegraphist and a gummer. The copy arrived on the

receivers as printed tape - this was before the days of the page printer - and the gummer's job was to draw the tape over a wheel running in a gum pot and stick it on to sheets of paper. These were passed to the sub-editor.

If the telegraphist was absent by reason of illness or holiday I would post off on my motorcycle to take his or her place. The operator, for example, at the Gloucester Citizen was an elderly lady and I often dashed off to that office to trace faults in the apparatus and repair them, or to take her place when she was absent. It was while I was on one of these visits to Gloucester that, in an idle evening, I went to the theatre there and saw Gracie Fields and husband Archie Pitts in their original touring sketch "Mr Tower of London".

I had longer and shorter spells in many towns. While on the Cambria Daily Leader I was able to explore the Gower coast. In the lodgings in Swansea I came across copies of Edward Carpenter's books: I was slightly startled when I read them ! I worked at various times in the offices of the Newport Argus, the Cheltenham Echo, the Southampton Echo, the Bath Chronicle and the Bath Herald. I was working in one of the latter when the two Bath papers amalgamated. My spells at the Swindon Advertiser were interesting. The first time I arrived, on a Monday morning, I was asked if I played cricket. "Yes," I said and went off in the middle of the afternoon with the team from the editorial staff to play at Wootton Basset leaving the unfortunate gummer to hold the telegraphic fort. I played dressed in my motorcycling kit and managed to knock up top score. The little shield awarded for this feat hung in the wire room for a week or two ! The staff of the Swindon paper were very social. As well as the evening Advertiser they produced a weekly paper. Every Thursday everyone worked all night for this and by the time the paper

was, in the traditional phrase, put to bed no one was completely sober.

As part of the servicing of telegraph equipment in the small offices round about Bristol, a receiver had to be sent by passenger train to replace a faulty one. I struggled from the office with the heavy machine, took a taxi to Temple Meads railway station and despatched it. Soon after I realised I had a hernia. I entered Bristol General Hospital to have the rupture repaired and spent six weeks sick leave, first at the hospital and then in the convalescent home on Durdham Downs.

I was in the Bristol Centre at the time of the 1926 General Strike. We telegraphists were required to remain on duty: all concerned found open telegraph lines useful. I remember how disturbed I felt when a destroyer was brought into the basin in Bristol docks. At that time the docks reached very nearly into the city centre. I recall seeing a sailing vessel moored at the Broad Quay with its bowsprit projecting well over the sidewalk at the end of Baldwin Street.

The chief telegraphist at the Bristol Centre was an elderly man and something of a reprobate. He drank too much and was often drunk on duty. He also left the office for long spells for his gambling activities. Being so often left in charge and involved so much with running the several offices in our area I became, while still quite young, a skilful and experienced telegraphist.

I have used the phrase "colourful character" several times in my story and, I am glad to say, I shall be able to do so many more times. It has to be used now to describe Kemp who joined us at the Bristol Centre. He and I shared lodgings in City Road, Bristol. Kemp was a teller of very tall stories. He claimed to have been in the siege of Kut in Mesopotamia in the

1914 war. British troops shut up in the city were, after surrender, forced by the Turks to make a long desert march. Kemp said he had been mentioned in despatches and, when I expressed disbelief, produced the documents ! On another occasion he was telling an outrageous tale of how an Indian bride at her wedding fell into the village midden. We didn't believe this, either. Kemp turned to the office mechanic, who had also served in India, for confirmation. Walter, by an almost miraculous chance, had been in the village at the time and was able to say the tale was true !

I was friendly with an operator on the Western Daily Press named Pillinger. We went swimming and walking together and he sometimes accompanied me when I went to Stobo. We went every week to the Bristol Hippodrome, then the number two house on the Moss Music Hall circuit. Here I saw almost all the stars of British music hall in what I think is regarded as its heyday. I recall seeing George Robey, G.S. Melvin, Elsie Carlisle, Rob Wilton, Anton Dolin, Fay Compton and husband Leon Quartermain, Harry Tate, Albert Whelan, Layton and Johnston and Billy Bennett: there may have been others whose names I have forgotten.

A short time after I left Bristol Centre Pillinger was made redundant by the amalgamation of the Bristol papers. He committed suicide by jumping from Clifton Suspension Bridge on to the tennis courts hundreds of feet below.

During my time at Bristol I visited Eastbourne regularly, staying with Jim and the family at Meads Institute. Jim and his sister Babs spent a holiday with me at Stobo and, by this time, my relation with Babs had become so close as to be described as "going steady".

In 1925 I had changed my Raleigh motorcycle for a new 3.5hp twin cylinder James, a rather powerful machine. On one of my Eastbourne trips, rounding a

corner too fast, I came off, damaging the motorcycle. I left it at a garage in Polegate for repair and continued my journey by rail. Changing trains at Lewes I entered a compartment in which was travelling Ron (Bunt) Martin, also travelling back to Meads. He was now working in London and when, soon after this incident, I left Bristol Centre and transferred back to the head office of the Press Association in Fleet Street, Bunt was able to find lodgings for me near his own in Clapham.

Returning on the train between Bristol and London to collect my repaired motorcycle I am mortified to record the fact that I lost £8 to a group of men operating the three card trick. The money was not altogether wasted: I learned from the experience and have smiled about it since.

So in the last few years of the 1920s I took up life in London again, living in Mallinson Road near Clapham Junction. I had plenty of friends. Reg Harmer, in the Metropolitan police, lived in a section house in Kensington. I went to many parties and dances with him. I met Eric Yates in circumstances I have now forgotten and he joined me in the "digs" at Clapham. He was employed by Thomas Cook the travel agents. I knew many of the operators in the wire rooms up and down Fleet Street: many of them were old W.U. colleagues.

In the wire room at P.A. there was a good deal of socialising and we ran a series of very successful dances at the Chandos in Charing Cross. There may be a certain unpleasant interest in mentioning the existence near the Law Courts end of the Street a brothel where some of the men, after pay day, spent the night. I had no experience of this myself. With Charles Wakeley, one of my workmates, I became rather more closely friendly. We went swimming and motor cycling and once he spent a weekend with me at Stobo.

I spent many companionable hours with Bunt Martin. He also had a motor cycle and we went touring and camping in Oxfordshire on one of our holidays. Dirt track motorcycle racing was then very popular and we attended the meetings fairly regularly. Parhaps the most interesting of our activities was our theatre-going. We attended a Lena Ashwell Players season at Battersea Town Hall. One of the players, Kynaston Reeves, later became a busy London and TV actor. On Saturday nights Bunt and I would go to the West End and join a queue for a seat in the gallery of a theatre, any theatre. If we failed to get in, we rushed round to another queue. In this way I added to my very long list of cinema and theatrical memories.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Among my very earliest memories of the theatre is of a visit to the Lyceum in London. As a youngster I was staying with Aunt Mabel at Weybridge Towers and she took me to a performance of "Quo Vadis" at the theatre. I spent the whole time in terror, sitting on a plank on the concrete terraces of the gallery, scarcely seeing the tiny-seeming stage, apparently miles below !

I remember very clearly the early short Chaplin films and probably saw, though now unremembered, the early Harold Lloyd and Laurel and Hardy pictures. I saw the original versions of "King Solomon's Mines" and "Daddy Long Legs" at the Devonshire Park and "Intolerance" and "Birth of a Nation" on Eastbourne Pier when that theatre was used as a cinema for a season. I saw the Douglas Fairbanks' films - "Robin Hood", "Mark of Zorro" and "Black Pirate". I have no recollection of seeing Fairbanks' wife, Mary Pickford, in anything at all. (Or was she in "Daddy Long Legs": I cannot remember.) I enjoyed the Ronald Coleman films "Beau Geste", "Shangri La" and the first version of "Prisoner of Zenda".

In 1925, with my aunts, I saw a special showing at Covent Garden Opera House of a coloured silent film called "The Glorious Adventure" in which Lady Diana Manners was the leading lady. This film was a curiosity. I enjoyed the early Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers films. I saw what I thought was an extremely good picture called "The Lost Patrol" from MacDonald's novel with one of the McLaglan brothers in the lead. It was never widely shown because it reached London at the very moment the first "talkies" arrived. I saw the original "Broadway Melody" with the diminutive Bessie Love appearing in it. Clive Brook was a very busy actor but, oddly, none of his films is

revived for television. Many old films (as some people complain) are !

I have seen one of my favourite films "I Know Where I'm Going" several times. A similar film "The Edge of the World" I liked very much: its theme was the evacuation of St Kilda and its leading actor John Lawrie, who died recently. Yet another film with a similar locale was "Man of Aran". This film is regarded as a classic and I am glad to have seen it and to have visited the island where it was made. I saw the several excellent war films during and just after the second war and also the Ealing comedies. I enjoyed, too, the early Maurice Chevalier films. I enjoyed particularly the Buster Keaton films but I disliked those of the Marx Brothers.

I am glad to add to my list of films seen and enjoyed Laughton's "Henry VIII", "Mutiny on the Bounty" and "Les Miserables": Chaney's "Hunchback of Notre Dame": Navarro's "Ben Hur" and the Jack Hulbert film comedies. Even further back in time I very dimly remember a film comedian called Langdon and also the notorious Fatty Arbuckle. Film actresses seem to have slipped out of my memory.

Some early foreign films I saw are "Madchen in Uniform" and Dietrich's "Blue Angel". This last I did not like. French films I recall are "The Red Balloon" and, almost my favourite film, "Les Parapluies de Cherbourg".

I saw two very notable films at a very wide interval. In "Carnet de Bal" Francoise Rosay played the part of a beautiful young girl whose memory of her first ball differed dramatically from the actuality. Nearly a generation later I saw the same Francoise Rosay, now a very handsome elderly lady, in a leading part in "Le Kermesse Heroique". This is a story of the Spanish occupation of the Low Countries. Many of the frames of the film were composed to resemble scenes painted by the Dutch masters. I have seen this

film twice and look forward to seeing it again.

My visits to the cinema became fewer after the Hitler war and dwindled still more when television entered our house. I took my grandchildren to see a dreadful film called "On the Buses" and have not been to the "flicks" since !

I have mentioned my very early recollection of visits to the Devonshire Park Theatre. I can recall seeing "Tosca" there and a version of the "Yeoman of the Guard". At the Pier Theatre I attended an amateur production of the "Merchant of Venice" with Sidney Hounsom, one of my Grammar School masters, in the part of Bassanio. I have mentioned my enjoyment of concert party shows, the Brownies, the Fol-de-Rols and others. On reaching London I was able to see the very famous concert party, the Co-optimists with their leading actor, Davie Burnaby.

In Bristol I saw an early touring version of "No No Nanette" whose leading man was my Eastbourne actor, Charles Heslop. In London, too, with my friend Reg Harmer I had a look at a different kind of theatre - "Manon Lescaut" at Bethnal Green and Shaw's "Arms and the Man" with Emlyn Williams. We also saw a version of "Uncle Vanya".

My specially pleasurable recollection is of being in London during what was, surely, the golden age of English musical comedy. I saw the famous Winter Garden Theatre shows and many famous players - Sonnie and Binnie Hale, Dorothy Dickson, Harold French, Jack Buchanan and his partner Elsie Randolph, Jack and Claude Hulbert, Cicely Courtneidge, Nelson Keyes, June and her partner Buddy Edson (who, years later, came on TV screens as a Beverley Hillbilly) and Jessie Matthews, singer and dancer in Cochran revues. With my aunts I saw the first production of Stacpole's "Blue Lagoon"

and also a show called "Sally". This latter had nothing to do with the Gracie Fields' character. Later I saw Gracie Fields in a variety act: she was not my favourite performer. My favourite performer was Cicely Courtneidge. I attended a good many of her shows when she partnered her husband, Jack Hulbert. I read recently that in a show called "Bye the Way" Cicely Courtneidge played so many parts in it that, in her absence, she had to have no fewer than five understudies.

I saw Beatrice Lillie in a revue in the small theatre in Charing Cross Road. I saw a mildly scandalous show called "Decameron Nights" at the Drury Lane Theatre and, at the same theatre, "Rose Marie" with Billy Merson and Edith Day.

On an occasion when Babs and Jim came to stay with me in Clapham we went to see the musical stage version of "Beau Geste" with the then youthful and unknown Laurence Olivier in the title role. I did not enjoy this: it seemed to me to fall so very far short of the earlier film version.

I recall seeing the Houston Sisters when they first came to London in their very glamorous boy and girl act. A few months ago, nearly fifty years later, I was able to give a lift to her home in Weybridge to Renee Houston, then an old lady and now, alas, dead.

I saw Marie Tempest in a Criterion show and Yvonne Arnaud in something I now forget. Yvonne Arnaud lived at Guildford (there is a theatre in that town named after her) and, years later, when I came off the late duty she and I travelled in the last train out of Waterloo to our homes in Surrey.

My theatre going days came to an end during the 30s. I now find that, in spite of so much criticism of television material, that there is an enormous amount of theatre to enjoy on the small screen.

At some time after my return to London I changed my James motorcycle for a 600cc Douglas and sidecar. I bought this combination at a shop owned by one of the dirt track heroes, Gus Kuhn. With this machine I continued to cover yet more hundreds of miles. One year Reg Harmer and I went holidaying together in it on a tour of Scotland. A vivid recollection of that journey remains with me. It is of driving over the moor just west of Dalwhinnie. The road, then having a surface of rather loose gravel of an attractive gold appearance, looked like a ribbon over a great bowl of brilliantly coloured heather. Coming south we arrived too late at night to visit Ely Cathedral - Reg had a keen interest in church architecture - and entered it very early the next morning. I have not forgotten the beautiful effect of the sunshine through the lantern tower at that hour.

Jim's wife, Hilda, had died. He had disposed of the house and furniture and gone into lodgings at a farm in Houghton Regis. Here I visited him on several occasions. Jim had been the site engineer on the job when a road had been cut from Watling Street, the A5, to Whipsnade Zoo, then recently established. Fairly late in his career Jim had been given a degree by his professional body, not for examinations passed in youth, which is usual, but for the good work he had done during his working life.

Many years later Jim suffered an appalling accident. He was supervising the clearing of snow from the roads on the hills near Whipsnade when he slipped on the icy surface and fell underneath the snow plough. The machine went right over his body causing terrible injuries including crushing and twisting the pelvis. After very long treatment he reached a condition of about fifty per cent disability which, over the years and with periodic

visits to hospital, was reduced to twenty per cent disability. He retired a few years early and died in 1978.

All the telegraphists in the private wire systems throughout the country were members of their union, the National Union of Press Telegraphists, and in the late 1920s I became a member. For some years my membership was perfunctory. Also in the late 1920s Northcliffe Newspapers acquired many provincial morning and evening papers and set up others, all linked with the London office by a telegraph system. There was, in consequence, a great moving round the country and up and down Fleet Street of operators going for better jobs. At P.A. I had become one of the three senior operators, each relieving the other on the three shifts round the 24 hours. Nevertheless I, too, went for higher wages. I failed to get a Northcliffe job but, in 1929, moved to the London office of the Glasgow Herald. My friend Charles Wakeley went with me.

The union position on this paper was interesting. After the 1926 General Strike the owners, Outrams of Glasgow, refused to have union labour. Nevertheless all the wire room staff continued N.U.P.T membership and paid their subscriptions sub rosa. I believe the same position exists in the offices of the Dundee publishing firm of D.C. Thompson to this day.

Office life at the Glasgow Herald was great fun. All the men were very special. We spent off duty hours swimming, playing tennis, drinking and making jazz music together. The wire room chief, a famous character in Fleet Street, Tim Brant, played the banjo, weighed around 20 stone, drank anyone else under the table and was able to beat any of his young staff at tennis.

Arthur Smith had, about this time, married his Wyn. Babs was the bridesmaid and I was best man. They moved into a house at Hampden Park and called it Wynarth. For the next half century we kept in touch with them, visiting from time to time. As already mentioned, Babs and I joined their golden wedding anniversary party at the Lansdown Hotel in Eastbourne in 1978.

In the summer of 1929 Babs and I spent our summer holiday with her relatives, the Sprankllns, at St Helier, Jersey. Uncle Charles and Aunt Ethel were proprietors of a continental type cafe called a bodega. A cousin was a waiter in a night club, the Striped Monkey, in which, of course, we were made welcome. We spent a splendid fortnight swimming, sailing, visiting seaside shows - I recollect seeing Clapham and Dwyer at one of them and Arthur Wontner at another - all in a mild alcoholic haze induced by Mary Ann beer and Uncle Charles' champagne at 1/- a glass: his 1860 brandy blotted out memory of the passage back to Weymouth.

Babs, after leaving St Saviour's School in Eastbourne, was apprenticed for some time to a milliner. Then she went to work for a wool finishing concern, later still to work in Meads Post Office. During those years she had a very pleasant life with a large circle of friends. While a Girl Guide, her captain was Miss Gladstone, daughter of the statesman. Noel Streatfield was also connected with the Guide movement in Eastbourne.

When Jim and I paid our visits to the 'Stute we joined in Babs' activities. In the late 1920s (to use that phrase again) we all played golf, mostly on the 9-hole course at Birling Gap. As I wrote earlier it was a beautiful little course with glorious views over the Downs and sea. I must

repeat that I once did the first hole in one ! A sartorial note: for several years around this time Jim and I and other young men wore suits, the trousers of which were called "plus fours". The bottoms of the knickerbockers were caught at the knee and a fold was allowed to hang down baggily over the calf of the leg. "Plus four" referred either to the golf handicap term or to the extra four inches on the length of the trousers ! At one time I had five such suits.

Shortly after the '14 -'18 War Mr Downer, I think because of his Navy background, was able to rent from Trinity House the Watch Tower on Beachy Head. He made shutters for its several windows which could be taken down and rigged for use as counters or writing tables. He stocked the small building with sweets, chocolates, tobacco and postcards (specially made for him with views of the surrounding scene) and, during the summer months, did a brisk trade with the hundreds of tourists to the Head. Sidney was a large genial man and a teller of wonderful stories and so was specially well fitted for his role of tourist attraction. He had a powerful voice and, it was said, when at sea in a storm and signal lamps and flags failed, he used his voice. He continued the holiday trade at the Hut right up to 1939. At one time he used a Baby Triumph motorcycle to ride between the 'Stute and the Hut. The Triumph was a tiny belt driven machine and the sight of so large a man on so small a motorcycle was one to wonder at. Each year at the opening of the season I would go down to Meads and help Sidney by climbing on to the Hut to paint the weathervane and the roof.

Sidney, because of his Navy background (is ground a good word to use in connection with a sea-going activity ?) and his interest in nautical affairs (sometimes I used to think he must have invented the Navy !) was a member of

an organisation in Eastbourne whose members were, in one way or another, seafaring men. Most of them were fishermen and boatmen from the Eastbourne beaches, and others were lifeboatmen, Navy men and so on. A leading figure was Slater, head of MacFisheries. Shackleton, the explorer, was a Meads resident and well known to Sidney. In 1915 Endeavour lay off Eastbourne for a day or two on its way to the Antarctic. When Shackleton died years later, Sidney attended his funeral service, wearing his old naval uniform. When it came out of storage Mrs Downer found moth holes in the trousers. Not having time to mend them, she inked blue patches onto Sidney's legs, so that the holes were less noticeable !

The seamen's organisation existed to safeguard their interests when negotiating with the council regarding use of the beach and other matters. At one of their annual dinners I was Sidney's guest, and after the speeches songs were sung. Sea songs, composed in sailing ships to fill the long watches below, were often very long indeed. At this dinner I first heard some of the many, many verses of Spanish Ladies !

In the 30s Sidney retired from work at the Institute and moved with his wife Bim (Bessie) into the end house of the Beachy Head coastguard station. This arrangement was made with the Admiralty and also doubtless because of Sidney's Navy service. Coastguard station and Hut were, of course, only a few yards apart. Sidney impressed visitors by sending messages in semaphore to his wife when he wanted his tea: he also shouted so it did not matter that Bim could not read the arm signals ! In good weather living on Beachy Head could be very pleasant indeed but in bad weather, in the exposed situation, rather trying. We found that, when visiting and sleeping in the upper storey, the wind appeared to lift the roof slates and sleep was

impossible.

Mr and Mrs Downer moved to a house at Hampden Park shortly before the Second War when their use of the Hut came to an end. The Hut became a post for the Observer Corps (of which unit my friend Arthur Smith was a keen member). Towards the end of the war an elaborate and high-powered radar station replaced both the coastguard station and the O.C. post. Little of the radar station can be seen because it is built underground. The Hut is now cut in half, has two plaques describing its origin and uses and has been made into a circular seat.

During those years when we spent so much of our time on the Downs, Babs had two rather disturbing experiences. In the first, walking on the Downs with a friend, she found a corpse lying part-hidden in some bushes. In the other, a little later, she was involved in another unhappy incident. She and the same friend, the daughter of the chief coastguard at the Beachy Head station, encountered an unfortunate woman trying to throw herself over the cliff. She would run to the cliff edge, stop, go back and run forward again, apparently being unable to take the last desperate step. Babs and Maisie ran to her, held her arms and persuaded her to go back with them to the coastguard station.

Beachy Head has been the scene of a number of suicides. There is kept, at the cliff top, rope and tackle for use in lowering a policeman or some other helper, down the cliff to rescue a stranded climber or to recover a body.

" ... the lover ... with a woeful ballad "

CHAPTER NINE

In the spring of 1930 Odhams, a publishing firm, undertook the publication of the Daily Herald as a national morning paper. The paper had hitherto been published by the Trades Union Congress, George Lansbury having been one of its editors. Odhams' proprietor, Julius Elias later Lord Southwood, owned the People, a Sunday paper. He looked round for a use for his presses during the rest of the week. In the next few years the Daily Herald, with one T.U.C. representative on its board and by dint of lavish free gifts to its readers, achieved a daily circulation of around two million copies.

The Herald printed editions in Manchester as did the other national and Sunday papers. The Express printed in Glasgow as well as in Manchester. The purpose of the printing of these northern editions was for convenience of distribution and to allow much later times for going to press. Copy for this northern printing was sent over private telegraph systems, the lines for which were leased from the Post Office. Copy collected in the provinces could also be wired to the London offices. The transmission of pictures and maps over telegraph lines had been developed and this the "nationals" did also.

The Herald recruited its telegraph operators from the members of the National Union of Press Telegraphists and I was one of them. I joined the wire room staff of the Herald on 12th May 1930 and worked there for 39 years till retirement in 1969. Most of my new workmates I knew: several were ex-W.U. men. Some time earlier the Western Union had taken back some of its former employees to staff a new transatlantic cable working out of Anzio near Rome via the Azores to North America. These men later returned to

England and one of them, Bill Crowley, was appointed chief telegraphist at the Herald. Hanscomb was a contemporary of mine at the W.U. training school

The telegraph machines used at the Herald were perforator, transmitter and page-printing receiver. The "perf" produced a slip with an arrangement of five holes vertically. These holes in various combinations produced the letters and figures required. This slip was fed into the "xtr" and sent signals over the line at a high speed, producing letters or figures on the page of the "recr". Years later the telex system came into use. In this the "perf" could put the signals over the line directly (or produce a slip for later use as well) and, through an exchange exactly similar to the telephone system in this country, call up any subscriber to telex throughout the world. The telegraphic links were sometimes by cable, sometimes by radio. At the end of my working life, when I had become chief telegraphist at the Herald (by then called the Sun), I was almost wholely concerned with the telex.

In the early 1930s a method had been developed whereby by making the five holed slip into a six holed slip (thus increasing vastly the number of possible permutations of holes) the signals at the distant end could be fed into a printing machine - the tele-typesetter. (Was the system telegraphy or printing ? The use of apparatus which started as a telegraph machine and developed into a printing machine became the subject of a debate that rumbled on for many years. It led first to the amalgamation (I prefer to think of it as an absorption) of the telegraph union by the printing unions, and even later was at the heart of the trouble which caused the eleven months suspension of the Times newspaper in 1979, and later still caused the strife at Wapping. The first union card I held was as a member of the

N.U.P.T. and I now hold an honorary member's card of the National Graphical Association.)

Further, the science which gave us our old five holed slip was taken on by the scientists into the great development of computers and (or is this too fanciful ?) to being able to put a man on the moon.

When Odhams started publication of the Daily Herald several notable journalists were recruited to the staff. One was Kuklos who wrote notes on cycling and was a Greek scholar. He always wore a velvet cycling outfit. Will Dyson was the cartoonist. In 1921 he had drawn an astonishingly prophetic cartoon. In it he had shown the figures attending the Versailles peace conference - Wilson, Clemenceau and others - and a child. The caption asked if a child could be heard crying and it was indicated that the child would be a soldier killed in the next war when it came 20 years hence.

Hannen Swaffer was perhaps the best known writer for the Herald at that time. He always wore a black stock and wide-brimmed black hat and was very good at self-advertisement. It was said his typewriters always had the personal pronoun character worn out. (This may be the case with the machine I am now using !) This story must be apocryphal, however, because his copy was always in practically illegible handwriting. As well as filling a page he would turn the paper round and write in the margins. So bad was his copy that the compositors got extra payment for "setting" from it. The telegraphists were required to "punch" from Swaff's copy without extra money. The editorial staff, therefore, tried the idea of sending the telegraphists' copy to the composing room. Both groups of operators objected to this and the idea was dropped. Swaff's prose, however, was extremely dense: it was almost impossible to "cut" it for reasons of space.

Other writers on the new Herald were the Tom Wisdoms, father and son. Old Tom was a sports writer and young Tom was a car racing driver and so motoring correspondent. Charles Bray, who was at that time captain of Essex County cricket team, also wrote sports copy. Templegate was the pen name of the racing tipster whose very considerable success helped to sell the newspaper. Michael Foot, later a leader of the Labour Party, was a staff writer on the Herald as also was James Cameron and, later, Clement Freud.

Every year for a few years Lord Southwood gave a party for the editorial staffs of the Daily Herald and the People. Wire room staff was regarded as editorial. The parties were held in big West End hotels and well known actors and singers were engaged to entertain. I am able to add to my tally of performers I have enjoyed Wee Georgie Wood, Derek Oldham, Flotsam and Jetsam and the negro singer, Hutch.

The Daily Herald had an office and wire room in Glasgow to handle a Scotch edition although the paper was not printed there. In those days Scottish papers published on Christmas Day so that telegraphists were required to work on every day of the year except the day before Good Friday when there was no paper published in the United Kingdom. The wire room men, therefore, had an office party each year on Maundy Thursday, the only day we knew we would all be off duty. On one occasion we went to the London Palladium. Here I saw Donald Connor and Michael Bentine, both at that time at the outset of their careers.

Babs and I had become formally engaged to be married at some moment that I cannot recall. Before I left the Glasgow Herald Charles Wakeley had drawn my attention to some houses being built at Barnehurst in Kent. Babs and my

future in-laws came with me to inspect them. We liked them and decided to buy one for our home when Babs and I were married. Charles Wakeley did the same and, in due course, we became next door neighbours.

I had attended some of the annual dinners of the Eastbourne Old Grammarians Association. At the 1930 one I met an old form mate, George Kimber. He was a solicitor, lived at Wimbledon and acted for us in the purchase of our new house. The house was a semi-bungalow, having its two bedrooms upstairs and the bathroom and all else downstairs. It cost us £600. This sum of money I borrowed from my parents, paying them interest on the loan at the rate of 5% a year. This I continued to do for the rest of their lives. When the house was built Babs joined me many times to prepare it for use. We also went with Aunt Alice to the Harris Lebus warehouse where a friend of my aunts sold us, in one go, the whole of our household furniture.

On one of Babs' visits we traded in the Douglas sidecar outfit for a very second hand Salmson two seater motorcar. It was in a worse state than I had thought. It was French, it had no differential gear, it was very fast and we had a great deal of fun with it. I had not at that time driven a car. The dealer in New Cross where we bought the Salmson told an assistant to go with me as far as Lewisham to show me how to drive it. Thereafter I continued driving with Babs to Eastbourne, zigzagging across country because I failed to negotiate some corners. I arrived, dropping with nervous exhaustion ! I am one of the dwindling band of drivers who have never passed a driving test: my licence allows me to drive all classes of vehicle including steam rollers ! Our Salmson was exactly like the one used by Monsieur Hulot on his holiday in Jacques Tati's film.

Babs and I were married in August 1930 at St John's church, Meads. The

members of the Institute were good enough to let us have the use of the reading room for the wedding feast. We did not go immediately on a honeymoon: we went off to our new home in Barnehurst for a week or two. After that we went off in the Salmson for a tour of Somerset, Devon and Cornwall during which, for most of the time, I was preoccupied with the mechanical vagaries of the motorcar.

For the next few months and years we settled into our new home, working on the house and in the garden. We were visited by relatives and friends - my parents, my in-laws, Jim and Hilda, Reg Harmer, Arthur and Wyn Smith, Bunt Martin and his new wife, Hephzibah - and making the round of visits which I had done alone hitherto. We spent the first Christmas at Meads and travelled down in the Salmson. This car had Whitworth type wheel-holding devices. Arriving at Eastbourne I discovered that the ring holding a wheel on was missing: the wheel was completely unsecured and could have come off but didn't ! A most obliging car mechanic spent the Boxing Day making a brass ring to replace the missing part.

At about this time we acquired a black cocker spaniel puppy. We called it Kim and it was the family pet for 13 years until December 1942. At the end it was run over by a car. It became deaf, as spaniels so often do, and in the war time black-out did not hear or see the car approaching. Kim came with me on one of my two climbs of Beachy Head. Having completed the climb from Fallen Sands to the coastguard station I ran down to Cow Gap and along the beach to Fallen Sands where the faithful Kim was waiting for me. These cliffs should not be climbed: the chalk is too soft for a safe foothold.

In the office the wire room staff members were rapidly becoming rather close friends. One man, Downing, gathered together a football team, mostly

from the Daily Herald but also telegraphists and journalists from other offices. We had no home ground but played matches against teams from business houses and the cable companies. I played regularly till January 1933 when, as a result of a collision with a player in the Commercial Cable Company's team, I had my right elbow knocked off. At Erith hospital the bone was wired back on and I refereed thereafter. I cannot straighten my arm completely and my elbow has a big blue patch on it.

Although Babs and I enjoyed driving in the Salmson it needed so much repair, finally developing a cracked axle casing, we changed it for a Morris Minor. This interesting little car served us well for about six years. It was a small four seater, fabric covered, and had an overhead camshaft engine, which type became the first of a long line of such engines fitted to MG cars. Jim had a 13/30 MG - I never saw another of this model - and in it in 1933 he and I spent a week touring and camping in the Scottish Highlands. It was on this trip that I discovered my great love of mountain scenery and was born my abiding enthusiasm for walking in the hills.

Jim and I went again to Scotland the following year. When we returned to the family, then living in Beachy Head coastguard station, we found they had a visitor, a young woman named Doris Taylor.

My Aunt Daisy, who had been my nursemaid when I was a child, lived in Bristol. At work she became friendly with Doris and the two of them spent a holiday in Eastbourne. Daisy returned but Doris had another week's holiday and the Downers, kindly as ever, invited her to stay with them. Babs and I, Jim and Doris spent a specially enjoyable week, walking, swimming, playing golf. Jim returned to his lodgings in Bedfordshire on the Saturday but returned on the Sunday to escort Doris to Bristol. Some months later they

were married and went to live in Barton-in-the-Clay near Dunstable.

Doris' real name is Dorothy but is known in our family as Dink. Bristolians have a very distinctive accent and will refer to an old woman as the old dink. There is a very strong tradition in our family of using nicknames for almost all of us !

On 8th January 1934 our first child was born. Babs had gone for her confinement to a nursing home in Crayford near Barnehurst. The birth was difficult and took many hours. Jennifer Mary, called Jen or Jenny, was a gey bonny baby. For a few months all went very well with her but, when vaccinated, she became very poorly. This led me to make the sworn objection to vaccination in respect of our two other children when they came along.

In 1935, at the suggestion of a workmate, Jack Phillips, Babs and I decided to take our summer holiday at a guest house of the Holiday Fellowship. As Jenny was then 18 months old we chose Milford-on-Sea in Hampshire, a family centre. This was a great success. The Holiday Fellowship is an organisation founded early in the century by a group of Quakers to provide simple holidays with an emphasis on communal life and outdoor activities. As time went by the Fellowship acquired more and more properties. These properties were usually big houses set in fairly remote countryside. Some H.F. centres belong to the National Trust. Several are family centres and the excursions, meal times and bed times arranged for the children. Milford was such a one and we spent our holidays there many times, before, during and after the 1939 war. Some H.F. centres are situated among the hills and moors. For example, I spent several holidays in Nant Gwynent and climbed in Snowdonia. Babs and I became share holding members of the

Fellowship and, just after the war, I was put up for membership of the Central Committee but failed to be elected; From the earliest of our H.F. holidays I acted as Host. My duties consisted of arranging and leading the social activities, helping manageress and secretary look after the comfort of the guests and helping with the many excursions.

At that early time the cost of a week's H.F. holiday was 52/6 for an adult, children cheaper. Our holiday in 1935, therefore cost about £7 a week. The 1981 H.F. brochure gives the weekly cost at Milford for two adults and three children, as our family became later, as £250. A list of the centres members of my family visited down the years include Milford-on-Sea, Freshwater Bay in the Isle of Wight, Derwentbank and Coniston in the Lake District, Tregoyd in the Brecons, Alltshellach in Glencoe, Cromer, Swanage, Gomshall in Surrey, Longshaw in Derbyshire, Selworthy in Devon, Lynmouth, Lyme Regis, Conway and Arran.

Not the least of the benefits of our H.F. holidays and later holidays with the Co-operative (later Countrywide) Holiday Association was that every year we made new friends. We would, after the holiday, meet one another. Sometimes the friendship would fade, sometimes it would last for life. We met at C.H.A. three such friends who lived at Twickenham. Over the years they became close family friends, and one of them became the very real godmother to my eldest granddaughter.

CHAPTER TEN

Babs and I decided we would move house away from Barnehurst because, unhappily, we found we did not get along well with our next door neighbours, the Wakeleys. I cannot say where the fault lay but it is true that a few years later and after leaving Barnehurst Mrs Wakeley took her own life. Charles Wakeley remained at the Glasgow Herald and in due course became chief telegraphist there. Soon after his retirement he went on holiday to Malta and died there.

On one of my motorcycling trips with Bunt Martin we had visited Claygate in Surrey. I was much taken with the village and memory of it stayed in my mind. Babs and I spent several months looking for a house in Surrey but always came back to Claygate having found nowhere we liked better. We settled on a house but failed to sell the Barnehurst one. At length we were able to sell our house and buy St Andrews, Hare Lane, Claygate. For some time the postal address of our house was St Andrews but later the houses were numbered and it became number 55. I got into touch with my old schoolfellow, George Kimber, and he arranged the purchase. We moved into our new home on 5th December 1935 and lived there for the next 29 years.

I cannot remember borrowing any more money to buy the house. I suppose I had saved enough to pay the difference between its cost and that of the Barnehurst one. St Andrews cost £850 and a few years later I was able to buy the freehold for a further couple of hundred pounds. Its value 50 years later has increased some thousandfold. My wages in 1935 were £6.10s a week and it was not till 1938 that they were increased to £6.12.6d. During the war there were further increases in pay. At my retirement - and by then

head of the department - I was earning £40 a week. I dare say that now, 12 years later, wages are three times that amount.

Our house, a four-bedroom one, detached (it had to be detached bearing in mind our neighbour trouble) was on the corner of Hare Lane and the Avenue, Claygate. In 1935 our neighbours in the Avenue bore the name Rider Haggard and were, possibly, relatives of the novelist. A few houses further along the Avenue lived the Whitleys. I became very friendly with Mr Whitley with whom I shared the cultivation of some allotment gardens. The Whitleys owned a cottage in Zennor and they let this cottage to D.H. Lawrence for that writer's Cornish period. The Whitley's, Lawrence and his wife, Frieda, had had continental holidays together. Mr Whitley told me that Lawrence had with him only three socks, one of which, in turn, was in the wash. Mr Whitley had also been shipmates (I suppose one would say) with Ivor Novello when they both served in the Royal Naval Air Service during the 1914 war.

Another neighbour who passed our house on his way to the station from his home, Wingham, at the end of the Avenue, was Lord Bradbury whose signature, as chief cashier at the Bank of England, appeared on the early £1 notes.

Claygate down the centuries was not a very considerable place: it was a loose collection of dwellings set in farmland. There were two sizeable brickfields here and one wonders if they supplied the beautiful red brick of which Hampton Court, nearby, was built. The brick making came to an end while we have lived in Claygate. I recall calling in at one of the brickfields and watching the kiln glowing with heat. The other brickfield was the property of Sims and Miller. One of the roads in Claygate is called Simmil Road. The last of the Sims family, a very old gentleman, had the allotment next to my own near the village school. He told me of an incident

he claimed happened to him and which has become the basis of a famous music hall joke. He was drilling with the militia on Esher Green during the Boer War and the soldiers were marching north when the drill sergeant could not remember the command to halt or turn them. The detachment, therefore, continued past Sandown Park and disappeared down More Lane !

There are some small houses round about the Hare and Hounds public house and this part of Claygate is referred to as the old village. Holy Trinity Church, Claygate (it is spelt Cleggett on the foundation stone) was built as recently as 1840. Before that the villagers walked over Telegraph Hill (more properly Cooper's Hill) by Old Claygate Lane (more properly called Green Lane) to St Mary's Church, Thames Ditton. The Foley family moved into the area, developed some of it and built their home Ruxley Towers. They gave their name to the Foley Arms public house. Ruxley Towers is a curious, rather ornate mansion and was used by the Navy, Army and Air Force Institute (NAAFI) as headquarters throughout the 1939 war. It was later acquired by the General and Municipal Workers Union, much altered and extended, and used by that union as its head office.

Our house in Hare Lane was, almost literally, a stone's throw from Claygate railway station and from it, of course, I travelled to work to Waterloo Station. The London and South Western Railway built its "new" line from Surbiton through Effingham Junction to Guildford in 1873. Railwaymen still refer to it as the "new" line. The greater part of Claygate near the station was built from that date onwards: St Andrews was built in 1906. In 1935, because a telegraphist was said to be an artisan, I was able to travel from Claygate to Waterloo on a Late Workman's railway ticket. The cost was tenpence halfpenny. The midday fare in 1986 is £2.20 and the full fare is

£4. The journey to Waterloo from Claygate takes about 30 minutes and, since I worked on a morning paper, I travelled in the afternoon and evening. The carriages at that time of day were never crowded and I was able to do a tremendous amount of reading. When my late duties meant I could not catch the last train directly to Claygate, I travelled by an all-night service to Kingston-upon-Thames. Here I parked my car ready for the 5 mile drive home.

The walk to Waterloo railway station from the Daily Herald office in Long Acre takes about 20 minutes and one passes Covent Garden Opera House, Bow Street police station and magistrates court, the Lyceum theatre (latterly used as a dance hall), the west front of Somerset House with its statue of Mary Stewart as Britannia, over (before and during the war) the temporary bridge alongside the old Rennie Waterloo Bridge, the old Shot Tower (in Napoleonic times lead was dropped from its top to its bottom to make cannon balls), through some old shops (now demolished) and so to Waterloo station.

Although we seldom used it, a tramway system then covered most of London. One terminus was at Long Ditton near Claygate. The opposite end of this line terminated at Bexleyheath near Barnehurst, our old home. In the 30s cheap midday fares were avaliable: one could travel anywhere on the system for two (old) pence. One could travel, therefore, if one wished, from Bexleyheath to Long Ditton, about 30 miles, for twopence. One would seldom wish to do so, however, because the tramcars were slow, very noisy and almost unsprung monsters. Their trackways were set in stone cobbles, making the road surface very uncomfortable for other vehicles. The tramcars were gradually replaced by trolley buses driven electrically from power supplied through overhead cables so allowing for new smooth road surfaces. In Kingsway in London's West End the trams were taken underground to "cross" the Strand. This tunnel

now, most usefully, carries ordinary road traffic.

The Daily Herald offices on the corner of Long Acre with Bow Street were housed in a building that had once been a theatre. During the 1914 war the building had been hit by a bomb from a Zeppelin and a huge tank in the roof had been blown right down the building into the basement. The printing presses were in a basement in a building next door but in Endell Street. The whole site has lately been cleared for new buildings.

Among the reasons for choosing Claygate for home was the important one that the village is surrounded by the Surrey commons and other good walking country. There is the Old Common, Claygate; Arbrook Common; Littleworth Common; Esher Common; Oxshott Heath and Prince's Coverts. Quite near is Bushey Park; the tow path at Hampton Court; Richmond Park; Wisley Common and, still not far away, Netley Down, Mickleham Down and Box Hill. We can go a little further to Ranmore Common and Newlands Corner at Merrow Down.

I recollect walking with Babs, Jenny in her push chair, and Kim, the spaniel, over Esher Common a day or two after moving into St Andrews. We "went round Arbrook" almost daily. I remember the first time Jenny accomplished it on foot. We must have walked the commons a thousand times. We wore out three perambulators when our children were young. Recently, Babs, Jenny and I "went round Arbrook" passing the site of cottages inhabited when we were there nearly half a century before but now entirely disappeared. The spot is marked by a piece of slightly denser woodland growth.

Canadian troops were quartered on Esher Common during the 1914 war. I think it must have been a bad camp because the common is almost all waterlogged. At one point the soldiers constructed a raised path which held

the water from a number of springs in the middle of the common thus creating the Black Pond about two acres in size. The pond can be emptied for cleaning by means of a sluice built into the bank. This Esher Council did from time to time as well as providing a diving board, a moored raft, a lifebuoy, changing rooms and a punt for use by the foresters to keep the pond clear of weed. My family and visitors used the Black Pond for very many summers and my children learned their swimming in it. Now, regretably, all the facilities are destroyed and the constant vandalism has discouraged the Council from replacing them.

The land south of Claygate and west of the railway line was largely Crown land and so escaped the shoddy development that spread round London between the wars. After the war, a major piece of house building in Claygate was the council estate called the Roundway. This estate is very pleasant in every way and it did,in fact, win a prize for its architect. The two brickfields were built over later and, for the rest, the building in the village is almost all "in-filling". Claygate has, therefore, remained the pleasant place it always was. It has, which is remarkable in a modern community, a strong spirit of place. In due course I and my family took a full part in the life of the village and this has been the source of happiness to us in the many years we have lived here.

In my bachelor days in Clapham I had a good deal of time to read and I subscribed to a very good private library there. I pursued no particular line of reading but read widely. Gradually, however, I found my interest narrowing to biography, history and travel, especially travel in Central Asia. When we moved to Claygate I joined the public library in Esher, which is a couple of miles from Claygate. I discovered that, quite often, books I

had asked for were included in the list of the library's purchases. This was noticed, too, by the staff of Surrey's central library which was also housed in Esher. One day, in conversation with the head librarian, it was suggested I might care to open a branch library in Claygate. I did so, with help from two local ladies, in a room in the Swedenborgian church a few yards from our house. We opened the branch library for a few hours every week and changed the stock of books every three months. This branch library continues in existence right down to the present time. It is staffed by volunteers and is now held in a room in the village hall. I am now only a borrower.

The Swedenborgian church I mentioned had as its congregation only the members of one family, that of the builder. This builder had built many houses in Claygate at the turn of the century. He built and occupied our house, 55 Hare Lane. When I stripped the kitchen wallpaper for redecorating I found his children's names written on the plaster. There is in Claygate and Esher a fairly big Christian Science community and its members acquired, altered and enlarged the former Swedenborgian church. The Christian Scientists have a large school in Claremont. Claremont is the splendid mansion built for Clive of India. later acquired by the royal family and used by them and lent by them to royal refugees. It later became the girls' school. The full name of our railway station is Claygate for Claremont.

We took our holidays at Milford in 1936 and were then looking forward to having our next baby. I, fancifully, thought of a boy with red hair to be called Christopher. This is exactly what the gods gave us on 26th May 1937. Those same pitiless gods took him away 27 years later. Babs had the baby in

a small nursing home at West End, Esher. While she was away and for a while afterwards a Miss Throstle looked after the household. I gathered she had helped in a number of wealthy and titled families. Nevertheless she was kindness itself in our much humbler one.

In January 1937 we changed our car, getting rid of the Morris Minor and buying a three year old Morris 10. I bought it from Salters Garage, Claygate, and so began a long acquaintance with the Salter family. I knew the founder of the firm who had set up a hackney carriage business in 1903. Many years later, in my retirement, I spent some time working for his grandson as a garage forecourt attendant.

The Morris was to be the family car for the next 19 years although during the war it was laid up and became part of our garage air raid shelter. In it we made our rounds of visits to friends and relatives, to Eastbourne and to Somerset. Our favourite place for a day at the seaside was Clymping near Littlehampton. At that time it was a very quiet stretch of shore: now it has big car parks and has thousands of visitors. We went off to our Milford H.F. holiday as usual, this time, of course, with our two children, Jenny and Christopher. A year or so later Babs was staying with the Smith grandparents at Stobo and my father would call the little boy Buster. This name stuck and for the rest of his life Christopher - whose second name was also my own, Douglas - was known to everyone as Buster. The exception to this is that his army comrades and later workmates called him Ginger.

While my in-laws were staying with us for the Christmas period in 1937 we paid a visit to a circus. It seems almost incredible now that the circus was in a hall that had been a public swimming pool in Wood Street, Kingston.

We were now collecting, so to speak, groups of friends made while on

holiday. Jenny went to stay at Reading occasionally and the sons of that family stayed with us. I went swimming in Holborn baths with another H.F. friend who worked in a nearby office. Several other H.F. friends visited us as did all the grandparents. Walks over the commons were constant as were swimming excursions to the seaside, to the Black Pond and to various indoor pools.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

In 1938 the Downer grandparents had moved to the house in the Beachy Head coastguard station and Babs took the children to stay with them. I, in the June, went on holiday to the H.F. centre at Kinlochleven. The guest house, Alltshellach - meaning a willow by a stream - is on the banks of Loch Leven. Its grounds go down to a crag called the Doonans from which one could dive into the icy waters of the loch. This I did twentyeight times in my fourteen days stay. The house had belonged to the Haldanes of Cluny, one of whom had been the Bishop of the Isles. Many years later I learned that a magisterial colleague of mine was a member of the Haldane family and had spent her childhood in the house. The H.F. had leased the house and afterwards bought it.

In this holiday I had my first real mountain walking, complete with boots and other mountaineering kit. I have been back to the West Highlands, to Snowdonia and to the Lake District hills time after time since then. Apart from the great enjoyment of that first walking holiday in the mountains I have vivid recollections of several incidents. I recall the 2,000 feet scree run off Buchaille Etive. This can no longer be done: all the scree has been kicked to the bottom of the chute by countless climbers since then. On a wet afternoon four of us - two local Scots, a Welshman and myself, the only non-Celt - were playing with an improvised ouija board. At that time there was much concern about Hitler's activities. We asked the board if war was imminent and were astonished when it spelt out a vague message about the occupation of Austria. It meant nothing to me at the time but I felt oddly disturbed when I remembered it later.

Returning from climbing Beinn a' Bheithir (which is usually anglicised Ben Vair) the party was crossing the narrows of Loch Leven by the chain ferry at Ballachulish (now replaced by a road bridge). A big open Bentley car was not quite far enough on to the boat to allow the tailboard to be hoisted. I suggested to the driver that we could push the car the necessary few inches. He smilingly said we could not: the car weighed two tons. We went on to chat about the mountains, of the sunrise seen from the summit of Ben Nevis and so on. I noticed from his luggage that he was Cameron of Locheil and therefore a descendant of the close companion of Charles Edward Stewart.

Despite being at that time only a novitiate climber, I, with another guest from the centre, made the traverse of the Aonach Eagach, the Chancellor's Walk, on the north side of Glen Coe starting from the Pap of Glen Coe. I was to do it again some years later but in the other direction. In 1938, when we came off the ridge down the Devil's Staircase into the glen, we failed to beg a lift and so had to walk the nine miles back to Alltshellach.

My political conscience had been a long time awakening and my political beliefs were very vague. I now think that private education of children works against democracy in the community. In 1938 I felt less strongly about this and Babs and I sent Jenny, now having reached primary school age, to a private school. She was joined there later by her siblings.

Newlands College had moved from its long established home at Weston Green, Esher, to a big house in Claygate. Jenny was the first pupil after the move. I and my family became friendly with the proprietors and headmistress, Mr and Mrs Hill, and with their partner and deputy, Mr Leonidas Constantinides. Mr Leo later became head of the school and, when the school drill sergeant

retired, he suggested I took the boys for cricket, football and on sports days. This I did on a day each week for about twenty years. When my son was killed I found helping with the Newlands boys too painful and the arrangement came to an end. I still meet Mr Leo from time to time.

At this time I continued to read widely - on the train and in the unbusy hours of night duty. I became steeped in the mountaineering literature. In imagination I climbed with Bruce and Mallory and Odell on the early British Everest expeditions; I went with Smythe into the Byundar Valley; I was with Shipton on Nanda Devi; I was with the Germans in their disaster on Nanga Parbat; I was with the Americans on Annapurna; I went up the Hindu Kush with Newby; I brought, wth Fleming, News from Tartary; with Firbank I Bought a Mountain and did the classic solo climbs on the Welsh, Scotch and English peaks; I went Language Hunting in the Karakorams with the Lorimers. I read the literature of the Golden Age of British climbing in the Alps, including, of course, the account of Whymper's ascent of the Matterhorn. Years later I was associated with Mrs Amy Woodgate, J.P. of Surbiton, a neice of that same Edward Whymper. I knew, from my reading, of the frantic efforts of the German climbers who climbed, not for pleasure and with careful judgement, but for the glory of their Fuehrer, taking unacceptable risks in order to gain a "victory".

Then I came to the book that had a great effect on my thinking and beliefs. It was the three-volume Civitas Dei of Lionel Curtis. It deals with history and politics and philosophy. It had in it an idea which fired a number of people as well as myself. The kernel of the idea was that conflict between nations would be avoided by the removal of frontiers. (I still toy with the notion that had the Allies not beaten Napoleon at Waterloo Europe

would have become a single unit under the hegemony of France, imbued with the ideals of the French Revolution, and thus would have been avoided the wars of 1870, 1914 and 1939. There might have been a United Europe instead of the far from satisfactory European Economic Community).

A number of people joined together to promulgate the idea of a union of nations. We called our organisation Federal Union. We published a small magazine to which I contributed and we started a luncheon club in Fleet Street of which I became secretary. These lunch time meetings went on till well into 1940 and we had as speakers a succession of figures well known at the time. Among them were Dr Joad the broadcaster; Sir Richard Acland, politician and philanthropist; Barbara Wootton, now Baroness Wootton of Abinger; H.N. Brailsford, a notable writer for the New Statesman; R.W.G. McKay, an Australian later to becaome a prominent Labour M.P. for Reading. McKay was one of the best debaters I have ever heard and his early death was a loss to public life. Federal Union sought to persuade the public and their spokesmen in Parliament of the value of the federal idea in its several forms - to include western Europe, or the whole of Europe, or Europe with the British dominions, or the democracies ringing the Atlantic. The whole movement ran into the sand, so to speak, after the end of the "phoney" war. I happened to be on duty in June 1940 when we had a "flash" message to say that Churchill had offered to France union with Britain. This was, one knew, far too late and was probably only an empty gesture.

I was, of course, a member of the National Union of Press Telegraphists but my attendance at the London branch meetings were rather perfunctory. Before the war there was in Fleet Street a well known hotel called

Anderton's. In it rooms were let out for meetings to the many organisations in the Street. These meetings often took place on Sunday mornings when so many newspapermen were off duty. Occasionally one would enter a room where a meeting was in progress and, after a while, realise it was not your own meeting !

In 1938 I attended a branch meeting and was much struck by how badly it was run. In my newly awakened impulse to take part in public affairs I decided to do something about it. I gave myself a year to study and think about chairmanship and then to offer myself for the position of branch chairman. I was elected to that office in 1939 and held the post for more than twenty years being re-elected unopposed at every annual meeting of the branch. I also never missed a single meeting of the branch in all those twenty odd years. This shows how fortunate I was in the matter of health and how fortunate not to be moved from home and job throughout the war years. The London branch of the N.U.P.T. was by far the largest - about eight hundred telegraphists in London as against about three hundred in the provinces.

At almost the same time as becoming branch chairman I was also elected Father of the Wire Room Chapel at the Herald. This job I held for twentyfive years !

Father of the Chapel (FOC) is the title given to the union official whose function is the same as a shop steward in the engineering industry. Printing, a craft going back to the Middle Ages, was at first in the hands of the Church. There are several other small traces in the printers' craft of its churchly origins, notably the names of certain type faces such as brevier, nonpareil and so on. When other groups of workers came into the

printing trade they adopted the old tradition of describing their departments as Chapels and their spokesmen as FOCs.

In 1939 we began to look forward again to the birth of our third child. Our family life went on smoothly with its working and walking and visits and visitors. I went, in that year, with two office colleagues to the Lakes at Whitsuntide and Babs and I and the children went yet again on holiday to Milford.

However, war seemed close, as indeed it was. A young Claygate married couple came to live with us, the young woman intending to help while Babs had the baby. Babs' time was expected to be when, in fact, the war started in the first week in September. I had to be given instruction by a midwife on what to do if no other help was available when our child was born. At the outset of the war the entire population was given gas masks in small cardboard boxes to be carried by a piece of string over the shoulder. The gas masks for small babies were big enough for the child to be put inside. We were supplied with such a one for the coming baby. My neighbours had a little boy of a year old and twins, even younger. This little family then would have had to cope with three of the huge gas mask boxes ! One of those twins lives in the house opposite ours at the present time.

In our worry and uncertainty about what might happen Babs and I made a series of decisions, some of which were unwise, some unnecessary. The young couple left, the man being called up for the army. (He was, incidentally, a "pigeoneer" in an airborne unit. I gather he was required to jump from his aircraft with the container for carrier pigeons attached to his leg.)

Jenny and Buster went to their grandparents who were then living at

Hampden Park near Eastbourne. This move was unfortunate. We decided to let St Andrews. We went to stay with friends in Torrington Close, Claygate, and awaited the coming of the baby. The confinement was to be at the same nursing home in West End, Esher, where Buster was born. Our second daughter arrived on 27th September and we called her Margot. When Babs was ready to leave the hospital I drove her and the baby to join the grandparents and Jenny and Buster.

We let our house to three ladies who had lived in a flat in London. For these ladies to be evacuated to Claygate and my family to move to Eastbourne for the same reason was soon seen to be the silly arrangement it was. This was the time of the phoney war and the only signs of conflict were the great number of balloons hanging over London, intended to be a barrage against air attack.

My parents' home in Somerset seemed a more sensible place of safety for the family and there I took them after only a few weeks at Hampden Park. The stay in Eastbourne was, in one way, a disaster. There was an epidemic of whooping cough there and the three children caught the disease. Margot, only a very few weeks old, almost died and would have done so had it not been for ceaseless nursing by my wife and by my mother. Nursing the children at Stobo was very difficult because there was no hot water system and, I think I recall, no electric light at that time. My mother was then in her 70s with failing eyesight. She did her gallant best but the burden on Babs was extremely heavy. The baby was lifted from her cot whenever she coughed, night and day, for several weeks.

Our tenants saw little point in staying in Claygate, gave up the tenancy and returned to their home. We came to a similar conclusion. So, the

children then being well again, I borrowed a trailer for the car and collected them. We returned home in January 1940 and settled down again to life in Claygate.

" ... a soldier, full of strange oaths, "