

Their Small Corner.

We all must, either willingly or unwillingly,
move along the Highway of Life.

The future is built on the past and each
generation plays its part in shaping it.

Nowhere.

Nowhere could grass be greener,
No where could skies be more blue,
Nowhere could rain fall more gently
Then whiplash in sudden squalls.
Nowhere could snow melt faster
When the warm south-westerly blows;
Nowhere could villages nestle
More happily under the hills;
Nowhere could bird songs be sweeter
Or fruits more abundant grow;
Nowhere could gardens be lovelier
Or Sons of the Soil be more free.
Nowhere could salmon be richer
Than those of the Severn and Wye.
Nowhere could cider so loosen
The tongues of the locals to tell
Such tales of subtle humour
To confound the astonished guest.
Nowhere could callers be greeted
More heartily when they arrive;
Nowhere could words be more welcome,
"I be pleased to see thee Ole Butt,
Thee casn't stand there on the doorstep
Cum in and 'ave sumut to yut."

L.F.C.

Twentieth Century Progress.

Those of us who were born early in this century have been privileged to live through many changes. Perhaps they have not all been good and some may even terrify us, if we dwell too much on what might happen, but most of them have been little short of miracles.

The many dreaded diseases like T.B. and diphtheria have been eradicated, and but a few years ago no-one would have imagined that hearts and kidneys could be transplanted.

The candle, the oil lamp and the hurricane lantern were our only forms of light.

There were no labour-saving devices either in or out of the house, and so very few people had a telephone.

The traction engines stayed at the brook over the road from my home, and many a donkey cart took goods to and from the station.

When Bleriot flew the channel just after I was born the village folk said, "Tent natrul." When years later we twiddled the cat's whisker on to a bit of c/rystal they said, "Whatever be things coming to?"

What would the old folk have thought to see members of European governments sitting around a table instead of fighting each other? Probably they would have said, "Well we've sin it all mate."

One person who would no doubt have rejoiced at such a gathering was Edward VII.

Perhaps the most disappointing bit of progress is the loss of our romantic notions about the moon, for we no longer see "the man in the moon," since we have seen the men on the moon.

The rich man in his castle,
 The poor man at his gate,
 God made them high or lowly
 And ordered their estate.

We have come a very long way since those words were written and accepted.

We sang that verse with the same gusto that we sang the others. It is true that we just sang words never thinking what they meant, but had we thought about them in the early part of the century we should not have criticized them. The days had not yet come when people thought of class distinction and when education made them think about such things as upstairs and downstairs, or high or lowly estates.

To have questioned those things seventy years ago would have left men without work, and without work the tied cottage would no longer be available to any man not satisfied with his lot.

Working from daylight till dark meant early to bed and early to rise, and little time for thinking. On the whole the village labourer was content to have a roof over his head, his bread and cheese and his cider, supplemented with garden produce.

Most boys could tickle a trout, poach a rabbit or a pheasant, and men went out after dark with their ferrets and nets when the moon came up. Unpolluted stream S grew plenty of watercress and mushrooms and blackberries grew in abundance.

Neighbours knew everyone's business and they saw that each other did not want.

Local fairs, dancing bears, hurdy gurdy men, the local pubs, and a good sing song gave enough entertainment and few wanted mor

It was a long walk to seek other enjoyments if one had no donkey cart or a horse, or the money to go by train.

Woolaston is a large spreading village on and close to the A48 road mid-way between Gloucester and Newport. It has had various ways of spelling the name Woollaston, and Wollastone which is still used for the school.

I understand that the word is derived from Wulflaf's Farmstead, and farming was in the past the chief occupation.

There had been a flourishing paper mill at the turn of the century, and a tanning industry.

At Brookend was the carpenter's shop where wagons, carts and coffins were made. All kinds of jobs needing the carpenter's skills were carried out. As children we all liked to watch the making of the coffins and the making of the wheels for the farm carts.

The blacksmith carried on his business on the side of the main road, and a very busy man was he.

Woolaston station on the main Great Western line was a very busy place, bringing the papers, collecting the milk churns, taking the salmon to the Gloucester fishmongers, taking goods of all kinds, bringing the truckloads of coal into the siding, and taking the folk who worked at the Chepstow ship yard and the people who could afford to travel.

People came to the inn next door, not only to drink but to try to sell cheeses, moss wreaths at Flowering Sunday time, and other goods. Mother often bought whole cheeses, but the children liked them packman to call and they were eager to see if anything in his bag would fit them. Many women paid just a few pence a week for their purchases.

Mother bought odd things but she usually sent to J.D. Williams' store in Manchester for curtain materials and for the velvet to make our best dresses.

We saw a lot of drunken men and a few women, one of the women was sometimes taken home in a wheelbarrow by some kind person.

There was always something of interest to see.

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The Lord of the Manor was still in evidence in some villages , but not in Woolaston. Much of the property belonged to the Duke of Beaufort and to Sir William Marling at the turn of the century, and a little later to Colonel Marling and after 1908 they sold properties to the tenants or to other local people. When I was old enough to take an interest many people owned their own cottages and smallholdings.

How things have changed. The owners of the the mansions and palaces around the country need the folk who once were of the lowly estate to finance the upkeep of their homes the ground of which would have been considered almost holy in the past.

Woolaston, being on the main road was in touch with the outside world, every man was employed, and so the inhabitants were very independent, obsequious to no one.

Good manners were the order of the day and men and boys touched their caps especially to women. At school we learned to stand still at the side of the road and to bow our heads if we should meet a funeral.

We were told n ever to pass an older person who was carrying a basket without asking if we could help.

There were few rules and regulations. The policeman boxed the ears of a child up to mischief and called at th e home to inform the parents who approved his action.

The dog and cat no longer wanted ~~was~~ ^{were} shot, and the pig which died mysteriously was buried by the owner in the garden by the light of the hurricane lantern. I held the lantern on a few occasions for my Father to bury pigs and I was forbidden to speak a word about it. One lesson we learned was how to keep things to ourselves, knowing full well that the leather belt was the alternative.

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Two of Mother's tenants were not able to cultivate their gardens so Father used the one for planting swedes, and mangolds for the pigs and the other was filled with vegetables for sale.

Gardening was geared to the calendar so that Good Friday was the day for planting potatoes and it was something to be ashamed of if the first new potatoes could not be dug on Lydney fair day, June 25th.

Likewise spring cabbage must be ready for Whit Sunday when the gooseberries should also be ready. Of course there were bad spells of weather which upset things and I remember one autumn which was so wet that most of the soil was washed off the crops and the water lay deep ~~between~~ between the rows.

We no longer see or hear of many of the sorts of apples which we grew in our orchard. The wonderful Warner Kings and Annie Elizabeth which cooked so well and the underleaves which could be cooked or eaten raw.

The warner king trees always had large cankerous growths on the branches, hence their fall from grace.

Thinking of names, so many of the old ones have disappeared from the area. Children usually had Biblical names and there were many christened Mancoah, Silas, Ephraim, Abraham, Isaac, Noah, Milo, and Jacob. The surnames have gone too, Shillibear, Shillam, Purchase, O'Hare, Burleigh and Munro have been replaced by those of people who have come to live on the estates built in the fields where we spent many hours picking cowslips, orchids and lady's smocks.

The old order changeth
Yielding place to new.

Many of the fields had interesting names such as, Mary Anne's meadow, Junie's Piece Rocky Leaze, Smokey, Foxholes, Fair Oaks and Piccadilly. We all knew Marling's mead which we called Mallin's med and all knew Swines' Close commonly known as Shewin's Close. Mallin's med was a favourite place for children from our end of the village, its deep brook being the great attraction, and many hours we spent damming, commonly called stanking, paddling and exploring the banks. More than one suffered a sprained ankle as we practised jumping from bank to bank.

Some houses were named after historic occasions, Possession House built on the site of a house destroyed by Cromwell's men in search of the royalists, and Burnt House named for the same reason. Lugg's Cross was of course associated with smugglers and the River Severn, being formerly Luggers' Cross.

At the turn of the century most village dwellers did not know and ~~do~~ did not want to know what went on outside their small world. People in adjoining villages were like foreigners and they were usually referred to in disparaging terms. Village youth spoiling for a fight went to the borders of their territory and were like terriers with their hackles up.

Men walked their animals to Chepstow market six miles away, the pigs having a rope tied to a back leg. The men spent much of their time and the money received in the village inns on their return. A few women took produce from house to house while a few took ~~took~~ it to Lydney or to Chepstow. My mother told me about the women who could carry baskets on their heads as well as having one on each arm but I do not remember seeing them.

Most villagers were self supporting, having a pig or two, a few hens and ducks or geese, a small orchard and a large garden.

Taps at the roadside or wells or water-spouts supplied water to most households. The buckets were fastened on to chains hanging from a strong wooden structure worn on the shoulders, called a yoke. This was a splendid way to carry, and I sometimes feel that it could still be put to good use when doing outside work, fetching and carrying.

Very few houses had water laid on so that meant that there were no indoor toilets.

Most cottages had toilets quite a walk from the house which was necessary as the excrement flowed through into open pits outside.

These were cleaned out once or twice a ~~week~~^{year}. A deep zinc bowl attached to a very long wooden handle was used for dipping out the horrible mess which was deposited on the gardens usually in the winter time. The hole commonly called the guzzet-hole was always beside the garden path and had to be passed to go to the lavatory. The word toilet was never used in those days. Some cottages had to share and our next door neighbour shared ours which was well up the garden. It was a whitewashed edifice with two seats, one for small children and one for adults. The whole place terrified me I always had visions of slipping through into that awful hole.

The edifice was referred to as up-the-garden. It was surrounded by a thick hedge of holly and snowberries, and its back was to the path. We were shy about being seen going there and I would cast furtive glances to make sure that I was not observed. The door had no bolt but it was big and heavy and if someone was approaching, he or she sang or whistled his or her warning of approach when the door would be pushed up hard with a bang as a warning. If I realised that someone was inside I crept away to watch from afar so that hopefully no-one would know that it was me.

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Toilet paper was non-existent and newspapers were cut to convenient sizes and hung on strings.

One of our visitors was quite happy to sit for a while. She came to us each autumn. She had lived in Woolaston during her childhood and she said that she could not live the winter through in the colliery town unless she came to breathe her native air in the autumn.

She took long walks, called at the inns for a drink and a snack, and I went with her to all the local harvest festivals church and chapel. She came from a religious home and she was pleased to be free to wander at will. But often in the evening she disappeared up the garden and she certainly took her time. Sometimes Mother remarked that she hoped the lady was well, but she seemed to be. One October after she had returned to her home Father decided to whitewash the garden edifice which was well covered with ivy inside and out. Over the door was a space well covered and when Father stripped the ivy away we learned why the lady went up the garden in the evenings, for hidden behind the ivy were several small whisky bottles and Woodbine packets. We laughed about it often but we knew that there would be no more smokes and sips for her until she came again next year. Had we mentioned it to her she would have said as she did about everything, "Ah, pity about it!"

Why no-one ever fell into the guzzet holes I do not know as we carried the hurried cane lamps to guide our way and were terrified of our own shadows. We were usually too afraid to go up there alone in the dark.

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Pre-school days.

Many events happened at home when I was four years old. My mother had a telephone installed. There were very few telephones, the police station at Lydney had one but not the village police stations. The doctors had them at Chepstow and Lydney.

Before we had one men took it in turns to walk, or go on horseback or with a horse and cart to fetch the doctor. My father did more than his share, walking when it was his turn. We were lucky to be left in peace for more than a few weeks at a time as people seem to be able to cope by day and at night panic would cause them to want the doctor, so to hear someone calling us up was a common occurrence. As babies seem to have the habit of arriving in batches, (our doctor swore by the moon phases), I remember one week in particular when we were called up every night for a week.

The postal authorities wanted mother to have a post office so our sitting room became a busy place. The telephone was boxed in and the few people who were brave enough to use it thought that as they could not be seen that they could not be heard. At first of course apart from emergencies there were few calls for or from the locals. Gradually more telephones were installed in business premises, but more of that later.

With the installing of the post office came troubles. Until then we had little contact with people, except for those who came for eggs, vegetables, pigmeat, walnuts and fruit.

Then people came for mother to write letters for them, and when her hands began to itch she was very ashamed to say that she had caught the dirty infection, the itch from the doctor said, handling coins and other people.

people's materials. That started the rule of Jeyes' fluid as a cure-all for everything. We put a few spots in our washing water for hands and faces, in the bath and on cuts.

Then came illness. My sister aged seven, a most beautiful child with large blue eyes and blond curls developed diphtheria, an all too common infection at that time. I was four years old but those last days of her life are still as fresh in my mind as they were then. Until the day before she died it seemed that it was a throat infection. I remember our doctor sitting on the edge of the table telling my mother there was nothing anyone could do. My mother bowed with grief and my father speaking angrily but all to no avail. That night I slept downstairs and the next day Gladys died.

In every village before the district nurses came into being one or two women could be relied upon to do what they could and to lay out the dead. At our end of the village was Mrs. Harris the wife of a fisherman, and the mother of a large family. She was what was then known as a "comfortable body," not very tall and with a reasonable figure.

The order of the day for ordinary wear was the black apron, which was changed to the white one for the sick room. I can see her standing midway down the stairs just after Gladys had died. She was waiting for a vest to put on her, and when she called downstairs to ask Mother if she had it ready, I can see Mother holding the vest in front of the fire and saying, "I'm just making sure it is aired." As I have grown older and I think of those words I feel choked. How deeply one can be touched by a simple statement made at such a time.

When it became known that Gladys was so ill straw was placed on the road to deaden the noise made by the traffic, horse drawn of course. This was the custom when any person living on the roadside was very ill. I remember the Head Teacher's wife, Mrs. Spencer coming to the house to offer sympathy, and I can picture her in her large brown hat and her brown winter coat while I stood close to Mother's side.

On the day of the funeral I was taken to a neighbour at the Tan House on the corner but the lady there wanted to see the funeral pass so she raised the blind a little and I also watched as the procession passed. Of course all coffins were carried all the way to the church and every house on the route drew the blinds as a mark of respect, and everyone in the village able to follow the coffin did so. Immediately a death occurred, whether it be in that house, or if it were a relative living hundreds of miles away the blinds would be drawn and voices were lowered. Black or dark clothes or black arm bands were worn, for some time. The mourners attended the evening service on the following Sunday at the church where the burial took place and they all walked to the grave afterwards.

The bearers, and several men would arrive outside the house in good time to have time for a drink before leaving, while the women came inside. After the funeral the house was full and everyone was given refreshment before leaving and most of the men had several drinks. This of course was the custom but it prolonged the agony as each person felt obliged to offer so many words of sympathy.

From the time my sister died my mother was afraid that I would get the diphtheria and I was ^{under} over and as folk said, the wind was hardly allowed to blow on me.

Having the post office, the telephone, a large orchard, lots of pigs and poultry, and three gardens there was far too much to do to sit down under the weight of grief.

There were few free moments and some people on their way to the station, the inn or the shop found some excuse to call at the post office, many because they hoped to get some scrap of information. They had a lot to learn because Mother never divulged any ~~kind~~ business and we were told never to tell anything which we heard over the telephone or what was talked of in the post office or the house. A few women tried to ask me questions but I always had the same answer, "I don't know. You must ask Mother." I was referred to as the little girl who didn't know. Funnily enough I never had the urge to tell. Friends were not encouraged indoors in the daytime in case they talked outside.

We knew everyone's business, bad as well as good. The police station had no telephone so we took all the police messages. The police station was at the top of the hill and many times I ran up with messages, written down by Mother but I knew what they were. Usually the policeman came to telephone back again but he always put Mother in the picture as to what was going on if she did not know the full facts.

There were very few forms to fill in but there was the occasional letter to be written for the few with relatives living distances away. Sometimes there were long ways to walk with telephone messages but if they were not urgent the postman who called twice a day on deliveries could perhaps take a message in the morning. The afternoon mail was brought to the post office not delivered like the morning mail.

I don't know for what reason, but our rector "let" the Rectory for a time to a

business family

They must have been business people because every afternoon brought letters for them. The morning post was delivered but the afternoon post was left at the post office to be collected. If it was not collected Mother gave it to the postman next morning. Sometimes we ran around to houses with the mail.

The folk at the rectory asked if their letters could be delivered. They bought my sister a leather satchel to carry the mail. Sometimes I had the job. I remember a very handsome young man visiting the rectory at that time. He may have been a son home from boarding school. He came for the mail when he stayed there. Needless to say the village girls were attracted to him and they were ignored by him. One day he left his bicycle the other side of the road and the girls wrote a note and stuck it with a pin on the saddle. He was furious and went back to tell Mother about it. The girls were nowhere to be seen.

Post office hours meant nothing to the village folk and after hours many came for a small postal order to send for something they had seen advertised in the paper.

What a different relationship there was then between the head postmaster and the sub postmaster. The head and his wife often came to tea and we knew the telephonists by name and we had many friendly conversations with them.

It is easy to see that the post office soon became the focal point for all who wanted to pour out their troubles, or for those who hoped to learn something of interest, so we soon knew almost everything about everyone around us.

We heard of the family quarrels, the skeletons in the cupboards, we knew before anyone else when women said they were "that way again," and the joy if a miscarriage helped them back to happiness again.

Old women were experts at reading the signs and all the denials would not convince them when told that they were wrong.

In one or two cases children left home when they could no longer tolerate the strict discipline of the home. In two cases when this happened we knew that on certain nights of the week the kitchen window would be unlatched so that the prodigal could come for food found in the night. Mothers were usually last to bed and first to rise and a tramp could be blamed for a break-in. Being on the main road tramps were always passing but it was not usual for them to break in, as it was food they needed and they were seldom turned away. On two occasions tramps appeared to have done so, in the one instance terrifying the blind woman who heard them, and in the other the cupboard, (there were no fridges) was raided and when the owner came down in the morning it was to find the kitchen table littered with the empty pie dish, in which had been the apple pie made for the next day, and a few crumbs were all that remained of the loaf of bread.

We were told exactly how much ^{money} people had, if they were lucky enough to have anything after the beginning of the week.

One woman had a bank account and at times she would come to ring the bank about her pass book, very few knew what that was, and she would ask my mother or sister to write down items, so we knew what she had and what she spent

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Few people would have trusted a bank if they had money to spare. The tea pot on the mantelpiece, a cup on the top shelf of the dresser, a drawer or a corner of the cupboard were hiding places, if that is what they could be called. When the landlord came for the rent or the insurance man for his few pence, they openly lifted down the vessel containing the money to pay. Doors were seldom locked, even at night, but the small amounts were not worth stealing in any case.

The favourite place of course was under the mattress and through all my childhood I slept on mother's money. All beds were iron ones with laths on which were straw mattresses and then a feather bed. A vallance was around each bed.

Mother had her salary as post-mistress, rents from her three cottages and her three fields, money for eggs, poultry, money from her two railway lodgers, from fruit, vegetables and joints of pigmeat and bacon when we killed our pigs, home cured lard and perhaps home preserves, much of which she gave away. This was not all profit by any means for pigs had to be bought and fed, so did the poultry, and gardens must be well stocked to produce abundance. Father being a ganger on the Great Western had a better wage. With a large orchard we were self supporting and we made several hog's heads of cider which were stored in the cellar.

If Father had charge of the money it would not have been so well looked after, especially on Christmas Eve when he and his friends spent the night in playing half-penny nap and the inn was only next door.

Each week Mother sent her order to the head post office at Lydney with an account of what business had been transacted and the new supplies came in large brown registered envelopes. Several of these envelopes were used to hold the various monies, each duly labelled and put on my mattress beneath my feather bed. Her own money, household money, the rents, money for the rates and so on. Only my Mother, my sister and myself knew it was there.

In my bedroom was a chest of drawers with two smaller drawers side by side at the top. Every night the post office money, the stamps, postal orders, and other post office stock was put in the drawers. Why this was not all kept in Mother's room I do not know. But I remember one Christmas Eve Father came back from his annual card party having lost all he took out and wanting more to go back, so perhaps it was to keep temptation out of his way.

Farm labourers in particular were very low paid as they lived rent free and were usually supplied with cider and milk and possibly some vegetables from the farm.

Money was not of great importance, enough to eat and drink, a fire and a bed, and a job was all most village people hoped for. The modern good neighbour schemes will find that they have nothing to add to the good neighbourliness of the past. "Draw thee cha-er up and § 'ave a tater, cum an' 'ave a bite, thee da looked starved sit thee down a bit, have a drop of cider" the welcome at almost every door. No rush no hurry, nowhere to go, life plodded on.

The Telephone.

What fun we had from the telephone in its early days. People came to look at it and they were afraid of it. This new contraption they called it.

One man asked, "How can ee yer anything on wires?" "I can't make that out," said another, "It don't seem right do it?"

Old and young put their ears to the telephone poles to listen. We had lots of laughs.

Of course it was not used much for some time because only the banks and the doctors had them and the Lydney and Chepstow police stations, and perhaps a few business people.

The main use was to call the doctor, or to take messages for the police. The police messages came in the day time but most people only asked for doctors when babies were due, so consequently we had spells of night calls. Invariably men rushed off without bringing any money and Mother waited long spells for her money and often she had to pay it herself.

Mother had a woman daily to do the washing and the housework. She was a tiny, frightened little body, afraid of her own shadow we said. When my uncle died in Manchester Mother and Father went there for the funeral. Mrs. Dane was asked to sleep at our house for company for my sister and I.

That night we were awakened by a voice shouting under our window, "Anybody about? I want the doctor. Anybody awake?"

We were so used to this that it did not worry us and my sister was prepared to go down and attend to the business. But it was not so easy because our companion was so afraid that she told us we must not go downstairs. "It is a trick. He knows your Father and Mother are away. He could murder

us and take the money." But my sister had already called down to say we would be down, but not of course until we were dressed respectable as she insisted. The poor man was far more afraid for his wife's state than she was for our safety.

A Welsh woman came often to ring her sister in Neath. If you cannot speak a language and you listen to the voice of an unsexed person, having a one-sided conversation ~~in~~ it is exceedingly funny. We dared not make a noise or we should have been sent outside, so with our handkerchiefs stuffed in our mouths we nearly died laughing, aching all over from being "doubled up."

The funniest person who came to use the telephone was old Mr. Hall who decided that he would start a fish round in the village. He was not too wholesome Mother said but few knew the word hygiene in those days. There were too many germs around for a few more to be added was no great shakes someone said.

No one had to have permits so all he needed was his old horse and cart. He came to ask Mother if she would make out his order, add up the amount, and telephone his order to Newport market twice a week. The market was twenty three miles away but all trains stopped at Woolaston station so the next morning his order would be at the station for him to pick up. Folk who could not do sums on paper were sharp enough with the money in their hands.

So Mother sorted out the order and the money side for him but he was terrified of the telephone, and would not try to use it, but he stood by while the order was given.

He often had a boil or a carbuncle on his neck, so I christened him Buncle.

It was only in school holidays that I was able to listen to and to enjoy the pantomime of the telephoning of the order.

It went something like this:-

The old man, chewing his quid of twist tobacco, looking none too clean, his clothes the mole-skin trousers and an old jacket, and a cap, stood by the counter.

"Mondn' Ma'am, here I be agen to worry ya." Mother would give him a cheery good morning and ask after his health.

"I got another of they carbuncles Ma'am and it da 'urt somethin' cruel " was often the reply.

After a word of sympathy Mother would ask if he knew what he wanted to order and she would then attend to it. When he was satisfied that everything was in order Mother would say, "You must learn to talk to Mr. Flack you know. It is quite easy - like talking to anyone else."

"Oh no," he would say, "I can't abide they things. They da frighten I. They da make me all of a tremble. But I should like to let 'em know as I ent very well and I got this yer carbuncle."

"Very well," said Mother, "When I have given him your order you can tell him yourself." "Don't give I that thing, just 'old it by me and I'll shout and tell um," was the reply.

Sometimes he ordered fruit or some vegetables but not always as most village folk had their own.

When the order had been given Mother would say, "Mr. Flack, Mr. Hall wants a word with you," and she would hold the receiver near to the old man, who would shout loud enough to be heard outside.

"How be Sir. I bent very well. I wanted ya to know."

Mr. Flack must have asked what was the matter. "I got a carbuncle on me neck. A gert big un. Ah, as big as a honion. Ah, a honion I said."

His repetition of the word onion must have made his hearer think that he was ordering onions for he shouted, "No, no, I don't want honions, I be talking about me neck. This yer carbuncle as big as a gert big turnup an' it da 'urt sumut cruel." Mother would be there of course and say, "Let me teil him" and he would say, "Aye Mam you tein, I can't make un unnerstand." Mother would bring the conversation to an end by repeating what the old man wanted Mr. Flack to know after which she would offer the poor fellow words of sympathy purporting to have come from Mr. Flack who had said something very different. But the old man went away pleased.

These bi-weekly calls took up a lot of Mother's time and gave asmany a laugh.

At one of the big houses in the district a family arrived with much style. Everyone gave them credit and looked up to them as being the "upper class". The sister of the wife came to stay and she often came to use our telephone to ring a gentleman (married) at the local town. The conversations were about dogs and it was usually found necessary for them to meet it seemed, always to do with the dogs of course. Another little secret we had to keep. A year or so later the family quietly left, and people local and from the towns came to the post office to know if Mother knew where they had gone. Of course they had taken good care not to leave any address, and we often wondered if anyone had traced them.

If we ~~had~~ had repeated half that we heard on the telephone we should have upset many people. It was the thing to run to us to ring the doctor for the least thing. The doctors soon got wise to this and to us they made some disparaging remarks which we could not pass on, before they said if they would visit, or send a prescription or to give some other order. They knew as we did that within a short time the person would be out again possibly enjoying a pint in the local.

One of the Lydney doctors, fed up with one man's constant moanings, gave him sixpence and told ~~me~~ him to get a couple of pints of cider which would do him more good than doctor's medicine.

Then there were the calls to the firm in Gloucester who collected dead horses and cows and the farmer whose animal had died in the field or stable was too upset to use the telephone himself.

Only once did I break the rule of not telling anything I heard on the telephone and that was when Jolly Jones was found dead in the Gumstalls field and when I told my friends we all trooped off to see and we danced around it and one girl tried to lift the hoof of the great cart horse. When I

think of the episode now I wonder what made us be so callous and to act so much out of keeping with our usual behaviour.

People rang us and expected us to get relations a long way off to come to the telephone, or to deliver messages at some outlandish place, but we also put a stop to that and told them to write, unless we knew that the postman would attend to it when he was that way but of course few people wrote or could write letters until the first world war came when many changes came swiftly.

Mother was asked to write letters or to help people to write. I remember sniggering at a love letter written by a young soldier not at the wording so much as at the spelling, but then I was too young to realize to a mother, a wife or a girl friend these letters were as precious as gold regardless of errors. I learned that lesson in the second war.

To Mother came the folk who lost sons in the first war and my Mother was in daily fear that my brother would be called up. The war ended in the year he was eighteen.

Men often referred to their wives as "my little doxy" but I am sure that they did not mean anything nasty or they did not know what the word meant.

One man returned from the war had a housekeeper who came and went at will, sometimes returning to her husband. When the old soldier was alone he would pour out his troubles when he came for his pension all of which he soon used to drown his sorrow in the pub next door.

We knew that the lady friend would be coming back and that she would write for her train fare, so that week a pound of the pension would be put in an envelope and sent to her and we would be asked to add a few affectionate words for him to sign. She would return for a while until his war wounds made him impossible to live with, then off she went again.

The inn next door was often first stop for men who drew their war pensions or the ~~XX~~ Lloyd George as they called the old age pension, so wives often came with them or they came to collect the pension and then went to the shop. It was easy to sign a name or put a cross or to write a good imitation of the man's signature and this often caused rows.

One couple in particular had many rows over this. Mother knew that if the man collected the pension not a penny would find

its way home to the large family so often Mother put up with abuse when she let the woman draw the money.

I remember one day in particular that this happened. The woman had walked the long way but the husband had been given a ride in a trap so that he was not long behind her in arriving.

When he was seen getting out of the cart the frightened woman in such a panic that Mother lifted the counter flap and sent her to the kitchen where she listened to what her husband was going to do to her when she got home. Mother of course said that she had given her the signed book so she had to pay her. I can't remember the outcome but I know that she stayed some time before she felt it was safe for her to go out.

Some pensioners (old age) were not well enough to come to the post office and a few of them were blind. Many of these lived in remote cottages across fields. Mother and Father often walked many miles at weekends to take the ten shillings to these and often they took a bit of bacon, a few eggs, a bit of home cured lard or something from the garden. Sometimes I went with them.

The blind were so grateful and so gentle and one old man used to ask me to sit near him. He would put his hand on my head and say, "Such lovely soft curls and the parting is dead over your left eye, and I've got no hair and no eyes but I thank God every day for the kind friends that help me."

What a different world it was then. Oil lamps, and candles, stone floors, dirty great fire places and often a newspaper on the table to do duty as a tablecloth.

Earliest Recollections.

My very early recollection is of an old man with a long white beard. I can still see him standing by our dining table, facing the window. When very young I talked to my mother about him and the description fitted my mother's father who lived next door to us, but he died when I was ten months old, and no-one else fitted my description. I have read that some people say that memory can go back even farther but most people would say my memory was just a product of imagination, but I am convinced that is not so.

The house in which I was born stood on the side of the main road, between two hills, with an inn next door, and a brook, with a deep trough, across the road.

The roadside by the brook was of some importance as it was a stopping place for so many travellers, and upon it pigs were killed and the cider mill came to make our cider.

The motor car was a curiosity, and the splendid traction engines pulled alongside to rake out the ashes and build up their fires and the steam rollers used it for a parking space. Piles of stone were also deposited for the old stone breaker to break up into smaller sizes for mending the roads.

The first of the charabancs also parked there while the Welsh trippers made their call at the inn on Sundays especially, for inns were not open in Wales on Sundays. That of course was a little later.

Riders stopped for their horses to drink and during the first world war convoys of soldiers, with horse drawn wagons, guns, loads of hay and foot soldiers often halted beside the stream. On many occasions my mother woke me to see them outside the house.

Greater excitement for me was when the circus animals walked by or when the traction engines pulling the fair stopped to see to their engines and to take up water.

It was a grand place to live so full of excitement and I did not need to get out of bed to see all these things and the early morning travellers.

Needless to say the brook was a favourite play place and I had more than one lot of punishment for falling in.

What was that punishment? The usual one for that age, being sent to bed and then father came up with the strap. Boys often had the buckle end of the strap but if anyone accidentally caught a cut from the buckle it was considered just punishment. Luckily I didn't.

That same brook flowed through fields where we picked mushrooms, watercress, orchids and cowslips, where we ate sour sally and spent many an hour making daisy chains.

We roamed those same fields to try to find the nests of the many ~~pl~~ plovers or lapwings listening to their constant call of "peewit".

Their eggs were a delicacy and many boys found them and had them for breakfast. What endless joy we found in the fields and the brooks. We picked lots of cowslips and washed them then we poured hot water over them and how we enjoyed our cowslip wine, it was wine indeed to us.

We also picked a variety of flowers which we pressed between two pieces of glass and we asked all we saw to give a pin to see a poppy show. What simple pleasures were ours.

In our favourite fields there were ponds green and slimy, but the haunts of so many interesting creatures. We took home tadpoles and put them in old boilers and when they became baby frogs we went to the Severn to pick up pieces of cork on which the tiny frogs sat until the sad day when they jumped out to leave us.

Newts fascinated us for a while and we kept those in water taking them out to watch their movement. But to see the lovely dragon flies and watch other tiny creatures in the ponds took up much of our time, to the annoyance of our parents when we returned looking like urchins.

If we were not needed to keep an eye on baby ducks or chickens there were no errands to run we spent our time bowling our hoops along the main road. What a grand noise the boys! hoops made with the metal rod attached to the hoop. We spun tops in the middle of the road, where of course we played hop scotch and bat and bird. The occasional horse and cart did not move us for long. I remember the very spot where two other girls and I were playing bat and bird the day the first world war ended. At eleven o'clock as we played outside the carpenter's shop at Brookend the tinsplate hooter blew. How did we react? I don't know but I so clearly remember that moment.

We played on the tree trunks outside the carpenter's shop paying no heed to the warnings about their rolling which they did of course.

One day I was ready to go out with my mother and I was all dressed up in my velvet dress and my best buttoned boots when I decided to get into a dog cart which was waiting to be repaired. No sooner had I stepped on the back step than the thing tipped up and my foot was trapped and when it was released one of my boots was torn all around the ankle but the concern about my hurt ankle saved me from punishment. Ah well, we all have to learn the hard way.

The old cottages were built of stone and and even on the hottest day one felt cold when first going inside. Our fireplace had a big open chimney and one could look up and see the sky. Soot was the everpresent menace and often it fell just as a lid was lifted to check on the contents of the saucepan. One day there was a large saucepan of black currant jam ready to pot and down came the soot. As a skin had formed on the top of the jam with a lot of care and a lot of blowing the jam was more or less edible.

Getting the fire going in the morning in time to boil the kettle and to fry the bacon was a miserable business. I can see the Sunday morning breakfast pan with bacon, and kidneys sizzling away.

On Saturday mornings the emery board came out and knives had to be cleaned. One day I discovered that steel knives cleaned very well in the soil so I stuck them in and went to play in the road. Not for long. I soon got hauled back to do the job properly.

It was rather a lot to expect me to keep watch over baby ducks and geese when my friends were screaming and racing in the road and more than once I was sent to bed for leaving the little creatures to the "mercy" of the rats for ever around the pig and hen houses.

Another task was hammering bits of china until they were as fine as dust to help the hens to lay eggs with stronger shells.

Most houses had floors of large flag stonesⁿ, which sweated in damp or sultry weather. Between the stones the filling looked more like dirt than cement and the constant damp from scrubbing often made gaps through which mice appeared. I often made a lasso with cotton and lay in waiting when mice were active and had one success.

Linoleum soon rotted on stone floors so most people made rag mats for warmth and comfort. Most winter evenings some time was spent in making these mats and every possible bit of material was kept to be cut into strips.

Our house was one of the first to have a^{water} tap indoors. There was a tap outside but when Mother decided to have water laid on to our house and also on to her three cottages there was no shortage of volunteers to dig the trenches for the pipes. There was no thought of hot water of course, that had to be obtained by putting a fire under the large copper or boiler.

Bath night in front of the fire was quite a ritual. Buckets of cold water then keep out of the way while buckets of hot water came in. The youngest first and off to bed as soon as the hair was dry. Going to bed with damp hair was supposed to give us so many complaints in the head so we were towelled in front of the roaring fire, wrapped in a blanket and into a bed warmed with either a stone hot water bottle or a hot brick wrapped in a cloth.

The candle which lighted us to bed was taken away and we lay in utter darkness and in fear. I used to hold my own hand to fool myself that I was not alone. ~~Then~~

Then I would start calling for my sister to come to bed and she would give me a thumping when she was sent up before she wanted to come.

Gladys had died in that bedroom and I could not forget it.

In Mother's bedroom was a large chest and what child could resist a peep inside such a treasure trove ? I spent many happy hours delving in that chest. I loved to dress up, in the high-necked gowns with their boned lace collars. The velvet neck bands, the gold guard watches, the feather boa and the fur stole, and the pony skin coat and trinkets that were going out of fashion all were stored away. I could be happy for hours draping myself but something else was a greater attraction. At the bottom of the chest were two books which held my attention.

One must have been a medical book for I stared at the skeletons and although they were strange and weird they fascinated me.

I felt that I was being very wicked, I did not know why, and the need to put them out of sight quickly should I hear anyone was ever-present.

The other book was even more of an attraction. It was either a Bible or the Old Testament but it was a huge book with gorgeous pictures in colour and each picture had a sheet of tissue paper over it. Decorative capital letters started each page. Two pictures I still see clearly. One was of Samson with his hand in the lion's mouth and the other of Solomon's judgment. Samson was depicted as a strong boy with thick legs. He wore a short loose robe tied with a cord.

When I first saw the other picture I was horrified for Solomon was holding a child by the foot, and the child's head hung down. In his other hand Solomon held a sword to cut the child in half to settle the

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dispute between the two women knowing that the real Mother would be the first to react to the gesture. On the face of the one woman was the look of horror while the face of the other showed little emotion.

At the first sight of the picture I took it to Mother to ask about it so that later I could look at it without fear knowing that the child had come to no harm.

The sacrifice of Isaac was another terrifying story illustrated in the book and pictures of Elija and Elisha beside the plough were interesting but I am sure that they did not wear such splendid cloaks as the artist gave them.

Our house was a 17th century one and Mother's bedroom originally had three windows but one had been filled in and the window sill made a splendid shelf and standing in the middle of that shelf was a bust of Julius Caesar. Where it had come from I do not know and somehow it scared me and I was afraid to touch it. It was white but of what it was made I do not remember but I would like to have it now but to a small child it was a weird object. Sometimes as I looked at the books from the chest I imagined that it looked at me and that one day it would come to life and speak.

All the pictures of outside scenes in the big book had the same types of clouds.

These clouds were fat and billowy with silver linings but peeping out around lots of the clouds were fat little faces of cherubs and pretty angels. I stared at our clouds in the hope that one day a cherub or an angel would appear.

Over sixty years later cloud formations fascinate me, especially the billowy ones and I am still fanciful enough to look for shapes.

We also spent evenings looking at pictures in the fire, how real they were. We roasted chestnuts in the fire, toasted cheese on the trippet, hooked on the bars, and the oven was always hot to roast an apple, an onion or a potato. What a joy an always-hot oven was, and the kettle always singing on the hob. One must not forget the soot which constantly fell, into our great open hearth.

At the side of the house was a lean-to where my friends and I loved to hold concerts. We dressed in old curtains, towels and shawls, made up our own songs, and pretended that we could speak in foreign languages. Any strange noise sent us dashing into the main road as we did when we heard the first motor cycle coming and the four friends and myself timed it so well that we caused the poor man to have an accident with only one of our members slightly hurt.

But my greatest pleasure was to climb the trees in our orchard on a windy day and to sing as loudly as I could as I swayed and imagined myself on a ship. I made up my songs about anything I saw around me, the hens, the pigs, the fruit on the trees, just anything.

There were times when I loved the orchard, when I could climb the trees, when I could talk to the pigs and the hens, when I could pick the apple of my choice. But there were times when I hated it. These were when the apples had to be picked up and put in sacks for cider making, when the trees were shaken and the walnuts had to be picked up and set aside for selling at Christmas. It was my job at Christmas to count and bag the walnuts which were sold by the hundred. One hundred and nine was the number ~~was the amount~~ for each bag, somewhat like the thirteen being the baker's dozen.

On cold frosty mornings even the gloves would not keep out the cold when we picked up the apples which had to be collected before the animals and the hens ate them.

In one of our gardens which we called the Patch was an apple which was called the b batheer. How I wished that lightning would strike it, for it was huge and cropped heavily every year. I sometimes got my friends to help but they soon tired.

When all the fruit was ready the cider ^{mill} arrived beside the brook opposite the house. Local children gathered around and as soon as the cider began to run from the press we held our cups under. The juice ran into a tub and men ran with buckets to pour it in the large casks in our cellar. This was up the steps, through the passage, along the back court so it needed able men ~~would~~ could move very quickly.

The residue was collected for the garden and the heavy wet "blankets" were washed in the brook. All helpers were promised a small cask of cider when it was ready to drink.

The bung hole was left open for the cider to ferment and the cask was topped up each day. It was quite a ceremonial when the time came to tap the cask. Family and

friends and neighbours came along to sample and the oh's and the ah's and the remarks, "That's a drop of good stuff Bill," or "Never tasted anything better Bill," or "That da warm the cockles of thee 'eart, Bill" "That be morish, I'll bring me little cask along next week," came from the tasters.

"All ya da want is a bit of bread an' cheese", would not always call forth any response. It was not surprising that men's hair seemed to grow a lot faster when there was plenty of cider on tap.

The hair cutting took place on the back court and now and again Father would tap the window which was the signal for one of us to go and draw another jug. The sixpences Father charged ~~was~~ ^{were} more than used up in supplying the customers with refreshment. Perhaps half a dozen men would be sitting on the back wall.

Many folk came for treatment for their ailments. Father often got things out of eyes, he made poultices from the comphrey which he grew, he massaged backs and stiff joints but few brought their own liniments or bandages.

Crushed sugar was put on proud flesh, and the Jeyes fluid was used for most cuts. Perhaps some of the folk needed the comfort of a good fire, and a cup of tea as much as any other treatment.

Living on the main road we had many callers, some welcome and some not so welcome some who caused no trouble and some who hung around and had to be watched. But all in all the doubtful ones were few and far between.

The tramps who we called milestone inspectors, were numerous. Almost every day at least one called. Some we remembered from previous calls. We were happy about those, knowing that they wanted only food or a hot drink.

Most of them looked reasonably well, their flesh more or less clean and they did quite well for clothes. Mother kept all cast-offs in the cupboard under the stairs right by the front door so that they were get-at-able when any tramp called. How grateful they were.

They were never refused food and tea. Sometimes they had some tea in the bottom of their billy cans, and occasionally some sugar. We never touched their cans, we let them hold them while we pored in the boiling water and the milk or whatever was needed.

The police said that we should not give them anything because begging was against the law so if they had to wait we sent them

around the back. Many many cooked dinners were eaten on our back wall, and many hundreds of chunks of bread and cheese were carried away.

We thought that our place was marked but whatever signs were used we never knew, but we often searched for marks outside.

We preferred the tramps to the gipsies who also were regular callers. The gipsies were both persistent and insistent and were the foot-in-the-door type and expert wheedlers. Most people were afraid of them, there were stories of spells and so on and people were very superstitious about so many things. Gipsies had learned their psychology in the School of Life. They needed no books.

Gipsies knew the right approach, they knew how to flatter, how to break down any resistance, and how to make a person believe that they really had the powers of telling the future.

"You have a lucky face my dear," melted any heart. "I can see great things for you. I can see there is happiness coming your way. Just cross my palm with silver and I will tell you your fortune." Who could resist it? Certainly not the young folk.

In 1919 an elderly gipsy came to the door. She was a regular caller so Mother sent my sister to the door. "Tell her we don't want anything and that I haven't any clothes to give her this time and shut the door," said Mother hopefully.

"I've got only a few pags left. I have trapped for miles today. I'm sure you'll give me a few pence."

"Not today," said May, "We don't want any." She tried to shut the door, but the large basket was in the way.

"Come in and shut the door," said Mother.

"Ah young lady you should let me tell your fortune. I can see the dark young man who will soon come into your life. You mark my words." May hesitated as the gipsy knew she would.

"Close the door," said Mother, but May lingered.

"There is a dark haired young man at this moment on a ship coming back to England. He will come here, and you will marry him. You can smile but mark my words you will think about them one day," was the parting shot. How the conversation was ended I don't recall but Mother was relieved when the gipsy had gone, when she told May that the old woman was a nuisance in calling so often and she would have to be more severe with her. I could not imagine Mother being severe with anyone.

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We certainly had cause to remember the gipsy's words a few years later. My Father was a railwayman and throughout my childhood there were one or two railwaymen lodging with us. A signalman, a signal porter, or a porter or lad porter we had them all in turn because at that time Woolaston Station was an important place.

A signalman came to stay with us in the early 1920's. He was dark haired, and at the time of the gipsy's prediction he was on board a troop ship coming home from service in India.

When about five years later he married my sister the gipsy's words were often retold.

This of course upgraded the powers of the old woman and it made many people around us really believe they had second sight.

At that time of course many ships were bringing many men home from war service overseas so her words could easily have been a shot in the ~~dark~~ dark which would have come true for many a girl and an ex-soldier.

The long black plaits wound around the gipsies' heads, their swarthy complexions, their black shaws, their long dresses and enormous baskets made them so easily distinguishable and often children would hide or turn back rather than meet them as the fear of having a spell cast on them was everpresent in their minds.

Of course gipsies were expert poachers and no doubt some of them helped themselves to fruit or vegetables at times but I cannot remember hearing of them doing anything to make them earn the discredit which was always associated with them, and we knew most things at the post office, and we knew all the police business as for many years we took all the police telephone calls, and we were able to listen to all the replies for some years.

I mentioned that we were never disturbed when tramps called. This was true when they came to our private entrance, which was usual. One day a tramp came into the post office, and that in itself was disturbing.

Luckily, or unluckily, whichever way we look at it, a neighbour was in our living room at the time.

The man asked Mother for money. When she replied that she had no money to give away he said, "There is money in that drawer." "That is not my money," said Mother. "If you don't give me some, I'll come round there and help myself," was the angry reply. He made as if to lift the end of the counter where the little door was, but I don't think he did lift it. Mother called the neighbour who had been all ears to what was going on and she ran to the top of the hill and brought back the policeman. The man had left the post office without any further trouble meeting the policeman on the way.

He was taken to Lydney police court on the following Wednesday, that day of the week renowned for Lydney's Meeting by the locals. This upset Mother more than the man's intrusion and when he was sentenced to seven days in prison Mother was so very upset and could not get him out of her mind.

One afternoon as she was standing by the window looking on to the road he came by. He saw her there, shook his fist at her and passed on. After a day or so of nervousness Mother felt that he would not return and the matter was soon put into the background.

I once gave a gipsy a sixpence out of the till to get rid of her when Mother had gone outside but Mother was angry when I told her about it and I saw the folly of what I had done. Unwelcome callers in the post office were a much greater problem than having them at the private entrance.

Living on the main road and close to a busy railway station, having a telephone, a business and so much contact with people of all types we were very much in the picture about things which were going on.

The police messages we took and the confidence of the police we made sure no-one heard about. The wrong-doers who sometimes gave the names of other people in the village would be described to Mother and many questions were asked to try to track down the culprit, and the injured person whose name had been used came to tell Mother about what had happened while she expressed surprise that anyone could do such a thing.

One woman came often to send money to bet on horses and Mother knew about her debts and she tried to persuade her to stop. She came one day while Mother was outside and when I had served her with the postal order she said she had no money, taking advantage of course of me.

Usually when Father or Mother was out in the garden Father gave me his railway whistle to blow and I would run to the back door and blow hard on the whistle then get back into the post office as quickly as possible.

I remember watching a man change the number plates on a motor car and the only thing I thought then that he was clever. We have learned a lot since then.

People fainted, some had chronic nose bleeds, some just sat "because me poor old knees is bad," and all told the most intimate stories, the village post office was a haven for so many in distress.

I knew when people were in the police cell and when they were to be taken to Lydney, by horse and cart and I often went to see them driven away, but I dared not tell anyone. One woman

After her spirit was in 'pittic' to drive in

Tea time was quite an important meal and about the only time when friends visited. We did not encourage visitors when the post office was open, but we had plenty on Sundays.

The ones of whom I remember most were some distant relatives from Bream. They owned a small shop and they had a dog trap and a pony. I liked the boy and the two girls who came and few people had visitors from elsewhere and I could ignore local friends and show off a little.

I was terrified when I went out in the high cart sitting with my back to the driver. Looking down on the road made me dizzy. I was sure that I should fall or the seat would slip off or the horse would fall. I died a thousand deaths often followed by nightmares.

Mother was very fond of Aunt Mary Ann and they had plenty to talk about. I can recall some of the family troubles she talked about. These would be common place today. She was a beautiful woman and I liked just to sit and look at her.

Mother had a friend in Lydney. Her husband was an engine driver on the Great Western Railway. On Thursdays when the post office was closed for the half day Mother went to tea with her. We went by train and the house was close to the station. Mother took a starched pinafore for me to wear at the tea table over my velvet dress. Ø

Its pocket came in useful as my poem will explain:-

Caraway Cake.

When a child, I was often taken
To tea with a lady sedate,
Her buttered scones were lovely
But oh! her caraway cake.
The table was tastefully laden
And she never forgot to bake
And put on a stand in the middle
That awful caraway cake.
We travelled by train each Thursday -
I travelled in Mother's wake -
And I sat so prim and proper
To gaze at that caraway cake.
A scone I ate so slowly
Such a long time did I take
Hoping she wouldn't offer me
A slice of her caraway cake.
But at last I had to face it
So sadly I relate,
The lady sweetly said to me,
"You must have some caraway cake."
I took a small bite and swallowed
But only for Mother's sake,
Then I stealthily slipped in my pocket
My slice of caraway cake.
So if you come to tea with me
For my early childhood's sake
You will never see on my table
A morsel of caraway cake.

Another woman to whose place we occasionally went prided herself on her good strong cup. Where we would have stirred the tea in the pot or we would have shaken the pot a little she liked to hold the pot high, point the spout at the photograph on the wall and say, "That is the photo of my late husband," as she gently agitated the pot. I asked Mother why the husband was late, was he working, and it puzzled how a dead man could be late for anything.

Mantel shelves were draped with pelmets made of heavy materials like mohair or a serge material trimmed with heavy bobbles which must have been a great fire risk as well as a harbour for soot and dirt. Chairs were draped with antimacassars and shaws very much needed in the cold draughty places. All beds had valances as much to hide what was underneath as for the appearance.

Windows needed blinds as much to be drawn at the time of a death or when a funeral passed by as for the real purpose.

Horse hair sofas were a misery to sit on, they were stuffed too hard and it felt as if you were sitting on a pack of needles or thistles. The old harmonium with its carpet-clad pedals found a place in many homes.

A lot of the light from the small windows was blotted out by pots, most beautiful ones in which were Christmas cactus and maiden-hair ferns of great size, while the aspidistra stood to gather dust in corners or on side tables. Eight-day clocks competed with the groaning old grandfathers to boom out the hour and its quarters. My Uncle's clock terrified me when it let out such a groan between each stroke, midnight being the most dreaded hour.

We must not forget the what-not which stood in the corners of the parlours, and were well stocked with ornaments and other bric-a-brac treasured by the owners.

Sundays.

In the early nineteen hundreds the fourth commandment was kept quite rigidly. After six days of dawn to dark toil it was good to rest. Our church was out of the way and many villagers went to the chapels nearer to them. Sometimes we went to one of the chapels for enjoyment only just to hear the comments made by one or two old men who we thought very funny. The set and stereotyped prayers of our church were so different from the prayers made up to suit the one who spoke them. One man always prayed for his wife and his son, by name, telling the Lord how good they were etc. while another one would pray for the children after which an old man would say, "Aye Lord, do Lord, bless the little children Lord," "And every few words were interrupted by "Aye Lord, do Lord, bless them Lord, aye the children the little children" etc. We thought this very funny, but it was only when we had a holiday from Sunday school or when a chapel anniversary service was on that we were allowed to go, but that would not have been allowed if our parents knew our real reason for going.

Our church rector, the Rev. Lambert was a small, quiet, well educated man and a musician, the real country gentleman type. My first memory of him was of an old man who took us to his garden to choose any rose, who opened his home for Christmas parties and who held musical evenings in his drawing rooms which contained a grand piano. He wandered the village like one in a trance no doubt his mind being full of thoughts above our plain.

His sermons were ~~some~~ somewhat long and monotonous and church attendance was poor except on special occasions, harvest festivals, Easter, Christmas and for funerals when the church often overflowed.

Sunday school was held in the church on Sunday afternoons. Several children walked together, and we were eager to get there early to "play" the organ but few wanted to go into the little cubby hole to blow the organ by pressing up and down the long wooden shaft. Someone was left to keep watch for the teachers and the rector so that we could rush to our seats and look as innocent as angels. We rang the church bell, swinging on the rope in turns, never thinking we were in any danger. We chose our hymns, enjoyed our lessons but most of all on summer days we loved to be taken around the rectory garden when we were told to choose a rose which would be cut for us.

Once a year we had a flower Sunday when every child carried a bunch of flowers and placed them in front of the altar.

Once a week on winter evenings the rector held orchestral evenings. Anyone who could play an instrument was welcome and those who could not play were given triangles, or some other percussion instruments. These seemed to be a source of humour for some reason, but how we enjoyed those evenings followed by coffee and some delicacy. Looking back I feel that the Rev. Lambert was a wonderful person whose qualities were never appreciated.

He wrote anthems which we sang on special occasions, "I will extol Thee" being my favourite and I was proud of the signed copy he gave me.

He was precise and corrected any errors in speech. I well remember saying often sounding the t and he said, "off-en off-en, never sound the T," a lesson which I have never forgotten and I find myself saying it to myself when most people in all walks of life sound the t.

One day he came into the post office in a fluster. The first buses had just started

to run and people had no idea of times and bus stops were of no consequence. You just stopped the bus outside your door, outside the pub or half way up or down a hill.

This particular morning he had encountered an irate man who had lost the bus, and was swearing to himself. When the rector asked what was the matter the reply was, "I lost the bloody bus. I saw the back of the bloody thing going up the hill."

The rector said, "I told the silly man there was no such thing as a bloody bus, it was made of metal not flesh and blood, and I asked him how he could have lost the bus when he knew where it was." The man had replied, "You silly old bugger," and started to walk away. I was in the post office at the time and although living next to a public house I heard a lot of swearing I was astonished to think that our gentle rector could utter such words.

A man, by name, Philip, Lord Wharton who died in February 1696 at the age of 83, in his will left to his trustees certain estates in Yorkshire, the proceeds of which were to be devoted to the distribution of Bibles and prayer books. In order to win the

Bible a pupil had to learn the psalms one, fifteen, twenty three, thirty seven, one hundred and one, one hundred and thirteen and one hundred and forty five. I am not sure of all the things which were to be learned to obtain the prayer book but of a certainty the catechism would have been one, as we all had to memorize it before being confirmed.

A table of readings day by day for the whole year was set out in the front pages of the Bible and prayer book.

Confirmation day was a great day in our lives. We were the V.I.P's of course but we had new white dresses and we wore confirmation veils in which we felt like the Virgin Mary.

We also wore our confirmation veils with surplices in the choir when Easter, Whitsun Christmas, harvest or a visit from the bishop came around.

Our organist was blind. He lived near me and called for me for choir practises and services. He never faltered on our steps and he said that I must not help him or go out to wait for him as it was good for him to find his own way. I sat by him in church and whispered $\frac{1}{2}$ to him "last verse" in each hymn. He depended on me and one or two others to start responses in the Litany and he often appeared to drop off to sleep.

One morning when I was not paying attention the rector stopped in the Litany at the words "from Thy wrath," and I thought that he had finished so I started to sing, "Good Lord deliver us," The organist followed my lead and when I and one of the men had finished he gave me a pained look and finished the sentence "and from everlasting damnation." I felt that the wrath of God was on me as we again sang "Good Lord deliver us."

I have laughed many times since about it but certainly not at the time.

One Sunday morning a young man came to church. He was home on holiday from Kenya. He sat in the front row in full view of the choir. I was twelve at the time and I felt this was a good time to be in full voice. The next day when I came home from school I was astonished to hear that he had been to the post office to ask Mother if my voice was being trained to which Mother replied no such thing had been thought of. Not having persuaded Mother to agree that it should be $\frac{1}{2}$ trained he asked if he could help to pay for lessons and even went as far as to offer to take me back to Kenya to see to it himself.

Mother politely told him that she needed no help to provide for all our needs

and most certainly I should not go anywhere out of her care. Father thought that the young man had some ulterior motive and I felt that I had missed some great adventure but the matter was closed with the warning not to repeat a word of what had been said.

Funerals whenever possible were held on Saturdays so that as many men as possible could attend. There were no hearses, the coffin being carried shoulder ^{to} the church often times a matter of two, or three miles.

Most villagers attended. It was somewhere to go, something to talk about. ^{was drowned} When a fisherman from the village died the choir was asked to attend. The church was full to overflowing. Men stood in the aisle and in the porch. The singing was very moving and when the hymn "For those in peril on the sea" was sung many men shed tears, there were few dry eyes. It was a memorable sight which I shall never forget and every time I hear the hymn I see so clearly Woolaston church, filled to overflowing and I can hear the preponderance of men's voices filling the air with pathos.

At the height of the flu epidemic in 1919 many young people were brought home for burial. One I remember in particular when the sister of the young woman screamed as the coffin was being lowered, "Don't put her down there. Bring her back."

Many children died. I can still picture a child dying of tuberculosis as thin as a skeleton, sitting in the front desk, not long before her death. No-one realised the gravity of the infection. In one week I attended three child funerals T.B. and meningitis being the cause of the deaths.

At home Sundays were what I called the No-days. Everything could wait until Monday no matter how urgent.

No singing of songs, no knitting, no mending, no gardening, no sewing, no whistling, no reading of anything except from the Bible or some religious, no wearing of weekday clothes, no going out to play in the road, it was for me church at 8am if there was a communion service, church at 11am Sunday school at 3pm and again church at 6-30 when often Father and Mother came too. After church some members of the choir came to our home and we sang around the piano while Father played the hymn tunes on his flutes. We each chose a hymn. Whenever I was asked to choose it was always "Fair waved the golden corn," but I have no idea why.

Father had to get up early on Sunday mornings to walk the length of the railway line between Woolaston and Lydney and partway towards Beachley. In my early years this was the only work for the day.

Later when motor cars came along the whole idea of Sunday changed and our family life with it. When Father came back from walking the length men came to have their hair cut and in the process to consume many jugs of cider.

The first car owners were mine owners from Wales, but one Mr. Thomas at first only aspired to a motor cycle and sidecar.

The first machines were not very reliable and those who drove them had very little or no idea what to do when they broke down which was ~~very~~ often. Our house lay in the dip between two hills. Many came to grief, too fast or too slow or mostly braking too harshly. Some turned over so we were quite a clearing station for those in trouble.

Often on a Sunday morning I would see every chair in our living room occupied by a stranger who had broken down and who had been taken pity on by my parents.

The first open tourers had the running boards on the sides, and the ladies wore big hats with a veil tied over the hat and under the chin. The pace was slow and the motorists often stopped to talk to passers by. I remember going home after a carnival in which I had been a buttercup dressed all in yellow when a large car stopped and the driver and his lady told me how nice I looked and each gave me a sixpence.

Village people resented the coming of the car and many old folk refused to walk on the side of the road when one came along.

One evening I was a passenger in a large open tourer in the outskirts of the village when we came upon an old man who was walking home to his cottage, which was luckily not far away.

A blast on the big bulbous horn was ignored a couple of times and the car had to be stopped. Turning round the angry man shouted, "Stop blowing that bloody horn. I bin on this yer road a seventy year or more and I bent a-going to move for thee nor that bloody new gadjut. Thee cast stay behind and wait till I da get to my gate and then thee cast have all the road to thee-self and I hope thee dost end up in the ditch." So there was nothing for it but to wait and as he leaned over his gate he shook his fist and shouted, "Bloody things."

One cantankerous old man who "learned" to drive thought that he had all the rights of the road and he would shout, "Get out of the way you silly bugger," and it was usual for folk to get up on the bank

for self preservation.

Then came the charabanc with the fabric hood and at weekends and holidays many came from South Wales. They stopped at the inn next door and made plenty of noise.

On Sundays they came because the inns in Wales were not open and as the inn next door was the second in England en route we saw plenty of them. The first inn had little room for the vehicles while ours had plenty of room on both sides of the road.

They came to buy flowers, fruit, v vegetables, and eggs or any other fresh product available. So our puritanical Sundays were shattered as we sold all the fruits in due season.

Our orchard was not easily accessable from the road but the one opposite had a gate so that anyone could gain easy access.

At the end of September many charabancs stopped at the inn on their way to the Barton Fair at Gloucester and many came armed with bags, baskets, pillow cases and I have seen bolster cases too. The women mostly raided the orchard filling whatever recepticle had been brought. On many occasions I stood in our orchard to watch them and knowing that the fruit they took was either cider fruit, or it was much too early to be of any real value.

We knew that on the Saturday night of Barton Fair we would get very little sleep until well into the morning when the merrymakers came back.

I have spoken of the piece of land at the brookside opposite our house. They made it a stopping place to off load their surplus water content on their way home and the screeching and laughing and the comments were like a dubious music hall, the women outdoing the men

in their mirth. I was supposed to close my bedroom window on Barton fair nights.

Father and Mother often went to the fair and came back with the inevitable coconuts, ornaments from the hoop-la and gingerbread. When I went I felt sick watching the people mostly men swallowing cockles and as I got giddy on swings or roundabouts or the horses I did not enjoy the outing.

Lydney fair was another important date June 25th. This was also the date when any self-respecting gardener should be able to boast that he had dug potatoes. The digging was linked up with the planting on or about Good Friday. My Father would be ashamed if we did not have the garden produce on the right dates.

Spring cabbage and gooseberries for Whitsun kidney beans in July and plenty of peas in June when the Severn salmon were at their best and not too big.

A salmon weighing six to eight pounds was bought from the local fishermen who sent most of their catch to Long's at Gloucester by train. Duck, salmon, chicken, picnic hams or a goose we did not consider luxuries. Country people reared their own pigs and poultry.

I can see the ceiling of the shop in Gloucester in Northgate street, I believe that it was Liptons where picnic hams by the dozen hung like Christmas decorations and customers walked around selecting which ~~was~~ one they thought best. Our kitchen walls were decorated with sides of bacon, the smell of which I hated so that I did not taste bacon until I was fifteen years old.

Palm Sunday was very important in that it brought together many folk who only met at that time. I did not care much for the time as before hand we had to take materials to the churchyard and scrub the tomb stones, cut the grass, wash the vases and have the graves looking spick and span before the day. Almost all Palm Sundays I remember as being wet and windy. On the flowering day folk came from far and near and Mother enjoyed talking to folk about days gone by. One of the women had been Mother's bridesmaid so they had plenty to talk about. Each year we took pots with cinerarias, american currant, jonquils, daffodils, and moss wreaths into which we put primroses. It was fashionable to place artificial flowers in dome-shaped glass cases on the graves. Our rector disliked them intensely and spoke out against them.

After flowering the folk walked around to see all the other graves and to criticise those who made a big show more than those who neglected their graves. The evening service on Palm Sunday was well attended but so many were sad to see what the rain and wind had done to their handywork.

Reading verses on the tombstones was great fun. How I wish that I had written some of them down.

We children had great fun also jumping from the high tombs or going into the stokehole under the church which was forbidden.

One summer after-when a friend and I came home across the fields by Goody Well, she said that she would take off all her clothes and paddle and proceeded to do just that. When she was quite naked a man appeared by the stile at the top of the next field. In panic I grabbed her clothes, and as she cried, "Hide me, keep behind me we ran like rabbits behind a hedge where she hastily dressed. She never tried that again."

Although my Mother was born at a small country inn she had an aversion to drink and we saw the results of so much of it when we lived next door to the Woolaston Inn.

In my earliest recollections I hear her singing in her lovely contralto voice in the early morning when I woke. As she worked the treadle sewing machine she sang the Sanky and Moody hymns which she had sung so often when she was a member of the Methodist church. As she made Father's shirts, and all the garments we wore the air was filled with the sounds of The Old Rugged Cross, We will gather at the river, and *Ave, Jesus loves me*.

What a wonderful sound to awake to each day. She made beautiful velvet dresses for herself and for my sister and I, in blue, in brown or in crush-strawberry, a pink shade. She sent to Manchester to J.D. Williams for the material and how excited we were when the parcel arrived. She was always smart with her velvet and lace, stiff boned collars, long full sleeves, and sometimes a band of black velvet around her throat with a jewel inset in it. I liked to dress in these things. Her feather boa, or her fur stole set off her dresses. Her hair was combed straight back from her face which needed no artificial aids.

Her blue ~~eyes~~ eyes shone when she was happy but they had not always shone that way. She had wanted to marry her cousin, a smart dapper, but her father would not allow it. The belief was that if cousins married the children would be of low mentality or even "daft," which was a word in common use.

Living near her home was my Father who was a handsome man and an old man often said to me, "You know, your Father and Mother were the most handsome couple who ever walked out." Whether on the rebound or not I do not know but they were married in a Gloucester church.

Mother was kind to all and the

tramp was spoken to as kindly as was the parson or the schoolmaster. To her so many came for advice, for help, or to relate their innermost troubles, often to borrow, or to ask her to read or to write a letter. Pots of jam, slices of bacon, vegetables, fruit, and a few eggs found themselves in many a basket.

In middle life she decided that she would be confirmed in the Church of England which she had attended with us so that at fifty she was confirmed in Gloucester Cathedral.

When she no longer did her own sewing she often went to a high class dressmaker in Newport on the afternoons when the post office was closed. She travelled by train of course.

She took me to Manchester to visit her brother who was a Deacon in the chapel. Naturally when we went with him and my aunt to the service we were very important people.

That was the first time that I had seen the handshakes in churches.

She also bought me clothes in Lewis' stores and was I proud to wear the brown hat and coat which I remember so well.

I was allowed to travel alone in the care of the guard to Barry to stay with my uncle, to Pontypridd to Mother's friend, and to Cardiff to an uncle and at each stop the guard came to see if I was all right.

My uncle who lived in Cardiff went every evening to the bridge over the ~~old~~ railway to wait for the last train to go by to Gloucester I often went with him and each time he would say, "There goes the last train to dear old Gloucestershire."

Mother did not make much profit out of her tenants. One old woman paid two shillings a week and after her rent book was signed she had the money returned to her. Every Sunday Mother dished up her dinner first and I ran up the Station Road to take it to her. She had the same dinner that we had. She gave me her rent and I took it home but on the Monday when she returned her plate and dish Mother gave her the rent back again.

I was pleased that I did not have time to talk to her because she did nothing but grumble about neighbours, or about the boys who came after dark to frighten her, or to knock on her door. She sat very close to an open fire with no guard and her full skirts were often in the fender. Why she never burned herself or the house I do not know.

There was a widow in another cottage and although she could afford stout or cider she sometimes had no money for her rent and she also got let off paying some weeks.

She used to put the poker in the fire and then put it into her drink a thing which amused me. Later when she went to another house she drank too much and she sent notes to Mother asking her to buy some ornament or other to pay for food for herself and her son. Although Mother knew where her small income went she never refused to help her, and several times I took her two shillings and on one occasion I brought back the china figure of a Scots soldier. She also died young.

On the verge beside the brook an old one-legged stone breaker sat. How he managed to sit on those sharp stones all day and hammer them was a mystery to the children. We tried to use his hammer or our own to no avail. Mother often gave him hot drinks and food on cold days as he sat there with the sack around his shoulders to keep out the weather.

The Old Stonebreaker.
Granite for mending the roadways
Was piled in high heaps by the stream
For the old stone breaker to hammer
On six days in every week.
I remember him well by the roadside
As he sat on the sharp stone mound
Never seeming to lay down his hammer
Except for his Tommy or bait,
Or to take a well earned mouthful
Of weak tea from his earthenware jar.
He never complained or rested,
Though one leg was off at the knee;
He wore his yorks with distinction
On both legs of his well-patched cords.
We tried to use his hammer
But it was too heavy to wield
And our own small useless hammers
Could not make a crack in the stone.
He seldom spoke as we watched him
Only to warn, "Mind yer eyes,"
When we got very close to discover
If the granite really got hot
As the sparks flew all around him
When steel and granite met.
My home was across the roadway -
Mother often gave him hot tea
And a tasty cake or tartlet
On days when the wind was chill.
He wore a sack round his shoulders
To keep out the wind and them rain
But only severest weather
Could stop him doing his work.
He must have been very weary
At the end of each gruelling day;
He marked the end of an era
And set a milestone on the hard way.

Pig Killing.

As I have already said, on the opposite side of the road from my house there was a brook and a flat area which was used for many purposes. One of these was pig killing.

We kept several pigs, for breeding, for pork and for selling live. When the colder weather came they were fattened on the boiled mangolds and lots of meal.

Dates were marked when killing should commence and everything was ready so that pig meat could be ready for Christmas.

My bedroom window looked out on to the road and the brook and how I hated the mornings when the killing took place. It was so awful to think that the pigs which had been treated almost like humans should on a cold dark winter morning be rudely taken to the brookside to become meat.

Straw was placed in readiness, and the pig bench put beside it, ^{under} Buckets and cloths, pumice stone and that awful butcher's knife. The poor creature would be manhandled on to the bench its screams cutting through the air, how I dreaded it. I pulled the clothes over my head to try to deaden the sound.

The pigs were not stunned the poor creatures were held fast while their throats were cut. I still shudder when I think of it. When all was quiet I would peep out but often at the wrong time to see one of the men gleefully catching the blood in a bucket. This was later used in the making of black puddings.

Then the flames would leap up by my window as the pig was laid on the burning straw to burn off the hairs.

If it was a porker boiling water was used for scrubbing it.

When the pig was returned to the bench it was cleaned and the clean-flowing

water of the brook was put to good use.

The pig was then carried around to our back kitchen where it was hung from a big beam, head downward. It was then cut open and all the organs were removed and examined by the owner. Bowls buckets and baths were everywhere, for the liver, the intestines.

When all was removed the inside was washed and the carcass left to cool and "set". A piece of hazel branch about a foot long was inserted to keep the body well open.

A day or two later the butcher came in the evening to cut out the joints and several people came to order or to take away such things as griskins, spare-ribs, sweetbread, lard, chitterlings and bacon.

All these had to be noted while boys came to ask for the bladder which when blown up made a good football.

The washing of the chitterlings was a horrible job. Gallons of water washed through the intestines and they had to be turned inside-out with a stick.

We had cold water laid on but people who did not have this luxury took the things either to the tap at the roadside or to the nearest brook.

While the pig hung in the back kitchen I was terrified. I could not sleep at night in case it moved, it really haunted me. I would not go near it and made detours around the house not to see it.

The sides of the pig were laid on a bench to be salted, another horrible job. One of us would have the salt, the salt-petre or the dredger of plain flour ready. For, I think about three weeks this went on and then the sides were ready to hang on the kitchen wall. Once again the hazel stick was needed and strong rope passed around it to stop the rope from cutting a larger hole

as it took the strain of the weight.

After some weeks the bacon was fit to cut. It had to be tasted and tested first so I kept out of sight because to see my Father cut off and eat a small piece raw made me thoroughly sick.

The smell of the bacon first thing in the morning always made me feel ill and it is small wonder that I did not taste bacon until I was fifteen years old and even now the sight of pig's liver in the butcher shop almost turns my stomach.

Nothing was wasted. The lard was melted and eaten on bread. The old adage went:-

On Monday we had bread and dripping,

On Tuesday we had dripping and bread,

On Wednesday and Thursday we had dripping on toast,

But that's only dripping and bread.

Our lard was kept mostly for winter coughs and it was a proven remedy. It will grease the inner pipes the old ones explained.

It was warmed and put on top of jam and it set and made an airtight seal.

The pig's head of course was made into brawn, and the feet, the trotters, were boiled and thoroughly enjoyed by the men of the household, *as were the faggots.*

When pigs were not well or when their tails hung straight the remedy was coal. A shovel of small coal was put into the ~~trough~~ trough and it acted as a medicine.

An old sailor told me that sailors also ate small coal when they were off colour.

Where there are animals there will be rats so that it was usual to look into the pig troughs and see rats or to open the bins in which the food was kept and find them.

This meant of course that ratting became quite a sport

Guns, ferrets, sticks, stones, gin traps and rat cages were used.

The gin traps now illegal were in common use and cats were often the victims. It was usual to see cats with deformed or with part of a leg missing but also these crippled animals were shot. My Father was a good shot. Sometimes badly injured cats were brought to him and on more than one occasion I saw cats put to walk up the garden path where they were shot. My own cats were often victims and some of those had to be disposed of and many times I cried when cats with legs hanging by a thread had dragged themselves home after being released from a trap. I released cats on two occasions from these cruel traps being badly bitten in the process.

More merciful were the rat cages in which some bait was put and once the rats were in they could not get out. Mothers and their families crowded in and it was quite a ceremony when Father took the cages to the brook and all the children and some adults came to see the drowning in the trough.

Guns were brought by neighbours and a watch was kept for the rats coming to feed at the trough when the pigs had moved away. Loaded guns were often stacked against the wall in readiness and children were warned to keep away and luckily they did.

Rats also ate the hen eggs, and the baby chicks and ducks and it was not safe to put the hand into a nest without first looking.

Mother "sat" hens and when she wanted the broody hen off the nest she took off her black apron and threw it over the hen so that she could lift the hen out without being pecked.

I was never brave enough to do that, but many would not come to feed and by the end of three weeks they became very thin, even when they fed.

The boy next door was sent each evening to an orchard at the top of the hill each night to count all the hens and the turkeys and to shut them in for the night. Several of us children

followed him and teased him for some time. He had to tell his mother how many of each sort were there not just the total number of hens. He would say, "One buff hen, two buff hens, three buff hens, one plymouth rock, two plymouth rock" and so on while we crept round and said, "six buff hens, two rhode island, or five wyandottes," until we reduced him almost to tears, but knowing how severe his mother was and how she could dole out punishment we always helped in the end to get the total right. We never referred to hens but always to their breed when speaking of them.

One woman who went to Newport market asked Mother to allow her to let people bring produce to our house and every Thursday evening she and her husband came along with the horse and cart to collect eggs, vegetables, and fruit to be taken to Newport market each Friday morning. Sadly she died quite young and her young baby with T.B. I can see her black curly hair wringing with perspiration as she loaded her baskets to take to market. I visited her a few days before her death and sat by her bedside and now I think what awful risks we took in those days in such visits or in letting children in their later stages of the disease come to school.

School Days.

I was four years old when my seven year old sister died of diphtheria so that when I started school shortly afterwards the headmistress who taught the reception class was very kind to me. Soon afterwards she and her husband who was head of the "Big School" left. He had I think been lamed by a kick but I am not quite clear about this.

When I moved into the first class I must have been able to read fairly well because I well remember staying in from drill as we called our physical training then, to teach a boy to read.

We sat on the end of the desk near the old tortoise stove which suited me well in the winter ~~and~~ as I hated the cold.

First bell rang at ten to nine and we were expected to be in the yard by then, if not we ran as fast as our legs could carry us. Late comers were punished.

I should have said that the new ~~school~~ school master who came just before I moved up to the big school was tall, thin and very severe. When he came he had a poor opinion of the village in general and the school in particular. His first words were a promise to lick us into shape and to put the fear of God into us, which was no idle threat.

In those days no allowance was made for those who lagged behind. The misbegotten idea that all children could learn and failing other methods the method of hitting it into them was tried out ^{was} not only in Charles Dickens' day.

The cane was always in evidence and used often, on boys and on girls. One day it came down on the back of a girl with plaits and it caught in the ribbon which flicked up and flew out of the window. Those children brave enough to laugh were reprimanded while the girl was ordered to collect the ribbon as

if it were her fault.

Let me go through a typical day. When the last bell rang or the whistle was blown we all rushed to our lines in a set order. There we were inspected. Clean necks, clean nails, tidy hair, no loose buttons or safety pins, no dirty shoes. Those who fell short were told to improve on the morrow.

Then into the classrooms in dead silence. We remained standing until told we could sit, upright and with our hands behind our backs.

The register was called and we went to assembly. After prayers and Bible readings we returned to our classes for scripture and to memorize the commandments, and certain Bible passages.

Then came arithmetic and the chanting of tables, and some easy rhymes to help us to remember rules. At seven we were expected to read well and know all our tables and to be able to apply the four rules with number capacity, length, time and weight. ~~W~~ I was always good with figures so I was happy but many had no play and were kept in after school to correct their work.

There were rules for everything. Geography ~~was~~ learned like tables going all around the British Isles chanting Newcastle on the Tyne, Stockton on the Tees, Hull on the Humber etc. and the names of the rivers in their order.

There was some way to remember lots of other places like "Long legged Italy kicked poor Sicily into the Mediterranean Sea."

Smoke blown by the wind and the look of the river Severn provided our weather forecast.

History was learned like tables. Dates were most important. Our "Bible of History" was Arnold Foster's book and how we revelled in our victories, the British who were always right; I wish we had known a little of the

other side, but we were great patriots and revelled in the pink patches on the map of the world. We learned the kings and queens of England like a poem :-

First William the Norman
Then William his son
Henry Stephen and Henry
Then Richard and John and so on to end
Came good Queen Victoria and
And seventh Edward her son.

Then the dates to go with these were learned:-
1066 - 1087, 10-87 - 1100. 1100 - 11-35
I still use this and find it very easy to sort out periods in history through it.

Modern teaching scoffs at such chanting of tables and so on but during all my teaching career I proved the value of a lot of the old methods.

Reading was all important and there were no abridged editions for us. Sir Walter Scott was hard going as to get the gist of the story we had to read so many descriptive passages. The Headmaster guided us through many of these passages and pointed out the beauty of them but for ten year olds to be enthusiastic about Scott was asking quite a lot.

Twenty years later I read and re-read the many books realizing that the early reading of them made a great contribution to to my enjoyment of them but by then I had the art of scanning well practised and the means of sorting the interesting from the less interesting ~~passing~~ passages and to keep the story flowing.

We also learned Scott's poem Excelsior, and in one of his very few moments of fun the Head told us the parody of the first verse :-

Breathes there the man with soul so dead
Who never to himself hath said
When he kicked his toe against the bed
"Excelsior !"

We laughed heartily , but - ah but - later

when a boy was told to recite the poem, he tittered when he came to the parody line, as did we all when he brought ~~down~~ on us what he was fond of calling the wrath of God. We were told that if we could remember sensible things half as well as we could remember nonsense we would be better scholars.

ah well, one lapse from the severity had been worth while, we had at least had one laugh in the presence and with the approval of the Head of Affairs.

Scott, Thacheray, Shakespeare, Longfellow, Dickens, Matthew Arnold, Mrs. Harriett Beacher Stowe, and Rudyard Kipling were but a few authors we had at our finger tips.

How he made the people live again for j us. We wept for Topsy and Little Eva, for Oliver Twist and David Copperfield, for Sohrab and Rustum, for Coriolanus, Uncle Tom and for Dora.

We learned pages of Hiawatha, and of Morte d' Arthur, the whole of such patriotic poems as The Revenge, If, and The Thousandth Man and many more.

Mrs. Beesley's History of Rome was a great favourite as was Aesop's Age of Fable.

Thinking back I am amazed at the amount of English literature we absorbed in those few years and I pay tribute to the man who made all this possible. In gratitude I would quote from Waldo Emerson's poem Problem:-

"He builded better than he knew."

I would also add to that he never ceased to teach the lesson that he knew and to quote from Morte d' Arthur:- "It is better for a man to leave behind a good portrait of his character than a finely painted portrait of his face "

Not only did we learn through great writings but we did character training. He would go out of the room putting us on our honour to be trusted not to speak in his absence and to carry on with our work as if we were being watched. He would listen outside the door, peep through the windows, get another teacher to look through the glass partition and so on. Any defaulter was caned two or often four cuts on the hand.

The biggest worry was hand writing especially when we were in the lower classes. We copied copy slips of beautiful copyplate writing with loops just right, thin upstrokes and thicker downstrokes, everyone so perfect. The head would come to the classroom door and say, "Pens down." That was enough to scare us but when he brought the cane how we trembled.

That cane was full of teeth marks and when he put it in his mouth it was look out. Heads would be bumped together chins would be rudely lifted and no-one's handwriting would be up to his standard.

When he ordered the teacher to give out the copyslips he would say that he would be back in ten minutes and woe betide us; how we managed to write at all I do not know as we trembled and our little ~~herats~~ ^{marks} beat fast so that at times our writing looked like a modern cardiograph when one has had an attack. How I dreaded those times and how many times some of us had to rewrite I do not know and the harder we tried the worse it got.

We were used to being called fools, blockheads, and idiots and sarcasm was cruel. We hated being asked questions in case we gave a wrong or a silly answer to be greeted with, "Oh wise young man how I do honour thee," or "The genius hath spoken."

Then would come the usual pause and we knew what was coming. "Did I say geni-US. I made a mistake. I should have said geni-ASS."

He often informed us that it was easier to get blood out of a stone than to get any sense out of us.

Nature study lessons were often our own observations and each week we wrote in our nature books and if we had to draw on the alternate page which was blank drawing paper. So often we did not know what to write about. One girl wrote about the primrose and had the quotation "A little primrose by the brim

A little primrose was to him a

And nothing more," *recited to her*

One girl wrote about a worm which had been cut in half and each half moved off in different direction. She never lived it down, and it called for another remark about not having the brain of D's worm.

Sewing lessons I hated. Our material was calico which made our fingers sore. We started by cutting out a chemise with the low neck, and the neck band. Run-and-fell seams were not too bad as we had a shaped piece of cardboard to measure the depth of the hem. But how many times we unpicked the hemming I do not know.

Worse however was the gathering at the neck. We first pinned and then tacked the gathered and then we had to stroke them. With our sewing needles we stroked and stroked until they lay flat, more often they were threadbare and the material thoroughly dirty and often bloodstained from our pricked fingers.

At long last and when the teacher was fed up with seeing it we hemmed the band on. But more misery was then upon us as we cut out the calico knickers which needed french seams which would never lie flat, or we did not turn in enough and the raw edges came out. I remember my ~~white~~ calico being black calico before I finished.

What made things worse for me was the fact that my Mother was a dressmaker who made wedding dresses of velvet and lace so beautifully, all our clothes even to Father's shirts with yokes and double cuffs, while I was one of the worst in the sewing class.

During the First World War we knitted socks and in time we did manage to turn the heel without help. After the August holiday knitting needles were always rusty so for some time we rubbed them with sand paper and also through our hair. It was a wonder no-one damaged an eye. I wonder what parents of to-day would say about that practice.

Picture study lessons were always very interesting and we could at least look and say what we saw and what we thought but the expressions were learned and seemed to apply were often used.

Everyone's nose was roman or aquiline, horses of the Stuarts were always richly caparisoned, all hands were expressive, smiles were enigmatic or sad, but I remember them all so well as I see in galleries on the television or in the cities the paintings of the great artists.

The Constable pictures are still my favourites but I so wish that they were not so dark.

In craft I do not remember making anything but hair-tidies to put on the wall in the bedrooms in which to put of course fallen hair, which one never left in the comb.

We enjoyed our singing lessons all songs being from the National Song Book and we tuned in with the tuning fork, no piano was used.

For drill we stood in straight lines and were told, "From the right in twos number."

However we did our drill so well I cannot imagine. There were no gym shoes and we were cluttered up with nheavy clothing but with precision we carried out our orders. Every movement had to be in unison or the offender was called out and shown up in front of the class.

One thing we did play well was cricket and I was a member of the ~~g~~ girls' team and we played the boys and we often beat them.

During World War One we picked blackberries on fine autumn days. We took milk cans and baskets to school and we were sent off in groups to pick and bring the blackberries back to school to be weighed and packed. A record was kept and when the season ended we were told how much we had earned. We were not given the money direct but the school bought Saving Certificates and at the end of term on a prize-giving day our names were called ~~the~~ the certificates were presented to us.

We were brought up on the system of punishment and reward, competition and comparison. In 1922 one of the school managers had a bright idea. He wanted to spend fifteen shillings on two books one for a boy and one for a girl. After some discussion with the Head it was agreed that all the school should vote for the best charactered girl in the school and the best charactered boy.

When the votes were counted I had the majority and so I was presented with Mrs. Beaton's "All about cookery " in which is written, that it was presented to "Ethel Williams, who on the vote of the scholars was adjudged the best charactered girl in the school." I was proud at the time but many times since I have wondered how children in a Junior school can assess character and I never knew why I got it as I

can only remember having four school friends at most during those years. I neither gave nor asked favours and out of school hours I associated with two girls only. I was an average scholar and apart from arithmetic and singing I was just ordinary.

I remember a boy talking in a lesson about the salmon. His father was a fisherman, and when the teacher turned to write on the blackboard he whispered to his neighbour upon which she turned and said, "If you know more about this Harris, come out and go on with the lesson." When he hesitated she hauled him out and after a moment's hesitation he told all he knew. Grudgingly he had some praise.

When I was seven we had a heavy fall of snow and we were sent home during the morning, but I decided to trudge to Alvington, a mile away, to visit my cousin who had recently married. When later Mother was told that the children had been sent home there was consternation as to where I could be.

My cousin was cross with me and after making me a cup of cocoa she sent me home. I was cross with her and said that I would not go there again. When she was at the end of her pregnancy Mother sent me to take some gifts and to find out how she was. I did not stay long and when Mother asked me how she was I angrily replied, "I don't know why I had to see her. She is all right. You ought to see her. She looks better than you. She is so fat, there can't be anything the matter with her."

I was a delicate child often having severe bilious attacks. Children who passed for the grammar school had to walk to Lydney three miles away so Mother would not let me sit the scholarship because she considered it too bad a journey. Why I could not have travelled by train I don't know but both stations were a long way off.

When I was thirteen I sat the entrance examination to attend classes in Gloucester especially formed for training future teachers.

So I travelled to Gloucester until I was eighteen, and travelling time plus study cut me off from village life to a large extent.

But this is not about me so I return to village school matters.

Today the teachers have no jurisdiction outside school, but the village schoolmaster went for a walk after school each day with an ever watchful eye for wrongdoers. Children watched him too and they breathed a sigh of relief when they saw him on his homeward journey.

At assembly each morning wrongdoers were called out for punishment.

Who was that in a certain orchard last evening? Who did not raise his hat to Mrs. James? Who was playing outside when he was too ill to come to school yesterday? and so on. It was difficult to try to get out of it as he had a way of knowing or of getting someone to tell tales. So assembly time was not only the time to praise God it was also the time for the wrath of God through his exponent. We were pleased when the session was over.

I well remember one family who lived quite three miles from school. They were poor and often they had no boots to wear across the sodden fields but young though we were we saw the injustice of the punishment they had for being late.

One morning a child brought an absence note from a mother saying that she had phlebitis and so she needed the boy at home to help with the younger children. The Head stood in front of us at assembly and read out the note with that cruel sarcasm. How the woman spelled the word we did not know any more than

we knew what the complaint was but we all thought what we were meant to think that it was flea-bitis so as expected, we laughed.

On bad days every book was inspected and on occasions they were torn up and thrown out the front while the teacher was asked why she allowed such disgusting work, and so we all had new writing books.

It seems as if I am dwelling on the nasty side of things, and forgetting the good days for when we were praised it was praise indeed, even if it was seldom.

One dinner hour I had cut my hand and returned with it bandaged with a note stating that I could not write that afternoon but the bandage was removed to check that I was not pulling a fast one. As if one dared.

One thing we did look forward to was our annual outing. We travelled in horse-drawn brakes to Sedbury Park about six miles away. As we went along Mothers came out to wave to us, and we were even allowed to wave and call out to our watchers.

We had tea provided on the lawn and a stage was erected on which conjurors entertained us while we sat spellbound wondering how a rabbit could be taken from a hat which we had been shown was really empty.

Evening entertainments were usually magic lantern pictures shown by the Band of Hope or by someone to do with the church missionary society. These were shown in the school or in the Parish Cottage which also housed what must have been one of the first libraries. The first book I had from there was "What Katy Did." Last year I was delighted to watch the film of it on television.

One morning a boy returned to school having been absent with a cold and loss of his voice. When he did not produce a note to say why he had been absent the Head to quote him, "came down on him like a ton of bricks."

The boy tried to say that he had been hoarse and in his confusion he said, "Please sir, please sir, I, I, I, had the throat of a horse, sir."

It took him a long time to live that down and the boy who was so nervous that he forgot why he had been away said that his Mother had not told him what to say.

The school dentist used a classroom for his surgery and although we were terrified of having extractions it was so good to go back to the classroom making the most of a bleeding mouth and being allowed to sit by the stove and have the sympathy of teachers as well as of scholars.

Teachers were often criticised by the head in front of the class and I remember one of my teachers, when I was about seven years old crying in front of the class as lots of our exercise books were torn up and thrown in the stove while the teacher was asked why she accepted such disgraceful work.

Probably the day before they had been looked at and passed without comment. Oh well, we all have our days I suppose.

I was very proud to be a guinea-pig for one of our inspectors who tried out many of his arithmetic problems at the Junior stage before he compiled his arithmetic book.

I was always very head-in-air and a boy used to hide behind a wall and throw stones at me. When asked why he did this he said, "I like her but she won't look at me. I want her to speak to me." A strange way to show his affection.

Dirty heads were very common. It was a constant worry to keep them clean. I wonder how many notes stated please move Mary away from Jane because she has come home with nits in her hair.

At home we had only to put a hand to our scalps when we were told to get the small-toothed comb and to lean over the ~~big~~ sheet of white paper spread over the table while the hair was raked through and the paper minutely examined.

Fleas were common especially in public places. Luckily there were not many public cinemas or halls to go to.

Silence in schools was a must unless the lesson called for reading aloud, chanting verse or tables, or answering questions. A teacher would often drop a pin and we were expected to hear it drop having been warned previously that we were to listen.

In sewing the teacher insisted that we were not sewing correctly if she could not hear the click of the thimbles.

Woolaston school was a leading P.N.E.U. school, the headquarters of this system was at Ambleside, in the Lake District.

This method was that after every lesson in history or literature a child came out in front of the class to narrate what he had learned then if satisfactory he/she would go to the far corner of the room and hear another child narrate while another one came to the front of the class to narrate and he in turn to took another child until every child would be hearing or telling in the room.

The group teaching of reading meant that good readers had graded groups to hear read and the teacher moved around to listen or he/she took the backward readers. A comprehensive list of pages was kept for each group. Young scholars who could not write essays had to

stand by the teacher and tell a story on a given subject. The teacher wrote this and the best were sent to Ambleside to be marked and

reported on.

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When I was old enough to spread my wings I was allowed a lot of freedom. This had not been the same for my sister who was six years older. Her life had been very restricted.

When I was very young I was very frightened in our dark bedroom. It was the room in which my sister had died and the unknown fear always seemed to hover around. I held my own hand to fool myself that someone was with me. I did not have a ~~doll~~ doll neither did I want one. If teddy bears had been around I may have found some comfort in one but dolls were of no interest to me.

Before I had been long in bed I would start calling to ask how long it would be before my sister came to bed and when at last she came to quiet me down she shook me or hit me and dared me to tell. Looking back I feel I deserved the punishment.

May was allowed to go to Band of Hope, with other girls and wherever she went she was given an early time in which to be home.

Most weeks there were whist drives and as we often played at home I went with her to whist drives. This served two purposes, or it was supposed to. If I were with her she would not be able to have a boy friend bring her home alone. It did not work that way as I was detailed to go ahead with someone and to wait for her.

On more than one occasion when she was late coming home from the Band of Hope meeting Father set out to look for her. I know that on one night he came upon a group talking and laughing in the road, and doing no harm but he had already taken off his leather belt to teach my sister obedience and he chased her down the hill.

She was friendly with a signalman but she was told never to go out with him. I knew that she met him some Sunday afternoons and I knew where they were likely to be. After Sunday school a friend and I set out across

a field leading to a footpath and sure enough they were sitting on the stile . It was a showery summer day and Mother had let me take her best umbrella to Sunday school. The young man was smartly dressed and wore a straw boater with the cord and clip which fastened it to his lapel. Needless to say I was the last person they wanted to see and I taunted them and my sister became angry and threatened me. I then picked up a pebble and threw it at the straw hat and my aim was good and a small hole appeared. In her anger May took Mother's umbrella from me and she hit me with it breaking the handle.

I ran home to get my side of the story in first and when May and the boy friend arrived they got no sympathy and he was told that he would get no compensation for the damage to his hat.

It ended their association , but when I looked back later I always thought how despicable I had been and I was thankful that I had no younger sister or brother when I had boy friends.

On Saturdays and on holiday times lots of young folk walked from Woolaston to Parkhill, the Chase and on to the lily beds as we called them . These were in the woods above Tintern. It was an uphill journey all the way, but the sight of all those lilies of the valley growing wild made the journey worthwhile.

When the churabene came we went to Tintern Abbey to see the full harvest moon shining through the circular window about ten o'clock or maybe a little later. That was a wonderful treat.

One of the happiest periods of my life was in my teens when I was a member of the Lydney Orpheus Choir which was conducted by Mr. Smale.

We competed in eisteddfods and these were held at Lydney Park and at Chepstow Castle. I do not remember any details of our awards but I know that we did very well and we had most enjoyable times.

Nodding Plumes.

The old lady who lived round the corner
 For her bonnets was quite renowned;
 Her head they fitted so perfectly
 And with ribbons of satin were bound.
 But it wasn't the fit or the ribbons
 Or the kind old face peeping out
 Which gave enjoyment for children
 Who lived in the houses about.
 For also trimming her bonnets
 Were plumes which nodded and dipped
 When she gracefully went out walking
 Or over the puddles she tripped.
 I often cajoled my Mother
 To ask her around after tea
 She thought it was due to my kindness,
 But my reasons were selfish you'll see.
 I always arranged the seating
 For to me such a lot it meant,
 Only Mother would know the reason
 When later outside I went.
 We had a very large window,
 The blind, made of linen, was cream,
 For shadows, and for all kinds of movement,
 It made a wonderful screen.
 The visitor's chair, nice and cosy,
 I set with its back to the blind,
 The lamp, set in front on the table,
 Was important for plans in my mind.
 When the visitor knocked and entered
 My pleasure I could not hide,
 Then politely I made the suggestion
 They'd talk better if I went outside.
 She sat in the chair by the window
 To converse about local trends
 So I quietly went through the door to give
 The cue to my waiting friends.
 As she spoke she gesticulated
 And her head nodded up and down
 While outside the window we waited
 For the plumes to start dancing around.

As she was such a good talker
And she always found plenty to say
The shadows were constantly flitting
And we were hilariously gay.
We laughed till we cried at the antics
As the plumes nodded this way and that,
For she emphasised every statement
While in the chair she sat.
Afraid of outstaying her welcome
We knew she would stand up soon,
And her waving arms would be patterning
The gaily nodding plumes.
She moved away from the window
Thanking Mother for being so kind,
Never dreaming what great entertainment
She'd unwittingly cast on the blind.

The baker lived at the top of the hill. He delivered home baked bread. His sleepy horse was a source of amusement so that we said we were as tired as Gerrish's horse.

We liked to go to the bake house to see the bread taken out and every Saturday Mother mixed a dough cake and I took it to be baked in the baker's oven.

We liked to get the baker to tell us about when he went shooting what he called quisties which we thought were wood pigeons. There was nothing in the story but every time he told it the number of quisties was different so that it could vary between forty to eighty nine and we would go outside to laugh about it. What fun we had out of small things. At the Tan House around the corner lived a lady who wore beautiful bonnets with plumes and

ribbons. We were allowed to play in the road in the evenings as long as we did not go out of sight of our house. One night while the lady was there we saw her shadow on the blind and we watched as the feathers danced as she talked to Mother. It then became a regular thing for me to invite her round and to tell the children around to come and watch and we had as much enjoyment from looking at the blind as children today would have from a spectacular film.

Boys could play the bones and one could whistle with his fingers in his mouth and we all tried to do the same.

I liked to sing and the younger woman at the Tan House was a pianist who enjoyed playing for me to sing such songs as the Volunteer Organist, Come on over the garden wall, Abdul, and the Perfect Day. I often crept out of the house and ran to the corner to see if there was a light in her parlour and when there was I asked Mother to let me go to sing. They were joyous times.

On Christmas Eve the husband had a card party where men played half-penny nap and my

Father was one of the players. The men asked if I would sing in the early part of the evening so while they played in a room across the corridor I sang for them.

I remember one night when my Father came home having lost all his money and asked for more at about two o'clock ~~in the~~ and as I have said I slept on Mother's money he had to be content with a small amount from Mother's purse.

One Christmas eve the lady of the house foolishly went to bed leaving her baking on the kitchen table. There were two sponge cakes and nearby was a gramophone and when well lubricated the husband put the sponge cakes on the gramophone and they were cut to pieces.

Imagine the trouble next morning and the miserable Christmas with no-one in that house speaking.

The same few men who played cards also went on an outing once a year. Women were never allowed to go but I do not think that they would have enjoyed it as the men played cards and drank beer all the way. They loaded up all their needs on the train and the station master remarked that they took enough beer with them to float a battleship.

We often had the hurdy gurdy men outside our house with their capuchin monkey on the top of the hurdy gurdy. We also had the men with dancing bears. They were huge black bears with a collar and chain. We thought they were wonderful and we were excited to see them stand on their hind legs. These type of travellers were a worry to the farmers, in case they stayed in the barns and set fire to the hay, so they were usual watch^{ed} out of the village. One night a couple went to the back of the barn near us to encounter a bear tied to a post and a run across road to the inn meant that soon they were away.

When I was quite young we had a different doctor from the quiet one who had attended my sister at the time of her death. The new one was a small fiery man who frightened adults and terrified children with his sharp manner, but when one got to know him he was kind and very efficient.

When I had the measles Mother rang to ask him to call and he told her to give me milk only. When he came in the afternoon he found that I had a high temperature and he asked had I had anything to eat or drink. When Mother told him that she had given me milk he snapped, "What a bloody silly thing to give her." Mother told him that he had given that order to which he replied, "I must be silly too."

He had asked Mother my name so when he started to come up the stairs he began to call out girl's names beginning with E, "Hello Ema, Edna, Ellen, Ella, Esther, Edith, Emma, and as he came into the bedroom he said, "Ethel, I have it right this time."

For some days I was very ill and delirious lying in a darkened room but he called often and began to look forward to his visits. Another girl in the village with the same surname had throat trouble which later needed surgery and he often got us mixed up.

One evening I went to his surgery and having attended to my needs he opened the neck of my dress and fingering my neck said, "When are you going to let me cut this throat of yours?" Once again I started to say you have the wrong girl as I had on other occasions but he apologised but I think he knew it before he spoke and he seemed to like his joke and to see my reactions.

One of our doctors gave an old man sixpence and told him to get himself some good cider which would do him more good than any medicine.

My sister, after her marriage went to live in a Cotswold village which was still under the dominance of the Lord and Lady of the manor. Most of the people in the village lived in houses belonging to the estate and some of the older residents were out of touch with the goings on beyond a small radius.

In the twenties I went to visit my sister. I liked to keep abreast with the fashion which then was the very short, sleeveless dress which was considered by the young as being "it" and by the elderly as being shameful.

During the afternoon a man came to the door and when he was asked inside he took one look at me and in great confusion said, "I be so sorry miss, I'll come back when you be dressed." He hastily made for the door and when I told him that I was dressed and this was the latest fashion he said, "Well all I can say miss is I hope you don't catch yer death of cold. You da make me feel cold to look at ya." Needless to say the poor man was too embarrassed to stay long.

When later I had some Hebden cord riding breeches made to wear for touring round the country on the back of a motor cycle I was told that I should be ashamed, that I was a disgrace to my parents and asked, "Whatever is the world coming to?"

In that outfit I caused quite a commotion in St. Ives when a child drew attention to me by saying "Oh do look Mummy there is a woman in trousers." It was the safest way to ride, especially at the speeds we travelled.

I wonder what the old man in the Cotswold village would have thought of that set up. He would probably ^{have} told me that I looked like a farm labourer.

From a very early age I was taught to say my prayers. As we understood that prayers could only be granted if they were offered while we knelt at the bedside, I dutifully knelt in the cold bedroom each night.

My first prayers were "Lighten our Darkness," and "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,"

and for a long time I said, "Pity mice and pity teeth," knowing no different.

I could understand asking God to pity mice for we had traps permanently set for those but why He had to pity teeth I failed to see. When I was able to read the prayer I had a better understanding of "pity my sympathy" when Mother was able to explain.

The colder the night the quicker the prayers were said and usually my sister was there to see that they were not forgotten.

We all had absolute faith in Father Christmas although our stockings on ly contained an apple, an orange, some sugar mice, chocolate and some pennies. New clothes were the most important items to try on after breakfast.

Each Christmas morning a friend and I sang carols at several houses and we returned home loaded with fruit, nuts and quite a lot of money. Most people asked us in to sing by the roaring fires and they joined in with our carols.

Thinking of fires, my Father always made sure that ours was out before going to bed. All red ashes were raked out to fall behind the dustpan and then he poured water over them and the hissing steam rose up the big open chimney.

When the chimney needed sweeping Father loaded his ~~double~~ double barrelled gun and he shot up it. We could see the sky when we looked up our chimney. Blackleading the grate was an awful task but one's room was judged by the condition of the fire-place, with its brass fire irons and fender.

We carried hurricane lanterns wherever we went. On winter evenings I would carry one to our garden near the station road where Father grew mangolds for the pigs. I walked along the rows as he pulled the mangolds here and there and then they were loaded on the wheelbarrow and taken home to be washed and boiled in the big copper for the pigs.

A cousin had lived with us and she had gone into service with the Woodroffe family at Alvington. On her afternoons off I carried the lantern and Mother and I walked back in the evenings with her. My early training of not telling anything I knew was useful to my cousin. Mother did not approve of her boy friend whose house we had to pass. Indeed Mother would not have approved of any boy friend, but as we passed a large tree on the road to the farm I often saw the young man half hidden there. We took Bertha to the house and Mother was satisfied as we left her at the door that she was safely in but when we had gone she retraced her steps and when we were safely past the tree the lovers met and Mother never knew.

When I was seven they married and for days I had to endure the wrath of the schoolmaster for staying away for the afternoon. Bertha's dress was shorter than those worn at the time and she was criticised for daring to show her ankles. How the times have changed, she had more criticism than a girl would get today for being in the nude.

The local football matches were attended with enthusiasm, the women making the most noise. They had slanging matches with the other supporters and imitated them. Tintern and Catbrook were the biggest rivals. If the opposing side was losing the locals were happy but if they were losing they imitated all the supporters said and if the women had umbrellas it was as well to keep away.

Village dances were fun and we often ended up on the floor in the lancers. When the first cars came we went to St. Briave Briavels occasionally. The locals were not friendly and to quote them, "If they did not like the cut of thy jib, look out." Fights were common and most inoffensive folk could get a "clout" for just walking in or out or for just looking on.

We spent a lot of time by the river. Everyone loved to go to the Severn and it was the worry of every parent. Many were drowned, including fishermen but the river was like a magnet. The fields around grew mushrooms, plovers nested in the grass, curlews, wild duck and partridge were there for the man with the gun, wood for fires was in abundance on the shore, it was an ideal place for picnic fires and the air was good to help the children sleep at night.

We swam in the dirty water and we waded to rock pools which were clean. Several went together to pull each other out of the deep mud. They were wonderful times and we did not see the danger.

I have a Parish Magazine for 1914 and these are a few of the extracts.

We English are fond of washing. There is no need to wash every day. A capital plan is to dip a towel in a basin of water and then standing rub yourself all over with the wet towel. We should have a hot sponge down once a week. Don't waste soap. Put scraps in a pan pour on a little water, and leave in a warm oven until the water evaporates.

Our outside clothes collect germs and dirt. They also collect colds in the head, consumption, sore throats, and other germs which are passed on to others. These garments should be cleaned and brushed well.

For general house cleaning we should use soap and water. Sometimes bedrooms are carpeted to the walls, and under the beds are things which cannot easily be removed so they make a nest for germs.

How to Breathe.

Our air is pure. Hairs in the nose warm the air and trap germs. We must breathe with our noses. A lot of people go around with their mouths open.

Mouths are meant for food and speech. Children should be taught to keep them shut when they are not needed. Breathing through the nose prevents sore throats.

Stomachs are cruelly treated. We should chew our food. Mr. Gladstone chewed every morsel thirty two times, once for every tooth in his head.

Men dig their graves with their teeth.

They are kept alive not by what they eat but by what they digest.

Everyone should drink two to three pints a day. At least two of these should be water.

Tea may be taken but only twice a day. It should never stand more than five minutes.

Coffee in this country is too badly made to be mentioned seriously.

Alcohol is no good to anyone. If you must

drink it never have more than one pint of beer a day or two wine glasses of wine, or on glass of spirits.

Onions are wholesome and good for the digestion. Potatoes are over-rated being 76% water and the rest starch. Never eat meat more than twice a day and never drink while eating meat.

Gambling. The Chief Constable of Manchester has said that, "gambling is on the increase and runs drink close as a cause of social and moral ruin." Enormous prizes are offered and a member of parliament asked the Postmaster General whether there had been a marked increase in the number of sixpenny postal orders sold recently.

The Postmaster General replied that the sale was two hundred and twenty seven thousand and per week more than in the twelve months previously, and that the increase was due to certain newspaper competitions.

A lengthy explanation of what a competition was followed and a Mr. John Hobson summed it up "Gambling is the determination of the ownership of property by appeal to chance."

Not too clear a definition to the folk in 1914 I imagine.

The advertisements are many and varied with great claims made in cures. "A completely paralyzed man cured by Dr. Cassell's tablets in six weeks."

Domestic servants were needed in New Zealand. By any steamer £2-16-0. If girls pay their own fares they will not be refunded. If they ~~pay~~ borrow their fares the amount will be taken from their wages. Members of the Church Travellers' Club could holiday in Switzerland for £7-19-6, and by the Italian Lakes for £8-12-6.

Father took on some strange assignments. He shaved the dying and the dead, he helped the undertaker, but perhaps the strangest was to accompany a man going to propose.

The man's family were grown up and they said that the woman was chasing him, and he would be foolish to marry again. He told us that he wanted a witness so that his family would know that he had done the proposing. Father agreed to go with him and when the appointed evening came we had great fun getting Father dressed for the occasion. The best navy suit, the stiff collar with the stiff front which was so awkward to fasten, shoes polished like a mirror, the black tie neatly knotted, hair so neatly curled across the forehead, and the well brushed bowler hat completed the scene.

When all ~~was~~ ready Mother asked if he were going to make the proposal himself, or on second thoughts were they going to a proposal or to a funeral. The neighbour also dressed in his best Sunday suit, and a ruby in his tie pin, called for Father and we laughed as we watched them set out on their mission.

As any lady at that time was expected to do at first she refused but at last she was persuaded and the men returned to say that all was well. The lady was a cousin of Mother's so we heard all the detail later.

Any man wanting to look smart wore a bowler, for weddings, for christenings and for funerals and I liked to see them grip the front to raise them to passers by. Being black they needed frequent brushing and each Monday morning Mother brushed and wrapped the hat and put it in the wardrobe. One Monday morning she was called away while she was doing this so she went downstairs putting the best

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bowler on the dressing chest. It had to be that morning that a pigeon decided to pay us a visit through the open window and it took a fancy to the hat so that when Mother returned the bowler was a sorry sight and it could not be properly cleaned.

Father was a wonderful gardener but he hated to work alone. When he had cabbages to plant, one of us, usually me, had to walk behind him handing the cabbages out as required. We all had to help in planting and picking. Mother had large patches of black currants, gooseberries and red currants, and we had to pick and string the currants which was as miserable a job as topping and tailing gooseberries.

Father was generous to a fault but when he had given away quantities of produce he would have second thoughts later. "Those lazy devils," he would say could grow the stuff the same as I do, and not come here cadging all the time." Mother told him he should charge for the things and that ended in argument so it was better to listen and say nothing.

One man named Charlie was what Mother called a bosom pal. When he came to visit us which thankfully was seldom, after a call at the inn next door, the garden would be visited and the very best found their way into his bag. "Come on Charlie, have plenty. Is there anything else you want? There's plenty here fill up your bag." And when he had gone it was, "That greedy beggar. He never knows when he has got enough. We shan't see him again for a few months thank God."

There was great competition to grow the biggest and the best to take to the harvest festival.

One of the favourite haunts of the village children was the blacksmith's shop. The blacksmith big and brawny as one would imagine, sang at his work. In his leather apron and with his sleeves rolled up we watched him make the shoes and we loved the hiss as they went red hot into the cold water. As he worked the bellows he sang,

Crick crack goes my whip
And I whistle and I sing
I sit upon me wagon

I'm as 'appy as a king.

He was very patient with us when we pestered him with questions and we never understood why the hot shoe did not hurt the horse. So many horses and implements were there to be attended to.

Most of the older men had their favourite songs. The carpenter always sang,

Good health to the barley mow,

The farmer's son always sang Joshu, Joshua, while another man was nick named Maginty because of the number of times he sang,

Down went Maginty to the bottom of the sea.

My Father had two songs he was often called upon to sing. The one was amusing with lots of names. I am not sure that I remember them all but they went something like this:-

My Father and Mother were excellent folk
They both had a weakness for practical jokes,
So when I was born they were both of one mind
They declared I should have all the names they
could find. Then the chorus

They were Jonathan, Joseph, Jerimiah,
Timothy, Titus, Obediah,

William, Henry, Walter, Sid,

Reuben, Rufus, Solomon, Jim,

Nathaniel, Daniel, Abraham,

Simon, Ryman, Nicholas, Pat,

Christopher, Dick and Josophat.

People liked to join in the chorus. There were three verses the second about getting married and the third about the burial of course.

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Father's other song was one full of pathos. and tears ran down the faces of some of those present when he sang it. The old folk were very sentimental despite their hard lives.

Father's song started:-
Are we to part like this Bill ?
Are we to part in this way ?
Who's it to be, you or me ?
Don't be afraid to say.
If everything's over between us
Don't ever pass me by
For you and me still friends can be
For the sake of those days gone by.

Living next to the inn we heard a lot of singing when the men had plenty to drink. We could tell how much they had consumed by the songs they sang. When they got to Nelly Dean they were well oiled and ready for home.

Two brothers used to leave their old motor cycle in front of our house, underneath my bedroom. After turning out time they would come along and sit on the cycle and then start to talk.

"We be brothers, bent we Jim ?"

"Aye, we be brothers, Jack."

"Let's shake hands on it Jim."

In order to do so Jack would get off the pillion seat and they would shake hands.

Then the engine would be started and I thought they were off. But no the engine would die again and the talk start again.

"We be friends as well as brothers, bent we Jim?"

"Aye we be friends and brothers Jack."

"Let's shake hands on it Jim."

So once again the hands were shaken and things went quiet. After several stops and starts they would eventually go, but most weekends this type of conversation took place.

Many times I lay in bed and heard conversation not meant for other people's ears, when tongues had been loosened by the alcohol.

The Gramophone.

"Canned music," said Father,
"I'll have none of it here,
You can't have a gramophone;
You have a voice, and fingers to play,
Far better than that awful sound."
How I envied the friend
With "His Master's Voice"
Who listened with wonder and joy
To the old minstrel songs
And the twanging banjo
Which I thought was a heavenly sound.
One day I borrowed the gramophone
Trudging backwards and forwards to take,
First the box, then the records
And then the great horn
To indulge to my heart's content.
The hours had slipped by
With the journeys I'd made -
Soon Father would come home to tea.
I made the best of the time I had,
And was enjoying the Harvest Moon,
When a stern voice behind me said,
"Take that away! I'll have none of that
canned rubbish here!"
In haste I detached the lovely blue horn,
Took the winder out of the box,
Packed up the records and started to make
Several journeys to carry them back.
My feet which had wings in the morning
Now felt as if weighted with lead,
And Father would not have been flattered
If he could have heard what I said.

Home entertainment was simple, telling stories, gossip, singing, playing cards or whist or draughts which we played for hours.

The gramophone was considered a poor substitute of which most older folk did not approve. A young man living close by had a His Master's Voice with a big horn. Children sat on the bank outside his cottage to listen to the records. I was quite obsessed by it and one day in the school holidays he told me that I could borrow it. It took me some time to collect the gramophone, the horn and the records but at last I had it all set up.

Mother warned me how angry Father would be if I did not get it all back before he came home. As he enjoyed music, and he played the flutes and in his younger days had been a splendid dancer "running" dances and dancing classes at the Town Hall in Lydney, I was sure that he would like the gramophone.

I sat spellbound as the old songs, Harvest Moon, Poor old Joe, and the twanging banjo was wonderfully filling the air when Father walked in. Before he shut the door he said, "Shut that thing off ! I will not have that canned rubbish in here! Get that thing out of here. You can sing and play, better than that tangling rubbish." So there was nothing for it but to trudge back with all the records and the big horn and the gramophone. I did not think that they were heavy to bring home but they were terribly heavy to carry back.

When the radio came the older folk said, "Taint natural" and they hated that too for a while. The first folk to have one would have not only a room full to listen but more listened outside as well.

Music on the radio was described as caterwalling and one man said he would far rather listen to his old tom cat on the roof than that horrible row. Like all new things there was suspicion that it would bring harm.

The radio we later had was a cumbersome affair. A lot of wet batteries in a box were charged in turn by a battery company whose man called weekly. The Blue Spot speaker was a grand affair but it needed a lot of room to house it all. It was a great day when electricity came.

The vicar was persuaded to have a generator and lights put in the church. The idea was not a good one. The lovely lamps were taken down but the lights broke down so often that eventually the lamps came into their own again. How we loved it and how we laughed when during the service the electric light failed. It was great fun.

Even when electricity came to the village lots of people had no faith in it and they always kept lamps trimmed and took their candles to bed. That reminds me of a funny thing that happened in a friend's house when the son came home late from a party and took what he thought was the candle upstairs. When in the morning the candle was on the breakfast table it was found that he had taken the cruet to bed, so he must have been well lit up I imagine.

Local concerts were very funny. Many went to poke fun and to imitate ~~than~~ rather than to appreciate or enjoy. A fair often came to the field in which was the village hut and we loved that when the singings had to compete with the sound of the fair organ.

Travelling players came once a year and we all flocked to see the woman sawn ~~in~~ in half, ^{and} the conjuror, and to watch the drama of such plays as East Lynn.

Local people also sang and played at the hut and any peculiarities were soon picked up to become used for moments of fun. Poor things they came in for such a lot of ridicule but there was no malice.

Local fetes with plenty of beer for the men were well attended. The pillow fights and the greasy pole were the best fun. In the evening kiss-in-the-ring ended the day.

My Father, as I stated earlier was a railwayman, a ganger on the permanent way. It was a responsible job which for many years he took very seriously and on several occasions he had letters from head office in London thanking him for saving life when the railway was flooded which was often.

Sheep and sometimes cows had to be rescued when tides added to high winds and heavy rain were usual at spring tides.

Fog was a great hazard and he and his ~~xxx~~ team spent many nights fogging. The river Severn often rose well above the banks but now the river has built up land on the Woolaston side so that floods to the station will probably never occur again.

Of course Father knew many engine drivers and guards and when I was travelling to Gloucester to school I knew some of them. One ~~day~~ examination day I arrived at the station to discover that I had left my spectacles at home. There was no time to do anything about it so when I got to Gloucester I rang Mother who tell her and she said that she would send them to the station and someone could collect them from Gloucester station.

When I came out of the examination room at the end of the morning it was to find that my classmate had forgotten to go to get them.

As the train on which they were coming was due in earlier than that time, I thought that they would be left with the ticket collector. This was not so. The guard said that he would not leave them but he would leave them at Woolaston station on his return journey for me to collect. This was a great disappointment for me as I was taking a mathematics examination in the afternoon.

My instructress had told the invigilators about this and four of them took off their glasses for me to try but none were any good as I suffered from eye strain and not bad sight. I'll never forget that day. My classmate was

so severely reprimanded that I felt guilty but when the results came out and not only had I passed but I had a credit everything was forgiven.

Father took vegetables, fruit and meat from our pigs and sometimes eggs to the train drivers and the guards who bought them so we knew many by name. As the train came in they waved or called out to us, how different from the modern way.

Walking to the station often made my shoes dirty and there was always a duster waiting in the ticket office for the station masters and their wives became personal ~~xxx~~ friends and frequent visitors.

When I was in my very early teens I had a crush on one of the station masters and I built up a dislike for his wife ~~who I felt~~ when they came to our house. How long it lasted I do not remember but I do remember ~~in~~ that many years later when he became station ^{master} of a big station I saw him again and I was surprised to see how very ordinary he was and that he was no taller than myself, so the teenage image was killed.

I often ran to the signal box at weekends and Saturdays to take dinners to our signalmen lodgers. The dinner between two plates was tied in a tea cloth and knotted at the top. The dinner could be hotted up if need be in the box. I was interested in the working of the box and the needle I soon learned to understand. Railway men were always noted for "talking shop" and I think that I loved the railway work in general as much as they did.

It was a busy station before the buses came. The first buses came when I was a teenager and the smart young boy conductors were very popular and some of us often travelled free as the lads sat by us and refused to take any fare and I do not think that we found any fault with the arrangement.

The Village Nurse.

It was not until the thirties that a district nurse came to the village. Until that time any woman who was capable and willing to attend the sick was allowed to do so. They officiated at births and deaths and they gave a lot of their time to their duties.

One cannot picture how difficult it was for these women who had no transport, and very little to use when they got to the house of the sick. Called out at night they trudged through fields and lanes often carrying sheets and something to put on the new baby. They took home with them clothes and bed linen to wash and occasionally a child who could not be looked after at his own home. Morning and evening they attended the sick often taking food to the very poor, and some of their own children's cast off clothing. Gratitude was all many had to offer for the services.

A lift on a farm cart or later on the pillion of a motor cycle was help indeed.

Such a woman was Mrs. Kingston who devoted many years in such work and getting no pay in return. She sat all night with the dying, made and administered remedies like elderflower tea, for influenza and for pneumonia, and in her quiet efficient way she did much to comfort and to reassure her patients. She laid out the dead and was called upon to help clear up after suicides, and some of those tasks were horrible. She needed the constitution of a horse to do some of the things she carried out. When I think of her I think of Leigh Hunt's "Abou Ben Adhem," and the angel who wrote in his book, the names of those who loved ~~his~~ fellow men, and in truth I can say also that, "To her name led all the rest."

The First World War.

I do not remember much about the war but some things stand out clearly. The troops who marched by in the early mornings the horse drawn loads of hay, the horses stopping to drink at the brook, and the rationing of food. We were lucky as most of our food we produced but butter was certainly in short supply and we walked a couple of miles to a farm to buy butter made by the farmer's wife.

When my uncle came to stay I was always interested in the putting on of his putties. My Father's brother Tom was one of the first in the Welsh Guards. ~~His~~ His number was 301.510. He carried with him a photograph of his mother with the words "My darling Mother" written on the back of it and Pte. T. Williams 510 W.G.

When he came to us on leave, (he was a bachelor), there was always a strained atmosphere as Mother did not like him and she objected to the amount he drank, often coming in the worse for drink. Since we have seen so many war ~~by~~ pictures giving us some idea of what the soldiers had to face we are probably less critical than people were then. He would not tell us anything about his time in France but before the war ended he was in a Cardiff hospital after being gassed.

Local lads asked the girls if they could write to them and I well remember poking fun at letters my sister had. How cruel young children can be. One sentence I still remember was "I hope your parrents wont mind." Why that stands out I do not know. Poor lads we little knew what a comfort a letter must have given however badly written or spelled.

One village lad put on a great act when he had his calling up papers. Outside the inn next door he went through all the motions of how he was going to kill all the Germans. He had quite an audience as he shouted and strutted around.

He did not repeat the performance on his first leave, war was not funny any more and he did not rise to the bait of the folk who tried to get him to talk.

During the war many German prisoners came to Chepstow, Sedbury and Beachley, and they were kept busy making concrete blocks for building the houses at Hardwick, Bulwark and Pennsylvania.

By 1917 we were very short of ships and six million pounds were allocated to shipyards at Chepstow and Beachley. This meant work for men and boys of our village and everyone took a great interest in the progress of the ships. Before the first ship was completed the armistice had been signed but the War Apple was launched in 1919.

Soon afterwards we heard that we could go to Chepstow shipyard to watch the launching of the War Glory, so on April 21st 1920 we eagerly set out by train to see Lady MacLay perform the launching. What a red letter day that was.

Five other ships were launched in 1920 all of them named War something, the War Fig, War Odyssey, War Genius, War Epic and War Idyll.

What became of these later ships I have no idea but the War Glory later was re-named S.S. Monte Pasubio and registered in Genoa.

Woolaston's Eminent Son.

Frank Hodges was born in a cottage at Netherend in 1887. He was the son of Thomas and Louise Hodges who left the village to live in South Wales.

Although he could not have remembered much of his early childhood in the village he most certainly remembered to come back often when he became a man of importance and a Member of Parliament.

Like most other boys Frank Hodges left school at the age of ~~fourteen~~ thirteen and he went to work in the Vivian Colliery at Abertillery which is now closed.

There for the princely sum of ten shillings a week he worked a fifty hour week. He soon began to realise that something should be done to improve this state of affairs, not only for miners but for all manual workers.

Where others slaved on with little complaint Frank was determined to improve his education and to try to rise to some post of responsibility where his voice would be heard.

After each day's drudgery he studied hard in the hope that one day he would be a miners' leader. What dogged determination he must have had to study when he must have been physically worn out at the end of each day's labour.

His efforts were rewarded and in 1909 he won a scholarship to Ruskin College Oxford which was supported by the trade unions. A close friend of his college days was Arthur Jenkins the father of Roy Jenkins the Home Secretary in the Labour Government (1974).

Arthur Jenkins became Member of Parliament for Pontypool and private secretary to Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee.

After his college days Frank returned to the Vivian colliery where he became Miners' Agent for the Garw District of the Glamorgah coalfield and he resided at Maesteg.

When the miners voted for a Secretary of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain Frank topped the poll, which was a great achievement, but before this other honours were his.

He was Miners' agent in 1912, General Secretary of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain in 1918, a member of the Royal Commission on Coalmines 1919, Member of Parliament for Lichfield 1923, Secretary of International Miners' Federation 1925-1927 and a fellow of the Royal Economic Society. What a wonderful achievement. How proud Woolaston people should have been of him and yet there are few there who know his name.

There was still a strong element of Liberal support in the area when I was a child. No name was more used than that of Sir Charles Dilke. I heard his name in my home and I imagined he must have been a good representative of the Forest of Dean.

With such a strong feeling for liberalism it was strange to hear of a labour movement as some people still hung on to the old ideas, possibly because they wanted to hang on to their jobs.

When Frank Hodges came back to Woolaston for relaxation the people did not appreciate that his labour principles gave him the opportunity to mix with the type who sat in the pubs in the bar and talked as one of them. There was still the idea that each person had a station in life, and one associated with his equals, for the idea that all men are equal had not yet been taken as granted.

When Frank came to the inn next door to my home one would hear such remarks,

"You would think he would have more pride."
 What is pride or rather what was pride in
 those days? The words had a totally different
 meaning then and as I think about him now
 I think of Kipling's "If" :-

If you can walk with kings
 Nor lose the common touch,
 for Frank made the best of both worlds and
 as the Bible says that a prophet is not
 honoured in his own country so he was not
 honoured for his enjoying the company of the
 locals or for singing with them in the
 fields up the Common.

I was asked to write letters begging for
 money for the local football team. The idea
 was to ask someone to be president and then
 as many people as possible to be vice-
 presidents. I wrote to Frank in London and
 he promptly sent the club a donation.

Political meetings were held in the
 school and at one of them one old man kept
 interrupting, "We da want our rights. I da
 say we da want our rights."

After being told several times, "All right
 my man I will talk to you later", again would
 come the interruption, "I da say, we da want
 our rights."

Later the man was asked what rights
 he wanted and the reply was, "I don't know
 what tha be but all I da know as 'tis up to
 thee to zee as we da get um."

My Father was a staunch Liberal and
 the News Chronicle was the weekday Bible.
 Every word in it was to him gospel.

Superstitions.

Everywhere superstitions were rife. It was a wonder anyone survived the bad luck which was always threatened.

If two met on a stairs one must go back. It was very unlucky to pass. It was also unlucky to turn on the stairs, one should go to the top or bottom before retracing the steps.

One must not view a new moon through glass, and it was not safe to sleep in a moonlit room, the moon did strange things to the brain.

Knives crossed meant a quarrel, and if knives were given as gifts a coin must be tendered or the friendship would be cut.

Pearls meant tears and they also broke friendships.

Spilled salt was very worrying so one quickly threw a little over the left shoulder.

Thirteen was always considered unlucky.

To meet a funeral, a load of hay or a cross-eyed woman on a journey meant trouble.

Seven years bad luck followed the breaking of a mirror, and when a thunderstorm was imminent all mirrors were hastily covered in case of breakage.

If a bee, a bird, a frog or a toad came indoors that was a sure sign of a death in the family, as also was a crowing hen which was immediately killed.

To cut one's nails on a Friday or on a Sunday was to encourage the devil.

It was fatal to walk under a ladder.

To see one crow meant sorrow, and to wear a green outfit was asking for bad luck. I wore a green hat to the hospital the day before my Father died and I was told that I should not have done so.

never open an umbrella indoors or put new shoes on a table, never move house on a Friday or you will be out again in the year.

Less things brought good luck. Seeing a black cat cross your path, putting a garment on inside out, meeting a chimney sweep, picking up a pin, or a dark haired man bringing a piece of coal to the house at the New Year or a bride wearing blue, white something old and something new were the best known.

Reading tea leaves was a serious pastime.

When my parents moved into the house where I was born an old Irish woman named Mother ^{LIZA} Delaney laid Bibles and Prayer Books on the floor in the doorway and insisted that the family walked on them to keep the devil from entering.

She was a strange woman who people said had strange powers. They were afraid to meet her in case they upset her as one man named John O'Hare had done. When the woman got angry with him she cast a spell on him with the words, "May your hair fall out in patches."

Whether she had detected some scalp trouble or whether she really had powers no-one would say but my parents said the poor man in a very short time lost most of his hair, so that when the woman died there was a great sense of relief.

When the first cars came Mother Shipton's predictions about the horseless carriages were told and retold, and her prediction that ships would go without sails and men would be seen in the air.

Weather.

I am sure that the winters of the early 1900's were colder than they are now.

I had to collect the milk from the farm, none was delivered in those days. The number of times I fell on the ice I don't remember. It was good that we collected the milk in cans with tight fitting lids or I should have had many more double journeys. All children and most grown-ups had terrible chilblains on hands and on feet and on the backs of their legs. The usual way of trying to bring relief was by rubbing raw onion on them.

More than one winter the Plusterwine and the Greenpool farm ponds froze solid and horse drawn wagons went on them to allow the farmer to cut the hedges and load up the debris.

Village folk took lanterns to place around the outside of the ponds and those who could not skate were able to slide. We were allowed to pour water on certain parts of the school yard to freeze over for the next day's sliding. I can see myself as I ran home from school some days crying with the cold.

Horses fell often and the first cars overturned at the foot of the hill outside our house. The animals had to have hot food, the hens sliding on the frozen orchard had to have Indian corn made into a kind of gruel by pouring boiling water over it and making a lot more work, and the hens! water had to be thawed, while the hungry rats and foxes paid many more visits, and the egg production fell off badly. They were hard times for the keeper of a smallholding if he was dependent on his stock for his ~~sustenance~~ sustenance.

If one had to pin-point the time when the villagers came out of their small corner it would no doubt have been during the First War. When it became necessary for women to take the place of men in many jobs, some of them having to dress like men, a whole new way of life opened up for many.

Some of our local girls drove tram cars and ambulances and we were all excited when they told us about their work. After the war these girls and women were no longer content to stay at home and there was a drift away. Several young men went to Australia but most of them returned after a few years. A few men and women went to Canada and most of those stayed.

One man came home for a holiday and he came to the school to talk to us about the life in Canada, and I remember the corn on the cob he showed, as I also remember the stuffed mongoose another man brought from India, and another man who came to talk about his native Denmark. You see we were never an isolated corner of the globe.

The coming of television and radio has of course penetrated all the small corners, and with the various forms of travel and the equality of the sexes, the breaking down of the idea of the rich man in his castle and the poor man at his gate, we move along into the future, and who knows what that will bring.?

Life.

A tiny seed is cossetted
And in secret hid away
Until the time is ready
For it to greet the day;
Then a tiny seedling peeping
From its dark and earthy bed
Sends out a tender leafy shoot
To investigate the air.
Then day by day so gently
Grows a sapling blithe and gay,
But too easily persuaded
By every wind that blows.
Soon time will bring maturity
With splendour, beauty, grace,
And strength to scorn the elements
In all their changing moods.
But the splendour of maturity
As years pass by must fade
And all too soon old age will take
All suppleness away.
All things which live must also die
And return from whence they came
To obey the ordered cycle
Till life returns again.

For a village there were a lot of tragedies. Many children and young persons died from the diseases, pneumonia was also a killer, several were killed falling from push bikes, the 1919 flu epidemic took a few more, some trespassed on the railway line and met their end, the River Severn lured others to their deaths and there were several suicides. These were caused by illness, by unrequited love, by marriages which went sour, loss of money, and from depression.

Thanks to Fairfield-Mabey Shipyard at
Chepstow for verifying facts about the ships
and for giving me a copy of the building
certificate of the War Glory.

Also thanks to Mrs. Andrews of the
Abertillery Museum Society for filling in some
facts about Frank Hodges.

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School Days.

I was four years old when my seven year old sister died of diphtheria so that when I started school shortly afterwards the headmistress who taught the reception class was very kind to me. Soon afterwards she and her husband who was head of the "Big School" left. He had I think been lamed by a kick but I am not quite clear about this.

When I moved into the first class I must have been able to read fairly well because I well remember staying in from drill as we called our physical training then, to teach a boy to read.

We sat on the end of the desk near the old tortoise stove which suited me well in the winter ~~and~~ as I hated the cold.

First bell rang at ten to nine and we were expected to be in the yard by then, if not we ran as fast as our legs could carry us. Late comers were punished.

I should have said that the new school master who came just before I moved up to the big school was tall, thin and very severe. When he came he had a poor opinion of the village in general and the school in particular. His first words were a promise to lick us into shape and to put the fear of God into us, which was no idle threat.

In those days no allowance was made for those who lagged behind. The misbegotten idea that all children could learn and failing other methods the method of hitting it into them was tried out not only in Charles Dickens' day.

The cane was always in evidence and used often, on boys and on girls. One day it came down on the back of a girl with plaits and it caught in the ribbon which flicked up and flew out of the window. Those children brave enough to laugh were reprimanded while the girl was ordered to collect the ribbon as

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if it were her fault.

Let me go through a typical day.

When the last bell rang or the whistle was blown we all rushed to our lines in a set order. There we were inspected. Clean necks, clean nails, tidy hair, no loose buttons or safety pins, no dirty shoes. Those who fell short were told to improve on the morrow.

Then into the classrooms in dead silence. We remained standing until told we could sit, upright and with our hands behind our backs.

The register was called and we went to assembly. After prayers and Bible readings we returned to our classes for scripture and to memorize the commandments, and certain Bible passages.

Then came arithmetic and the chanting of tables, and some easy rhymes to help us to remember rules. At seven we were expected to read well and know all our tables and to be able to apply the four rules with number capacity, length, time and weight. $\frac{1}{4}$ I was always good with figures so I was happy but many had no play and were kept in after school to correct their work.

There were rules for everything. Geography was learned like tables going all around the British Isles chanting Newcastle on the Tyne, Stockton on the Tees, Hull on the Humber etc. and the names of the rivers in their order.

There was some way to remember lots of other places like "Long legged Italy kicked poor Sicily into the Mediterranean Sea."

Smoke blown by the wind and the look of the river Severn provided our weather forecast.

History was learned like tables. Dates were most important. Our "Bible of History" was Arnold Foster's book and how we revelled in our victories, the British who were always right; I wish we had known a little of the

other side, but we were great patriots and revelled in the pink patches on the map of the world. We learned the kings and queens of England like a poem :-

First William the Norman
Then William his son
Henry Stephen and Henry
Then Richard and John and so on to end
Came good Queen Victoria and
And seventh Edward her son.

Then the dates to go with these were learned:-
1066 - 1087, 10-87 - 1100. 1100 - 11-35
I still use this and find it very easy to sort out periods in history through it.

Modern teaching scoffs at such chanting of tables and so on but during all my teaching career I proved the value of a lot of the old methods.

Reading was all important and there were no abridged editions for us. Sir Walter Scott was hard going as to get the gist of the story we had to read so many descriptive passages. The Headmaster guided us through many of these passages and pointed out the beauty of them but for ten year olds to be enthusiastic about Scott was asking quite a lot.

Twenty years later I read and re-read the many books realizing that the early reading of them made a great contribution to my enjoyment of them but by then I had the art of scanning well practised and the means of sorting the interesting from the less interesting ~~passing~~ passages and to keep the story flowing.

We also learned Scott's poem Excelsior, and in one of his very few moments of fun the Head told us the parody of the first verse :-

Breathes there the man with soul so dead
Who never to himself hath said
When he kicked his toe against the bed
"Excelsior !"

We laughed heartily , but - ah but - later

when a boy was told to recite the poem, he tittered when he came to the parody line, as did we all when he brought down on us what he was fond of calling the wrath of God. We were told that if we could remember sensible things half as well as we could remember nonsense we would be better scholars.

ah well, one lapse from the severity had been worth while, we had at least had one laugh in the presence and with the approval of the Head of Affairs.

Scott, Thacheray, Shakespeare, Longfellow, Dickens, Matthew Arnold, Mrs. Harriett Beacher Stowe, and Rudyard Kipling were but a few authors we had at our finger tips.

How he made the people live again for us. We wept for Topsy and Little Eva, for Oliver Twist and David Copperfield, for Sohrab and Rustum, for Coriolanus, Uncle Tom and for Dora.

We learned pages of Hiawatha, and of Morte d' Arthur, the whole of such patriotic poems as The Revenge, If, and The Thousandth Man and many more.

Mrs. Beesley's History of Rome was a great favourite as was Aesop's Age of Fable.

Thinking back I am amazed at the amount of English literature we absorbed in those few years and I pay tribute to the man who made all this possible. In gratitude I would quote from Waldo Emerson's poem Problem:-

"He builded better than he knew."

I would also add to that he never ceased to teach the lesson that he knew and to quote from Morte d' Arthur:- "It is better for a man to leave behind a good portrait of his character than a finely painted portrait of his face"

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Not only did we learn through great writings but we did character training. He would go out of the room putting us on our honour to be trusted not to speak in his absence and to carry on with our work as if we were being watched. He would listen outside the door, peep through the windows, get another teacher to look through the glass partition and so on. Any defaulter was caned two or often four cuts on the hand.

The biggest worry was hand writing especially when we were in the lower classes. We copied copy slips of beautiful copyplate writing with loops just right, thin upstrokes and thicker downstrokes, everyone so perfect. The head would come to the classroom door and say, "Pens down." That was enough to scare us but when he brought the cane how we trembled.

That cane was full of teeth marks and when he put it in his mouth it was look out. Heads would be bumped together chins would be rudely lifted and no-one's handwriting would be up to his standard.

When he ordered the teacher to give out the copyslips he would say that he would be back in ten minutes and woe betide us; how we managed to write at all I do not know as we trembled and our little hearts beat fast so that at times our writing looked like a modern cardiograph when one has had an attack. How I dreaded those times and how many times some of us had to rewrite I do not know and the harder we tried the worse it got.

We were used to being called fools, blockheads, and idiots and sarcasm was cruel. We hated being asked questions in case we gave a wrong or a silly answer to be greeted with, "Oh wise young man how I do honour thee," or "The genius hath spoken."

Then would come the usual pause and we knew what was coming. "Did I say geni-US, I made a mistake. I should have said geni-ASS."

He often informed us that it was easier to get blood out of a stone than to get any sense out of us.

Nature study lessons were often our own observations and each week we wrote in our nature books and if we had to draw on the alternate page which was blank drawing paper. So often we did not know what to write about. One girl wrote about the primrose and had the quotation "A little primrose by the brim

A little primrose was to him a
And nothing more," recited to her

One girl wrote about a worm which had been cut in half and each half moved off in different direction. She never lived it down, and it called for another remark about not having the brain of D's worm.

Sewing lessons I hated. Our material was calico which made our fingers sore. We started by cutting out a chemise with the low neck, and the neck band. Run-and-fell seams were not too bad as we had a shaped piece of cardboard to measure the depth of the hem. But how many times we unpicked the hemming I do not know.

Worse however was the gathering at the neck. We first pinned and then tacked the gathered and then we had to stroke them. With our sewing needles we stroked and stroked until they lay flat, more often they were threadbare and the material thoroughly dirty and often bloodstained from our pricked fingers.

At long last and when the teacher was fed up with seeing it we hemmed the band on. But more misery was then upon us as we cut out the calico knickers which needed french seams which would never lie flat, or we did not turn in enough and the raw edges came out. I remember my white calico being black calico before I finished.

What made things worse for me was the fact that my Mother was a dressmaker who made wedding dresses of velvet and lace so beautifully, all our clothes even to Father's shirts with yokes and double cuffs, while I was one of the worst in the sewing class.

During the First World War we knitted socks and in time we did manage to turn the heel without help. After the August holiday knitting needles were always rusty so for some time we rubbed them with sand paper and also through our hair. It was a wonder no-one damaged an eye. I wonder what parents of to-day would say about that practice.

Picture study lessons were always very interesting and we could at least look and say what we saw and what we thought but the expressions ~~were~~ learned and seemed to apply were often used.

Everyone's nose was roman or aquiline, horses of the Stuarts were always richly caparisoned, all hands were expressive, smiles were enigmatic or sad, but I remember them all so well as I see in galleries on the television or in the cities the paintings of the great artists.

The Constable pictures are still my favourites but I so wish that they were not so dark.

In craft I do not remember making anything but hair-tidies to put on the wall in the bedrooms in which to put of course fallen hair, which one never left in the comb.

We enjoyed our singing lessons all songs being from the National Song Book and we tuned in with the tuning fork, no piano was used.

For drill we stood in straight lines and were told, "From the right in twos number."

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However we did our drill so well I cannot imagine. There were no gym shoes and we were cluttered up with nheavy clothing but with precision we carried out our orders. Every movement had to be in unison or the offender was called out and shown up in front of the class.

One thing we did play well was cricket and I was a member of the ~~g~~ girls' team and we played the boys and we often beat them.

During World War One we picked blackberries on fine autumn days. We took milk cans and baskets to school and we were sent off in groups to pick and bring the blackberries back to school to be weighed and packed. A record was kept and when the season ended we were told how much we had earned. We were not given the money direct but the school bought Saving Certificates and at the end of term on a prize-giving day our names were called ~~the~~ the certificates were presented to us.

We were brought up on the system of punishment and reward, competition and comparison. In 1922 one of the school managers had a bright idea. He wanted to spend fifteen shillings on two books one for a boy and one for a girl. After some discussion with the Head it was agreed that all the school should vote for the best charactered girl in the school and the best charactered boy.

When the votes were counted I had the majority and so I was presented with Mrs. Beaton's "All about cookery" in which is written, that it was presented to "Ethel Williams, who on the vote of the scholars was adjudged the best charactered girl in the school." I was proud at the time but many times since I have wondered how children in a Junior school can assess character and I never knew why I got it as I

can only remember having four school friends at most during those years. I neither gave nor asked favours and out of school hours I associated with two girls only. I was an average scholar and apart from arithmetic and singing I was just ordinary.

I remember a boy talking in a lesson about the salmon. His father was a fisherman, and when the teacher turned to write on the blackboard he whispered to his neighbour upon which she turned and said, "If you know more about this Harris, come out and go on with the lesson." When he hesitated she hauled him out and after a moment's hesitation he told all he knew. Grudgingly he had some praise.

When I was seven we had a heavy fall of snow and we were sent home during the morning, but I decided to trudge to Alvington, a mile away, to visit my cousin who had recently married. When later Mother was told that the children had been sent home there was consternation as to where I could be.

My cousin was cross with me and after making me a cup of cocoa she sent me home. I was cross with her and said that I would not go there again. When she was at the end of her pregnancy Mother sent me to take some gifts and to find out how she was. I did not stay long and when Mother asked me how she was I angrily replied, "I don't know why I had to see her. She is all right. You ought to see her. She looks better than you. She is so fat, there can't be anything the matter with her."

I was a delicate child often having severe bilious attacks. Children who passed for the grammar school had to walk to Lydney three miles away so Mother would not let me sit the scholarship because she considered it too bad a journey. Why I could not have travelled by train I don't know but both stations were a long way off.

When I was thirteen I sat the entrance examination to attend classes in Gloucester especially formed for training future teachers.

So I travelled to Gloucester until I was eighteen, and travelling time plus study cut me off from village life to a large extent.

But this is not about me so I return to village school matters.

Today the teachers have no jurisdiction outside school, but the village schoolmaster went for a walk after school each day with an ever watchful eye for wrongdoers. Children watched him too and they breathed a sigh of relief when they saw him on his homeward journey.

At assembly each morning wrongdoers were called out for punishment.

Who was that in a certain orchard last evening? Who did not raise his hat to Mrs. James? Who was playing outside when he was too ill to come to school yesterday? and so on. It was difficult to try to get out of it as he had a way of knowing or of getting someone to tell tales. So assembly time was not only the time to praise God it was also the time for the wrath of God through his exponent. We were pleased when the session was over.

I well remember one family who lived quite three miles from school. They were poor and often they had no boots to wear across the sodden fields but young though we were we saw the injustice of the punishment they had for being late.

One morning a child brought an absence note from a mother saying that she had phlebitis and so she needed the boy at home to help with the younger children. The Head stood in front of us at assembly and read out the note with that cruel sarcasm. How the woman spelled the word we did not know any more than

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we knew what the complaint was but we all thought what we were meant to think that it was flea-bitis so as expected, we laughed.

On bad days every book was inspected and on occasions they were torn up and thrown out the front while the teacher was asked why she allowed such disgusting work, and so we all had new writing books.

It seems as if I am dwelling on the nasty side of things, and forgetting the good days for when we were praised it was praise indeed, even if it was seldom.

One dinner hour I had cut my hand and returned with it bandaged with a note stating that I could not write that afternoon but the bandage was removed to check that I was not pulling a fast one. As if one dared.

One thing we did look forward to was our annual outing. We travelled in horse-drawn brakes to Sedbury Park about six miles away. As we went along Mothers came out to wave to us, and we were even allowed to wave and call out to our watchers.

We had tea provided on the lawn and a stage was erected on which conjurors entertained us while we sat spellbound wondering how a rabbit could be taken from a hat which we had been shown was really empty.

Evening entertainments were usually magic lantern pictures shown by the Band of Hope or by someone to do with the church missionary society. These were shown in the school or in the Parish Cottage which also housed what must have been one of the first libraries. The first book I had from there was "What Katy Did." Last year I was delighted to watch the film of it on television

One morning a boy returned to school having been absent with a cold and loss of his voice. When he did not produce a note to say why he had been absent the Head to quote him, "came down on him like a ton of bricks."

The boy tried to say that he had been hoarse and in his confusion he said, "Please sir, please sir, I, I, I, had the throat of a horse, sir."

It took him a long time to live that down and the boy who was so nervous that he forgot why he had been away said that his Mother had not told him what to say.

The school dentist used a classroom for his surgery and although we were terrified of having extractions it was so good to go back to the classroom making the most of a bleeding mouth and being allowed to sit by the stove and have the sympathy of teachers as well as of scholars.

Teachers were often criticised by the head in front of the class and I remember one of my teachers, when I was about seven years old crying in front of the class as lots of our exercise books were torn up and thrown in the stove while the teacher was asked why she accepted such disgraceful work.

Probably the day before they had been looked at and passed without comment. Oh well, we all have our days I suppose.

I was very proud to be a guinea-pig for one of our inspectors who tried out many of his arithmetic problems at the Junior ~~stage~~ ^{stage} before he compiled his arithmetic book.

I was always very head-in-air and a boy used to hide behind a wall and throw stones at me. When asked why he did this he said, "I like her but she won't look at me. I want her to speak to me." A strange way to show his affection.

Dirty heads were very common. It was a constant worry to keep them clean. I wonder how many notes stated please move Mary away from Jane because she has come home with nits in her hair.

At home we had only to put a hand to our scalps when we were told to get the small-toothed comb and to lean over the ~~big~~ sheet of white paper spread over the table while the hair was raked through and the paper minutely examined.

Fleas were common especially in public places. Luckily there were not many public cinemas or halls to go to.

Silence in schools was a must unless the lesson called for reading aloud, chanting verse or tables, or answering questions. A teacher would often drop a pin and we were expected to hear it drop having been warned previously that we were to listen.

In sewing the teacher insisted that we were not sewing correctly if she could not hear the click of the thimbles.

Woolaston school was a leading P.N.E.U. school, the headquarters of this system was at Ambleside, in the Lake District.

This method was that after every lesson in history or literature a child came out in front of the class to narrate what he had learned then if satisfactory he/she would go to the far corner of the room and hear another child narrate while another one came to the front of the class to narrate and he in turn to took another child until every child would be hearing or telling in the room.

The group teaching of reading meant that good readers had graded groups to hear read and the teacher moved around to listen or he/she took the backward readers. A comprehensive list of pages was kept for each group. Young scholars who could not write essays had to stand by the teacher and tell a story on a given subject. The teacher wrote this and the best were sent to Ambleside to be marked and

reported on.