

2-188.



The times of which I am about to write cover only a period of seven years, from 1927 to 1934 yet those years have always seemed to be the most important years of my life. I suppose we were not as badly off as some were during those depression years but the words 'we can't afford it' seemed to be the regular reply to all our wants and ambitions. If my grandfather had only been a good business man we might not have been in these circumstances but he was a dreamer, his head always filled with political ambitions. He had been well educated at the Blue Boys School, (Queen Elizabeth's Hospital) and was trained as a compositor with a leading local newspaper. Why he gave this work up and decided to open a news agents shop I have no idea, but after his marriage this is what he did. The burden of the shop running mostly fell on the shoulders of his wife because he still pursued his political dream and stood regularly for the Conservative party, unfortunately in a totally Liberal minded constituency. When his wife died in her thirty ninth year he was desolate, he had depended upon her so completely and although she had borne him a son and two daughters none of them were interested in the business. The profits began to drop, he lost money through customers ordering bound volumes of magazines such as The Pick Me Up then forgetting to collect them or deciding they didn't want them. He still had piles of these old books when he died. When his son married and left home and shortly afterwards his eldest daughter also he decided to give up and retire. He let the shop and house to some tenants for the sum of ten shillings a week and this amount of rent never rose as long as they occupied the premises, neither did they ever do any repairs. Grandfather went to live in a small house that had been entailed to him, he had two actually next door to each other. The rent from the other house brought in five shillings per week and as grandfather had very little money left by now he had to live frugally. His youngest daughter my mother kept house for him until she met my father. Father was born in Kinsale Ireland, and came from an itinerant theatrical family. He was also a jack of all trades picked up here and there during his wanderings. Grandfather did not approve of him at all and refused to allow the newly married couple to occupy his house. My father tried to get work as a painter and decorator but he was more often out of work than in. He and my mother could only afford the cheapest of accommodation and the first two years of their married life were spent in moving from one set of bug ridden rooms to another. To crown it all mother found herself pregnant three months after she married and again two years later. They decided to emigrate to Canada where they had heard work was plentiful. However they found to their dismay that conditions were very similar over there and they had a rough time, but nevertheless they stuck it out for seven years. Then father had a stroke one hot summer day whilst painting the outside of a house and died; exactly on my fourth birthday. When grandfather received the news of the death he despatched a card at once. It pictured a man with his hands pulling out empty pocket linings and underneath the words 'Never mind if you're stony broke - come home'. Mother hastened to do so. She had had enough of Canada and somehow she managed to scrape together and borrow some money to get us back to England. Mother, my sister Mary and myself arrived at Gloucester Place St. Michaels Hill in the city of Bristol in June 1927. I think it must have been late in the evening because my first memory of our arrival is of standing in front of a dark door whilst mother knocked. A rather frightening deep voice called out 'Hello there' and the figure of Grandpa appeared dimly in the unlit doorway. Gloucester Place was a narrow lane leading from St. Michaels Hill, opposite the church and consisted of twelve houses opposite each other, six in a row and undetached. Actually our house was semi-detached because it was the end one and a large gasometer loomed by the side of it. It has been only since the houses in the lane were demolished that I have realised how small they must have been judging by the ground they occupied. They were supposed to have been replaced by university buildings but at the time of writing the lane is still a wilderness of plant life kept back by a wire fence from the last remaining house. It has been in this condition for the past twenty years, a pity because the houses were very sturdy, I never remember any dampness anywhere. The front door opened into a minute hall where another glass panelled door led into a passage running the length of the house. On the right as you entered was the door to the 'Front room'

this was always kept neat, was cold and uninvited in, mostly used by visitors, except at Christmas time and when grandpa used it in the summer. Next to that room was the staircase, steep and leading to the two bedrooms. No bathroom here. Next again along the passage was the kitchen/living room where mother cooked, we ate and we sat. In one corner of it was the range with its two ovens, always kept black leaded, a hateful job that, I did remember doing it but not often if I could help it. In the other corner was another steep flight of stairs leading to the two cellars, one in which was the copper for the washing the other where the coal was kept. The end of the passage from the back door led into the back yard, about twelve by eight foot. This was whitewashed and had the sink and water tap in one corner. At the other end was the shed housing the wooden seated lavatory. It was some time before Mary and I were accepted by the other children in the lane. They objected to our Canadian accents and we were usually told to 'Go home you Yankee kids'. They laughed at our queer habits. When we disapproved of anything they said or did we would draw one fore finger across the other and say 'Shame on you, double shame'. No wonder they thought we were peculiar! Eventually though we were accepted and from that time we had plenty of playmates. We were like a little community in the lane. Even the older children of fourteen or so joined in our games. Playing Creep Mouse and Giants in which we either crept up gradually or took great strides taking care not to be caught doing it by the one who was 'on it' standing with their back to the rest of us. The older ones would turn the thick pieces of rope for the smaller ones to jump in and out of, or play leap frog with us. We played with marbles, and spun wooden tops on which we pasted coloured paper to make them prettier, lashing at them with a stick with some thick string threaded through it. The girls made jewellery by threading tiny beads on wire then bending it into the shapes of flowers and leaves. We carried thick books around with cut out pictures of scenery or post cards between the leaves and charged a pin to prick the leaves to find a picture, if they found one they kept it for their own book. When we were at school we delighted in our nature boxes wandering far afield to find hips and haws and ash and sycamore wings, carefully laying them separately in cotton wool beds. At the end of the lane were the shops on the hill and we were delighted when we had roused the anger of the grocer on one side by the noise we made in the evenings. He would come out roaring and chase us while we fled for cover only to reappear when he had gone back in. I believe he had an invalid wife and perhaps if had appealed to our better nature we might have stopped our tormenting, but he never did.

We were never given pocket money, mother doled us out a few toffees each evening when we went to bed, regardless of possible harm to our teeth, it just never occurred to her. Sometimes we earned money by running errands for neighbours and this we used to buy the usual junky sweets that children love, sherbet fountains, sticks of licquorice or black and spearment chews. When they were seasonal we bought pomegranats from the greengrocer, they lasted ages when you picked out each seed with a pin. On one occasion I found some Canadian cents lying around in a drawer at home and spent them without shame at the local sweet shop where the old lady in charge was unable to see the difference in them and farthings.

When I grew older about nine years old I was asked to take a baby out for walks or rather rides in his pram. The baby belonged to a glamorous young mother who lived directly above our house. That is to say her garden ended at the top of our back yard wall. She and her husband were always giving parties and keeping us awake at night with their ragtime records and chatter. I was very amused at the way she and her husband called each other 'Pet'. They were really bright young things. I would call at her house and wait whilst she bathed the baby, cooing to him, 'Got to have his bundy washed hasn't he?' etc. then she would place him in his pram and off I would go. I took that baby all over the place walking right through the centre of the city right up to Clifton sometimes. I must say she trusted me far more than I would have done with my babies, but he was very good and I had no trouble with him. For these trips I was paid the magnificent sum of sixpence, riches to me, and I thought I was very lucky to be the chosen one.

One of the families in the lane seemed extremely poor. The youngest child Mabel would be sent out to play with nothing on but a cotton frock, no knickers or socks even in cold weather. Mother sent me down one time with a parcel of outgrown underwear for her but later on Mabel told me that her mother had taken them to the second hand shop and sold them so the child still went improperly clothed. My pity for Mabel ceased however on the day she broke my doll.

It was my Christmas present, taken out for the first time. It was only a small baby doll but it had been lovingly dressed by my two godmothers. Each garment from vest to bonnet and bootees all knitted with fine wool and using intricate patterns must have taken some days of busy knitting. No one would have the patience to knit for a child like that these days. Anyway Mabel gazed at the doll and begged to be allowed to hold it, 'just for a minute'. I handed it over and to our mutual horror she immediately dropped it and the china head lay in fragments on the ground. Mabel howled with misery so much so that her elder brother came out to find the reason. I explained what had happened but he ignored me and cuddling his sister led her into the house assuring her that it didn't matter. Mother never forgave the family for the lack of apology. Poor Mabel, I don't suppose she ever had a doll of her own, I never saw her with one.

My two Godmothers who were named Dorothy and Daisy and whose mother had been a friend of my grandmother lived in a dusty musty old bookshop in the Notwell Road. I never much liked visiting them because the house always seemed dark and stuffy, but they had one attraction, this was a parrot. He was a large bird and seemed too large for his cage. He didn't talk but sometimes he would honour us by spreading his wing feathers, showing all the lovely glowing colours. All the activities concerning Mary and I at home took place in the kitchen. The kettle was always singing on the ring over the fire and the flat irons were placed on the hobs. The kettle had to provide all the hot water for washing up and washing us besides making tea etc. On Saturday nights however, bath night, mother would heat water in the cellar copper and carry it in bucketfuls up to the kitchen and tip it into the galvanised metal bath. Mary and I had to share a bath, but it still must have been very wearing for mother carrying up the water. On Mondays she spent the whole day down in the cellar doing the washing. The cellar was dark but there was a grating in the wall near the ceiling to give some light. All mother had to do washing with was the same round bath with a scrubbing board placed in it and she had to get downstairs early in the morning to get the copper fire going to heat the water. Also in the cellar was a huge iron mangle to use when the clothes and sheets were rinsed, it stood on wrought iron legs and had thick wooden rollers. All the ironing, washing up and pastry making were done on the wooden kitchen table, scrubbed every day until it was almost white. Grandpa spent all his days in his bedroom. Although he was only in his seventies he was prematurely senile, in body, never in mind. He came downstairs only for his meals and went out only to the barbers on the hill. He enjoyed his meals and I was fascinated when he drank his tea at the drops which clung to his drooping moustache and which he mopped at carefully with a very large red patterned hanky. Whilst he drank his tea mother read the newspaper aloud to him and when tea was over she would go up to his room to remake his bed and tidy up also carry up coals to bank and replenish his fire. In the summer grandpa would go into the front room while she did this and play his gramophone. He had a collection of records in a cupboard near the window and the gramophone was old fashioned with a large horn. It had to be rewound for each record. Grandpa was almost blind and as he could not see which record was which he just played them as they came to hand. There were many small boxes of gramophone needles in the cupboard drawer and I'm sure he didn't know which were new needles and which were old as he never threw any away. He had some weird records, some of which mother loathed like the Laughing Policeman and Casey at the Dentists. Mother bought a record once, one of Gracie Fields singing Sally, but grandpa didn't like that one and somehow it got broken. I remember one dreary record called the 'Rosary' in which a convent bell chimed throughout whilst a shaky female voice intoned 'each bead a pearl, each pearl a prayer(dong)' it was really awful. In the winter months grandpa would stay sitting in his high backed wooden arm chair and sing to me whilst I washed the dishes. He sang about 'Rosalie the Prairie Flower' and 'Turn about and wheel about and jump Jim Crow' amongst others. After each song he would inquire 'What do you think of that Jeanie?' and I would reply gravely, 'Very nice Grandpa'. Eventually and probably to his great relief mother would come downstairs and he could escape back to his room. I often used to wonder what on earth he did up there all day, unable to read or do anything much. He did like to sew his own buttons on his clothing and for him to do this either Mary or I would be sent up to his room to thread needles. We wound the thread round and round on the needle before replacing it in the needlecase ready for the next repair job.

As grandpa always sat in his high backed chair so mother always sat in a large Windsor type chair with the spokes curving from side to side. There she would sit whenever she wanted to rest. The easy chairs were all in the front room they were black leather covered ones and there was also a horsehair sofa with a round bolster, uncomfortable and prickly to sit in. The room must have been crammed with furniture as we even had an upright piano which no one ever played. Mother had taken lessons in her youth but said she could really only vamp with her left hand and I heard her do this for the first time when we visited a relative. It sounded fine to me. She said she never played our old upright because it needed retuning. We children hadn't done it any good banging away on it and picking out the notes of 'Oh go and wash your father's shirt'. It was a Victorian one with silk front and candle holders and the stool which was round and unscrewed for height was lovely for swinging around on. Upstairs we shared the one bedroom with mother. Somehow a large bed and a single bed were accommodated side by side with a commode on mother's side and a small table between the beds. The room also contained a chest of drawers, a marble wash stand and a table with a drawer and a swing mirror on top which served as a dressing table. Needless to say mother had the commode and grandpa's chamber pot to empty every day as no one wanted to wander off to the back yard at night. Even on dark evenings we had to sally forth out there carrying a candle in a round candle stick. I used to sit out there and meditate for ages and poor grandpa very often came shuffling out and went mumbling back indoors again when I called out 'I'm in here grandpa.' I never even thought of his discomfort in my thoughtlessness. Mary and I went to bed at eight o'clock each night although there was two years difference in our ages. I expect mother packed us both off in order to get some peace and quiet at last. Mary and I had some peculiar pastimes lying in bed. She slept by herself in the narrow bed whilst I shared the larger bed with mother. We always had a candle on the table between the beds and we liked to drip the candle wax in spots all over our hands then roll it into a ball and chew it. We also liked to play with each other's hair taking it in turns. It made you feel sleepy and relaxed. Sometimes we had a shock when a large garden spider would come crawling up the wall. They came in from the creeper which grew on the outside wall. We would scream out for mother and she would reach up and squash it with her slipper. I remember a ghastly thing I used to do concerning spiders. Behind the hill shops ran a little back lane with rough concrete walls whose crannies were occupied by spiders which built thick blue webs. Together with some other children I would catch meat flies by hand, stun them and then toss them into the web just for the horror of seeing the spider come out and drag it away. It makes me shudder now to think of it. Dividing our house from the gasometer was a high wall and flanking it were two trees a lilac and a laburnum, golden chain we called it. The lilac spread over the garden of the house opposite much to the disgust of the inhabitant a rather morose middle aged woman. She was always hacking away at it which didn't enhance relations between her and mother. Everyone grew a few flowers in their front garden. I remember the lady next door to us asking us if we didn't think her 'gladiolians' were nice this year. Sometimes on a summer evening the beautiful smell of night scented stocks was heavenly. Grandpa liked flowers but would never have any out ones in the house, I don't know why. In one of the houses opposite us lived a young man of about nineteen or twenty years old. I can see him in my mind's eye standing by the gate at the end of his path wearing the long sharply creased trousers of the period with the bottoms almost covering his pointed shoes, poring over his film magazines. He was a great film fan and loved all the beauties of the day, Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford, Constance Bennett for example. His hobby was sketching copies from the photographs which he did extremely well. I was fascinated watching him as he leaned there on the gate drawing and eventually I asked him to teach me how to do it. He was very willing and provided me with pencil and paper. He never drew anything else but the film stars and he started me off drawing profiles which even today I can still do well although I am hopeless at drawing anything else. When I dared to criticise the famous faces he would just say dreamily 'Oh she's beautiful' in an American drawl. One of the rare treats for our family was a visit to the cinema. It was heaven sitting in the sevenpenny seats (Half price for children) and watching the organ gradually rise up to play to us before the film started. Most of the films mother took us to see were musicals but on one occasion the main film was 'Jane Eyre'. It terrified me when the mad wife came out of her room

with her wild black hair hanging around her face and carrying a candle with which she set fire to the bed curtains chuckling in a horrid way that chilled my blood. I could not go to sleep the following night and when mother came up to bed I lay there crying. When she wanted to know the reason I told her that I was sure the mad woman was lurking in our closet where the clothes hung. 'What! she cried in amazement 'Hiding in my clothes closet - how dare she!' Then she opened the closet door and called out 'Come out I'm not having you in there!' Then she went right in and waved her arms about whilst I watched nervously from the bedcovers. Finally she came out and turned to me. 'Well I can't find her, there is nothing in there at all except the clothes Jeanie'. I had started to laugh at her antics and the fear was quite dispelled. What a marvellous way to go about it! It was grandpa who urged mother to get out of 'these four walls' as apart from visiting the town each week to do the shopping and going to the 'Mother's Union' meetings she went nowhere. Although we lived opposite St. Michaels church mother never went there. She always attended St. Mary Redcliffe and would slip out of the house very early on Sunday mornings to attend Holy Communion. She would walk there not bothering to have any breakfast before she left and on one occasion she began to feel rather ill. She must have looked pale because the vicar, instead of just letting her touch the wine when he held it out to her, tipped the glass so that she had a really good mouthful. Afterwards he told her she must take some nourishment before she came to the service because, the 'Good Lord is not that severe'. She adored the vicar. His name was actually Canon Hertslett and he was a handsome man I suppose, with a lot of fair wavy hair. I used to get bored stiff with his sermons though when we were dragged off on Sunday evenings to the service. It is a beautiful church and I was interested when they had processions around the church on special days. The vicar sailing around in the capes made especially for him by the non. Mrs. Roderick Fry. She was connected to the chocolate firm and had pots of money. She had a special pew right at the front and would sweep in like a ship in full sail wearing a wide loose coat and a queer sort of flat hat, something like those worn by Elizabethan men. It seemed she spent all her time making the beautifully embroidered capes for the clergy using gold and silver threads. I must say the Canon looked magnificent in them. The services bored me to tears. All I can ever remember of the sermons was the Canon raving about 'The beauty of St. Mary Redcliffe' every now and then. The only amusement I found there was in piling the prayer books up like blocks while crouching down by the little hassocks. On one evening mother gave me some jelly babies thinking they might keep me quiet but unfortunately I had to drop them and they rolled all about into the aisle making an awful noise right in the middle of the sermon. Mother could have killed me. At last however the service would draw to a close and when Mr. Morgan the organist crashed out with the triumphant final chords we were able to make our escape. Mother always had to have a natter with some of her cronies at the back of the church and amongst these were two elderly spinsters called the two Miss Angels. I gather they were gentlewomen in reduced circumstances because they were always dowdily dressed and for some reason were always exchanging each others hats. They were large wide brimmed ones and I can't think why they changed them, they must have known people knew the hats. I suppose it just made them feel a little different. They would beam down at me and murmur 'Dear child' and the other one would echo 'Sweet child' I was no such thing and I use to think they were bonkers.

At least mother never dragged us off to church on Christmas day. That was a marvellous day. I suppose everyone remembers their childhood Christmas's as being so but we really had so little to get excited about compared to the modern child. I really believed in Father Christmas and would be loath to go to sleep on Christmas Eve because I longed to see him. Mary always my complete opposite by nature simply went to sleep as usual but I would lie there much to mother's annoyance. She would hover around outside holding our stockings and every time she opened the door to peep in a small figure would rise up in the bed and she would have to retreat muttering 'Damn kid' until I finally fell asleep from sheer weariness. In the early hours we awoke and fumbled around to find the bulging stockings and unpack them by the light of the candle. Oh the joy we found in the little packets of balloons, crayons and chinks, gradually coming to light until we reached the toe and the nuts and orange that weighted it. There has never been any pleasure to beat it because apart from birthdays we had no gifts throughout the year. We usually had a gift from mother and one from an aunt and

the Godmothers. We always had plenty to eat at Christmas, mother buying items gradually in the preceding months. We could not afford turkey or chicken, strangely chicken was more expensive than meat then but we had a large piece of roast pork and all the usual fare. Mother made her Christmas puddings in the copper downstairs and we all had a go at stirring the mixture when they were made. She managed to buy some crackers too and we would retire after dinner to the front room wearing the paper hats from them, though grandpa would not keep his on very long, I expect it made him feel undignified. Then we would play board games until tea time after we had carried our loot out into the lane to show it off to the other children and admire theirs. Mother managed very well on the twenty-five shillings a week housekeeping. She would go down to the market late on Saturdays when the butchers were selling the joints of meat cheaper to get rid of it as they had no refrigeration. Sometimes she would send me down to a small cafe in Maudlin Street to get sixpennyworth of roast beef in a bowl. They gave plenty of gravy with it and it was ample for the four of us. Clothes were a bit of a problem. Mother knitted all our underwear and sometimes sat up late at night sewing dresses for us by hand. Grandpa always bought shoes for our birthday gift so we were always well shod, even if it seemed a dull present at the time. Then there were the visits of Aunt Mamie. She was not a real aunt, not even related but merely a friend from the church, but she was a kindly person and knowing our circumstances would bring along parcels of clothes. If mother should ever give a doubtful look at the contents Aunt Mamie would immediately say sharply 'If you don't want them I can give them to my cousin in Plymouth'. We used to laugh at that familiar saying for years afterwards. Sometimes she would rifle her jewellery box and bring us old brooches and broken trinkets to play with so I was glad to see her. I expect most of the clothes she brought were for mother but I never remember ever seeing mother in new clothes. She had a black velvety sort of coat with a fur collar and I always thought she looked very distinguished in it, worn with a white silk scarf, even though the coat was about twenty years old. I was rather put out the day mother had her hair cut off. It had been very long and piled up at the back with the side pieces softly waving around her face, but one day she went mad and visited the hairdresser. She came home with a marcel wave, crimped and with snail curls nestling around her neck, it was a shock for us. Grandpa had lived a lonely life before we came home from Canada. When his health began to fail uncle Will his only son had had him taken to a geriatric hospital and he was very unhappy there. He told mother that the male nurses were very rough handling him and threw him in and out of bed like a sack of potatoes. He had become covered in bed sores so it must have been painful. He never forgave his son for sending him there and after he died we found little notes with words like 'He didn't want responsibility' with the last word underlined and various other bitter written thoughts. He told mother she had added ten years to his life by coming home to look after him. He certainly had a lively life with us. It was obvious that he loved Mary more than he did me and I suppose that it was because she resembled his wife, the same as mother did, whereas I was like my father. Every night when we passed his door on our way to bed we called out 'Goodnight Grandpa' and he would reply to each of us. 'Goodnight me bonny Mary', 'Goodnight me bony Jean'. It was true, I was bony. I was by nature nervous and disinclined to eat but the worst part of my troubles was the school. Mother had tried to get us accepted at Kingsdown Council School but they were full at the time so we had to go to St. Michaels Church school. Mary found her schooldays quite acceptable but I did not. She was a bright child and later on was tried for a scholarship to the Red Maids School but the teachers had little patience with the pupils and Mary's teacher ended up throwing a book at Mary's head and she never passed the exam. I had one big drawback. I was a perfect dunce at arithmetic. Somehow I just could not master problems and many times I was called out to the blackboard to work one out and would stand there holding the chalk helplessly whilst the rest of the class tittered and the teacher made faces. Unable to work out the problem I was dismissed contemptuously and slunk back to my seat hating myself and everyone else. Whether it was for this reason or because of some failing in my behaviour of which I was unconscious I was not at all popular with the teachers. I received canings for every little mistake. They had a special method of caning. The child would stand in front of the class holding out a trembling hand and the teacher would swish the cane back and forth then carefully measure it on the hand before finally bringing it down smartly. All the fingers would swell up immediately and be very sore for days.

one day I was caught during a lesson in which the teacher read to us. I was filling the letters on the cover of an exercise book. For this crime I was caned on both hands and a desk was placed for me in front of the whole class for several days. I shall never forget the humiliation I suffered during that time. I also remember the same teacher punishing another small thin girl, for what reason I don't know. The girl was from a very poor home and was listless enough at any time but something she had done raised the teachers anger and she beat the child with the cane all down the body and legs. The teacher was wearing a low cut v neck blouse at the time and her face and neck were red with fury right down to the v. I was horrified at the spectacle and remembered it particularly because the child died the same year from diphtheria. There was an epidemic of the disease in the district at that time and many children died. It did not even miss my own family. On Sunday nights when we came home from church mother always gave us a fry up supper of left over vegetables. usually we were hungry and enjoyed this meal but one Sunday Mary refused her portion. She had tried to eat it but said her throat was sore. Mother asked me if I would like to eat it up and I did. Later on as Mary was still distressed Mother said 'Let me have a look at your throat'. When she did she saw at once that Mary's throat was covered in yellowish spots and she cried out. 'Oh my God you've got diphtheria!' Mary at once burst into tears and her nose started to bleed. This confirmed mother's suspicions and without delay she put on their coats and walked straight away up to the Children's Hospital at the top of the hill. As soon as the doctor saw Mary's throat he ordered an ambulance to take her to Pill Hospital where the disease was being treated. He told mother that she had saved Mary's life by her prompt action. During the weeks that followed mother and I were quarantined and unable to go out but none of the rest of the family caught it which was remarkable in my case because I had even used Mary's fork after her. Mary was as a rule a healthy child but I noticed over the years that her throat was her weak spot and later she had quinsy. It was me that mother worried about continually. My nerves were in a bad state owing to the treatment at school. Mother was always threatening to visit the headmistress and complain about the canings, but I got into a panic when she did because I was afraid I would get punished for complaining to her. I was always getting swollen glands and being taken up to the Children's hospital, and my appetite grew worse. During an examination at school I fainted. I had sat staring at the questions on the exam sheet knowing full well that I couldn't answer any of them and when the door opened and the headmistress came in to collect the papers I blanked out. Again mother took me up to the hospital and when the doctor was told of my fainting fit he said 'That was sheer funk'. He then told her that I was obviously unable to cope at the school and that I was to be transferred to an Open Air school situated at Knowle. I was not at all unintelligent really except in arithmetic but they seemed to care more for that subject than any other at St. Michaels. I was good at English and History, art and music, bad at geography and sewing. Also I longed to show my acting prowess but never got the chance. Every year the school put on a Christmas play and when volunteers were called for my hand always shot up, but I was never chosen. The same children seemed to be picked every year. I remember my intense jealousy of one child who was everything I was not. Clever at everything and very pretty with long waving hair and a rose complexion, she was always chosen. An exciting thing happened one year. Our school being the closest to the Prince's Theatre was chosen to give the pantomime children schooling for the rest of the year. They were billed as the Twelve Little Sunbeams and were all in my class. I was absolutely thrilled and delighted with them. They had a presence and sophistication far beyond their years and would talk airily of rehearsals and other theatrical affairs which fascinated me completely. I hovered around them continually during play time in the playground but they usually ignored me and kept to themselves. On the last day when we broke up for the Christmas holidays the school forgot lessons and the children were given gifts from advertising firms which were exciting, just little colouring books and things like that, also we were allowed to make paper chains and play quietly. During the afternoon the teacher asked the Sunbeams if they would give us a song. A couple of them were willing and did solo numbers each, one singing 'I'm Willie, just Willie' and putting the song over with perfect acting prowess. We clapped them wildly and then the teacher asked if any of us lesser fry would like to sing something. At once my hand went up. The teacher gave me a forbearing look and said 'Come along then

I walked out to the front and began to sing. I chose a song which mother had taught me and which was one of my father's, when he was on the halls. It went like this.

"Before the King I did appear  
 Tra-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la  
 When he heard me sing he loudly cheered (repeat tra-la's  
 Came to me and said you are a marvel  
 At singing you have really got the knack  
 Then from his breast he took a diamond scarf pin  
 Smiled at me and then - he put it back.

I thought it would amuse the children and tried my best but the teacher would not let me sing it properly. She kept joining in the tra-la's and asking if it was right, so the children laughed more at her than me and I felt foolish as usual. After Christmas mother took us to the theatre to see the pantomime. We queued for ages to get into the cheaper seats in the gallery but it was worth it. I forget the name of the pantomime (It has Idle Jack in it) but the stars were Billy Merson and Jean Colin. I couldn't wait to see the Sunbeams and when they danced on I nearly fainted with joy. I felt so proud of them and pointed out my favourite to mother. They looked the picture of daintiness as they sang;

Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,  
 What if the raindrops sprinkle  
 Tie a little bell to a dancing shoe  
 And the sun will shine.

Oh I did love those children.

We used to see quite a lot of theatrical folk because there were several boarding houses in Horfield Road (where St. Michaels Hill branches off) who took them in, and they used to pass our lane on their way to the theatres. Whenever the pantomime happened to be Cinderella, the ponies to draw her coach would be stabled in the back of the King David Hotel at the bottom of the hill. This is now given over to the university. The management there allowed the children to feed the ponies with sugar and other tidbits and I spent a lot of time down there with them. They too would seem like old friends when I saw them on stage. Sadly the Prince's theatre was a victim of the blitz and is no more.

Mary and I appeared together with some other children as the pupils in Barrie's play 'Quality Street' which was produced at the Parish Hall by the Sunday School. The only words we said were 'Yes Miss Phoebe' and 'No Miss Phoebe' but it was fun dressing up in the costumes. The local dancing teacher Mrs. Barnes was greatly taken with Mary who was a pretty, dainty child and offered to teach her dancing at a reduced fee but mother was still unable to afford it. Mrs. Barnes daughter took part in a concert on one occasion at the Parish hall. She wore short black pants black tights and carried a top hat and cane whilst she sang 'Walking my Baby back home' I thought she put it over marvellously. Later on she too became a dancing teacher and the Peggy Barnes dancers appeared in every pantomime. Also at the concert we saw magic lantern slides and even an old Charlie Chaplin film. Mary was asked to sing a carol solo and her voice sounded very small and sweet. We attended Sunday school every week regularly in the afternoon. I quite liked it there as the teachers were very gentle and we were allowed to draw and given pretty book markers and religious cards. Mother gave us a halfpenny for the collection. One day during the time that Mary was away at the Pill hospital I left the lane to go to Sunday school as usual and as I reached the end of the lane I heard music. There on the corner of St. Michaels Hill and Norfield Road outside the Scotchman and his Pack, a public house, were a group of war veteran musicians. I was too young to realise that they were war victims of course but I stood looking at them while they played and I noted that they were all injured in some way, some with arms and legs missing and one with something wrong with his eyes. One of them had a cap on the floor by his feet with a few pence in it and I realised they wanted money. On impulse I dropped my halfpenny in the cap and turned away. They had said nothing but one of them came up beside me took my hand and led me over to Mrs. Luke's sweet shop where he bought not a halfpenny worth but a whole pennyworth of sweets and handed them to me with a smile. I was amazed at this but I accepted the sweets and made off down the hill to Magpie Park. Sunday school didn't see me that day.

Attending a church school meant that we had quite a few holidays which the council school didn't get. We usually went to church in the morning but had the rest of the day off. On one of the holidays we were presented with a huge bun each, they call them penny starvers and are still given to this day.



Having these odd holidays plus the fact that we could go up to Kingsdown school and jeer at them through the railings calling their school Kingsdown cabbage stump was at least one bonus for not being allowed to go there.

I was getting older and whereas I had previously despised films about love, I used to kick the posters on the walls advertising them and say 'love ugh', I was suddenly in love with a film star. His name was Owen Nares and mother had to take me to every film in which he appeared. Imagine my delight when I heard that he was coming to the Prince's theatre in a play called Double Door with Sybil Thorndyke, and mother promised to take me to a matinee. Instead of the gallery we were to go in the pit so we queued along the front of the theatre instead of down the long corridors. As we waited there mother suddenly whispered to me 'Look he's coming' and there was my hero walking along towards us chatting with another man. It was a heartstopping moment. I didn't like the play though, it was not at all like the lighthearted films I had seen Owen in at the cinema. Sybil Thorndyke played a horrible old woman obsessed with some pearls that belonged to the heroine, so much so that she shut the girl away in a room with a double door so that her cries for help were unheard. Of course it all ended happily with the foul deed being discovered and when the curtain finally fell Sybil Thorndyke was left on stage sitting in a chair with the pearls in her hands and mumbling to herself. 'the pearls, they're mine, mine'. Evidently she had gone dotty or had been all the time. I still think Owen Nares was a very handsome man and recently I bought a photograph of him at a postcard counter in the antique market. I pounced on it with delight. All I can seem to remember of him though was his cultured voice saying plaintively 'Oh but dahling'. As I have said Mary my sister was a dainty neat child but I was just the opposite, a real scruff. My playmates seemed to be mostly boys and they never cared whether we stayed clean or not. I well recall Mary's intense dismay when she was out walking with another child who came from a well to do family and I suddenly appeared before them. On being informed by Mary that I was her sister the snobbish kid looked at me in disgust. 'Is that dirty little girl your sister?' she said in tones of utter disbelief. Although it was true I still felt hurt by the remark. I was a real roughneck and one of my joys was swinging on the railings beside the big wall by the church. One day I fell off the railings on to the path below breaking my nose and a corner of one of my teeth. I went over there the next day to examine all the blood spots on the ground. As I grew older I bitterly regretted this accident as it did nothing to improve my appearance and I would look at my nose in disgust if I glanced in the mirror. It was so ugly compared with the dainty Grecian noses I was so fond of drawing.

We spent a great deal of our time playing in the churchyard. The proximity of the ancient grave stones never disturbed us, they had always been there and were separated from the play area by railings anyway. We always gathered at the front of the church whenever a wedding was held there in order to gather up the lovely silver horseshoes and rose petals made of paper which was thrown at the bridal pair. At the side of the church was a path leading up to the school and lying at the bottom of it was a house called Pear Tree Cottage. This was the home of the Boyd twins, two of my classmates. I used to envy them living in what seemed to me a very big house and with such a large garden. The Boyd twins were not identical in fact they looked very different, one being plump and round faced, the other thin and long faced. Together with another little girl named peculiarly, Tinksy Lewis we all joined the local guides and I was in the Robins. I went regularly for a while and enjoyed the singing and making knots but gave up after a few boring first aid talks which seemed likely to go on and on. Another girl I was friendly with for a while lived in the Scotchman and his Pack. The pub is still there as far as I know. This girl had every sort of expensive toy imaginable A dolls house, rocking horse, everything and they were placed in the skittle alley where I was allowed to play with her. She was very spoilt however and her dominating ways soon irritated me. I preferred to play with the boys any time.

When I left St. Michaels school to attend the Open Air school I rode there every morning on the tram which stopped at the bottom of the hill and took me right up to knowle. I was given small red tokens for the fare. I had breakfast and dinner there and these meals were presided over by a formidable female called Matron who wore the usual flowing nurses cap and navy dress. She was very large and plump and had a jutting nose like a parrot. We had our meals in a large hall with the kitchen at the end and the meals were handed out to us through a hatch while we stood in line then carried them to the long tables stretching out down the hall.

the food was very good on the whole and I began to regain my lost appetite. One thing I could not bear however was the square cubes of meat which seemed to be mostly fat. Matron tried to make me eat them when I first went there by standing over me threateningly but when I kept gagging on them she left me alone afterward. She was really angry with me though on one occasion when we were given porridge for breakfast and I discovered maggots in it. The oatmeal was delivered in sacks and was usually very good but this time I absolutely refused to eat it. I picked up my dish and walked back up to the serving hatch and showed the porridge to Matron. She could scarcely believe her eyes but most unwillingly took the dish back and then grew really annoyed when the other children followed my example and also brought their dishes up to the hatch. I had never seen the poor woman look so embarrassed before. We used to get lovely plum duff and cottage pie there though, the best I have ever tasted. We were also given large mugs of milk. I love milk and always drank mine but it was served hot and some of the children hated it, so we used to slide along a full cup for an empty one and that way I ended up having three or four cups instead of one. I have regretted this since because I realise how essential that milk was to the children but at the time they were glad to get rid of it and I was glad to have it.

Each day we had to rest for an hour on a camp bed outside the class rooms. The beds were set out in rows but we hardly ever managed to sleep. I and the girl in the next bed passed the time by mouthing songs to each other and trying to guess the name of the song. After the rest we had to have a shower which I hated. It was so cold and I shivered continually. I suppose it was meant to toughen us up. The school was intended for delicate children and the teachers were gentle and encouraging. There were no examinations and we were allowed to progress at our own rate. We were each given a little plot of ground to grow flowers in but I don't think I ever grew anything in mine except mustard and cress. They had a large goldfish pond there with huge fish in it and that reminds me of something which preyed on my conscience for years. At the week-end I had gone fishing with some children and come home with some tiddlers as I thought. After noting that one or two had died I thought how nice it would be if I took them to school and tipped them into the goldfish pond where there was plenty of room. This I did and I don't think anyone saw me, not that I thought I was doing anything wrong. However during the next few days we were surprised to find that dead gold fish were floating on top of the pond and no one could understand why. I felt dreadful because I realised that the fish I had put in there must have killed the goldfish. I daren't tell anyone what I had done and I still don't know if the strange fish were ever discovered.

Whilst at this school I heard my first radio programme. We didn't have a radio at home and listening to it was a real thrill for me. It was a schools programme about the slave trade and I was enthralled as the story sounded like a play. It was a mixed school and I fell in love with a real boy for the first time. His name was John Edge and I thought him very handsome. The other girls used to talk about 'going with' boys and I decided it was time I did. I wrote him a note which said, 'Dear John I like you very much, will you go with me' He sent me back a note in reply, 'Dear Jean, I cannot go with you as I am going with somebody else'. End of hoped for romance. At that time thankfully I suffered no heartbreak.

Another thing I did for which I was thoroughly ashamed at the school. Before we left to go home we were given our tokens to go home and to return in the morning. We would go into the washroom to wash our hands and while we did this we sometimes placed the tokens on the window sill above the sinks. One day when I was on the tram and put my hand in my pocket to take out the token I found I had four tokens. I had picked up some other child's tokens as well! To be honest I really intended to tell Matron that I had made this mistake the next day, but to my horror she stood up in the hall at breakfast and announced that someone had stolen two tokens, and that she would like the culprit to step forward. I cannot imagine how she expected a child to show his or herself up before the whole school and I sat there feeling the greatest criminal that ever lived. Nothing however would have made me reveal myself and the theft had to go undetected, except that it was not a theft at all as I had not intended to steal the tokens.

My health returned to me during my stay at the school and I was sorry to have to leave when we moved. Our life in the lane came to a close when grandpa died. He was not sorry to go, as he told my mother. So frail and almost blind, life had no more to offer him. His only pleasure had been when someone from his past life

came to visit him. He would remark after they had gone and he was alone with mother again. 'Oh Nellie, it was so good to talk to a cultured man again'. He passed quietly away without pain. I remember gazing down at him as he lay in the coffin in the front room. He looked so peaceful. His hands were slightly curled and on his thumb I noticed a black man's pinch as we called it, a small blood blister. I wondered how he had come by such a thing. I have never liked the smell of new wood since that time or even the strong smell of Chrysanthemums. My uncle had inherited the two houses at St. Michaels as they were entailed but grandpa was able to leave mother the shop and house at Hill Avenue and she decided to go there. She and her brother were not on friendly terms especially as grandpa had left everything he had to mother except the entailed houses and my uncle tried to contest the will by saying that his father was senile and had not known what he was doing. He failed to prove this however. Anyway mother arranged with the tenants at Hill Avenue to move in as soon as they could find some other place to live. Whilst we waited we moved from St. Michaels to a flat in Bellevue, Clifton. We had to take a basement flat and were not very comfortable there because the place was alive with fleas. Mother assumed it was because the tenant in the flat on the first floor was in the habit of shaking her dog's sleeping mat over the area railings every day. Mother scrubbed the entire flat every day using Jeyes fluid in an effort to get rid of the fleas but they still persisted. Mary and I used to make a game of counting the fleas at the bottom of our beds every morning which used to upset mother very much. After three months we were able to leave Bellevue and take up residence at Hill Avenue. The shop was completely empty and mother would have to take up the reins as shopkeeper. I was to attend another 'Open Air' school in the disused bandstand of Victoria Park. A new phase of life began for us, but, looking back it seems my heart has never stopped yearning, to be back living in the lane.

Amendment: I have stated that the King David hotel was taken over by the University. In actual fact it was used by the Bristol Royal Infirmary. Was converted into staff residences.