

CHAPTER 10

Factory Days

A few days before we were due to take up our jobs as 'women factory hands', Mummie and I went to London for the day to find suitable rooms. We didn't aspire to a smart part of London, in spite of Mummie's longing to find rooms in the Curzon Street locality, where her rich uncle had had a house and which she maintained was the only part of London she felt at home in and liked.

We aimed instead at the less fashionable district of Kensington. Just two bedrooms and a sitting room would suffice, overlooking a quiet square and in no time we would make them attractive with new curtains and cushions, our pictures, photos and flowers. With all our experience of moves in India and the speed with which we there converted a bare bungalow into a gay home, we optimistically imagined that we could do the same with rooms in London.

Alas for our hopes! We were only to get fourteen shillings a week each in wages, and on that we were determined to live. The rooms we saw and liked were far beyond our means, so further and further towards the western slums we made our way until late that evening, seeing a notice in the window of 'Bedroom to Let', we rang the bell.

A slatternly, blousy type of woman answered the door and showed us the bedroom. Hardly looking at it, we took it. So dead tired and dispirited were we that we paid the first week's rent of ten-and-sixpence in advance, told the landlady that we would arrive on Saturday and had barely time to catch the last train back to Eastbourne. The address, No. * Chiswick Crescent was the only thing we could console ourselves about. It didn't sound too bad!

So on the Saturday we left our comfortable pretty little house in Eastbourne and took up our residence in Chiswick Crescent. That it was a lovely spring day made the drabness of it seem worse – or perhaps it made it better, for when the winter came then we really did know the misery and cold of living in the slums.

However, during the summer at least we did not experience the arctic cold job which the fetching of water brought us in wintertime. Having barely glanced at our room when taking it we now discovered its various drawbacks, one of which was the only water supply was a tap out on a flat roof upstairs.

The room was on the ground floor at the back and looked onto a blank wall of dirty yellow bricks forming the back wall of another house. There was an old iron bed, a 'double' one with sagging springs and a thin lumpy mattress. This Mummie and I had to share, and I think the only reason we slept at all was our extreme tiredness at the end of a hard day's work. A rickety cupboard, washstand, two upright chairs and a strip of worn carpet on the floor completed the furnishings. It was a simple room with only the bare necessities, but it was clean and we occupied it for about a year.

Our only means of heating was a gas ring. On this we could boil a kettle for hot water bottles and make our early morning tea and also fill a Thermos to take with us

to the factory. That afternoon we went shopping. In the slums shops stayed open until late on Saturday evening. A tin kettle, Thermos, a couple of teacups and one plate, one knife and a loaf of bread and a pot of paste, completed our requirements.

We crouched over our gas ring and ate bread and paste for our supper. On Sunday we had toast and paste for breakfast and the same for lunch, tea and supper, carefully leaving enough over to make sandwiches for the next day's meal to take to the factory with us. Between these exciting Sunday meals we explored our district and wrote enthusiastic letters to various members of our family, describing our charming room!

In all honesty I must admit that we need not have gone to quite such lengths in living as we did, in acute discomfort and near starvation. My grandmother would I am sure have advanced us some money; but we had decided to live on our earnings and to make a grand, successful and exciting adventure of it.

Monday morning was the start of our working life. By my experience of living with Mummie I judged only too well that even getting dressed for factory work would take as long as an average person would need to get ready for a ball. So the alarm clock was set for five-thirty in the morning and that was not a bit too soon. I made tea and the sandwiches and as I dressed, hurried Mummie for all I was worth.

In the end we had to run to Earls Court Underground in order to catch the 6:30 am workmen's train. As far as I can remember we nearly always had to run to catch that train. From Turnham Green station we had a good mile to walk along a very unsavoury looking road of ill-repute, with the romantic name of Devonshire Lane! This led us to the gate of Gwynne's Aeroplane Works.

We reported at the office and were then taken to a shed and there instructed how to file the burred edges off screws, by a kind little old man who hovered over us like a broody hen. During the mid-morning break and the dinner hour we sat together and ate our sandwiches and drank our thermos tea. Another woman had started work that same day, but she did not speak to us nor we to her. After two days she 'walked out' and Mummie and I were left as the sole women workers. It was dirty, smelly, noisy and tiring, but we were certainly going to stick to the job.

After a few days of filing screws, and I suppose showing quickness and aptitude for it, I was promoted. The shed had been a small and friendly place, but now I was taken into the main body of the factory, alarmingly large and deafeningly noisy. Rows of huge lathes, all being worked by competent looking mechanics, stood beneath huge whirling iron wheels attached to the lathes by fast revolving leather belts. Altogether it was a most alarming looking place.

A foreman with a disagreeable look fetched me from the dear little shed saying: "Ere, you come along. I've been told you are to start work in the main building; don't approve of this idea of the Boss's; women on heavy industry! They won't stick at it" (with a sneering look); "you least of all!"

I meekly followed him up and down the lanes of lathes till he arrived at one of the largest and most ungainly looking of the monsters. Drawing the worker of the machine aside – supposedly out of my hearing, but who could hear, let alone overhear, anything in that infernal din? – the foreman and man proceeded to have a

shouting match. Judging by their expressions it was a fierce quarrel and they cast many baleful glances over their shoulders at me. The little undersized foreman won and strutted away in his overlong and very clean khaki drill overcoat, twirling his whippy steel ruler, his badge of superiority.



I was now left to the mercy of 'Wallaby Jack' – (the name I was later to know him by, for he was an Australian) a great big powerful man, swarthyly dark, with black eyes who may have had aboriginal blood in him. Above the din I managed to hear him shout something about his 'having to teach' me, so I'd 'better stand to one side and take bloody good care not to get in the way but just watch'.

I stood meekly where he had pointed for a very long time but could see nothing. His body and shoulders completely hid what he was doing with his hands, so after some time I moved to his other side. Immediately he swung his body round so that the secrets of his work were safe from my eyes. After a bit I returned to my first place and at once his body turned to block my view of what he was doing.

The only compensation came from the position of his lathe which was at the end of a row and close to a glassed-in side of the factory, overlooking the river. Every now and then I dared to take my eyes off his obviously unfriendly back and gaze at the beautiful Thames. At the lunch hour all machinery was switched off from a main switch and there was a lower and lower hum as the big overhead wheels gradually clanked to a stop and peace took the place of the ghastly noise. Then Wallaby Jack put some tools in the iron locker beside him, locked it and walked away without a word. I dashed off to join Mummie in the friendly shed where we ate our sandwiches together.

Well before the luncheon hour was up I was back in my place having a good inspection of this thing called a lathe and of what I supposed was the work being done. It looked appallingly complicated, heavy, evil and dangerous. As the machinery started up Wallaby Jack appeared, unlocked his locker, took out his tools and recommenced work. I might not have existed, except for the intense feeling of dislike he managed to convey by his squarely-turned back.

So passed the long afternoon and the whole of the next day, and I can honestly say that I never again felt quite so exhaustingly tired as I did at the end of those two days, two ten-hour days of standing, doing nothing, an unwanted and disliked female!

On the third morning Wallaby Jack, in reply to my 'Good Morning', said, "What! you still here?"

"You can see I am."

"Too right! I can see you," and he gave me the glimmer of a smile. On his return from the mid-morning break he produced a short piece of plank and told me I had better stand on it. "Cement floors don't do any good to legs – might do yours an injury. They don't look too strong."

I was more than grateful for this first sign of friendliness. My bit of plank was placed alongside his, and he stood so that I could watch him work, and fascinating it was to watch. The job was one of the processes of making cylinders for aero engines, and this operation was cutting the air-cooling grooves.

The heavy steel cylinder was trued-up in the chuck and clamped firmly with a strong key. By pulling a six-foot long wooden overhead lever to the right the lathe was set in motion, and by pulling it to the left, stopped. By pulling something else the tool was made to move along the cylinder, cutting grooves in it. Twenty times or more these cuts were made and each time they were deeper. The first few were done in low gear and great spiral curls of steel crawled like a snake up and around and finally into a tray beneath the lathe, all spilling over in interesting coils around our feet. They turned many lovely colours, from vivid reds and electric blues to a silver grey.

As the grooves became deeper the belt was manoeuvred by a deft movement of the right hand holding a firmly gripped spanner with which the leather belt was slipped from a smaller to a larger wheel on the lathe. At the same time the belt was flicked by one's left hand upwards to a larger sized wheel overhead. This sounds easy and looked easy, but believe me it was not! It needed a rigid yet elastic movement with both hands, perfect timing, and quite considerable strength. If one 'missed', off would come the belt from the pulley. That meant getting the belt-man to fix it up and probably a long delay.

The sharpening and setting of a tool was an art and there were no gadgets for stopping the tool from cutting too deep or too far. It was all done by hand and depended on one's eye and judgement. Little by little Wallaby Jack explained things to me, and it was a proud moment when he stood to one side and I did a few lines of cutting by myself. The last cuts were the most tricky as they were done on the highest gear at great speed, and finally the grooves were filed and polished until each one fitted the gauge to perfection.

For some days I was only allowed to do the first few rough lines of the grooves, then stood on one side and watched my instructor finish them; but before so very long I was able to complete one to his satisfaction. That was a definite step towards our friendship!

If I had showed signs of being a bad workman I do not think we should ever have become friends, but as it was – we did – slowly and surely.

He would join me by the window before work started and tell me about the wide open spaces in Australia. In his eyes every thing in Australia was bigger and better than in England.

"You are fond of a bit of a view, aren't you?" he said to me one early morning, as I was looking way down the river. I admitted I was. (*Plate 6a*).

"Call that a river?" he asked, looking disparagingly at the Thames. "In Australia

I'd say it was only a swollen creek. You should see OUR rivers! ten times as broad. Call that a view? Why you can't see no distance at all. In Australia OUR air is so clear you can see a hundred miles."

I told him my greatest wish was to see his wonderful country. My reward was instantaneous! Out of his dirty overall pocket he took a couple of lumps of sugar and pressed them into my hand.

"I've had a parcel from home – and here is some sugar for you."

"Oh! thank you, but I don't take sugar in my tea."

"Go on! that's just your niceness; I want you to have a treat; a real sweet cup of tea." (I hated sugar in my tea.) But I accepted the sugar and his friendship with it.

On the next lathe to ours worked a Belgian youth – not a nice type, and inclined to be friendly towards me. Wallaby Jack wasn't having that! and managed to appear unexpectedly early at lunch hour intervals and if he saw the Belgian sidling up to me, thrust his stalwart figure between us and told the youth 'to get off'. Not only did he tell him to 'get off' but he got him moved to another line of lathes.

"Fair puts me off my stride," he confided to me, "to see that calf eyeing you when he should have his eyes on his work."

"A few forceful words to the foreman and Wallaby Jack took possession of the 'calf's' lathe.

I was now to work what had been our joint lathe, while he worked the one next to me, and he would keep HIS eye on me. My Australian instructor's friendship for me was not entirely altruistic – it had a distinct mercenary tang to it!

He had 'had it out' with the foreman (he confided to me) that he had no intention of being a financial loser – caused by delays in instructing me – since he was on 'piece work'. So our joint work was to be booked on his card to repay him for his responsibility. So I did the rough 'turning' on each cylinder which he then took to his lathe for the skilled finishing.

As I became more skilled and quick, so did Wallaby Jack's friendship for me increase! He was doing very nicely out of our joint work and very anxious to save me much of the heavy lifting in case I got tired and slowed up!

Even after a month or so, when I was put on to a 'piece work' card of my own, I think he continued to get a 'rake off' on my work.

By that time I could sharpen my own tools and 'swing' my own belt, but he always kept an eagle eye on me and could spot in a second (from his lathe) by the look of the coils of steel shavings that wriggled and squirmed off my work, if my tool was sharpened and set to his satisfaction. If it wasn't he would give me the 'rough side' of his tongue, and after a lot of 'B's' would tell me it was for my good – for I had it in me to make a first class 'turner' in about five years' time.

Anyhow we remained firm friends for the eighteen months or more that we worked as mates on the same job – and after.

I learnt a lot from Wallaby Jack – apart from work – apart from how to become a skilled mechanic and a first-class turner, I learnt a side of life that was new to me, and a fascinating amount of new strange words! I found it all most interesting – and

told him so.

"Yes," he agreed with me, "I can teach you a thing or two but don't you go listening to all chaps tell you – it mightn't be for your good," and then as an afterthought, "I've learnt a thing or two from you, and one of them is – a lady can have guts – and I'm meaning you."

I thought that a wonderful compliment – and wondered where exactly guts were in my inside! Should I ask him? Of course he would know and it would be rather fascinating to know more about guts, which till now I had thought were used to make violin strings, and were made from cat's guts. Or were they? If I wanted to know I must ask him, which I did during a break.

"Guts? – Oh! stringy things in your inside and they make you stick to doing anything whether you like it or not, and sometimes they help you out if you are in a tight corner."

Soon after I was moved into the main building, Mummie joined me there. She was also put to work on a lathe – some distance from me. Her instructor was a kind elderly man who soon fell for her charm. We were the only two women workers in the factory for many months and extremely proud of the fact! (*Plate 6b*)



Enid dressed for work at the lathe.

When we started work on lathes our weekly wage was raised from fourteen to eighteen shillings a week. Later, when we were on 'piece work' we earned more, but it was a year before our weekly pay packet contained more than £2-0-0 apiece. In the meantime we did not dare raise the standard of our living more than a very little. The war was getting more and more serious and we did not know what the future would bring, so we conscientiously put something by every week (even that first week on 14/-d. we saved 5d!) and from then on put hard earned money into savings certificates.

Our hours were from 7 am till 8 pm (including overtime), Saturday afternoons as well as mornings and sometimes for weeks on end – all day on Sundays. Aeroplane engines could not be turned out quickly enough and we were only too willing to work 'all out' for as

many hours as required.

Some time later that summer, extensions were built on to the factory, and to Wallaby Jack's disgust – a bunch of women appeared. He refused to teach any!

I was different, he told me. He had accepted me – we were mates – with a joint dislike of the foreman, despising bad work and bad tools. We shared a locker and he trusted me with his keys.

"Women! And what women!! Still more men, and what men! and what types! 'Fair cows' they are – the whole mob of them. They will never make skilled workmen. They should have been 'cut out' before they were drafted here."

Wallaby Jack looked at them with the same scorn and disgust with which he had once looked at me!

"Just look at that chap – hasn't even got a hammer of his own. Watch him. He'll never make a mechanic."

Of course by then I had bought my own hammer, rule and other necessary tools – on Wallaby Jack's advice of 'buy the best and they will last you a lifetime if you look after them'.

With the influx of more men and some women we had the great advantage of the addition of a canteen. Up till then Mummie and I had eaten our sandwiches beside one or other of our lathes, or more often – when very hot – in the yard outside, sitting on old packing cases as did other workers, singly or in groups.

The canteen was a great boon. Now we could have a hot midday meal and tea out of a great urn, instead of that queer, peculiar tasting grey liquid that comes (after many hours) out of a thermos – calling itself tea!

That summer we started on night work, alternate two weeks on day and two weeks on night shift. No lathes were to be idle, but to be run day and night when possible.

It was rather romantic working at night, once one had got used to the feeling of sickness in the early hours and realised that eating a decent meal between 1 and 2 am kept that feeling of nausea at bay.

At night one felt that all the world was asleep except the workers (and that included us). And at night the ugly inside of the factory had a weird glamour. The shaded lights over each piece of machinery threw the high overhead structure of revolving wheels, straps and belts into a mystery all their own. Many shades of blue surrounded one, and in spite of the incessant noise of the machinery a strange peace descended.

The foreman did not bother one (having a good sleep in an office no doubt) and neither did the Boss, conducting some inspector or VIP round the works. The workers were too tired or too intent on their work to have rows or cause disturbances and so the night workers just got on with their jobs.

Sometimes I would look all around me and above me and think of what a fortune teller had once told me in Lucknow. We were sitting on the verandah – not doing much except perhaps a little desultory sewing – when a fortune teller came up and was so persistent about wishing to tell our fortunes that finally we gave in and had

them told.

Natives can be very politely persistent, and this man had been hanging about all morning and would probably continue to haunt us until he had achieved his object. So partly to amuse ourselves and partly to get rid of the man, we let him have his way.

Mine had the usual: fair man, dark man, letters to come, journeys to go, marriage etc. then at the end – after staring at me for a long time – said: "Chota Mem-sahib (little lady) will have five years when she will be unhappy, and for many of those years she will be surrounded by wheels and wheels all round her and above her, like many motor cars I can see all those wheels round the Chota Mem-sahibs in the future."

I told him that I had now heard enough and thanked him – thinking he was really getting rather stupid and fantastic – and thought no more about it. Now I remembered it and from time to time when I saw all the factory machinery wheels revolving around me I would think of that fortune teller, squatting at my feet on a verandah at Lucknow.

On hot summer nights (while on night work) Mummie and I would sometimes go outside the factory gates, after we had had our midnight meal, to get a breath of fresh air. We would stand and look at the river by moonlight.

Try as hard as I could, not to remember – I did. I would remember the only other occasion my fortune had been told.

We, Mummie, 'R' and I were staying at Allahabad. Mummie and 'R'¹ were playing in a tennis tournament. We were all three staying with some charming friends in an old fort overlooking the river Jumna. The walls of the fort were ten feet thick, and my bedroom was what at one time had been one of the dungeons. 'R' had a dungeon next to mine and by crawling along the ten foot deep stone window seat – ending in a narrow arrow slit of a window – in response to a summons from him, we would carry on a light-hearted conversation from our arrow slits! It was all such fun!

One evening – by way of amusing us – our hostess told my fortune. She told it by cards, explaining card by card in connection with the ones before, behind, above and below, what each card signified. There were the usual letters to come and go, journeys, fair men and dark men, money or lack of it, and so on. But one card she left untold – it was the ace of spades at the end of a row. I pointed out to her that that was the only one of which she had not told me the meaning. She gathered up the cards together, telling me she could not always tell the meaning of every card – and I thought no more about it.

After 'R' was killed she wrote me the sweetest letter of sympathy, saying amongst other things that she had not told me the meaning of 'that ace of spades' because it meant the death of someone I loved and she thought – young as I was – I was in love with 'R', and she knew – since he had taken her into his confidence – that he was in love with me. She ended her letter by saying 'R' was 'one of those whom the Gods loved'.

What a long time ago all that was, and still I could not forget. The misty

¹ Roland Dudley.

moonlight on the Thames would remind me of moonlight on the banks of the river Jumna and Gumti, and I'd turn away and tell Mummie it was time we returned to the factory.

As soon as it was early morning light all the big, heavy, wooden shutters from the windows were taken down, and one got some exquisite views of misty dawns on the Thames; of barges gliding past; of busy little tugs – filled with their own importance; of the far bank and the shapes of warehouses and buildings taking form.

For a moment of time the outside world of river, sky, buildings and shipping, and the inside world of factory wheels, dimming lights, of the blue lights of steel and men's overalls, looked perfect. It seemed strange that a factory could have beauty, but both inside and out were for a few fleeting seconds very lovely.

It soon passed – outside became just another beginning of a summer morning – inside, the end of another night of work.

How grey the faces of the night workers were. One felt (without looking in a glass) how grey one's own was with heavy physical work, hours of concentration of brain, eye and hand, and lack of sleep. For it was well-nigh impossible, if one was a naturally bad or light sleeper, to get more than a very few hours sleep during the day. Also it was tempting to spend more hours than one should out in the open air before going to bed, or get up early in the afternoon and do likewise. And in the winter – mend stockings, write letters, or accept a tempting invitation to have lunch or tea with friends.

Sometimes when I was on day shift, I even went to a dance, if some cousin or boy-friend was home on leave! The gay evening was hardly worth the effort of trying to get my hands reasonably clean!

Through shortage of petrol, taxis were practically off the roads at night. Sometimes I was lucky enough to be motored back but more often I returned by a late underground and then walked the long distance to our room, but never alone!

As I came out from our boarding house it seemed as if a policeman was practically waiting on the doorstep – with a, "Good evening Miss, mind if I walk along with you? Which way are you going?"

"To the Earls Court Underground."

"Funny! That happens to be my beat, so we'll go together."

Happily we would chatter away and as we parted at the station he would enquire about what time I would be returning and then tell me that if he was off duty by then he would tell his relief to escort me back.

True enough either he or his relief would be there. It was rather comforting to be escorted by the strong arm of the law along those slimy streets – "And if you don't mind it Miss, we walk in the middle of the road at these hours; nasty lurking places there are on the foot paths, doorways and the likes."

Dear policemen, how I love them! From the first time I came out of the factory gates and the one on duty there lifted his eyebrows and said: "Any more like you coming round the corner? Say Miss, which is your afternoon off?"

Regretfully I told him I didn't have any afternoons off.

It seems strange, now that I think back, that Mummie – with her Victorian idea of chaperonage – allowed me to go out and come back late at night on the chance that I would pick up a police escort.

However, the odd nights of gaiety were few and far between. I rarely accepted an invitation as one paid heavily for it the next day by being extra fatigued.

I could sense Mummie anxiously watching me as I worked and she would leave her lathe and come over to ask me if I was feeling overtired, and to my assurances that I was not, she would implore Wallaby Jack not to let me work so hard. He would give her one of his 'dark' looks and say:

"Thank you for your advice Mam, but when I want it I'll ask you. I'm quite capable of looking after my young mate." And if she hovered around – as she did on one occasion, saying: "But you don't know my daughter, she will work till she drops" – his reply was instantaneous:

"Then you can trust me Mam! No one will be quicker or more delighted than I, to pick her up."

To the look of indignation, he continued: "I've been looking for some time for a chance to hold her in my arms..."

She would fly back to her own work then, knowing that anything more she said would only bring further assurances from him of what he was prepared to do!

Wallaby Jack would turn to me with a grin, showing a flash of his very white teeth. He was as nice and safe as a policeman – my dear Wallaby Jack.

As I have said, we both disliked the foreman. He had his own reasons. I had mine. Mine were that I disliked the way he 'pinged' my suspenders! Now if for any reason one's mate, foreman, inspector or anyone else, wanted one to stop one's work to have a word, he pinched one's thigh. This was legitimate and the only way of attracting attention without giving a start to the worker. A tap on the shoulder or arm, or a shout in the ear might cause a sudden jerk resulting in scrapping the work. A pinch on the thigh merely meant one stopped one's lathe as soon as safely convenient and gave one's attention to the pincher.

The foreman had a nasty way of feeling for, catching hold of, and then letting go – my suspender with a 'ping'!

If Wallaby Jack saw him do this – and he was mighty quick in seeing – he would edge off the foreman, swing off my lathe, cross his arms, look down from his height at the undersized rat-like looking foreman and say: "Got any complaints about my mate's work? Got anything to say to her? If you have you had better say them to me, and in the yard during the dinner hour."

The foreman would slink away, twirling his little ruler. Wallaby Jack would give me a triumphant grin and say: "That 'cow' won't trouble you for a bit."

"Why 'cow'?" I asked him – he was always applying that word to most un-cow like people. "He's more like a rat."

"Just an Aussie word for being a bit of no good. Now you should see my brother Ben – there's a man for you – he ain't no 'cow'."

He was very proud of his youngest brother who was in the forces. Later when he

was on leave, he came to see his brother Jack at the factory, and was proudly introduced to me. Such a tall, good-looking fair young Aussie – in his uniform. I told Wallaby how much I admired his brother.

"You can't really see what a fine lad he is all dressed up like that. You want to see Ben stripped to see him at his best. Wish you could see him stripped."

With a sigh at what I had missed, Wallaby returned to his lathe.

With the approach of wintry weather life wasn't so very funny. It was arctic inside the factory and not so easy to work with dead fingers. A tip to the floor sweeper produced a charcoal fire bucket (as used by men working on roads) and from time to time one made an effort to thaw one's hands.

Why we didn't find a better room before the winter set in, I don't know. We could afford one, for we were on regular 'piece work', overtime and working all day Saturdays and most Sundays. But in spite of our frugal living and after eight months of work, our joint savings only amounted to £11-0-0d. If we had moved to a better room I did not see how we could save anything. Also I think we were just too tired to make the effort of looking for another room.

I'll never forget though having to go up and out to get our water. This either had to be done before leaving for work in the morning or on our return late in the evening. In either case it was dark and bitterly cold. Trying to bribe our landlady was useless. If she did it for one lodger she would be accused of favouritism. She was adamant, so we stuck it out for that winter, for with all its disadvantages we knew it and were used to it.

The extra women workers (about twelve) were installed in the shed where we had originally started work. They were real factory hands from cotton works in Lancashire. Except in the canteen we hardly saw them. Mummie and I remained the only women workers in the main building till next spring. Then with the extensive enlargements that were built on to the factory – women invaded it.

I was moved about to learn different jobs, or rather to pick them up as best I could, for no man was willing to teach. Some explained to me that if women learnt men's jobs, they would be taken off to fight and surely I could see, 'that wouldn't be fair'.

Naturally I could not agree with them, so I battled away more or less on my own till I mastered the job, became expert at it, making 'tidy piece work' money – when I would be moved to something else.

"You are making too much money, can't have a woman making more than a man, that wouldn't be fair" – was the explanation given to me. "The Union wouldn't stand for it."

Even Wallaby Jack who gave me a tip or two – on the quiet – said he daren't be seen helping me or the Union would be down on him.

I was rather lonely working thus, with no one to whom I could turn for help and encouragement other than the hated foreman, who was as discouraging and unhelpful as possible.

But otherwise I rather enjoyed the change of doing different types of work. There

was a definite satisfaction in mastering a difficult or tricky job until one reached perfection, and then getting up speed by saving a fraction of a second on the many operations which, when multiplied a thousand times made a considerable difference to my output. At times I was given work which was so fine that I had to use a jeweller's lens and go by my micrometer; working to the exactness of a third of a human hair! Pulling out one of my own hairs, I would measure its circumference by my micrometer – yes! It was quite true – my hair was three times as thick as the almost invisible spiral wisp of steel I had just tooled off my work!

But the real skill of a turner lay in sharpening a tool, not only to fit the gauge to exactness but in its curved undercut, for which there was no gauge to go by – for it was an art on its own which alone would give the tool that perfection of cut.

There were only a few grinding wheels and I was always having to step politely to one side after feeling a 'ping' at my suspender, to let a man sharpen his tool which I watched him do with envy – in a few minutes. It took me half an hour or longer if I was interrupted by many 'pings'. Sometimes a tool only remained sharp enough for a very short spell of work, and I was back at the grindstone wheel again.

In great difficulties I would appeal to Wallaby Jack for advice. Help he would not give because of the Union, and I was no longer under his protection. He would tell me to make a row at the tool store for giving me a 'soft' tool (one not properly hardened).

"I can't," I pleaded, "they wouldn't take any notice of me, I can't give them one of your 'dark and dirty' looks that are so effective – at least not now, though perhaps if the war goes on long enough I might be able to." (For I had followed him on more than one occasion to the tool store and had seen the 'look' that had got him what he demanded.

"No," he agreed, "You aren't the type to make a proper row, so take this tool and give me yours, and don't you dare say I have swapped with you."

That tool lasted many hours without my having to re-sharpen it, for it was a bit of pre-war German steel. I treasured it for months. The precious little stub of good steel made all the difference to my work – carefully kept for the finest finishing process only – till alas! it eventually became too short to use at all. When I asked Wallaby Jack if by any chance he could give me another bit, he sadly said:

"No, that was the last one I had – the one I gave you."

"Then I will keep this stump in my pocket – as long as I work it shall be my mascot."

I did. It had been a gift of real unselfish friendship and as such I valued it.

What wouldn't I have given though during those hard months of 'making good' to have had his strong stalwart strength beside me, backing me up.

Once I told him something of my feelings, when I was rather more than usually 'up against it'. His advice was good.

"Now look here. A time comes when everyone has to stand on their own. I'd aimed to be alongside young Ben when the fighting came – just to keep me eye on him. Gets a bit forgetful he do, and a bit too free and easy with his fists, or anything

that comes in handy, but as I've told you my flat feet has stopped me getting alongside of him – so he's got to stand on his own and so have you. I'm powerful fond of young Ben, and I'm... Now don't you go forgetting what I've told you, you've got guts, so get on with the job. I'll keep my eyes on you – got eyes in the back of me head if you want to know! and can give them Unions a dirty look when I've a mind too."

I went back to my difficult work full of good resolutions, thinking of dear Wallaby Jack's anxiety over his young brother – in the thick of the fighting.

We went down to Eastbourne when we could, Bank Holidays, Christmas and an occasional weekend. But a weekend was very short. Work stopped at 5 pm on Saturdays. We had then to walk a mile to the Underground, again a longish walk to our boarding house, a quick clean up and change, another walk to another Underground to Victoria Station and then by train to Eastbourne, ending up with quite a long walk to our home which we did not reach before 9 pm. We would have to leave again on Sunday afternoon. But it was worth it to see my sisters and brothers and have a night's rest in my own bed and the refreshing change from London air.

Often that train to Eastbourne was so crowded that one had to stand for the whole journey. I remember one such journey when I was feeling particularly tired, with my back aching almost beyond endurance and several people (I among some) had to stand. A youngish man – who was sitting, said to me:

"You will excuse me I hope, if I don't offer you my seat, but I work in a factory and have to stand for my work. I find it tiring and it makes my back ache, so I hope you will excuse my apparent rudeness."

"Yes of course I quite understand how tired you must be feeling."

"You ladies are very lucky, you don't know what real hard work and long hours of standing mean."

He went on to give me a description of his factory and the hard work it entailed. He went on and on about it and, feeling as tired as I did, the last thing I wanted to listen to was a description of factory life! So when I could get a word in, I said:

"Please don't bother to talk to me – I can see how tired you are. Why not shut your eyes and have a sleep?"

I was thankful that he took my advice!

About March, Violet (who was now over seventeen) was to join us as a factory worker, and we would have to find better accommodation. We found two quite decent bedrooms in a semi-detached villa in Chiswick Lane. This was only twenty minutes walk from the factory, a great saving of time getting to and from work.

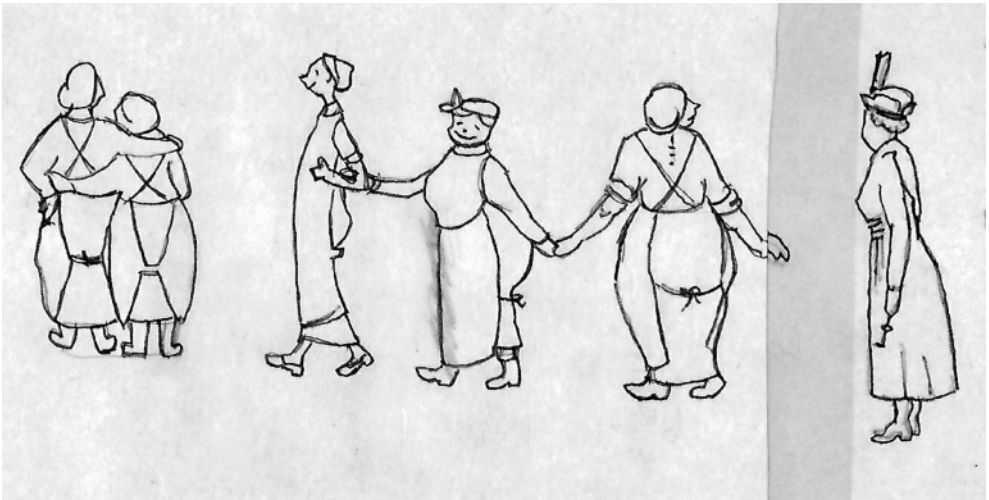
It was great fun having a sister sharing one's life again. Violet entered into the work with grand zest and enthusiasm, was entertained with all that went on around her and kept us vastly amused.

With Violet came a great many more women, a further extension of the factory and still further modernisations, such as a 'Ladies Cloak Room' with a woman in charge – Mrs Barney – who, with a watch in her hand, saw that 'girls didn't spend too long'. Before that we had been honorary members of the gate-keeper's 'Privy'!

Also a new rest-room, complete with benches, a few old wicker armchairs and a central wicker table ornamented by an unhealthy looking palm (of two yellow fronds) in a pot, as a final touch of 'making it look more like home'. This was Mrs Kidd's idea.

Mrs Kidd was the 'Lady Superintendent of the Girls' (also an innovation). She always dressed very smartly in a dark blue trim afternoon dress, silk stockings and high heeled shoes. Her hat (she always wore one) was a model toque, with a very tall, very direct quill or pheasant's tail feather sticking up in front. You could see this long wired feather weaving in and out and above the machines, and know that somewhere below (for she was very short) was Mrs Kidd. It was useful. Word passed around that Mrs Kidd was on the move. Girls stopped doing what they shouldn't be doing and did what they should.

Locks, curls and puffs of air were pushed inside their head caps. Their apron tapes were tied exaggeratedly tight behind. This 'safety' idea of Mrs Kidd's was most peculiarly unbecoming. We 'girls' were all issued with hard stiff American cloth black aprons with bibs in front and tying round the waist with tapes. She insisted on another set of tapes – to be tied well below the 'sit-up-on'. This emphasised the most smackable part of a girls behind – and they got some good whacking playful smacks from the lighter-hearted of the men workers; which some girls fairly asked for and some objected to. In any case it was most unbecoming! and the amount of men chasing girls, and plenty of squeals and giggles, delayed the output.



Mrs Kidd with her good obedient girls!

Mrs Kidd as a supervisor – together with the Boss and head-up Inspectors, did not make her appearance much before 11 am. From 7 am till 11 am girls and men worked hard or slacked according to their natures; but at 11 am everyone was industriously working. Girls showing very little hair and aprons tied below their behinds – with a rude tightness.

Actually Mrs Kidd was rather a dear. We liked her, though refusing to wear her aprons, and as 'old hands' she knew better than to insist. But she tried her best to look

after the girls' welfare and insisted that stools were provided which was a great help to those who had jobs at which they could sit. Unfortunately we, as lathe workers, could not sit.

A first-aid room was installed. This was certainly much needed, though the 'Sister' was rather too obviously a 'girl friend' of the Boss – and she oozed sex appeal to nearly every man; they made any excuse to go into the first-aid room and under a becoming softly shaded pink light – have their hands held.

"Calls it – 'just seeing if I am running a temperature'," said Wallaby Jack with a snort of contempt as he stopped to have a word with me after a visit to the first-aid room to have a splinter removed from his eye. "I've got no use for the likes of her."

"Would you call her a 'cow'," I enquired with hopeful interest.

"No, a much smaller four-legged female animal."

"A sheep?"

"No, I just calls her a bloody bitch!"

I had learnt a new expression and wondered if it was Australian or just factory, but before I could ask, Wallaby Jack had left me.

The women workers were very suspicious of that nurse. As women they could 'see through her', but also for entirely different reasons.

Very much later when I was a 'setter-up' in charge of a number of girls and one of them had a sore throat, tummy ache, or cut finger, I would suggest that she went to the first-aid room for remedy. In most cases I was met with a horrified refusal. On enquiring why I had some such reply as – "Go into that place! Too much like a 'ospital – not I!"

"It isn't a hospital – anyhow what is wrong with a hospital? It's a place where you are looked after and made better."

"Not it! They cuts you up in those places as soon as they looks at you!"

"Honestly they don't. They don't operate on anyone unless it is needed."

"Oh yes they does. I knows better than you. They cut you open just because they're inquisitive and wants to see what a respectable woman's inside looks like – young fellers too – it ain't decent – why my sister had such an experience as you never did hear the likes of, she..." I hurriedly interrupted her with: –

"But you have only a sore throat, that nurse will give you something to drink or suck, or," said I temptingly, "perhaps a pass for 'off work' for a day or two."

At this inducement I could see the patient hivering and she would finally give in, but only on condition I came with her and held her hand the whole time till we were safely back in the works. So leading a dear, hefty Cockney woman firmly by the hand, I would take her to the first-aid room.

As we entered the Sister would say to me: "It's quite unnecessary for you to hold her hand and neither need you wait."

"I'm sorry," I said, "But I've promised I'd stay with her and hold her hand."

"And I've told you that is not necessary and also they prefer to tell their troubles without having a stranger listening to what they say, don't you dear?" Turning to the

patient.

"NO," said with great emphasis, "no I don't – not to the likes of you I don't – and her and me ain't strangers."

I had been in the factory long enough by now – by the time when I was in charge of girls – to have got quite expert at holding my own and getting my own way, at least as far as sticking up for my girls was concerned. (It was always easier to do that for other people than for myself.)

So now I stood my ground firmly in front of the Sister and looked her slowly up and down, from head to foot, several times without saying a word and keeping my own face expressionless, till finally she began to shuffle her feet, twiddle her fingers and say – "Oh well then..."

"Oh well then – kindly look at her throat which is sore. I'm staying here and holding her hand while you do so."

An expressionless stare was quite effective I found, though as yet I couldn't give that still more effective 'dirty look' – but no doubt in time I might even achieve that!

When the patient had had a dose of black 'linctus' and I had led her safely back, she rewarded me by saying: "Well you are a real lady you are, keeps your word, you does."

Becoming a 'charge hand' and setter-up of girls' machines did not take place for a year or longer after Violet had joined us. Up till then I had long spells on cylinders, interspersed with many various other jobs; until one day the Boss, Manager and a couple of other men came to me and asked if I would like to try a very complicated and highly skilled job. It was to do – among other operations – the final groups of screw threads on the main crankshaft of the aeroplane engine. After persuasion I agreed to have a try. So in due course, I was given a set of six of these crankshafts, the gauges, and a very brief explanation of what work was required.

Now I was up against it! Not only the highly skilled work it involved (if I could do it) but up against the Union! The foreman would have nothing to do with it, or me. In vain I appealed to Wallaby Jack, but all he said was: "Don't you take it on, it ain't fit for a woman – that job! More fool you, if you tackle it!"

"I've said I would, so I must have a try. Please give me a little advice..."

"Well, have they given you a 'blueprint'?"

"No; would that help?"

"The 'cows'! So they haven't shown you that? You are 'in your rights' to see that. I wouldn't take on that job without having a look at the 'blueprint' and they'd know better than trying that sharp one on me. You go up to the drawing office and demand to see those prints – and don't you dare say I've put you up to it."

So off I went to the drawing office and insisted on seeing the 'blueprint', which was grudgingly allowed – only I was not much the wiser! Though I didn't let them know that!

But by dint of carefully following the plan, sharpening my tools with the greatest care, and working with every nerve and faculty I possessed, I succeeded.

It took me a week to complete those six crankshafts. During that time Managers,

foremen and men would stand and watch me from time to time and then leave without saying a word of help, criticism or encouragement.

I completed the six. They were passed perfect by the inspectors. Up came the Boss and an important French visiting inspector to congratulate me. What one woman could do, others could do – I was told. It would prove that so many more men, in time, could be released to fight. Would I take on the job as an example? Again I said I would try.

But the Union would not have it.

All that day I hung about without being given any more of that work or any other. Men clustered in groups and gave me 'dirty looks'!

The next day the Boss told me that the Union had determined to call a strike if I was kept on that job. He was extremely sorry but there was no alternative but to take me off it. He had been more than proud of me, and the French inspector had told him he would have liked to have kissed my hand – if it hadn't been so grimy! – and so on...

Now would I take on being 'setter-up' for women workers: the Union would agree to that.

"Oh yes, I'll try that or anything else if it's wanted."

I was disappointed – in a way – to be taken off that job, but on the whole rather relieved. I was pleased that I had proved capable of that super-skilled workmanship required – but at the same time it necessitated lifting in and out of a lathe that dead weight of a crankshaft weighing 60 lbs. Also there was a great responsibility in working on something that had already been through fifty operations and its value was over £100 before it reached me for its last operation.

Some days later Wallaby Jack told me that he had won a good bet with some of the chaps that I would succeed in doing that 'job on crankshafts'.

"Oh!" I snapped back, "That's why you advised me to go to the drawing office and look at the 'blueprint' – you were only thinking of your bet."

"Now look here," he said, swinging round and gripping my arm so that I couldn't get off with the satisfaction of a having said 'the last word'. "Cut out that sort of talk, it don't become you. You ain't that type and don't you go forgetting it."

"I'm sorry" I apologised, "I'm grateful to you for so many things and for so much you have taught me – truly I thank you, and I'm sorry I said that about your bet – I was just feeling a bit tired I suppose."

He changed his vice-like grip round my arm to a rather comforting press on my shoulder, saying: "That's why I says to the Union, says I, stop them bits of girls doing what's no good for their insides, says I, stop them before it's too late, for its too bloody heavy lifting them 60 pound crankshafts, says I."

So I became a 'setter-up'.

I had about twenty machines – mostly drills – to set-up, first to work myself (to get proficiency) and then given to the girls for the machines.

The work they had to do was easy and mechanical. I had to set-up the machines, constantly change them for the different operations of the jobs, see that the girls

worked industriously, and as far as possible avoid scrapping material. The tricky part was keeping the machines set to perfection and preventing the girls 'yanking' them out of order.

I liked this job very much in some ways, though not in others. Having stayed for so long as a worker, I missed the satisfaction of steadily working and relying on my own ability. But I liked coming into more constant contact with the women workers with whom, up till now, I had only exchanged the occasional word in the canteen or in passing.

Now I got to know the twenty or so girls of whom I was in charge really well. My 'girls' were all girls or women a good deal older than myself and I was thankful that they were either honest-to-God Cockneys or from some Lancashire mill. The couple of girls who were out to impress me that they were not accustomed to work I soon had removed!

Of course I had all kinds and types, and very fascinating I found it – getting to know them, their characters, the lives they had led, or were leading and their outlook on life in general.

From the first I was struck with their amazing generosity to anyone who was in trouble through ill-health or bad luck. A collection would be made amounting to a good many pounds (just from a handful of girls) and handed over as though it were a few pence.

One little woman was looking after a bed-ridden husband and two small children. She had to cook for them before leaving for work (leaving sufficient within reach of her husband), her children were collected by a neighbour for the day. But at the end of her day's work she had to do all the average house jobs. Poor little soul! She looked so fragile and worn, yet never complained. If she could not support her husband and children, her husband would be taken to an infirmary and her children to a 'Home'. She was prepared to kill herself with work rather than have that happen. A very generous collection was made for her and the money given to her anonymously – it being left at her home by a friend of a friend of hers.

I would do what I could to help add to her 'bonus' by working her machine for her with lightning speed whenever I had the spare time. This of course was 'not allowed'. My job was to see that the girls worked, keep them up to the mark, keep the machines properly set, etc. but not to do any girl's work for her. This I was told emphatically – more than once – by the Foreman.

"Take me off being a 'setter-up' or I'll go and see the manager."

"Oh, I wouldn't do that if I were you – it might cause trouble."

"Who for? You or me?"

He would walk off.

So I moved that poor little woman onto a machine in the centre of the group so that she was surrounded by her friendly workers, who – if I was giving her a helping hand – could quickly report to me if one of the disliked gentlemen (in a light foreman's coat) was seen making his way towards us.

Mrs Duck (I've never met anyone else with that delightful name) was a great ally

of ours. She could be counted on to be the quickest spotter of likely interference and, if the foreman got inside the barrier, to engage his attention by a carelessly dropped spanner to trip him up, whereupon she would fairly smother him in affectionate apologies or curse him for getting in her way. She was a formidable woman with huge arms and immense bosom. But how she made us laugh with her quick Cockney wit – which was the best I have ever heard!

The 'Bay' where these drilling machines were, was far quieter than amongst the lathes, for they were electrically driven – so conversation was possible.

Some of the girls were naturally lazy and would slacken off for any or no reason. Others seemed just so slow in grasping the simplest work that I would wonder if they were really half-wits, or if it was their method of doing as little work as possible, knowing that they would probably have to work all their lives. But the majority were steady workers and some amongst them very friendly and full of curiosity about my life – my private life – as they called it.

"Tell us about your 'love life'," they would ask.

"I haven't a 'love life'."

"Oh! come on now! Tell us about your sweetheart. What is he like, and what does he say to you?"

"But I can't, because I haven't got one."

"You must have, you are shy, that's all. Come on ducky, tell us where they 'do' it?"

"Do what?"

"You know! Courting and kissing and that sort of thing! We think they do it in conservatories and not down country lanes like the likes of us."

"I have lost a great many of my friends in the war."

"What a shame! Never mind ducky, you'll pick up some more one of these days."

They wanted to know if my father was a regular officer or just a temporary.

"He is a regular."

"There now," said one to another, "I told you he was."

"Why should you think that?"

"Well, you ain't afraid of the foreman or the Boss or any of them, and you fights for us good and proper you do, so we says 'Her father is a regular all right!'"

There had been a stupid idea of the manager, that when some important person was to be shown round the factory, all the duck-boards were to be removed as they made the place look untidy.

These boards played a very important part in the comfort of our lives. By tipping the floor-man he made a platform of old planks to the height to suit each worker.

We had suffered once before by everyone having their boards removed and piled in heaps in one of the yards. It took the best part of the next day for people to sort out their boards and a great deal of heated argument and a few fights took place over the reclaiming of these boards. For days disgruntled workers spotted his or her board that had been 'pinched' by someone else who refused to give it up.

So when one day the floor-man came along saying he had orders to take away our boards for the day because a visitor was expected, my girls refused to give theirs up and I backed them up to the extent of going to the Manager's office and 'having it out' with him. "It was not reasonable," I told him, "the girls couldn't work in comfort without their boards and there would be trouble if they were taken away etc..." I started by being nicely polite to him on the subject and trying to make him see reason, but when he got rude and abusive to me, telling me to mind my own business – and a lot more – I warned him that if he persisted there wouldn't be a girl working when his important visitor was shown round, and I'd take the trouble to let him know the reason. With that I stalked out of his office.

My girls gathered round me on my return to know the result. I told them I hoped I had been successful, but couldn't be sure.

Mrs Duck was all for 'making sure' that my efforts were not wasted by all of us laying down on our boards and holding fast to them if any further attempt was made to take them away.

"It will take at least four men to carry me – sort of like I was wounded and on a stretcher," and she looked proudly down at her immense bulk. "I hopes they tries to take away our boards. What a party we'll have! It'll make a nice change from work! and then you can do one of them funny drawings of yours to make us laugh."

Luckily it did not come to a 'lay-down strike' (I am afraid to the girls' disappointment) as our boards were left severely alone.

It had its compensations though. The important visitor was to be a Duke. This caused great excitement amongst the girls who wanted to know what a Duke looked like.

"Just like any other man," I told them, adding, "this one is rather short and thin."

"What will he wear?"

"Just an ordinary suit I expect."

Their faces fell with disappointment.

"Not even a crown thing on his head?"

"No I am sure he won't wear that."

"Well, then you go and see the manager and tell him the likes of us have never seen a Duke before and we wants to see him dressed proper, as a real Duke should."

"No," I said, "I can't do that. I only go to see the Manager on matters of output, our comfort, or something important. I'm afraid I'd get turned down."

They gave in to my better judgment but were duly disappointed when they saw the Duke – a small man in an ordinary suit and a bowler hat.

But his Duchess was quite an imposing figure, decorated by several rows of pearls around her throat.

"Yes," in answer to their query, "they are real pearls."

"Fancy that now! They are as big as Woolworth's best, and they are real!"

This brought up the subject of 'jooels'. "What were mine like?"

Alas! Here again I had to disappoint them, and the best I could do was to tell

them my mother had a tiara which had belonged to her mother, and that it was made of pearls and diamonds and looked rather like a crown.

I also gave them a description of the really priceless jewels I had seen worn by some of the ruling Princes of India at State functions. Ropes of diamonds, pearls, sapphires, rubies and emeralds, each as large as pigeon's eggs and worth a king's ransom. That cheered them up considerably!

When King George visited the factory, nobody minded having their duck-boards removed for HIM, and he was given a most loyal reception. His uniform and rows of decorations were highly approved. He talked in a friendly easy way to many of the workers including my mother. I have a good press photograph of him laughing at something she had said as he stood beside her at her machine.

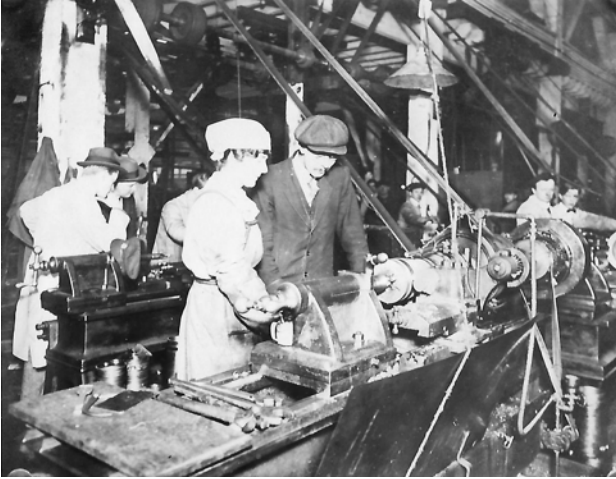


Mummie with King George V.

During the last year of the war it became the fashion (for a short time) for the upper classes to work on munitions. We had quite a spate of them in our factory. Headlines in the papers such as "Duke's Daughter in Overalls!" – "Lady... gives up hunting for a few weeks (there was a hard frost) to work in a factory," etc. often referring to some at our factory.

My girls would have bets as to how long they 'would stick it out'.

At about this time a Hostel was opened for 'lady workers' (so-called). It was a big house on the Mall at Chiswick, next door to Walpole House (Becky Sharp of 'Vanity Fair's' old school). We moved to it and had a charming large room overlooking the river. Part of this room we made into a sitting room. One of the many advantages this



Mummie at her lathe.

house had was that it was only five minutes from our work. This was especially appreciated on densely foggy nights when we could tap our way back by the iron railings!

Not that we were always able to go straight back on a winter's night after overtime, as often an elderly 'girl' would like our escort in the opposite direction. The older and plainer the woman the more she feared walking alone!

During the night it was far from easy to keep one's girls going. There were not so many of them, but they got tired, lazy or sleepy, and neither my nor their sense of humour flourished during the small hours. Up until 12 pm they were very confidential. That was the time I heard most about their lives and living conditions (appalling some of them were!) told without a grumble.

The average woman worker did not have a room to herself in which to sleep during the day. She, her husband and children shared one room and with their comings and goings and meals to cook, she could have had little sleep or even rest.

But the idea of sleeping in a room alone was a horror to them and one of their fears should they be taken to a hospital (besides the certainty of being 'cut up') was the awful thought that they might be shut up in a room alone – a truly terrifying thought.

I learnt some strange recipes and customs for 'home cures' and they were 'much better than what any doctor could tell you'.

One certain cure was 'by eating mice'. Said one woman to another: "I'm having such trouble with my little Tommy; he will wet his bed. I've tried everything. Can you suggest what I should give him?" The reply was prompt. "Give him a baked mouse to eat when he goes to bed." "Oh, is that good? How do I cook it?" "Bake it, head, skin and all, and don't forget to leave its tail on, gives the little chap something to hold on to while he chews. They love it – acts as a sort of comforter. I've never known it fail to cure bed-wetting – cured all my eight with baked mice I did. Don't bake 'em too crisp, little-uns like a bit of juice to suck."

I listened, fascinated and horrified, but when I remonstrated was told that as I had no kiddies of my own I couldn't possibly know what 'to do right for their little troubles'.

Getting to know as I did, by working with and amongst so many and varied types who would have to work hard till age, illness or death stopped them – gave me a very great sympathy for what was known as the 'working classes'.

It was all very well for 'the likes of us' who were working 'all out' for the duration of the war – perhaps? – but what about all those life-sentenced workers? I was all for shorter hours, longer holidays and better pay and conditions generally when we had peace once more, so I was rather interested in the Trades Unions and their aims and objects. While wholeheartedly disapproving of the strikes they organised and led in war-time as being the most unpatriotic act possible, I was full of curiosity as to what was said at the Union meeting. No one was allowed to go to such a meeting unless they were members and would get a rough handling (we were told) if attempting to do so.

However, Mummie and I thought we would have a try at a meeting to be held one evening not far from the Works. We succeeded in getting into the hall by waiting till there was a crush at the entrance, then squeezed in with the crowd, and by a gesture flip up and down the lapel of our coats as we had seen others do (where our Union badge should have been) and we were passed in. Standing well at the back of the crowded hall we listened for some time to the extremely vicious speakers.

The Union's motto was 'To fight, to struggle, to right the wrong'. One speaker spoke principally on striking. When he said 'they must never be content with what they got, but to go on striking for more and higher wages and never be content' – 'never be content with what you get, but always want more and more...' and a lot more in that strain – Mummie and I were disgusted and wriggled our way out. That terrible discontent that he was urging seemed such a hopeless and unhappy outlook.

But when we met some of our outside friends and they would say something like, "Don't you find it awful working with that 'class'," we would flare up in defence of our fellow workers. Some people could not understand how we could like them – 'The factory girls! the lowest class of all!'. It was no good saying anything to them – they wouldn't understand – they didn't know them as we did, and I hated that word 'class'. To me anyone who did their job well – if it was running their estates or a high official position or sweeping a factory floor – if they did it well they were good class – if badly – bad class.

Some of the women were very antagonistic towards us, caused perhaps by some long ago and never forgotten hardship or ill-usage. I came up against such a one (I can't remember the circumstances) but she poured out what she thought of 'the likes of me' in a flow of bad language. Mrs Duck happened to be listening. When it came to: "I hope to live to see the day when every Lady has to do her own dirty house work."

Mrs Duck thrust her formidable bulk between us, saying: "I can tell you this – when 'my' Lady has to do her own house it will be clean – not dirty like yours – you *** now be off."

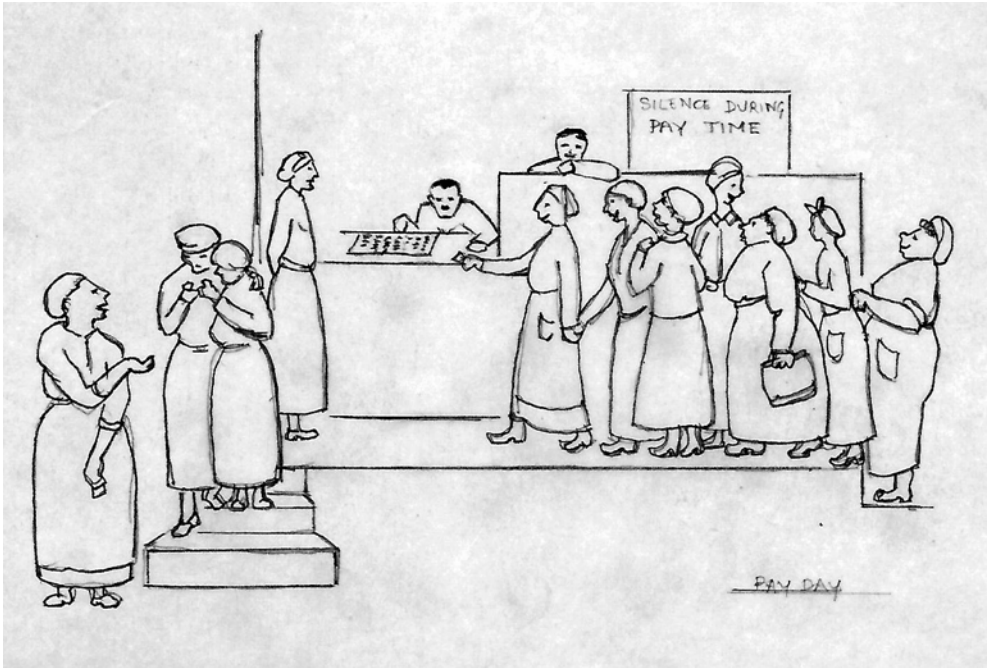
Trust Mrs Duck to get the last word and see anyone off if that was her intention.

Fascinated, I watched the broad determined back of my champion as she walked a few paces after the scraggy female she had 'got the best of'. Then stood with her arms akimbo – a massive rock of utter stillness – and I knew that her vanquished opponent could feel Mrs Duck's eyes boring right through her shoulder blades!

It was during my years of work in the factory that I realised how extraordinary

expressive 'backs' were. When anyone came towards one, one instinctively looked at the face and the expression on it, which could easily be disguised. But not so the back view.

I could tell from the expression of their 'backs' whether it was two workers – or worker and foreman, or two foremen as they stood together or walked off in opposite directions – who had got the better of whom. Nearly always the winner would follow the loser for those few paces before standing dead still, and one could tell from the angle of their head that their eyes were mentally striking a knife between the shoulder blades, for the loser would nervously stroke down the hair at the back of his neck, while the winner would run his fingers through his front locks – with a gesture of triumph.



So I suppose it was, that what sketches I did, were generally back views of individuals or collections of people. Also I was not artist enough to draw faces!

Ah! those factory days! There were so many things to enliven and amuse us. Apart from distinguished visitors etc. there were various incidents and excitements, such as storms and floods – which caused quite a panic!

Lightning was considered very dangerous amongst all that steel, though I am sure it was fully guarded against all such perils. But a good thunderstorm gave the girls an excuse to stop work and run – with shrieks of terror into the arms of men!

On one occasion we had a really good, deep flood, following a spectacular storm. London has a way of staging a sudden flooding after a cloudburst – the drains being unable to carry away the excess water.

Our factory was flooded to a depth of over two feet in places, a magnificent effort on its part and highly approved of by us – on the principle that 'if we are going

to have a flood, let's have a good one while we are about it and no half measures!"

So we had it, and in an incredibly short space of time. Panic reigned. The shrieks of the girls could be heard above the noise of the machinery, which soon came to a standstill. The youngest and prettiest girls fainted into the arms of the strongest and best-looking men! Others stood on their machines holding their skirts up beyond the mark of decency.

Mrs Kidd had a wonderful time, her hat and feather all anyhow, as she tried to restore law and order and to persuade the girls – without success – to pull down their skirts and to pull themselves together. They had no intention of doing either, they were enjoying themselves far too much being carried about, or hoping to be rescued by the men.

Mrs Duck said with some sadness: "A few years ago when I didn't weigh what I do now – I wouldn't have been the last to get carried!" Then to me: Why don't you have a try? Look there's Wallaby Jack got a hopeful eye on you, and he's not going to be cluttered up with just anyone, he isn't carrying anyone yet. Go on ducky, have a try, do now!"

But I didn't – to her disappointment.

When the worst of the confusion was over, everyone was given the rest of the day as a holiday so that the factory could be drained and swept dry.

For some time afterwards at the first few drops of rain the girls would be in hopes of another flood and another holiday!

At the end of the summer and beginning of autumn 1918 there were hopes that peace would come.

It came on November 11th – Armistice Day!

Thankful that war had at last come to an end, it somehow brought back to me the tragedy of all the lost and shattered lives, and I remembered with renewed sadness all those relations and friends who had been lost.

I have said nothing about Mummie's and Violet's work and experiences. We all did more or less the same work, each had our own or shared experiences and we always had a lot of fun and amusement exchanging our news and recounting our adventures.

Three weeks after the Armistice we said goodbye to our factory days and our many friends.

My girls wanted a photo of me as a farewell present. They could not make up their minds whether they would like me in full evening dress with plenty of 'jooels' and a background of a palm filled conservatory, or as they knew me in my working clothes. It was put to the vote – with persuasion on my part – and luckily the working clothes won. I duly presented them with photos of myself thus dressed.

I said goodbye to many of my friends, a great number of them with real regret. I gave my various tools away – my micrometer to Wallaby Jack. He held my grimy work-stained hand in his (equally so) for a long bone-crunching vice-like grip and said:

"I've never taught another girl to work. I told you I wouldn't and I have kept my word." (It was true, he had refused to teach any other woman.) "If you ever come out to Australia get in touch with me and if you want a job, I'll see that you get one as a turner – £5 a week steady, if I have anything to say."

He gave me the address which would always find him out there. With a final, "Well, goodbye and good luck mate – till we meet again," we parted.

Many years after I did go to his country. Alas! by then I had lost his address or I would have travelled any distance for the pleasure of meeting his honest self again.

We said goodbye to the management and I was given a certificate saying I was 'a highly skilled turner and equal to any man'.

So we left the factory after three-and-a-half years. We left all that experience of working life – the dirt, smells, noise and weariness as well as many things of value, never to be forgotten – behind us.

In a few weeks time Mummie, Violet and I set sail for India.

CHAPTER 11

Back to India

Once again my Mother was to go to India accompanied by two daughters. Once again the excitement of getting pretty clothes. How prices had risen! (How cheap they were compared with present-day prices!)

The fashions were quite attractive and we had some very pretty dresses. While we collected our outfits we stayed at a Residential Hotel in Bayswater. The room next to ours had a very thin partition and it was occupied by a Mrs G. and her sister, who used to discuss the former's divorce proceedings which were then on. We could hear all the lurid details and Violet could be trusted to miss none of them. In fact Violet would be trusted to miss nothing. In a day's shopping with Violet we would 'happen' to be standing next to Queen Mary in some department of Harrods.

"Stop!" she would say as we were hurrying along a crowded street. "You will see Tallulah Bankhead getting into that waiting car."

"How do you know?"

"Didn't you notice the car had DARLING GAL in sparklers on the front bumper? It was given her by Lord ***"

"Look, there is the Earl of *** I bet you he will go into No. ** (of the street in which we were walking).

"Yes," with a further look over her shoulder he has. The notorious Mrs *** lives there."

"How do you know?"

"Well, I am almost sure, but we will just go into the Post Office and I'll look it up in the London Directory."

Of course, Violet had been quite correct. She was a wonderful companion anywhere and had a great zest for life. She was well read and had a retentive memory as well as being very quick on the uptake. She got amusement out of discomfort and revelled in luxury. Altogether she was good company and made one laugh.

How exciting it was to get new clothes – lots of new clothes in a few weeks – and to know that we would have plenty of opportunities to wear them. A contrast after three years of factory life, living in coarse and oil-stained overalls. Just to see and feel attractive materials was delicious.

Our outfits collected and our boxes packed, farewell visits were paid to the boys at school, Margaret in Yorkshire¹ and other friends and relations. We left in a troop ship from Tilbury.

A delightful surprise at Tilbury was to find that Lisle had come down to see us off. He got a day's leave from Cheltenham and had come all that way just to see us for so short a time. Dear Lisle.

¹ Claud was stationed in Barracks at Beverley.

Down the murky Thames we sailed, grey, cold and ugly. We were so looking forward to the warmth and sunshine to come. Yes, it was good to feel the throb of engines and smell that indescribable smell of 'board ship' once again.

It was a troop ship, or rather had been one, though now it was mostly filled with women who, like ourselves, were going out to join their fathers or husbands.

I can remember little about that voyage except that a good deal of grumbling took place amongst those who had been allotted cabins practically down in the hold, cabins that had been roughly converted from what were once horseboxes and still smelt of the stables! We were among the lucky ones who had good cabins. The twenty-one days' voyage must have passed pleasantly and without incidents.

Our destination was Simla, to join Father, who was now Surveyor General of India with his Headquarters there.

During the long journey from Bombay I found pleasure in the unchanged aspect of India as I watched hour after hour, day after day, the great panorama unfold itself. I even found pleasure in the fact that the railway carriages were the same and that there was no change in the comic little narrow gauge mountain railway which wended its way for eighty miles up to 8,000 ft. until Simla was reached with its pines and deodars and with a background of eternal snow.

Soon after our arrival the Season started and life became hectically gay. Violet and I, like many other young girls enjoyed ourselves enormously – more so perhaps after the grim years of War and working for so long as factory hands.



Enid upon her engagement.

There could not help but be ghosts for me in Simla – gay happy ghosts of past friends and loves. When riding I would sometimes come round the curve of a path half expecting that I would see *** coming out to meet me.

Dance music had not changed so very much in the last few years. There were of course new modern dance tunes, but the old-fashioned valse was still popular and it might be that during the haunting gayness and sadness of a well remembered and much loved valse that I would look over my partner's shoulder, or across the room, thinking I could see 'someone', who would be my next partner

and then suddenly realise that it was after the War, it was the present, and that I must exert myself to enjoy the present and to be entertaining to, or be entertained by my partner of the moment.

I became engaged and was married in August. I don't think I wanted to be either engaged or married particularly, but when several men want to marry you at the same time it seemed easier to say 'Yes' to one and then go on saying 'No' to the others. One evening I told my future husband I would 'toss up' if I married him or not and would abide by the toss.

I did.

People say marriage is a gamble, so why not toss for it, I thought.

I had a big wedding, a really lovely wedding. The Viceroy lent us his carriage, the only one in Simla, and also his summerhouse about twelve miles further into the hills for our honeymoon. My husband¹ had taken two ponies and we used to ride along the forest paths in that superb Himalayan country. He was a very good horseman and was keen that I should ride well. I was too, though riding in that mountainous country was only a way of getting about, and it was rarely possible to go beyond a walk.

I liked that part of my honeymoon.



Wedding group from left: ?, ?, Violet, Charles, Enid, ?, Neil, ?, Ida, ?.

¹ She married Neil Campbell on 7th October 1919.

After a very short time, we were on our way back to England, as my husband was due for leave and very keen to get home for the hunting and shooting that the English winter would bring him. I rather loathed to leave India again after so few months and never had liked an English winter.

A troop ship again, a very wobbly one, captured from the Germans. An officer was always on duty to see that the men did not go in too great numbers to one side in case it upset the balance. She did heel over and sink on her next voyage. Luckily it was in port and no lives were lost.

The passengers were temporary officers going back to England to be demobbed and Neil was in command of them I was the only woman on board! How Mummie would have enjoyed that! No, I wasn't the only woman. There were two stewardesses. I often went down extra early to change for dinner and they would come to my cabin and talk with me. The captain suggested that a small portion on deck should be roped off for the only Lady's use. It was. Neil Thought it a splendid idea and he could join me there when he felt like it. So there I sat when on deck, feeling like an animal in the zoo, a trapped feeling. True, some of the men would come and lean on the ropes and talk to me occasionally but at the appearance of Neil they would rapidly melt away.

Neil was busy of course. He had his job to do in command of the troops and he was a good mixer among men and liked their company in the bar. He spent much time there.

I was very lonely. If there had only been a few women on board, it would have been different. If Violet had been with me and we had been roped off together it would have been fun. We would have laughed and chatted, read and sewed and been happy. As it was I felt neglected and quite miserable.

I decided that my marriage was a failure, at least from my point of view. I had been married about two weeks, quite long enough to know that it was not a success.

I would do something about it. Doing something about it would give me something to do! I would write to one of my old loves – the one who had assured me I should never be happy married to Neil. He had said that so when I found it out, I could write to him and he would come and rescue me – come from the other side of the world at any time. I had only to send him word.

How romantic that would be. I should adore to be rescued, so I spent a delightfully happy afternoon writing a dramatic letter, ending up with: "To prove I mean everything I have said, I am going to throw my wedding ring into the Indian Ocean!"

I was reading the letter through again, surprised and pleased with my effort, when Neil came to find out why I had not gone to the cabin to change for dinner. I had always been ready and waiting for him before. This evening he had been waiting for me for the first time and was not too pleased about it and wanted to know the reason. I was longing to tell him of my important decision and would tell him all about it in the cabin while I did a hurried change. I tried, but he just would not concentrate on what I had to tell him, merely suggested that I was probably feeling a bit seasick (it was dead calm), and that we hadn't time to talk over things like that

now. He ended by saying that he would go and have a drink and meet me in the saloon

So the moment passed. I had no opportunity to talk to him after dinner, the captain asked us to go to his cabin, have coffee, and so on.

It would be feeble, I thought, to flip my wedding ring into the seas unless my husband was with me and I could finish off by saying: "So our marriage is at an end and away with my ring." It must be gloriously dramatic.

I felt so much better for having written that letter. I had told someone all about it – although the two involved were never to know – my husband, who wouldn't listen, or my rescuer, to whom I never sent the letter. I read it through again next day and decided it was sentimental trash, so overboard it went.

I decided I would be philosophical about married life and that I would grow a sort of duck's feathers so that anything I did not like would glide off my back like water off a duck. I determined not to let anything hurt my feelings.

It was much more fun to be happy than unhappy. I thought it was not Neil's fault that he was uncompanionable. His mother had been killed hunting when he was four years old and he had no sisters. I felt more sorry for him than for myself when I had finished thinking things out!

When we arrived in England, we went straight to stay with Neil's Uncle Henry in Hill Street, off Berkeley Square. It was a big London house with sixteen bedrooms but no bathroom and no telephone. Uncle Henry was old-fashioned. His father and his grandfather had had no bathroom or telephone, so why should he?

Neither did he have a car. He had stables at the back of his house and a darling old coachman, who for forty years had driven the brougham in winter and the victoria in summer. He also had his own laundry at the back and two laundry maids. I learnt a lot from them about how to wash things properly – how one washed men's socks and the finest silk stockings by putting one's hand inside the sock or stocking and using a soft nail brush. There were many other tips which I have used ever since with great success.

I thought Uncle Henry's staff far nicer than Uncle Henry. Grey, his old Butler had been with him for 45 years and always spoke of my husband as Master Neil. Blundell, the head housemaid, had only been in his service for 35 years. She thought it a treat to have a visitor and maided me very well. She was paid only £30 a year and told me that she had once plucked up courage to ask the Master for a rise, but he told her 'No', so she had never dared to ask him again.

As there was no bathroom, the bath, and old-fashioned hip bath, was brought into my bedroom every morning. An under-maid would first lay and light the fire, another would bring morning tea, just as far as the door, where Blundell would take it from her and place it by my side, then superintend the drawing of the curtains. The fire would blaze brightly, the bath mat be laid out, two large cans of hot water and one of cold brought in, the bath filled to the correct temperature – approved by Blundell – and extra hot and cold water left for me to add. A modest little screen would then be arranged round the bath and I would be left to get up and have my bath in comfort before the fire.

All this happened early as Uncle Henry breakfasted at 8 am and expected us to

have it with him. What Uncle Henry expected, others had to do, my husband included.

I shall never forget my first meeting with Uncle Henry. Dear old Grey had given us a warm welcome at the front door and shown us into the library. Uncle Henry stiffly shook hands with us, asked me if this was my first visit to England (I think he thought that Neil had married a black woman because he had married in India) and in the same breath asked me how long we intended to stay with him, and that if we did not hurry we should be late for dinner.

Dinner was stiff and formal. Neil had warned me that Uncle Henry was difficult to talk to but he wanted me to make a good impression as he had expectations from his Uncle. I did try, frightfully hard, but neither then nor on any other occasion, when we stayed with him could I succeed in carrying on any flowing conversation. He had the knack of bringing anything you said to a full-stop. If in desperation and after having tried many subjects, you remarked on what a wet day it was, he would say: "There is no need for you to tell me that. I can see it for myself."

If, after dinner, he picked up a book to read and I asked him if it was a good book, what it was or who was the author his reply would be: "I just read what the library send me. I don't find them interesting..." Silence!

The only remark he made at breakfast was to ask me what time I wanted the carriage.

I loved going out in the carriage. It always meant driving through the Park and shopping in Bond Street. To get to Bond Street one had to drive through the Park in the opposite direction and to return to Hill Street the way was along the Mall.

For some reason Uncle Henry expected us to stay with him in London, though I am sure he got no pleasure from our visits.

From London we went off to pay visits to my husband's many uncles and aunts and relations. Uncle George was a pet. He was also a bachelor, had commanded the Coldstreams and now lived in a hunting lodge in Oakham. He was practically stone deaf, and roared at everyone but was very popular, most generous and sporting. He hunted hard and lived well. Uncle George was most refreshing after Uncle Henry.

Aunt Alice was a dear. I liked her from the first time I met her until the day she died. We stayed with Uncle Seymour, Aunt Janet and several others but made our headquarters while Neil was on leave with his cousin Algar Howard at Thornbury Castle in Gloucestershire. (*Plate 7a*) It had been Neil's home since his Mother's death and it was a lovely old place. Algar was charming and friendly. I was always delighted when we came back to Thornbury. I was also very fond of Algar's sister, Ruth, who lived at Hatherop Castle and I loved our visits to her.

Neil had plenty of shooting and hunting and we went to dances and Hunt Balls and altogether had a very good time. We stayed with some of my relations, visited my brothers at Cheltenham. It was fun being a married sister and taking them out to treats.

We led four months of this sort of life and then Neil's leave was up and he was to join one of his battalions in Ireland. However, just before we were due to go to Ireland he was ordered to join the Battalion in Palestine instead, and at once. Wives could not go out there unless various permits were granted. These would all take

time and so it looked as if I would be left behind in England.

When it came to the morning that Neil had to leave, I decided that I did not want to be left behind so I would go to the War Office and see if I could get permission to go too.

Off I went to London, to the War Office, right to the door of the room of the man in charge of such things. There I had to wait in the passage for some time with another woman, also wanting to join her husband. She told me the right way to go about it. I must demand the right to join my husband etc. I listened to all she had to say, all the good advice she gave me and decided I would try other tactics. Hers hadn't seemed so successful for she told me she had paid innumerable visits here and was still demanding her rights. She went in for her interview before me and came out raging with fury and frustration.

"You are young. I am afraid they won't listen to you but don't forget you must demand your rights. I intend to stay here until I get mine."

"Thank you for your kind advice. All you have told me will I hope be of great help to me," I answered and then went in for my interview with a charming but exhausted looking Major C.

"Do you think she can hear what I say?" I glanced back at the door. "She has been telling me what to say and how to say it, and she is going to sit outside your door till she has got what she wants." We laughed.

"And do you want to join your husband in Palestine too?"

"Yes, but mine is far more impossible than hers, for I want to go out in the same troopship with my husband. It sails tomorrow morning from Plymouth."

"What is the name of the ship?"

I told him. He looked it up.

"I am afraid it would be impossible for you to go on the same ship for every bunk is full."

"I was afraid so, but I just thought that as my husband is in command of the troops he might be having a cabin to himself and there might be a spare bunk in that."

He looked it up.

"You are right about that! Have you permission to land?"

"No, I'm sorry I haven't. I hoped you would help me to get that."

"Have you accommodation assured?"

No, I'm afraid not, but you could say I'd love living in a tent. I'd rather live in a tent than in a house."

"Yes. I believe you would."

Finally – "If I did manage to rush these permits through, you could never pack all your things and get everything you'd want to buy to take out there in time. You've only an hour before the shops shut! You'd have to take the night train to Plymouth. The troopship sails at 10 am tomorrow morning."

"I can easily do all that."

It seemed to amuse him that any woman could be thrilled with the idea of a quick

pack and get away. He looked at his watch again.

"All right, be back at five."

Off I dashed, sent a wire to Neil at Plymouth, another to Thornbury to ask that my clothes might be packed and sent to Plymouth. I went to Hill Street to tell Uncle Henry that I was leaving and told Blundell that I would be back to get my clothes and pack. I was back at the War Office by 5 pm.

Major C. had been marvellous. He had all my permits, tickets and warrants etc. ready. I signed some papers, thanked him with all my heart and said goodbye to him. He wished me luck and told me that it was my enthusiasm to live in a tent that had made him want to help me. He loved camp life himself.

Back again to Hill Street where Blundell and I packed and after a formal goodbye to Uncle Henry I was off to Paddington and the train for Plymouth. I was far too excited to sleep in the train of course!

Neil met me early next morning. He was much amused and delighted that I had managed everything the way I had. There was one hour in which I could shop in Plymouth, so at the Army and Navy Stores I bought a couple of camp beds, bedding, a table and two chairs, some china and glass and a few kitchen things, just what I could think of in the short time and taxied off to the ship with them. Shortly after, the gangway went up and the ship moved away.

Plymouth is the only attractive port for a ship to arrive at, or leave from. England looks her best, coming or going.

We were leaving in the spring this time and the weather was good.

CHAPTER 12

To Palestine

It was a short voyage. We disembarked at Alexandria and spent a couple of days there and then trained to Cairo. After a night there we motored out to see the Pyramids by moonlight and the next day we trained to Ismailia on the Suez Canal. We crossed the Canal, got into a train on the other side for a day and night's journey to Acre.

I had been thrilled with Egypt and the many changes we had to do. I was also very amused at the funny little train in Palestine, the narrowest gauge possible. I had a distinctly restless night. I had been warned about bugs in railway carriages so had armed myself with a couple of tins of 'keatings'. I used them both up but it made no difference, the bugs still came. Sleep was impossible. It was very hot and dusty.

Neil could sleep through anything. I don't think the bugs went for him. They concentrated on me! Luckily they disappear completely once it gets light. The dawn creeping over the Palestine hills was beautiful and as it got lighter I could see the grey-green of the olive groves and the vivid green of the orange trees. The exquisite scent of orange blossom came in through the carriage window all that day.

We reached Haifa late in the afternoon. While waiting on the platform for our luggage to be collected, feeling and looking tired and dirty, a wonderful apparition came floating up to my husband, greeting him as, "Darling, how wonderful to see you here!"

She was dressed in a pleated flowing pale grey chiffon dress, a large black straw hat, dripping with grey ostrich feathers, elegant shoes and long white kid gloves. Perfect for a garden party or Royal Ascot.

I was introduced to Rosita Forbes. She told us she was on her way to visit the Governor¹ to try to persuade him to arrange for camels for some expedition she wanted to do. She was going to make contact with some powerful sheiks.

A smart ADC appeared to tell her the car was waiting. We saw her into the Governor's Rolls, then with the flutter of a scented lace-edged handkerchief, she had gone.

An old Ford car had been sent to meet us and a truck for my luggage. Actually, a Ford was the only suitable car for the journey we had to do. We got in with our luggage and two Arab servants we had collected in Cairo and brought with us.

Acre was seventeen miles further north (*Plates 7b & 8*). We followed the curve of the bay and were driven for most of those seventeen miles along the sand of the sea shore, having to keep two wheels in the sea for a firmer grip in order to avoid the car bogging in the soft dry sand. It was slow going and it was nearly dark when we reached Acre.

Acre is an old, small Saracen town with very narrow streets. It appeared very

¹ Of the British Protectorate of Palestine created after the First World War.

picturesque in the growing dark. A few miles the other side of the town was the camp of the Somerset Light Infantry. It was on the very edge of the sea shore where there was an outcrop of jutting rock. On this was built a little Arab house where the Colonel and his wife lived. Not far away was a strip of sand on which two tents had been pitched for us. They were much larger than I had expected. They were of the type that have two tent poles and between the poles was swung a hurricane lantern. Once the luggage was unloaded the task of unpacking and arranging had to be done.

"What can I do to help you?" said my husband.

I asked him to do what he could to make the sitting room look habitable. The packing cases with the china and glass and cooking utensils had been put in there, also some Bedouin rugs, camp chairs and table etc. I said if he would unpack these cases it would be a great help to me and I should do what I could with the bedroom.

I got busy, undid the camp beds, unpacked linen, made up the beds, rigged up the mosquito netting, got out of our boxes what we should need for the night – as there was nothing in the way of furniture except the beds, the boxes must serve as tables and a chair. Now I thought, for a look at the sitting room tent.

Neil had taken both the servants to help him, so he ought to have got on well. The only packing case which had been opened was the one containing his saddlery. The contents were spread out on horse blankets on the floor and hung from the tent poles. Both these servants were busy with saddle soap and polish. Neil was looking happier than he had done for some days.

I had not the heart to show my disappointment, so ordered the cook to get the cooking things unpacked in the cook tent and to get a meal as soon as possible. I told the Syce to remove the saddlery to his tent. Before long, the sitting room looked better and in an incredibly short time supper was produced. So began our camp life. (*Plate 9a*)

After a few days I did manage to make the tent look quite attractive. It was impossible to get any furniture or wood to get anything made, but I contrived a very luxurious looking divan. The foundation was large stones, then sacks filled with dry grass and covered with gay broad strips of material from the bazaar. I piled cushions on top, also a filled with bags of bazaar material. I put the Bedouin rugs on the floor and packing cases covered in gay stuff for tables. The whole effect I thought looked most seductive!

I think the light inside a tent is so glamorous, that soft subdued light. The tents were lined with yellow. The effect was charming, soft and becoming and I thought it far more romantic than the Colonel's house, although that was far more comfy and did have furniture, even a piano.

The Colonel and his wife were friendly and very kind. She had arrived there a month or so before us and she was all for making everything merry and bright, collecting the young subalterns and having sing-songs. She even made a gallant effort to get up a variety show. Thank goodness it didn't get very far, for she expected me to sing a song which went something like this: –

"I love a song called tulips," reply from male chorus:

"We love two lips too."

The male chorus (the subalterns) were to stand in a semicircle, poised on one toe, they were to point an accusing finger at me and look amorous.

They were to be dressed as Pierrots, I as a tulip! Thank goodness it never got further than the first rehearsal. Mrs Colonel tried her best to inspire enthusiasm into the group she had collected round her piano, but it was no good – the only two who were keen were an over-tall and an under-short subaltern; even she couldn't make them into a chorus.

The normal-sized ones backed out, I with them.

Life was so simple and natural, our surroundings so beautiful – I, for one, would not spoil it by a poor effort at musical comedy.

So I happily just lived.

In 1920 Palestine was quite unspoilt, at least the part we saw was, and I think it was all like that. Unfortunately we were not able to go much beyond the country just round Haifa because of the unsettled conditions, so I only saw a small part of the country. It seemed to me unchanged since the days of the Bible – Rebeccas were at the wells, shepherds watched their flocks by night calling out the watches of the night to each other, four watches ending with 'cock crow' and 'the morning'. The shepherds were dressed in their long blue cloaks, often carrying a lamb on their shoulder and with their long crooks in their hand; everything and every person one saw reminded me of illustrated Bible stories.

I think it really was very little changed since those days; we were told that I and the Colonel's wife were the first white women to be seen here since the days of the Crusades. That, I expect, was an exaggeration but I liked to believe it and we certainly were stared at or touched as curiosities at times.

Acre itself was an old fortified, walled Saracen town; the sea washed its walls on one side and the town had not spread much, if at all.

The town was as picturesque as possible with its very dark, narrow streets, archways and an open marketplace (*Plate 9b*). Once, when going through the town, there was excitement and confusion and the sound of many camels. Edging my way into the market square I watched for some time the camels being made to lie down. Some of them were being unloaded. The Arabs with them were quite unlike any I had seen, very tall and very dark, but strangely the very obvious head-man of the caravan was not very tall, as fair as an Englishman and very good looking. He was standing on a raised part of the well and having his immaculate, beautifully cut English boots cleaned and giving his orders.

I found out afterwards he was 'Lawrence of Arabia', a very fascinating man he looked.

I spent a good deal of time sketching; it was quite the most sketchable place I had ever been in; the old town, the sea, the sweep of the Bay of Haifa, the plain behind surrounded by mountains, the very blue sea, very white sand, the very lovely mountains, wherever one looked there was something I longed to try and paint. (*Plate 10a*)

Owing to 'trouble' with the Arabs, who were under French control just north of

Acre, we were not allowed to go beyond the steps of Tyre and Sidon. The sort of trouble with the Arabs was that on moonlight nights, amorous young Arab men from the French side¹ liked to raid and carry off a few young women and girls. Once they had got them over the border to French controlled country they could have a good laugh, for the infuriated rightful owners of the captured women could not follow further than the border.

The object of having a British regiment outside Acre, was to try and prevent these raids and very hush-hush parties used to go out at night and try and cope with them. Creeping out of my tent in the very early dawn I would watch with a pair of field glasses the returning British troops. If they were coming very slowly I knew they had wounded with them. I could also recognise my husband (by his seat on a horse) and know that he was safe.

No situation for our tents could have been more ideal. They were pitched a stone's throw from the sea itself, just a short smooth stretch of sand, then a very slight drop of rock to shallow rocky pools, hardly deep enough for a bathe, and beyond that – only a few yards beyond – was a hidden tremendous drop. This was the danger, for unless warned, anyone would go happily beyond the rocky pools searching for deeper water and get caught in a terrible undertow. There was no tide, the rocky pools were always the same depth, the water a vivid jade-green to dark sapphire-blue, and beyond the danger line the sea would be of every shade of green and blue. The dazzling whiteness of the sands (from which the early Phoenicians made their glass) intensified the colouring of the sea by its startling contrast. (*Plate 10b*)

The front of our tents opened straight onto this lovely sea. Looking left one could see the massive dark-red stone tessellated walls of Sir Sidney Smith's Bastion, which had withstood Napoleon's attacks. To the right there was a long curving stretch of coastline ending with the high cliffs and the steps of Tyre and Sidon.

Behind the tents was a picturesque looking swamp, beyond that the tents of the regiment, and further, stretched a vast plain bounded on three sides by mountains. One of the latter was Mount Carmel and how I wished that I had been there in the early spring and had then seen the flowers. Alas, when I was there most of the flowers were over, as it was the hot dry summer season.

From where we were there was nothing to be seen but wild beauty and, except for the old and small Arab town of Acre, not a sign of habitation. For the rest there was to be seen a little scattered cultivation, the dark green of an orange grove and an occasional solitary Arab hut or, perhaps a cluster of them, also at times a few Bedouin tents.

Behind the camp was this flat plain, and in the plain a swamp. The swamp was at a lower level than the sea and so could not be drained, and it was the happy breeding ground of a particularly vicious malaria mosquito.

I got bouts of fever, bad ones at times with a temperature of 105° or more. On one of these occasions Neil, who was going off on a hush-hush party for several days, thought I ought to go to a hospital and arranged for me to be sent to the one at Haifa. He had to go off before the ambulance arrived. I waited in my tent until some

¹ i.e. Lebanon.

time that afternoon. A very young soldier popped his head inside my tent and said:

"I've brought your ambulance, Miss." So I got into it and lay down on the stretcher and off we bumped for the seventeen mile drive to Haifa. But he was not an experienced driver in that soft-sand country and soon after leaving Acre we got stuck in the sand.

"Sorry, Miss, but will you get out and push?"

There was nothing else for me to do but get out and push and once the ambulance (luckily it was a very old and light type) got moving, it daren't stop for me, in case it got stuck again, so I had to run after it and dive into the stretcher and away we went for a few more miles till the same thing happened again. Five times during that journey did I have to get out and push my ambulance. I felt very weak with fever and with laughing by the time I got to hospital.

The hospital was a military one and full to overflowing with malaria cases. I was put into a room with one other woman; she had had a car accident near Ludd¹ and had broken both her arms.

The nurse explained how understaffed and overworked they were, could I look after this woman, wash her and that sort of thing, and take my own temperature and quinine and whatever I liked? I said I would do my best.

The poor woman with the broken arms was delighted to have me in her room. I did all I could to make her comfortable. When an orderly came in and slapped down a tray of food I was able to feed her, and I washed her and brushed her hair and tucked her up for the night, but the night was to be the worst part because as soon as I put out the light, out came the bugs, hundreds of them. I de-bugged her bed and mine several times but it seems the more bugs you killed the more came. The hospital was an old wooden building and quite incurable of bugs. Luckily after a couple of days, Neil came to see how I was getting on and it was easy to persuade him that I was better off in our own tent. The lady from Ludd was sorry to see me go and so was the nurse who would now have to look after her own patient.

Luckily malaria is a thing that comes very quickly and goes equally quickly and in between bouts of fever I got a lot of enjoyment from being in Palestine. The beauty of the country, the wild flowers and the very simple life we led appealed to me, an occasional picnic at an old ruined Crusader castle, riding in the plain behind the camp, a luncheon party given by an important Sheikh – it was all, I thought, a wonderful picnic sort of life, though the lunch part with the Sheikh was a great deal more than a picnic.

I was thrilled when we were asked to go, but to get to the place was a long ride. The place was a 'garden', a sort of oasis; there were several of these 'gardens' owned by people of importance to which they went to rest, laze, get cool and eat. This was a particularly beautiful garden, walled in and through it ran a stream; over the stream were tresselled tables and above were orange trees in full flower and fruit. It was a large party of about thirty. I was placed between two sheikhs, quite revolting looking, large, fat old men who could not speak a word of English or even French, and in front of me was a pile of at least twenty-four plates, an indication of how many

¹ Otherwise Lod or Lydda.

courses we were going to eat.

I had been told it would be considered bad manners not to eat all that was put before me. My heart sank as I was helped to dish after dish of rice, rice with meat, rice with chicken, rice with something else and so it went on. I tried to be polite. I smiled my appreciation of the beauty of the garden, at the shade of the orange trees and the cool of the stream, at the deliciousness of the food, but every time I smiled at the Sheikh on one side of me, he belched politely and the one on the other side squirted my plate of food with a spray of horrid, cheap scent.

So we sat and ate, or tried to, from twelve o'clock to four, when it was considered cool enough for our ride back. Luckily it was a long ride which helped a bit but I could not look at food for several days.

A picnic at one of the old Crusaders' castles was very different; just a small party of us and a meal, which we brought with us, eaten in the old ruins. There was one very lovely one, Athlete, it was on the coast and I suppose the sea had encroached, for what had been the banquet hall was sea. (*Plate 11a*)

Neil who was keen on polo, very soon organised a polo ground of a sort, never very good. Men tried to clear the ground of stones but more stones came. Camels were collected to graze the thistles, but they grew again. Neither were very successful, but polo was played.

There were not sufficient horses of the polo pony sort to make up two teams, so each team had a mule, 'Honeybee' and 'No. 99', were their names. They were very reliable and soon learnt to gallop from end to end of the ground, but nothing would stop them until they got to the goalpost, when they would solemnly turn and gallop back again. As each side had to have a mule, it was quite fair and the player played what he could, but not a yard out of its set course would the mule go.

I used to ride Honeybee sometimes. He was a 'safe ride'. He started off at a walk and it would be several miles before I could persuade him to do anything else. Then it would gradually dawn on him that I'd like to go faster, so he would trot; after several more miles he would canter and it seemed to me to take several miles to persuade him to stop. I preferred riding one of the few horses and we used to have rides on the plains in the cool of the evening. After a bit I got used to an Arab on his horse galloping straight at me with his spear levelled, but the first time it was rather alarming. Neil didn't know what was going to happen but told me to sit tight and stay still and the Arab with his burnous¹ flying in the wind galloped full tilt at us and pulled up his horse a yard from us. Neil politely saluted him and smiled admiration at his horse. It was what the Arab wanted, admiration for his horse and his horsemanship, having given us a wonderful display of both. We often used to get these voluntary displays and they were most picturesque and I think the Arabs used to sense Neil's genuine admiration of really superb horsemanship and the beauty of their horses.

Alas! our time in Palestine was a short one, it lasted only about four months. The weather got very hot, the malaria very bad. Lord Allenby came to inspect the troops – there were only about 40 men on parade, the rest of the regiment was down with

¹ A long, loose hooded cloak.

malaria. Acre, owing to its swamp, was considered unfit for British troops, the Regiment was invalided to Cairo, and we went on short leave to England.

How sorry I was to leave Palestine, in spite of malaria and many other discomforts. I thought it a beautiful and picturesque country and loved our few months there.

CHAPTER 13

To England again, then on to Cairo and Lucknow

Although it was eighteen months or more since the end of the war the number of people due to return to England for leave, for business reasons, or other purposes, far outnumbered the accommodation available on the relatively few ships.

Neil was advised that the only chance of our getting home before his short leave of three months was up – the three months in which his Regiment was convalescing at Cairo, before proceeding to India – was to wait in Port Said, and so be on the spot to snap up a last moment cancellation of two berths.

This we did, staying at a cool and comfortable hotel facing the sea, awaiting our chance for five weeks. I rather enjoyed it. There was sailing, bathing, and expeditions along the queer little back canals.

Neil who always seemed to know a vast number of people, or soon got to know them – for he had the happy flair for making friends – before long had every Embarkation Officer, or anyone with influence in that line, playing golf, sailing, or drinking at the bar with him. He was a generous host and extremely good company. Anyhow, the result was that at almost less than the last moment we were able to 'jump a ship' which was on the point of pulling up the gangway.

We had agreed to take any accommodation. What did it matter for the four days from Port Said to Marseilles, for from there we would go overland.

My berth was in a narrow six-berth cabin. As I made the acquaintance of my cabin mates, I was not sorry that the voyage was to be such a short one. I could sense that they were of the unattractive complaining type, all of them bar one 'bossy'.

Said the most 'bossy', emphasising that she was a Colonel's wife – "We must get this organised at the start. I must have an hour to get up in the morning, and I insist that during that time I have the cabin entirely to myself, as well as an hour when I go to bed. I will rise at 7.30 for 8.30 breakfast, and I shall retire punctually at 10 pm."

The others then chimed in with their claims and demands. One claiming that although her husband was still only a Major – and here followed a story of the bad luck, that had always followed him – she was a General's daughter and should have priority.

The ship was beginning to lurch and we were all trying to remove from our suitcases a few necessities for the night. I had my eye on a little old lady who had said nothing and was trying to make herself even smaller.

I butted in with: "What about the eldest having the first choice?" (sensing that the little old lady would not mind admitting her age) "and then so on according to age." They all looked fairly old to me – about forty – and of the type that would not care to admit being a day older than any of the others. They all except the really old

one glared at me.

I continued: "It's quite ludicrous for so many of you to demand so much. Let me tell you this, I shall be the first up and out of the cabin – and it will be at an unearthly hour. I shall go to bed long after you are all asleep. I shall dress and undress in the dark, and will only take a few minutes to do both. The less I am in this cabin the happier I shall be." I kept to this promise for the next four days and it was no trouble!

I then turned to the little old lady, whom I now realised was not only old but nearly blind. Seeing that she had been allotted a top berth I changed with her, as mine was a lower one. I do not think that she was capable of clambering onto the top one and I always preferred a top one.

She was a dear little soul and was so grateful for the a few odd ways in which I could help her. We made friends on deck and she told me her story.

She was an English governess to a family in Egypt and when out for a walk by herself one day she was chased by a bull. She was so frightened that as she ran, she looked over both her shoulders with both her eyes at the same moment and something that kept her eyes in the proper place broke and her eyes remained nearly disappeared, both still trying to look over her shoulders.

Poor little thing! She was going to England to see if her eyes could be tied together again. It made a great impression on me and ever after if I have seen a bull, I have thought, "If that bull should chase me I must remember to try and not to look behind, or if I do feel I must look, I must only look over one shoulder."

Our few weeks leave in England soon went. We made many visits but they were nearly all spoilt for me through recurrent attacks of malaria.

Neil bought a racehorse before he left England, which he shipped out to India and together we went to some kennels near Croydon where they bred bull terriers. It didn't take us long to decide which dog we wanted. 'Topper' (twelve months old with a brindle patch over one eye) hurled himself against the bars of his run as if to say: "Choose me, and you will never regret it." How right he was! We never did; he was a dog in a million and he was the 'dog love' of our lives.

"He is not good enough for show," said the dealer, pointing out a slight kink in his tail. We didn't want one for show, we wanted a loyal friend and Neil was keen to have a dog who would be a good guard for me in India. Neil paid £12 for Topper and we were the proud possessors of a bull terrier.

Near the school where my brothers were, was lovely Eridge Park and here one Saturday morning we took my brothers and Topper for a long happy ramble. Topper had a gorgeous time, breaking the rules by chasing deer! He also made good friends with my brothers.

In the afternoon at the School, was one of those boring football matches and Topper soon decided that he was not a spectator by nature. If there was a fight or a game going on he was most certainly going to be in it. When he recognised my brothers being knocked over and struggling with a ball he hurled himself into the game to go to their rescue. With head down and great weight behind him he just knocked over right and left any boys who dared to tackle his little friends and then chasing the ball he scored a goal in their favour.

"Call your dog off!" roared the Games Master. Not we, we were enjoying this match and so were my brothers. Finally the match came to an end and Topper had an excellent photo taken of himself in the centre of the football team, with his tongue well out, surrounded by boys and thoroughly enjoying his success.

If he had been a man he would, in later life, have shown that photo to his girlfriend or wife, saying – "Can you recognise me in this group?"

We took him to Hyde Park, let him off the lead and he had a glorious scamper round. He came when he was called and followed close at our heels as we walked back to Hill Street where we were staying with Uncle Henry. Uncle Henry was, of course, not interested in dogs! Topper needed no lead, we were his and he was ours. The next day we took him down to Frant for the weekend where we went to say goodbye to my two youngest brothers at school there. The next day we returned to London and Topper was collected and shipped out to India to await our arrival.

Soon we were on our way to Cairo, en route for India. Fate was unexpectedly very kind to me, as the departure of the Regiment was delayed for a good many weeks after our arrival there, enabling me to see some of the things of great interest.

When being shown round the museums, I was appalled at my ignorance of the Pharaohs and the various Egyptian dynasties. I was very impressed by the great difference in the art and sculpture of Egypt to that of other countries. The difference I think was due to its utter calm and complete serenity, as though time, past, present and future would on the whole be of little importance.

Then there was the famous Citadel and also the Mushkie Bazaar; and from the latter came two of my lovely Persian rugs which always reminded me of it. The word 'bazaar' does not adequately describe it, for it was practically a small enclosed town within the city of Cairo. It had a reputation – rather a sinister one! – and one was warned not to go to the Mushkie unless accompanied by a couple of armed police from the Intelligence Department. At the entrances were some of these men on guard with orders not to allow a European inside unless possessing a pass, or unless it was someone known to them.

When we were there it may have been a time of some political unrest and thus orders were being strictly enforced, or it may have been due to the general 'unsafe' reputation it had.

Anyhow it took a little time to get the necessary passes and guard escort. We were then able to see some of it to a limited extent, but only went where our guards chose to take us.

One expedition was in the hopes of buying some Persian rugs and the two we've bought have always recalled the many leisurely hours we spent in the house of a Persian gentleman, sitting on a low divan in a dim, incense-scented room, sipping cups of strong, sickly coffee, while rug after rug was displayed for our benefit.

We had had an introduction to this gentleman, who entertained a prospective buyer only if, after the first interview, he approved of him. We had been warned that if he took a dislike to a person he politely regretted that 'he had no rugs available to show'. Luckily for us after a preliminary hour's conversation, he 'had a few rugs, which it would be a pleasure to show us'. We had also been warned that he was not

one with whom one could bargain. The transaction was therefore an agreeable and friendly one.

Desert country has always held a fascination for me and there was much of it beyond Cairo. When riding, I was able to get a vague and distant vision of it.

The simple grandeur of this huge expanse of practically uninhabited land – I visualised a few romantic oases! – charmed me at all times but most of all at dawn and the brief time between the setting of the sun and darkness, for then the sand and sky were flooded with quiet soft shades of creams, blues, and greys. They were fleeting moments of a calm mysterious beauty which appealed to me far more than the startlingly vivid sunsets and sunrises.

Such was Cairo and its environs. Never visited again, but never forgotten.

The time for us to leave Cairo came with an unexpected suddenness. I was enjoying life there, and there was still so much to see and do. Our long wait had begun to make me feel that we would be staying there indefinitely.

We were actually staying at an hotel in Heliopolis, just outside Cairo. The attraction here was its open courtyard in which, on moonless nights, a Cinema was shown. Our bedroom window overlooked this courtyard and while slowly changing for dinner I could enjoy long spells of watching a film.

Then one evening while I was watching, enthralled at the drama being shown on the screen, Neil came in and announced that he had orders to join a ship between Ismailia and Lake Timsah immediately.

I was very annoyed that I would not now be able to see the end of the film, and even more annoyed to feel that in spite of it being a hot evening, my teeth were chattering and icy shivers were running down my spine. I realised only too well that malaria was again taking its horrid grip of me.

Ships however, will not wait for wives while they recover from malaria. I think that it was early the next morning that we entrained for Ismailia. I have a hazy idea of that journey, but I suppose Neil thought that I was too ill to go on, for we stopped at a comic wayside halt South of Ismailia and spent the night there – at the bungalow of one of the Canal Pilots.

I remember a dear motherly soul, with a very comforting expanse of bosom, collecting me and a soothing running flow of, "Poor, little young lady! She didn't ought to be travelling with the temperature she's got on her. I'll look after her" – then to me – "You come along of me, you shall share my bed, you shall ducks. My husband is away on one of these 'ere piloting jobs, so I can look after you proper."

And I did share her bed that night! She was amazingly kind. It must have been a rotten night for her, with me tossing and turning with a high fever.

The next morning my fever had gone as quickly as it had come, and I was able to take stock of my surroundings. They were as unexpected as unusual. I had remembered little if anything of my arrival the night before.

Now I stood on the verandah and looked around me. All was water. In every direction as far as I could see, there was water. It may have been canals, lakes or swamps, probably a mixture of them all.

The steps of the bungalow led down to the water. I sat down on the top one, for I felt as though my legs had as much strength as cotton wool! Somewhere I thought must be the railway and the halt at which we had stopped the previous night, but I could see no signs of it, nor could I remember how I had arrived here.

"Not feeling queer, are you luv?" The boards of the verandah groaned as my hostess came towards me and the step on which I was sitting gave an enormous creak, as she sank down beside me.

"Thank you, but I am feeling quite well and it's a marvellous feeling to feel only just weak and wobbly and not ill." I went on to apologise for all the trouble I had given her.

But she assured me that it was a pleasure to see folks – nothing had been trouble – it was lonely at times when her man was away, which he was more often than not – she had been a bargee's daughter, and so was used to the water, had met her husband on the Thames. He'd been in the Pilot Service there, and plenty of life and gaieties and goings-on there were on the Thames – couldn't beat it.

"What made you come out here?" I asked. "The good pay I suppose," she replied and then after a pause – "and having no children, it didn't seem to matter where we lived. So might as well save up for a comfortable old age."

I looked at her with surprise, she looked to me so like a jolly mother of many children.

"Oh, yes" – she had guessed my thoughts – "I've had children, eleven of them, but none lived longer than three months and that was the eldest – she would have been about your age had she lived, blue eyes she had and fair hair. She might have looked like you had she lived, and I was slim at your age."

Now I knew why she had been so kind to me on my arrival; some fancied likeness to what her daughter might have been like – "And what were the others like?" I asked. She shrugged her shoulders. "After I lost my first, I daren't let myself look or think too much, so feared I was of losing them, but my first I never did think I could lose. I didn't think it possible to lose something you loved and looked after the way I did her."

In spite of all her sad losses she gave out a buoyant cheerfulness and soon had me laughing at tales of her bargee life. I am sure she must have been the life, soul and wit of many a party.

Presently she padded off to get me some refreshments. Externally nothing could have looked more drab and dreary looking than that bungalow. The paint was faded, blistered and peeling, the wooden boards looked, and I'm sure they were, rotten, the corrugated iron of which there was plenty was rusty – but my kind hostess gave me a feeling of home. Her Nottingham lace curtains and faded furnishings were spotless and the generous helpings of good food, if I had had any appetite, would have proved most tempting.

I felt I would give a great deal to stay quietly here for a while, lead an entirely simple life basking in her natural kindness, taking in all this water country which rather reminded me of the Norfolk Broads, though far wilder. It would be I thought most sketchable. I was sure it was the haunt of many wild waterfowl.

But by that evening we had left. A motor boat had been produced and we chugged-chugged out to the troopship which was lying out somewhere – I suppose.

My feelings at returning to India were mixed – on one side looking forward to a gay, happy and easy life of riding, tennis and dances, of seeing my parents and Violet who were still there (for it was less than a year since I had married) – also the excitement of having a home of our own. The other side was – why of all places must it be Lucknow? – I was afraid that I would feel the ghosts of my youth there more than anywhere else.

We spent a night in Bombay at the Taj Mahal Hotel and collected Topper the next day. Wild with joy to see us again, he followed us through the crowded Bombay Station, he wasn't going to let us out of his sight again. There was no need to have a lead – ever – as far as he was concerned.

When we got to Lucknow my immediate interest was our bungalow. I had brought out yards of chintz for curtains and chair covers, cushions, pictures, lampshades, our Persian rugs, china and glass and all our wedding presents. These all had to be unpacked and arranged. Very soon our second home (our first had been the two tents in Palestine) looked I thought very attractive and I set to work getting the garden in order. It being undignified to touch the soil with one's hands, I gave orders to the Mali and saw that they were carried out.

As I could speak a little Hindustani, we got first-class servants – no good-class servant would go to anyone who only spoke English, it was undignified; one must at all costs avoid that and everything would go smoothly.

Neil bought a car as soon as we got to Lucknow and his racehorse duly arrived. 'Smiling Morn' was a beautiful chestnut and very well mannered. Neil's ambition was to train this horse himself and ride and win the Army Cup. It didn't take him long to collect several polo ponies. Everything was soon in full swing, polo, racing, entertaining and early morning duck shoots in the jeels¹ outside Lucknow.

My father, mother and Violet came to stay. Violet was engaged to a tall good-looking young man then and he also came to stay. Broken engagements seem to run in our family; three out of the six of us have not married the first person to whom we were engaged. Violet's engagement came to an end eventually but as she married a far nicer man, all ended well.

Topper, although he would not follow anyone except Neil or myself even a yard, had charming manners towards our guests. He greeted them warmly and told them to make themselves at home, but not so with Violet's young man. For some reason he did not trust him and on one occasion he edged him out of the bungalow to the verandah and stood over him, not allowing him to move until we came and rescued him.

Some years after we were asked to be kind to a young man who was engaged to a girl we knew. We asked him to dine; to our surprise up went the hackles on Topper's back as the young man came in and he was all for edging the man out of the house, and Topper could look very determined. We of course spoke sternly to the dog, whereupon he shrugged his shoulders as much as to say; "Oh! very well, just

¹ Small lakes.

you wait and see, I know I'm right." Later we heard that the engagement had been broken off.

As Lucknow was the first of the plains' 'stations' in which I stayed, I think that it made a more lasting impression on me than any other. True, I had had two visits there, the first of a few weeks, the next of several months, just before the 1914 war, and as a young girl I had a marvellously gay and happy time.

Once again I was in India and again it was Lucknow. Now I was a married woman with the pleasure of having my own home as well as enjoying the usual gaieties, but always underlying everything were memories of those friends who had lost their lives in the First World War.

During my time in Lucknow I thought much and often of the days of the Indian Mutiny. To me, when young, it seemed ancient history, but now when I come to think of it, it had happened not so very long ago from my father's viewpoint. His mother was a young married woman with a family at that time, and she and my grandfather¹ only escaped being in the Indian Mutiny by being on leave in England. So my father's knowledge of the Mutiny came from his aunt who had been all through the siege of the Residency in Lucknow and had survived it, and from various contemporary friends of that generation who had been through that terrible time.

The Residency in 1857 was on the verge of the huge teeming city, the old Palaces nearby and also the cantonments. After the Mutiny the new Residency and cantonments were built a couple of miles or more away. The reason for this was that in case of another outbreak they would be far easier to defend, easier to sally forth from and far less prone to attacks from the city. This was of course the reason why there were no bungalows older than about sixty years in Lucknow.

The broad main roads leading to and from Lucknow are now deeply shaded by avenues of large trees, planted about fifty years ago. As we drove comfortably along them in a car and not in the very hot weather, we grumbled about the heat and at having to stop every now and then in a village to have water thrown over our tyres to cool them, I could not help thinking of the men who had marched here when there were long stretches of shadeless roads, sixty miles or more with the burning dust blistering their feet and with the death-dealing sun beating down on their heads. How many had died from thirst and heat-strokes? Yes, it made one think.

When British troops filed into a Garrison Church and took their seats there was a rippling metallic 'clickety-clack' sound as each man placed his rifle in the wooden slot and metal clip at the back of the pew in front of him – ready for a sudden, unexpected emergency or another Mutiny. It had happened in one or two places when the sepoys had taken advantage of British troops being in Church and unarmed, on compulsory Church Parade,. It had been an easy matter for the sepoys to seize the rifles and ammunition which had been left behind under an inadequate guard and turn them to their own use. Now the British troops took their rifles to Church with them and a round of ammunition apiece! I am not sure if taking ammunition was strictly true or whether it was told us to make it seem more realistic, but they certainly took their rifles to Church.

¹ Spencer and Julia Ryder.

We all had to be very careful of our manners and our speech, for what we might do or say even thoughtlessly, could be exaggerated, built upon and made into a mountain of dissatisfaction. Small seeds could be sown that would grow and ripen into another mutiny. At the back of the minds of the men who knew their India and its history was the fear that a small spark might cause a fire that would spread rapidly, and the thought of the lives that would be lost and also the great tragedies that would be caused in extinguishing that fire.

I thought far more about the Indian Mutiny of 1857 before the 1914 war, as after that the sorrows, losses and tragedies of that time were personal ones of my own and of my generation, and not those of an older generation.

The cold weather season was coming to an end and Neil was lucky in getting command of a hill station for the hot weather months, a small place called Raniket.

We had a charming bungalow and as I lay in bed I had a view of the snows, including the two sickle curves of Nimji Purbit (*Plate 12*). I could see the immense perpetual snows as the sun rose and for a view brief moments they turned a heavenly pink. At night, on full-moon nights, they looked ghost-like and I could also watch the very spectacular mountain storms when the lightning never ceases and the thunder gets caught in the mountains and before the echo dies away the next mighty roll of thunder is all around one.

We went to dine one night with the Black Watch. A storm broke while the pipers were marching around the table playing their pipes. The lights fused but the pipers continued by the light of the lightning. The Officer Commanding was known as the 'Bad Baron' and the lightning lit up his fiery red moustache! I felt as if I was in a Scottish stronghold in the middle ages – all very dramatic!

I believed in making a bungalow comfortable even if only for a few months and so took all the things that make a place look nice up from Lucknow with me. I also started keeping hens, or rather I started with chickens. A retired Colonel and Mrs *** were living in Raniket and she kept English hens. I bought twelve day old chicks from her and kept them in my bathroom in a wooden box padded round with hay. For the first few nights I hardly slept as I made so many visits to see if they were warm and alive. They flourished and I reared them all. How lovely to have proper large English eggs eventually. My hens went down to the plains with me and up to the hills in the hot weather. Neil was able to have his favourite breakfast, a fresh boiled egg. I have kept hens ever since in whatever country I have been and Neil remained faithful to a boiled egg for breakfast!

It was a pleasant life in that small hill station. We had brought up two polo ponies to ride and when we were asked to stay at Naini Tal with Sir Harcourt Butler, the Governor of the Northern Provinces, we went there by riding across the hills from Raniket to Naini Tal. It took us from dawn to dusk along small mountain paths but Neil could find his way anywhere across country.

Topper was a very successful dog husband and had many wives. In Raniket he married two sister bull terriers and became the proud father of twenty-two puppies in one day. Each of his wives had eleven puppies. We used to have the pick of the bunch and Topper earned us £120-0-0d while we were in India.

At the end of the hot weather we moved back again to Lucknow, hens and all.

A very gay season was before us. Neil was busy training 'Smiling Morn' to run in the Army Cup, and I think trained himself a bit too much. He was riding over weight and was so anxious to knock off the extra that he hardly ate for days, and lacked just that extra strength when it came to the final effort at the end of the race. He was fourth, a very close finish of half a length between the first four horses.

When the Prince of Wales came to Lucknow, 'Smiling Morn' was chosen for him to ride in the race meeting that week. He followed the instructions well and won the race and Neil got a very handsome silver cup and also a signed photo from HRH.

That was a week of extra-gaieties, big balls and dinner parties. I had the honour of sitting next to the Prince at several dinners and also of dancing with him. He had great charm then and was far easier to talk to than the average subaltern but he was then beginning to show signs of self-will and independence, of wanting and insisting on doing things against the advice of those who knew better. He wanted to be informal, he wanted to be so in public. The Indians' own Rajahs did not behave so and they did not understand it; it did not go down well and it caused a lot of anxiety to the people who were concerned for his success and his safety. I suppose there was a certain amount of selfishness in him; he wanted to do what he wanted; he could not see things from any point of view but his own.

Again, at the end of the hot weather, we were lucky and Neil was given command of the hill station for the summer months. This time it was Kailana, a more attractive place than Raniket I thought.

We led much the same sort of life as we had at Raniket, but there were better roads or paths to get away from it further into the mountains. We went for several long marches, riding and walking, staying at forest rest houses, our servants and camp luggage going on ahead of us. Coolies always arrived to carry the luggage very early in the morning. One is aware of their presence by the sound of clearings of throats, coughing and spitting.

Distances are a bit vague. The first day we set out for one of these marches we were told that the forest bungalow was seven miles off, so we did not start till the afternoon. We had walked many more than seven miles and still no sign of the rest house and it was beginning to grow dark. We wondered if we had missed the path when we came up to a very old native carrying a large tree trunk on his back, held in place by a strap round his forehead.

"Which way is it to the forest rest house, and how far is it?" I asked him.

I was given the usual reply: "Only one mile and straight on." It was the polite reply, the one the old man thought we would like to hear as we were obviously tired looking.

A few miles further the path forked. There was no indication as to which was our path, so we tossed up for it and luckily chose the right one! Some miles further on we saw a welcome light. We arrived at our little log cabin of a rest house and it was midnight.

A blazing wood fire had been lit in the clearing to give us a guiding light and within a few moments of our arrival a good dinner was served. We ate it outside by

the fire.

The distance we had travelled we found out later had been twenty-two miles instead of seven, but the beauty of the place more than made up for our long walk and we rested there the next day before going on further.

It was incredibly lovely, right in the heart of the mountains and the pine trees and deodars were of an immense size. There were a few little clearings in the hills for crops and brilliant scarlet patches of chillies were grown.

It was country that could only provide a living for a very small population, so it was controlled by only having one wife for every five men. We met one of the wives with three of her five husbands following behind her. She was hung with many silver necklaces and bracelets; she was good-looking and walked proudly and happily and her husbands looked most contented.

I was always sorry to have to turn back to the more civilised life. Luckily, one can never forget places of such beauty and such simplicity. At the time one realises that it is pure beauty, that one is happy at the moment and that one will never forget it, and for ever be able to recall all the sights and scents and sounds. It is memorised for life, a thing that can never be taken away.

We heard at Kailana that we should be going to Agra instead of Lucknow on our return to the plains. Our car had been left at Delhi, so at Delhi we collected it and started out for the longish drive to Agra. First one tyre burst, then a second – our tyres had all perished during the hot weather and we had to return to Delhi and buy five new tyres. It was still very hot and we had constantly to stop where we found water and throw it over the tyres and wait in the shade till they cooled down.

It was late in the evening when we got as far as Mutra; the Fourth Hussars were stationed there. Neil called at their Mess for a drink. The Colonel was a friend of his and he very kindly put us up in his bungalow for the night.

The next evening we reached Agra. The bungalow which had been allotted to us, was quite the most charming I had ever seen. It had a very large octagonal central room and was an old bungalow, spacious and cool with a thick thatched roof. It was away from the other bungalows on the outskirts of the Canton and behind stretched vast plains.

Soon everything was unpacked and arranged. Curtains and chair covers were altered and refitted and I was busy, for the fourth time in India, making my garden. It was still very hot and for some time we slept out on the lawn under mosquito nets and Topper, of course, on my bed.

"Have you seen the Taj Mahal?" – "What do you think of the Taj Mahal?" – "When are you going to see the Taj Mahal?" – I got so tired of being asked these endless questions. I made up my mind I would go when I was in the mood and I would go by myself. So I went one night when there was a three-quarter moon. I was glad I had gone alone. There was no one else there and I was able to wander about by myself.

So much has been written about the Taj, so many photos taken, so many awful little imitations made – it is so well known, it is so beautiful and so quite indescribable.

I saw it of course many times. In the early dawn, late evening, by moonlight and

starlight, but never in the full daylight, so it remained to me like a lovely ethereal dream.

There were a great many places to see round Agra; old forts and palaces, mostly along the broad Ganges River.

Among the many places we visited was Cawnpore, where we stayed with our friend Alex Shakespeare. Before we left I went to see the statue of – I think it was called – 'The Avenging Angel', which, when peace was brought to India after the Mutiny, was placed over the well into which a great number of women and children's bodies had been thrown after they had been brutally put to death.

The face of the Angel was I thought a strange and wonderful piece of sculptor's art, for looking at it from one side the expression was one of great love, compassion and peace, while that of the other side was of stern reproach. Yet at no angle did those two expressions clash. I looked at it long enough never to forget it.

It was my great uncle (by marriage) Mowbray Thompson who had been one of the only two survivors of the massacred garrison of Cawnpore.

In 1858, the year after the Mutiny, when sent back to England on sick leave he wrote 'The Story of Cawnpore', which was published in 1859. This book I possess and have lately read again. It reads extremely well for it is a simple and direct account of all that happened and what he personally witnessed and took part in. It describes how after a long siege, great loss of life and when their rations were down to the last four days of half rations and half a cup of water a day, they accepted Nana Sahib's offer to capitulate, the conditions being that the women, remaining men and children should have safe custody.

The women and children were then about ten to every man and it would be impossible to defend them for more than a day or two. Nana Sahib signed the treaty. The men, women and children were put into boats and onto rafts on the banks of the Ganges to be taken by river to Allahabad, but no sooner were they all on these riverboats than the native boatmen abandoned them by pushing the boats into deeper water and taking away the paddles. Then from either shore these helpless boats were fired into with burning arrows. The timber, dry wood and thatched coverings caught fire at once and the occupants had no other choice but to jump overboard. Most of the men were shot while still on the burning boats or killed as they reached the banks. But the women and children who managed to reach land were captured and imprisoned for many weeks before being brutally murdered and their bodies thrown into the well.

Great-uncle Mowbray had a miraculous escape. The burning thatches on his boat were torn off, pieces of timber used as paddles and the boat made its way downstream for about three miles, but during this time they were shot at by armed horsemen from the banks on both sides, and twenty of the occupants were killed and the boat finally sank.

Uncle Mowbray, though shot in the head and shoulder was one of those who swam six miles down the Ganges, and finally landed and was befriended by a rajah who was faithful to the Government, Dirigbijah Singh.

CHAPTER 14

House hunting in England

Soon after I arrived in England I had a wire from Neil saying he had managed to get an exchange to the Home Battalion. So he duly arrived, delighted; he had enough of India, he had trained and ridden his own horse in the Army Cup, he had won the Infantry Polo Tournament, he had had all he wanted from India. Topper was being shipped home but would have to do his six months in quarantine.

Neil had some months' leave due to him as usual. We did rounds of visits before we went to Plymouth where the Home Battalion was stationed. I liked Plymouth very much; it was quite gay. I loved all the Devonshire country and places in Cornwall that we were able to go and see and I liked the people; they were friendly, kind and hospitable.

We had a funny little tin bungalow outside Plymouth, at Crown Hill, a field for me to make a garden and when the six months' quarantine was up we collected a wildly joyful Topper. We had some happy months at Plymouth.

Not only had Neil had enough of India, he had had enough of soldiering. He was getting 'fed up' with it. He openly said that he only specialised in getting as much leave as he could (and he certainly succeeded!), in sport, and in doing his best as a soldier when there was a war on. He had no ambition to command his Regiment; he wanted to retire and live the life of an English country gentleman.

Uncle George Pleydell-Bouverie died and left him some money, so Neil 'sent in his papers' and applied for leave, pending retirement.

We set off to look for a house to buy. I had not been keen on Neil retiring, but it was his life and one of his many mottoes was: "I'll do what I like!"

I would have liked to have had a home in Devonshire; I liked the county and Neil had made a number of friends. But Devonshire, Neil said, always made him feel half alive. He wanted somewhere around Taunton. He had been brought up in the West Country and had happy memories of sporting times at the depot. Uncle Henry had a large country house, Brymore, near Bridgwater, and as a boy he had shot and hunted over Exmoor and he had many friends in Somerset, and in Somerset he wanted to live.

So we found and bought 'Apple Hayes'. It was seven miles from Taunton and in the Blagdon Hills¹. It was a long, low 14th century farmhouse – miles from anywhere. Our daily papers were not delivered till the next day by the postman. It had quite a lot of land (Neil wanted to farm in a small way) and had some woods and a chain of fish ponds.

It all seemed all right but when we took possession of it and moved in, I had a queer feeling. I wished we did not own it. I could say nothing about it to Neil. I had liked it all right before we bought it. I thought I would be thrilled having a house that

¹ Or Blackdown Hills.

I could go on making nicer and nicer, and a garden that I did not have to give up after a year or only a few months.

It was in the country – I adored the country and had always wanted an old farmhouse. What was wrong with it? Even while the furniture was being moved in, I had to get outside for a short time and into the garden. Not much of a garden, but I would make it charming, or would I?

It was the first time I had had any doubts that from our first home of tents in Palestine onwards, I might not be able to make a delightful home. I saw the empty furniture vans leave with regret.

I pulled myself together. Beds must be made, unpacking done, cook and house-parlour maid given their orders perhaps they wanted cheering up, but why should they? Anyhow I must get going and by the time I had finished arranging things, I firmly told myself I felt better.

The sitting room was a long, low room with old oak beams and a huge open fireplace. I had a log fire lit to cheer things up and picked a bowl of nasturtiums, the only thing I could find in the garden, to make things look happier.

Neil came in quite cheerful. He had been wandering round the fields with Bright (his ex-batman, who was installed in the cottage and was going to do farm work for him) and Topper and our wee terrier 'Kruschen'. They had all been happy exploring woods and fields.

The dining room was somehow antagonistic. We dined there that night and I said we would in future, have our meals in another little sitting-room, until I had painted the dining room. It was a dirty grey and I would paint it white. I decided I would do all the painting myself, room by room.

That night, for the first time, Topper chose to sleep in the sitting room and not on my bed. He had never slept anywhere else except on my bed. Kruschen slept on Neil's bed. But now both dogs wished to stay downstairs.

"Much the best place for them," said Neil.

I thought, rather miserably, that it was all a part of 'retiring'; dogs would sleep downstairs in the future and everything would be different.

Soon I started painting the rooms. I liked painting rooms and the ceilings were so low that they were easy to do. The white dining room now looked cold and so with the excuse of the smell of paint we continued to have our meals in the small sitting room. I would do some of the more necessary painting first and then re-paint the dining room and go on re-painting it until I got it right.

Neil bought a couple of cows, some pigs, a farm horse and various farm implements. Neil was very country minded and loved attending a sale of livestock and got on well with all farmers; he also got many invitations to shoot for, besides having many friends he was a very good shot – he was enjoying life as a country gentleman.

My father and mother, home from India, came and stayed with us and my brothers spent part of their Christmas holidays at Apple Hayes.

We had gone there at the end of the summer; rather a depressing time to move

into the depths of the country, and I tried hard to look forward to the spring and summer.

After a short time the elderly house-parlour-maid gave a month's notice. She was a countrywoman who had never been to London in her life. She said, apologetically, it was too far in the country for her; so as I could not replace her, Mrs Bright came in and did her work.

Then I had trouble with the cook. She had been with us as children in Eastbourne, had always kept in touch with us, had been our cook while we were at Plymouth and was very keen to come with us to Somerset. She was a plain, honest young woman of about thirty; a good cook and a hard worker. Now she became queer, said she could smell death in the house. I firmly told her that it was nonsense, old houses and old books had a rather nice scent and she only imagined things because she had never lived in an old house before. She stuck to it that she could smell death.

"Then you had much better leave. I shall quite understand if you would like to go to some place not so far out in the country."

No, she wouldn't leave me; could she have the kitchen door open and would we leave our sitting room door open in the evenings?

I had to agree to that for the time being and until I could get another maid to live in, though Neil grumbled at having to sit with a door open. But I had sympathy for her (though I dare not show it in case she became more frightened), for not long before she started to go quite queer, I'd had a very frightening experience myself. I had of course said nothing to her about it.

She got still more queer and had a wild look in her eyes. Then one day I heard a commotion in the fields below our house. Luckily Neil and Bright were just coming through the woods when they saw the girl running down the field and Bright, with great quickness, caught her just as she was about to throw herself in the deepest of the ponds. She was brought back to the house in a distraught state of mind; she wished to end her life.

I got her to bed, put hot water bottles to warm her and gave her hot milk to drink, held her hand, did all I could to talk her out of her mood. Neil got a doctor to come out and see her – we had no telephone, so it meant motoring some miles to get one. The doctor said cases like this were difficult. No hospital would take her, and of course no mental home at present. Anyhow the only thing to do was to get a relation of hers to come over and take charge of her.

Mrs Bright and I took it in turns to sit up with her all night and the next day. Having found out the name and address of a relation of hers, Neil motored off to the Midlands and back again and brought with him the relation. After another night of the relation and I taking it in turns to sit up with her, Neil motored the poor girl and relation cousin back to their home in the Midlands.

Now I was left with no living-in maid. Mrs Bright was getting very depressed and felt working in the house was too much for her; the only help I was able to get was an occasional odd hour or so from a local poacher's daughter, aged 14. She came when Mum and Dad 'didn't mind if she did'.

My own frightening experience had happened before all this. Actually I had been feeling more cheerful for some days. I had planned a lot of things to do in the house and garden and had gone to bed feeling happier than I had for some time. I had been asleep for two hours or more when I slowly woke up. Something was crouching beside my bed on the floor. 'It' was very, very frightened, so terrified did 'It' become that I was almost petrified with fear of what was going to happen to 'It'.

I woke Neil up, he lit the candle, assured me there was nothing there, that I must have had a bad dream. I had not had a dream. 'It' had come after I had woken up and to me it was still there, crouching in front of a cupboard in the wall that was next to my bed and still so frightened. I had never liked that cupboard; it was very deep in the old thick walls and seemed to have no back to it. One day, I thought, I will clear it out properly and paint it and use it, but I never did. I had only opened that cupboard door once; I put off opening it again. I never did open it again!

Neil offered to read to me, to stay awake and talk to me, a great concession on his part as he was an excellent sleeper and usually slept the whole night through. He did stay awake too, until more than an hour afterwards when 'It' went.

Ghosts I did not believe in, or want to – something quite explainable must have woken me and frightened me, something quite simple probably and I tried to think no more about it. We both agreed never to say anything about it to anyone.

Next morning on going downstairs early (I had not slept much and thought I would let the dogs out and have a breath of fresh air), I found in the big sitting room below our bedroom, where the dogs slept, the seat of one of the chairs had been torn and there were a number of 'messes' about the room. This from two perfectly trained house dogs had never happened before. I cleared up the room so that the maids would see nothing, returned to our bedroom and waited for our morning tea. When I told Neil about the dogs' behaviour he said:

"Well, whatever you felt in the night must have frightened the dogs. Dogs would never have made messes like that unless really frightened."

Neil was wise in the way of dogs.

After the maid giving notice, and the cook going queer and Mrs Bright getting depressed and Neil's leave being up (he having to go off on manoeuvres for some weeks before his final retirement came through), it was going to mean that I would be left in the house all by myself.

"Let's sell 'Apple Hayes'. I've tried and I can't be happy here. I'm sure it is an unlucky house."

To my surprise, Neil agreed with me and when I asked him why, all he would say was that he didn't like the way the dogs behaved, it was unnatural.

So off he went on his last few weeks of soldiering. 'Apple Hayes' was put in the hands of an agent. I'd decided I'd rather pack up, store the furniture and clear out and leave the house empty as soon as possible.

The removal men would come in three days. I would stick out three days alone in the house, be busy packing up personal things and count the hours till I left. Nothing would matter now that we were leaving. I could put up with anything for three nights. I put off going to bed for as long as I could that first night alone. I toyed

with the idea of sleeping on the sofa in the sitting room with the dogs, but decided it was weak to give way to nerves and that I would make a roaring fire in the bedroom and be sensible and I would make the dogs spend the night with me. When ready for bed, I fetched the dog baskets, put them in front of the fire – they could sleep there or on my bed. I carried Kruschen under one arm, pulled Topper with the other and into the room I got them. As fast as I got them into their baskets or onto my bed they got out or off. Topper fixed his eyes on that horrid cupboard door, he backed to the bedroom door, his hackles went up and he whined piteously to get out. It was unnerving me so I let him out of the door. The little one I had in my arms. I would take her into bed with me, but she also would not take her eyes of that beastly cupboard. She trembled with fright so much that I had to let her out too.

I managed to get through that night and the next two. I did not feel anything myself beyond a longing to get away and thankfulness that I soon would be leaving it all. Indeed, I was never more thankful when the removal men came, when the furniture was out of the house (I would not even go round it to see if everything had been removed) and when I had finally left it. Bright was paid off, our beginnings of a farm and 'Apple Hayes' itself was soon sold, to my surprise for fifty pounds more than we gave for it.

Some months afterwards when we were passing through Taunton and lunching with some friends of ours, they asked us if we had ever seen the ghost at 'Apple Hayes'.

"No, I never saw it. What is the ghost story?"

"A man was supposed to have murdered his wife, but they never found her body. Your bedroom was the haunted room. We often wondered how you could sleep in that room."

"Luckily, I didn't know the story."

"Why did you leave 'Apple Hayes'?"

"Oh, it was too far in the country." And from Neil: "I didn't like living in a place where I had to wait for the papers till the next day. How could I keep up to date with the racing news?"

We called in at the agents and thanked him for selling at a profit and ask him out of curiosity what sort of people had bought it.

"A bachelor, and a bachelor had it for many years before you had it."

"Was it haunted?"

"If it is, a bachelor doesn't seem to feel the ghost!"

I fervently hoped it would always be occupied by a single man.

So ended 'Apple Hayes' and our first attempt at owning a house in England.

The night after leaving that haunted house, both dogs were sleeping on my bed again. Topper did not even wait to say his prayers with me, as he generally did. Kruschen was a little atheist and never said hers. I had a delicious night. I couldn't move properly, there was a comfortable weight on my bed! I slept well and so did the dogs, we all felt happy again.

When Neil's final few weeks in the army were finished and he had really and

truly retired, we both felt we would like a break, so motored to Scotland and had a happy few weeks up there.

We were lent 'Farleigh House'. Castle Menzies had belonged to Neil Menzies, Neil's godfather, and 'Farleigh House' was a charming farmhouse on the estate. Castle Menzies was no longer lived in. It was gaunt and cold, but 'Farleigh' was warm and sunny and very comfortable. It was on the the River Tay and Neil fished happily and killed salmon. He refused to sleep out all night on the banks of Loch Tay which I, and a couple I knew, did. We had a marvellous night – not much sleep I will admit, for the midges were bad and we had to burn 'smudges' all night to make a sort of smokescreen, but except for that it was a wonderful night, light nearly all night and we talked and fished early the following morning.

After Scotland we spent a few months near Minehead, staying with Neil's dear old Aunt Alys Mildmay. Neil collected a couple of polo ponies, played polo at Dunster and we looked to see if there were any houses we liked in that district but found nothing.

We then moved to the New Forest and stayed a month or more at Brockenhurst. We had the ponies and riding in the Forest was delightful. We also looked at many houses for sale but none came up to what we wanted. We were a bit fussy after 'Apple Hayes'.

We went to Gloucester to see one house we heard of, an old mill house. It was delightful. It seemed everything we wanted. After seeing all there was to see, I asked the Gardener who had shown us round if there was a ghost? Was the old mill house haunted?

"I've never seen anything," was the answer. Neil gave him a tip. The old man hesitated before he shut the door of the car for us.

"I said I'd never seen anything, and I never have, but there do be those who believe it's an unlucky house. Maids don't stay long here, there are stories."

Neil thanked him and as we drove off again, said: "Never again will I buy a house that has the faintest ghost of a story attached to it."

I felt strongly the same.

We went to the Continent for a few months. Neil was never keen to leave England and it took a lot of cunning persuasion on my part to get him out of England, but once out and after much grumbling at the start he thoroughly enjoyed himself. Taking a car abroad in those days was very different from now. Comparatively few people took cars.

"Are you really going to drive on the Continent?" – "How sporting of you to take your car!" – "What will you do if anything goes wrong with your car?" These were the sort of things people said to us.

A little crowd collected to see the car landed and we drove off with good wishes from them.

If we saw a car with 'GB' on it at any time, ten to one it was someone Neil knew, or soon would get to know.

As long as Neil felt sporting, he was happy; I felt once again the glorious feeling

of adventure before me.

We landed at St. Malo. It would be nice to spend a couple of days at Dinard, it was so pleasant. We spent three weeks there before we went slowly south, through the Château country to Biarritz.

Neil was not much good at looking at Châteaux. He said they all looked the same to him, that he was feeling his bad knee, and would wait in the car for me. He hoped I wouldn't be long. So I had to do very hurried sightseeing.

At that time, the French Exchange was very much in our favour; we got 120 francs for the pound, and before very long 200. Prices had not started to go up for the English except at the big, smart hotels. At the small inns, the kind that tourists do not stay at (such attractive little places off the main roads, clean and with good food), the prices were amazingly low. I have kept some of the bills. The record for cheapness was at a small place at the foot of the Pyrenees. We stopped there for the night, had an excellent dinner of blue trout (fished up out of the catch pool in the stream while we watched) cooked to perfection, spring chicken and fresh cherries. Wine of the country of course, and Neil and 'mine host' drank cognac together after dinner. Our bedroom was spotless; we even had a hot bath. Breakfast the next morning, our luncheon basket filled with food for the road, garage for the car etc. and the whole bill was the equivalent of 6/- in English money!

Those were the days! Now the franc is about 1,000 to the £ but it works out that everything in France is more expensive if possible than in England.

I was keen to go into Spain; it was the last place Neil wanted to see, so I bided my time. Luck was on my side. We met some friends of Neil's, a Colonel and Mrs S¹. They were on their way to Spain in their car. There was a bullfight at Pamplona the next day which they were keen to see, would we join them? Oh no, I now didn't want to go to Spain. Whereupon Neil did, so I finally gave in to his wishes (I had got my way, but he must never know) and we packed up and started off to cross the Pyrenees that evening, for it was too long a drive to get there the next day in time for the bullfight.

The drive over the mountains was rather hair-raising: most of it in the dark and the higher we got the denser became the mountain mist. We reached a small village called Brigette just over the frontier, late that night and put up at a little inn.

A very early start had to be made the next morning. A lad from the inn came with us as a guide and also for the joy of getting a lift to the bullfight.

I expect he was right, for even the outskirts were crowded, so we took rooms at the hotel and the two men of our party then demanded breakfast. They were very hungry from the very early start and must have a proper breakfast of fried eggs and bacon. It did not look the sort of place that would be able to produce that sort of breakfast and I advised coffee and rolls, but no, it must be fried eggs and bacon. None of us spoke Spanish and our guide who spoke French and Spanish had disappeared. He would be back in an hour to show us the preliminary sights of the bullfight.

"My wife can get anything she wants by signs if she will only make the effort,"

¹ Colonel and Mrs Sydney (Sydney being crossed out in the manuscript).

said Neil.

So off I went to the kitchen to make my efforts. Madame and I and her staff had great fun and laughter trying to make out what it was I wanted. Various tins and boxes of food were offered for my inspection: finally I had to draw a hen laying an egg and underlined the egg. It was understood and from out of an old biscuit tin were produced eggs. I made signs of how they were to be fried and returned triumphantly to the hungry men and awaited results.

The eggs and bacon arrived! Two huge plates with lumps of greasy pork and the fried eggs on them. Unfortunately they had been fried in castor oil and I don't think the eggs were new laid! On going back to the kitchen to find out what they had been fried in, Madame proudly showed me the bottle of English castor oil and I was made to understand that it was medicinal and good for the men. I smiled my appreciation for all her trouble but coffee and rolls it had to be for all of us. Mrs S. had escaped even the revolting smell of the eggs and bacon as she had gone to her room for a rest.

When our guide returned we set off to see the sights. There was a feeling of intense happy anticipation in the air and milling crowds, all gay and laughing. We were taken on to a balcony to see the bulls being driven through the barricaded street, shepherded by a couple of staid old bullocks who knew their job. Brave young men would dash in front of the bulls and the crowd would cheer.

Later we were taken inside the arena and from above the pen where the five bulls were we watched the toreadors draw lots and choose the bulls they were to fight. As the lots were drawn, down into the pen dropped the toreador and he manoeuvred his bull through one of the doors. The men were like cats in the skintight, black trousers and jackets and I have never seen anything so agile. They could dash behind the safety places or scale the wall of the pen in the most quick, graceful and feline way.

After that was over there was a long time of waiting. Our guide showed us where to get our tickets, was given money for himself and he disappeared.

Nothing would induce me to watch a bullfight, but I would stay and watch everything until the bull appeared. There was a great deal to watch. People were in their seats early; everything is late in Spain except bullfights. We watched the lovely Spanish ladies in their high combs and mantillas, take their place in special boxes, the President and his friends in theirs, the grandest. The very colourful procession of toreadors, matadors, and picadors marched round the ring.

I edged to the back of our box and had my hand on the handle of the door to be ready to open it and bolt. I watched the President throw down the key to declare the fight open, a roll of drums and two huge doors at the end of the arena swung open; a tense moment or two and then out rushed the bull with the flagged darts on his shoulders. He stopped in the centre of the ring and started to paw the ground.

I hurriedly left. The streets were deserted as I walked back to the hotel, but I could hear the cheers and roars of the crowd in the arena for a long time.

After a while Neil joined me at the hotel. He was looking very green and said he had felt quite sick at the cruelty to the horses. He had stuck out three of the five fights and that was as much as he could do.

Colonel and Mrs S. returned after watching till the end. They were full of

enthusiasm, Mrs S. declared that the excitement more than made up for the cruelty; her eyes were sparkling and she certainly looked as if she had enjoyed herself.

Neil took a dislike to Mrs S. They were going back to Biarritz – so we decided that as we were in Spain we would make our way along the north of Spain and back to France that way. This we did.

When we got to La Napoule it was the height of the summer and very hot. We stayed at La Napoule several weeks, bathing early in the morning, resting through the heat of the day and driving up to the hills behind in the cool of the evening.

When we had had enough we went into Italy, lingered by the Italian lakes and then on into Switzerland and so back to England.

We had been wandering about for some time (about five months) and thought we ought to settle down for a time and take a house, so we rented a small furnished house in Camberley. We both disliked Camberley but my parents had a house there and Neil could play golf and get away easily for race meetings and we could have our dogs with us again. It would do for the time being and something might turn up.

It did.