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“OUT OF THE DEPTHS!”(1)

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By

John Roberts

(Being a record of my life from the time of the Great Depression of l929, to the present time.)

CHAPTER 1

ORIGINS

My family was of British working-class origin. George (my father), then 5 years of age and Edward Roberts(Ted), 3 years, his younger brother, were brought up as Orphans, following the death of their mother in 1900: a year or so after she returned from Singapore, where she had visited her dying father, in late l897. Her husband, Owen Roberts, had been Provost Sergeant, with the 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment, but was discharged, on 15 June 1896, following his demotion for drunkenness.

It appears that Owen abandoned his wife and children following his dismissal from the Army, The boys spent their early childhood at the Hawarden Orphanage in North Wales: conducted by Lady Gladstone, widow of William Gladstone, former Prime Minister of Great Britain. George eventually arrived in Salford Lancashire, at the age of 14 years, or thereabouts, where, some years later, he married Elizabeth Jones, my mother. She was the daughter of a small Ironmonger, John Jones; a God-fearing and serious man.

Reference (1): Psalm 130

#### CHAPTER 2

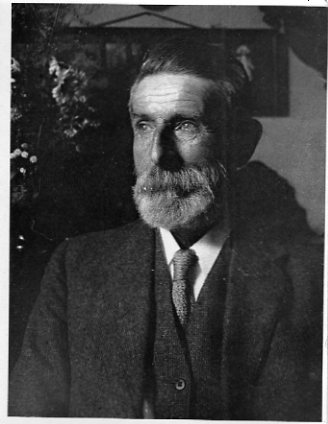
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#### SALFORD

The mass of the British Labouring Classes, during the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, worked long hours, usually from 6am to 6pm, throughout the six days of each working week. The Protestant Ethic, however, protected the labourers from total exploitation, by providing that the Seventh Day should remain sacred: a day of dedication to the service of The Lord. In addition, workers usually had a week’s holiday each year, in which they were free to enjoy themselves, as they saw fit. These holiday periods were known as “Wakes” in the mill Towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire. At such times, the local Mill would close, to enable maintenance to be carried-out on machinery. Lancashire workers would entrain in their hundreds, for such holiday resorts as Blackpool, Southport or Fleetwood. The more adventurous spirits might even venture to such mysterious and intriguing destinations as the Isle of Man or even as far as Scarborough, on the North-Yorkshire coast.

The Jones’ family, although privileged to some degree, in the sense that the father was self-employed, was still required to exercise a measure of self-discipline: the demands of trade insisting on the maintenance of proper standards. Thus the mother was kept busy in the shop, in addition to her household duties, whilst her husband occupied himself in his workshop, in the manufacture of furniture, both for personal use and for sale.

Below is a photo of Grandfather John Jones, aged about 82 yrs.



On Sundays, John permitted neither himself nor the members of his family any personal indulgence. This day was largely devoted to attendance at Mission Services, which were held morning, afternoon and evening. Fortunately, the chapel was conveniently close at hand. Much of the domestic work was completed on Saturdays, leaving the mother, Mary Jones (nee: Mason), free to devote Sundays, after Chapel, to the preparation of meals.

There were three older boys born to John and Mary, prior to Elizabeth,(b 1888): These were John, Frank and Harry. Five other children were born to the family after Lizzie Jones. These were, Mary Ann (l891 to 1894), Frederick (1894-l911), Thomas (1896) who lived only six weeks, William (1897-1961) and Harold in l901, the last of the brood. He died of a heart attack at age 60 years.

As Lizzie grew older, she began to find herself in the common position of many women, who grow up as a single girl in a family of boys. Much of the domestic work was thrust upon her, as well as the requirement to assist her parents in the shop. Her problems were compounded by the death of her mother in l910, which left Lizzie with a heavy burden of care for her father and brothers. She was a small woman, only 5ft 2” in height, with dark, almost black hair: rather plain features and an olive complexion. Being short-sighted, she wore pince-nez spectacles. In the drab working-class garments of pre-l914 England, she could not have been regarded as an attractive woman. There was little prospect of Lizzie making a successful match in the romantic stakes. I show a photo of Lizzie, with myself and Margery, aged approx. 4 yrs, below. The scene is the Western-end of Lord Duncan Street, outside the Hardware shop. Grandfather is also in the background:



The shop itself was of a genre that has now all but disappeared from the English business scene. The premises consisted of one room, about 15 feet square, into which was jammed a motley collection of Ironware, Earthenware, Crockery, Brushes, Mops, Screws, Nails etc., which made up the stock-in-trade of the Ironmonger. The entrance was by way of a door, set at an angle in the corner of the building, being the original entrance to the taproom, when the premises had been conducted as a Public House. A bell, fixed above the door and activated by a metal strip screwed to the door itself, proclaimed the presence of customers, whenever anyone came into the shop. On the window, fronting Lord Duncan Street, were inscribed in gold-leaf the words, “John Jones, Ironmonger”. During the hours of daylight, on either side of the door, were suspended pans and cooking utensils of various kinds. On the narrow glass panels of the door itself were pasted advertisements for Sankey’s Soap, Reckitt’s Blue, and other familiar laundry aids of Yester-year.

To the rear, a counter ran the length of the shop: behind which stood the person in attendance upon potential customers. Much of the trade was in Paraffin Oil (Kerosene), for which there was a great demand, before the widespread use of Gas or Electric Cooking and in things like tu’penny cups, clothes-pegs, etc.. There was not a great deal of money to be made in premises of this nature. The general penury of the neighbourhood also ensured that substantial profits were not to be garnered there.

Manchester was still growing, with long rows of cheap terraced cottages: spreading out two or three miles from the centre of the City. Eventually, its boundaries would merge with those of many of the smaller Lancashire and Cheshire towns, to form what, at that time, constituted the greatest concentration of population on Earth. Salford, itself, once the “Saxon Hundred” or “Wapentake” of Salford, had been mentioned in the Domesday Book of William the Conqueror, but was now reduced to the status of a mere satellite of Manchester.

This, then, is the background to our story: a background certainly drab and in many respects forbidding. However, it was an environment in which there flourished a great sense of Community: a desire on the part of a large proportion of the people to live in accordance with the Law and to do no harm to any man or woman. Superimposed upon the harsh physical realities of life, was the sure and certain conviction of the superintending influence of the “Divine”. This factor, more than any other, influenced the lives of rich and poor alike. It essentially proclaimed that “God” is the sole arbiter of human happiness and all things are subject to His control.

It mattered not that there were various religious denominations, all proclaiming that they held the key to Salvation. What was important was that people generally realized that they themselves were responsible for the consequences of their own conduct. Ideas might have varied, relative to the nature of the “future state”, if there is, indeed, to be such a thing. But the majority of people accepted the certainty of Divine Superintendence of the affairs of Mankind. This led to a greater sense of personal responsibility, in the awareness of the fact that our conduct is subject to the scrutiny of God: to whom we must all answer for the consequences of our own activity.

The population of Salford was composed of a people of diverse origin, mixing the remaining Celtic inhabitants of Lancashire with Saxons, Welsh, Scots and Irish, whose individual characteristics had combined to produce a person at once intelligent, contemplative, democratic, rough and humorous. Perhaps there was a nucleus of individuals, whose ancestors had tilled the soil of the Saxon Hundred of Salford, generations ago; but they must have been few in number. There were many people from Ireland: the overflow from Liverpool: drawn to Manchester by the prospect of employment in the Cotton Industry. Many, like John Jones, had come from the Welsh Border Country or from Wales itself, to seek a share of the prosperity now beckoning from the industrial North.

The common experience of poverty, in towns like Salford, drew people together, who would otherwise have kept to themselves. Whilst grouping into religious divisions became the norm, within each community there were people who were prepared to assist those who were less fortunate than themselves. The principle of “sharing” became established in the life of each neighbourhood. The Communal ties of the Mill, in which each person developed close, and scarcely comprehended, bonds with his or her fellows, led to a real sense of mutual interdependence. Individual families lived in close proximity to one another for generations and developed a relationship, more akin to the blood-tie than to merely social grouping. Thus, in spite of poverty, there were formed bonds of friendship surpassing by far the casual indifference of more comfortable souls who, in more prosperous circumstances, may, perhaps, condescend to nod their heads to their neighbours, from time to time. The people of Lancashire developed the capacity to care-for and consider their fellows. The easy-going and democratic notions of the Irish, found a fruitful soil in which to spread in Salford, resulting in a capacity for humour and good-fellowship, which is part of the make-up of the Salford man or woman or,indeed, of Lancashire people in general.

The musical influence of the Welsh produced Choirs and Choral Societies, which were well-supported in all the towns of Lancashire. Brass Bands were to be found in every town and were a common feature of open-air entertainment in the parklands of the North. This love of music is also, perhaps, part of the original Celtic legacy of Lancashire.

The Lancashireman may, in some respects, be a little too easy-going and good-humoured, but these are admirable traits. He is also a spendthrift and careless about money; in contrast to the Scandinavian Yorkshireman, just over the Pennines, who husbands his financial resources as carefully as the Scot.

#### CHAPTER 3

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#### LORD DUNCAN STREET

The premises occupied by Jones’ “Pot-shop”, as it was known colloquially, at some unknown time in the past had been converted from a Public House into two separate residences, one a dwelling-house and the other a shop. The latter had living-quarters at the rear and three bedrooms upstairs. Beneath the shop was a damp cellar, in which coals and non-corrodible items; earthenware and glassware, were stored. The shop was situated at the extreme end of a row of terraced cottages.

Lord Duncan Street was about three-hundred yards long and occupied, for most of its length, by residential dwellings: with two small grocery Off-Licenses situated about half-way down the street, one on each side. These shops provided foodstuffs, dairy produce, tobacco and ale to the inhabitants of the surrounding terraces.

Duncan Terrace was a short street of only a hundred yards in length, situated at right-angles to the western end of Lord Duncan Street. It contained a short row of, relatively large, terraced houses on the opposite side to the shop. Adjacent to this terrace, on the Southern end, there was also a three-storey, detached dwelling; originally erected for a Mill Manager. This house which fronted directly on to the end of Lord Duncan Street, was protected by a high wall and, for most of my childhood, remained vacant, although occasionally, mysterious tenants would occupy the house for a few months, before leaving, as quietly as they had appeared.

At the other end of the street, bordering on Cross Lane, a main thoroughfare, stood the Cross Lane Barracks and Parade-Ground. This was a fine Victorian structure containing much wonderful wrought-iron. On the other corner stood the Falcon Public House, an Art-Deco establishment, possessing no architectural and little other merit. Within Lord Duncan Street, itself, and about seventy-five yards from Cross Lane, stood a mysterious and, for respectable people, not-to-be-mentioned “Spiritualist Church”, which yet retained some semblance of its former glory as a Welsh Chapel. This building had been erected with loving devotion by the members of its original congregation. It was substantially built and contained massive mahogany furniture, in addition to a fine organ. The building also housed a stained glass window, donated by Emma Hardinge Britten, a well-known Victorian Spiritualist pioneer. For the whole of my childhood, the “nature” of this Chapel remained a mystery to us childen. Only when my father began to take an interest in Spiritualism did we discover what happened there.

No consideration was, evidently, given by the town planners of Salford to the architectural merit of either this building or the Cross Lane Barracks, in the post-war re-development of Salford. Both buildings should have been preserved for the benefit of posterity. Sadly, British people have little concept of what constitutes “architectural merit”. If a place is less than four hundred years old, it is not worth preserving. When I visited Salford in l979, the “Salford Centre for Spiritualism”, which replaced the old church, was a cheap, temporary building, situated near the junction of Cross Lane and Liverpool Street.

Running parallel with Lord Duncan Street, were similar streets, containing terraced dwellings. The buildings, externally, were drab and soot-begrimed. There was no evidence of the verdure which had clothed the district, prior to the coming of the factories and mills. The carriageway was invariably inlaid with rectangular “sets” of Millstone-Grit; a dark-grey, hard-wearing granite; abundant in the Pennine Hills. The footpaths were paved with slabs of the same material. Most of the streets of the North were constructed in this manner, resulting in a rough but serviceable roadway. This was adequate in the days of the horse and cart but hardly suitable for motor vehicles or even bicycles; as the “sets” had a tendency to settle into an uneven and irregular surface, which made cycling a nightmare.

The nearest Public Park, worthy of the name, was about half a mile distant. This was called “The Chimney-Pot Park”. It had once been a large water-supply reservoir but had been filled-in and converted into quite a pleasant garden, with flower beds, Bowling-green and Tennis Courts. Peel Park, was another open area, situated on The Crescent: a broad, curving thoroughfare, which takes its name from the curve of the River Irwell and is about half a mile from the Barracks. The Park is named after Sir Robert Peel. This gentleman, one-time Prime Minister and founder of the modern Police Force, had once owned a residence in The Crescent, at a time when Salford had been a more salubrious place in which to own property and to which Sir Robert could repair, when affairs of State demanded his presence in the North of England.

If one wished to visit a substantial parkland, the Buille-Hill Park was about a mile and a half from the Jones’ shop, to the Northwest. The effort expended in walking to Buille-Hill was rewarded by the prospect of extensive and well-maintained gardens, Bowling Greens, Tennis-Courts, Tropical Greenhouses, Floral Gardens and even, at a later stage, a mini-Golf-course. The Park also housed an extensive Natural History collection; displayed in the original Georgian mansion: a massive building of soot-blackened sandstone. There were large numbers of stuffed animals and birds of every description, including an elephant and a rhinoceros. The Park was a favourite place of resort for Salford people, particularly on pleasant Summer days, when the flower-beds produced an abundance of colour and perfume to delight the senses.

Standing on the grassy hillside, one could observe the pall of suffocating fog that clothed the streets below, and feel that here, at least, was a place in which nature was not totally annihilated and which revealed a glimpse of the beauties of the world beyond the gloomy streets and choking fumes of the town.

The natural-history collection is no more. The building now houses a Mining museum, including a realistic representation of an underground coalmine. See photo of Stuffed pit-pony hereunder:



For recreation, the workers of Salford, (there were no others residing here), might have recourse to one of the local Public-houses, of which there was an abundance. If, of a philosophical bent, they would, perhaps, attend one of the many active Church and Chapel organizations, dotted here and there throughout the District. It was well-known that Cross Lane, a notable thoroughfare, could boast a greater number of Public-houses in the half-mile of its length, than any other street throughout the whole breadth of England, aye, and, perhaps, Scotland, Wales and Ireland too, for that matter. Certainly, over the years the number of Public Houses was reduced progressively, as the smaller breweries were gradually absorbed by larger Companies. A walk along Cross Lane today, would find it a sad reflection of its former self: as the bulldozer has effected a massive transformation, not only of that august thoroughfare but of the whole City of Salford. The Salford known to the citizens of yesteryear has disappeared, together with most of its inhabitants.

The ladies of Lord Duncan Street considered themselves to be rather superior, in social status, to the tenants of certain nearby dwellings, as the former were, to a certain degree, rather house-proud. The Lord Duncan Street terraces had not themselves deteriorated markedly, as yet, presenting a tolerable appearance, when compared to some of the slum and tenement dwellings, scattered throughout other parts of Salford. None-the-less, to maintain even a small house in this part of England in anything approaching a clean condition, demanded constant activity.

The extent and nature of this working-class snobbery usually depended upon the size, age and condition of the various blocks of terraced houses. The possession of a private toilet would be considered to be an indication of superior status, whereas, those families forced to share their lavatory with other families, were in a decidedly inferior condition. Those citizens who were fortunate enough to dwell beyond the fringe of the terraces, further out from the city centre, would congratulate themselves upon their own improved physical and social condition. Thus the seeds of social and class divisions were evident, even at the lowliest stratum of English society. Salford, in common with many other towns, could be seen to be divided into roughly defined social districts: the dirtier slum areas being regarded contemptuously by those who occupied dwellings which, although jerry-built and of a poor standard, were maintained by the occupants in a relatively clean and tidy manner. Naturally, the personal standards of the individual were of crucial importance in setting these distinctions. Those who were content to live in filth and neglect their children became, self-evidently, the refuse of Society.

Such attitudes are remarkable, when one considers that Salford, at that time, was a place of which one would scarcely care to admit a connection. The “Royal Borough of Salford” was, in fact, a cesspool of human life; neglected and disregarded by affluent property-owners who, themselves living a privileged existence far, far away from these slums, had no thought for the underprivileged masses of humanity. In fact, much of this property was owned by the Crown and controlled by the Duchy of Lancaster. The Monarch avoided the towns of northern England, as indeed he (or she) well might; there being little regard for the interests of Kings amongst the working-class people of the North.

My mother’s brother, John Jones(Jr), was one of those who were, evidently, ashamed of their Salford origins. He was known in the Toc-H Movement as, “Seedley” Jones, rather than “Salford” Jones. (Seedley being a sub-district of Salford itself). Whilst there is nothing to commend Seedley to the attention of anyone, it was certainly a little more salubrious an environment than some of the worse districts, such as “Hankinson Place” (or “Hanky Park”), not so very far away from Seedley itself.

It is saddening to reflect, that class-consciousness still permeates the whole gamut of British Society. There does not appear to be any hope of a truly democratic Britain, so long as its people cling to such false and worn-out institutions. “Cast” perpetuates the “every man for himself” syndrome, in which nobody cares a damn about the lot of his fellows. To aspire to a better life; to escape from within the confines of one class-grouping to a higher stratum, constitutes a primary objective for many people. Such an attitude presupposes the inevitability of the class system and repudiates the principle of the fundamental equality of mankind. It results in the continued denial of one’s roots: in the severing of family ties: in the breakdown of those intimate bonds of love and affection which should be preserved, before all others, to the eternal shame of a Nation. It is the perpetuation of a corrupt and utterly false concept of the innate superiority of one group of persons over all others. Individual nobility is a matter of personal spirituality and can never be a question of place, birth or breeding.

Following the hard times subsequent to the First World War, the shop became increasingly insolvent, as people were often unable to pay for goods advanced on credit, without security. This situation prevailed until the commencement of the Second World War in September l939, when the combined effect of lack of funds, a shortage of Stock-in-Trade and the bombing of Manchester and Salford on Christmas-Eve l940, forced the closure of the premises.

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#### CHAPTER 4

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#### GEORGE ERNEST ROBERTS

George Roberts’ early history was interesting and may well be worth recording, so far as it is known. He was born in Singapore, at a time when it was an outpost of Empire. His mother was the daughter of a German Physician, Georg Seelhorst, a Widower. He was also a scientist and explorer and visited Borneo in this capacity. He took his family, which consisted of two sons, Theodore and Wilhelm and two daughters, Anna and her younger sister, Elizabeth, with him to Singapore.

Anna was a slightly built young woman of about twenty-three years of age, when she arrived in Singapore. She had light-brown hair, a delicately-moulded, slender face with grey eyes and a fair complexion. She was a sensitive, thoughtful girl; who spoke English, French and Italian, in addition to her native German.

At some time during her stay here, my grandmother met the Provost-Sergeant of the 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment, then stationed in Singapore. His name was Owen Roberts. Owen was a muscular and good-looking Londoner of Welsh parentage. He was of medium height, well-built, with dark hair and complexion. In keeping with the fashion of the period, he sported a heavy moustache. Smartly outfitted in red coat and striped trousers, he would have been the terror of all evil-doers, within the Ranks of the Regiment. My father used to say that, as “Provost Sergeant” he would have been: ‘the most hated man in the Regiment”.

Anna’s father, Georg Seelhorst, being, evidently, of a strict Teutonic temperament, did not welcome such a connection between his family and that of a penniless and ignorant British Sergeant. Seelhorst was a North-German, the family originally from Breslau, Silesia. He was Lutheran by persuasion and, evidently, jealous of his good name and that of his family. It seems that, notwithstanding the opposition of Georg Seelhorst, Owen went ahead with plans to marry Anna, who was Of Age and did not legally need her father’s consent to marry. Owen saw the Garrison Chaplain and arranged for the Banns to be published in St. Andrew’s Cathedral. A date was set for the wedding, on 14th April l894: the Service being performed by the Archdeacon and Military Chaplain, Mr. Pelham. The parties then repaired to the Vestry, where the appropriate entry was made in the Register. Georg Seelhorst duly signed the register, as witness to his daughter’s marriage. To this extent, he may have become reconciled to his daughter’s marriage.

Owen took his bride into Married Quarters, which he had prepared for the reception of his wife. There was a female Malay servant to assist Anna in her domestic duties. Thereafter, regimental life continued as before, with Anna making the necessary adjustments to her lifestyle. Georg Seelhorst appears to have made clear to Anna that, having declined to accept his guidance in regard to her marriage, he would not accept any future responsibility for her. Eleven months after her marriage, Anna gave birth to a Son, who was destined to become my father. This son, named George Ernest, was born on 7th March 1895 and, thereafter, baptised into the Anglican Communion in the Garrison Chapel.

The Roberts’ family returned to England on 31 Jan 96, at the conclusion of the Regiment’s tour of duty in the Colony, arriving in England a month later. Presumably, the family would have been allocated Married Quarters at Aldershot; at which military base his Regiment was then stationed. When George was two years old, his mother gave birth to another Son, Edward Herbert, known later as “Ted”.

In the Autumn of 1897, Anna received news that her father was seriously ill in the Colony. She sold her jewellery to raise funds and travelled with her two small sons to Singapore. The vessel was the “Tamba Maru” a new Japanese vessel, which sailed on 26 November l897. After her father’s death and funeral, Anna returned to England, leaving Wilhelm to settle their father’s estate. Theodore had obtained an appointment as a Plantation Manager in Borneo, where he died some years later. Elizabeth married and returned to Europe to reside with her husband in Holland. Unbeknown to my father, his Aunt Elizabeth later spent many years in England. However, there was no contact of any kind between the boys and their Aunt, during this period.

(A snap of Anna, George and Edward, taken circa l899 - My father is the elder of the two boys):



#### CHAPTER 5

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#### THE RETURN

On returning to England, Anna discovered that her husband, who had been discharged from the Army, on completion of his 12-years Service, had disappeared. Anna would, no doubt, have written to her husband, informing him of the expected date of her return to Southampton. She was now compelled to seek employment in the Aldershot district, in order to maintain herself and her children. As a foreigner she was, perhaps, under an even greater handicap than an Englishwoman would have been under similar circumstances. There was no question of her returning to Germany, as there were no close relatives with whom she would have been able to secure accommodation. There were relatives of her husband living in London but it is not known whether they gave her any assistance at all. In fact my father knew nothing of his mother’s life at this time.

Although well-educated, Anna must have had no other English friends, who might have been able to assist her to obtain suitable employment. At a time when the “Workhouse” was the only available facility for the poor, that was the ultimate degradation and to be avoided at all costs. Evidently, Anna had no experience in business or trade of any description. She would, probably, have only been able to obtain domestic work, at a low rate of pay: sufficient to barely maintain herself and the two boys. Nor had she ever been obliged to undertake hard physical work. My father informed me that his mother contracted a chill, which developed into Pneumonia, from which she later died, in the Workhouse at Hartley-Windley: leaving himself at age 5 years, and Edward, 2 years, to be raised as Orphans. The date was February l900.

A surviving photograph, printed upon a silk handkerchief, reveals Anna as a handsome, slender young woman, with delicate features and clear, sensitive eyes. She left a number of small personal items, which were subsequently passed-on to the boys. Amongst these were a note-book, inscribed in her own hand, with poetry in several languages and three or four bronze medals, commemorating International Exhibitions in which her father had participated. This was the sum total of her effects. One of the poems was in English, as follows:

### “WHEN MIDST THE GAY

“When midst the gay, I meet  
 that gentle smile of thine.  
 Tho’ still on me it turns most sweet,  
 I scarce can call it mine.  
 But when to me, alone,  
 your secret tears you show.  
 Oh! then I feel those tears my own  
 and claim them, as they flow.  
 Then still with bright looks, blest:   
 The cold, the gay, the free.  
 Give smiles to those who love thee less;  
 but keep your tears for me!

The snow on Thora’s cheek  
 Can smile with many a beam  
 Yet still in depths of coldness sleep  
 How bright so’er it seem.  
 But when some deep-felt ray  
 Whose touch is fire appears,  
 Oh! show: the smile is warmed away  
 and, melting, turns to tears.  
 Then still with bright looks blest:  
 the cold, the gay, the free.  
 Give smiles to those who love thee less;  
 but keep your tears for me.”

( Author unknown. )

I enter here a snap of Owen Roberts, taken in Singapore, when he was a Sergeant in the British Army: (He is the person lying on the right-hand side of the picture):



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Following their mother’s death, the German Authorities endeavoured to obtain custody of the children. This claim was rejected by Britain, on the basis that they were British Subjects: potential cannon-fodder for British, rather than German armies. Had the German claim succeeded, George might well have been fighting on the other side in World War I. In that event it is certain that he would not have fathered myself and siblings, nor, in all probability, would he have survived the wholesale slaughter that ensued. In justice to my grandfather, Owen Roberts, it must be admitted that the children learned nothing of their father’s failure to support their mother or themselves, on their return to England. His Army History of “drunkenness” would not induce feelings of confidence in relation to this evident lapse of any basic regard for his matrimonial or parental obligations. The consequences were tragic, indeed!

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#### CHAPTER 6

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#### HAWARDEN

The now destitute children were placed in the Orphanage at Hawarden, in Flintshire, North Wales. This establishment was conducted by Lady Gladstone: the Widow of the former Prime Minister, William E. Gladstone: in the grounds of Hawarden Castle. Here, they were cared for and educated by people who were devoted to their employer and to the boys in their charge. Hawarden castle is situated in a charming rural environment. Lady Gladstone herself took a personal interest in the welfare of each child, ensuring that, although lacking the love of their parents, they at least were properly fed, clothed, housed and received a basic education. Considering the condition of many Orphanages in Britain, at that time, the brothers were fortunate to be placed in this establishment.

George and Ted remained at Hawarden until they were of sufficient age to enter the “Duke of York’s” School at Chelsea: an establishment maintained by the authorities for the reception of the sons of deceased soldiers. Owen had, evidently, died, subsequent to his Army Service, although the boys never discovered the circumstances surrounding their father’s death. Later investigations suggest that he returned to the East Indies, where he came to an untimely end, in Borneo.

Many years later, I visited the home of an aged Edwardian lady at Prestatyn, North Wales, during the Second World War, whilst on a cycling holiday with my father. This lady’s name was “Miss Peters”, who had conducted the school at Hawarden and was revered by the children she had loved and cared-for, during her years at that establishment. Even though now a very old lady, she still regarded them as, “Her Boys”. I dimly recall this tall and stately lady, elegantly dressed in the Edwardian style, with full-length skirt and high collar. She affirmed that she still had some contact with her surviving former pupils.

It was during this same cycling holiday, that we had earlier visited the home of Mr.Stokes, who kept a small shop and Post Office in the village of Blackeley, not far from Hawarden. Mr. Stokes himself was an old gentleman at this time. A former inmate of the Orphanage, he had been employed there as a handyman for many years. This man had suffered the appalling tragedy of losing his three sons, killed in the Great War: one of the many sacrifices made, at that time, to human pride and lust for power.

My father also showed me the Hawarden Orphanage buildings, which are still standing in the grounds of the Castle. A short distance from the Gate he pointed out a fresh-water spring, which the Orphanage Boys had called “The Rushy Spring”. In l979, I again visited Hawarden, with my wife and two youngest children, Ted and Margaret, but was unable to locate the Spring.

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#### CHAPTER 7

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#### SONS OF THE BRAVE

My father had told me the story of his adventure, leaping from the first floor windows of the Chelsea, Duke of York’s School buildings. For a wager of a few pence and as an act of bravado, my father jumped from a window, clearing the entry railings, some feet from the base of the wall. The railings presented a formidable barrier to persons attempting unlawful entry to the premises. Good-fortune was, partially, with him on this occasion. He managed to clear the railing but, in landing, fractured both ankles. As a result of this exploit, he obtained the nickname of “Mad Roberts!” Some time later, Kaiser Wilhelm the Second, of Germany, was to attend the school, during a State Visit. Amongst the entertainments provided for His Majesty, it was determined that Tennyson’s poem, “The Charge of the Light Brigade”, would be read by one of the boys. This was undoubtedly considered to be a great honour. My father was chosen for this distinction. On the appointed day, with the whole School on Parade, George, no doubt, looking very smart in a new uniform, marched out and stood to attention before the Kaiser and his accompanying dignitaries. He showed no trepidation and was confident of his ability to recite this stirring, albeit militarist, poem. Total silence reigned, as his clear, juvenile voice rang out across the Parade Ground:

“Half a league, half a league,  
 Half a league onward,  
 All in the valley of Death  
 Rode the six hundred   
 “Forward, the Light Brigade!  
 Charge for the Guns!” he said;  
 Into the valley of Death  
 Rode the six hundred.”

In l909, George, then a Soldier-Boy aged 14 years, was posted to a Regiment in Ireland. Being a strong-willed, boisterous youth, he fell into disfavour with his Company Sergeant over a minor prank. The latter promised to make life difficult for him. George understood that a good relationship with his senior NCO’s was vital, if he was to have any satisfaction from Army life. He, therefore, decided that there was no future for him, as a Soldier.

The following evening he deserted and travelled to Dublin, where he was befriended by a French lady and her husband, who assisted him to get to England. On arrival in Lancashire, he made his way to Salford, finding work at the local, CWS sugar mill. He took lodgings in the home of a Mrs. Pownall, an aged Widow, who lived in Hodge Lane, Salford. This lady was still alive when I was a child and I recall visiting her tiny terraced cottage now and again, during my early years.

Upon the outbreak of War in 1914, George, then a mature l9-year-old, enlisted immediately under the assumed name of Ernest Rawlings. Within two weeks he was promoted to the rank of Corporal. (His previous Army training must have become evident to his superiors.) Throughout the war he remained in the British Isles, most of the time being spent as a Physical Training Instructor at Aldershot. During the Irish “Rebellion” of l916 he was posted to Dublin, but, so far as I am aware, managed to avoid direct involvement in the bloody conflicts of the time. On discharge from the Army in l9l9, he returned to Salford and, five years later, married Elizabeth Jones.

CHAPTER 8

LIZZIE ROBERTS

Elizabeth Roberts plays a short but important part in our subsequent story, for she was my mother. She was of a robust but not heavy build. Dressed in the drab and shapeless fashion of the day, she was not a beautiful woman. In her later years she would not have turned the head of any man.

My mother spent the whole of her short life in and around the City of Salford. Her social life centred upon the Lee’s Mission; conducted by a dissenting Calvinist, James Lees. I understand that this Mission is active and flourishing, even to the present day. Grandfather Jones participated in the establishment and maintenance of the Chapel and his children all attended services regularly. The Mission building was situated in Shah Street, fronting on to Hodge Lane. It was usually referred-to as the “Lee’s Mission!” The doctrines inculcated at the Chapel Services embraced the familiar Calvinist ideas of Death, Hellfire and Damnation; Justification by Faith; Pre-destination and Election, etc.. The members of the Mission held strong views on the evils of drink: views which were amply justified by the evidence of the harm caused in the Community, by excessive indulgence in alcohol.

With the loss of so many young men in the Great War, Lizzie’s chances of matrimony were slender indeed. However, George Roberts had survived the War and returned to Salford, bent on re-establishing himself in the town. He once more lodged with Mrs. Pownall and attended the Lees Mission. Although my father had been raised as an Anglican, he felt no particular loyalty to that persuasion and enjoyed the intense social life of the Mission, of which he was by no means a prominent member. My grandfather was an Elder of the Chapel: to which he devoted much of his time and resources.

In l924 Dad was 29 years of age and my mother, 36 yrs. She was well and truly “on the shelf”, with little hope of finding a steady and reliable husband. George, however, was lonely. He was five feet eight inches in height, fair-haired and grey eyed. He was a smart, good-looking and serious young man. His only living relative, so far as he was aware, was his brother, Edward (Ted), with whom he had little contact and who had left England, for a life in the Indian Army Service. Since leaving the Army in l919, George had worked at the Sugar Factory and also repaired boots and shoes on a part-time basis, having been taught this trade in the Army

My father told me, many years later, there was not the rapture of young love in his relationship with my mother; more a need for companionship and security. However, he was a steady, reliable young man, not prone to the excesses of youth: never went a-whoring. Although a smoker, he was not a heavy drinker and, in fact, rarely took a glass of ale or spirits, both of which were frowned upon in Mission circles. My mother, although unprepossessing in appearance was, like many persons in a similar position, a deeply passionate woman: desperate to fulfil the role of wife and mother. She was loving and needed to be loved. She was also one of a generation of women whose chances of matrimony had been reduced by the massive blood-letting of the Great War, in which a million British lads were butchered.

The marriage took place in July 1924, at the Mission. A large number of relatives and friends attending the wedding, following which my parents took the train to Whalley for their Honeymoon. They stayed for a week at “The Abbey” Guest House. (Photo of Mother with “Prince).



#### CHAPTER 9

#### SELF

My sister, Margery and I arrived in this world on the 3rd January l929. It was not an auspicious time. The economic collapse of November of that year did nothing to improve the already poverty-stricken condition of the British working classes. The masses of the poor of England had known extreme poverty during the years before the Great War and subsequent to the Armistice of l918: nor was the scene into which we were projected, in the usual inconvenient manner, one to gratify the eye of any member of that privileged and educated minority, who have the management of things.

I was born in the bedroom of the tiny Ironmonger’s shop, conducted for many years by my maternal grandparents, amid the slums of Salford. Salford was renowned for the foul and overcrowded conditions under which the majority of its inhabitants were obliged to exist: penned, as they mostly were, in long rows of dirty terraced dwellings, that provided the minimum in shelter or comfort. A hundred years of uncontrolled industrial pollution; combined with the smoke from thousands of domestic fires, had coated the district of Greater Manchester with soot and filth; presenting constant problems for the conscientious housewife, who was called-upon daily to try to maintain a decent home in such a place. In spite of these handicaps: most Lancashire womenfolk held personal standards of the highest order. Sadly, there was an almost total absence of those necessary domestic facilities, which today we take so much for granted.

I had one older brother, George, who was born on the 19th April 1926. I was followed immediately, by a sister, upon whom was bestowed the name of Margery. Our mother was exhausted by the confinement and spent a week in bed, recovering her strength. This was less than recommended by Dr. Meyer, the attending physician, who advised at least two weeks’ complete rest for the mother.

Our arrival brought with it increasing difficulty for Mother, who was called-upon to act in the triple capacity of wife, housekeeper and shop assistant. Like all working-class women, she worked hard; cooking, washing and ironing clothing and trying to keep the shop in a decent condition. We three children were a heavy burden. Nobody, who has not experienced washing, scrubbing and boiling nappies, in the old way, can appreciate the amount of labour and discomfort, involved. After rinsing in, usually, bitterly cold water, came the hardest task of all, operating a hand-mangle for a half-hour or so. Being already at an age when most women had ceased producing offspring, (she was 40 years), the strain of child-bearing and constant work, weakened her physically. There were few years remaining to her in this life.

(Below Margery and myself – aged 4yrs?)



#### CHAPTER 10

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#### LEES’ MISSION

The Lees’ Mission held regular outdoor Services as part of its work in the Community. The Services included hymn-singing, accompanied by a wheezy portable harmonium, extemporary prayers and preaching. That these meetings were effective, was evident from the large number of persons who regularly attended the meetings at the Mission. Church Missions were necessary to restrain the proliferation of vice in the cities. Whatever the nature of the doctrines expounded at the Chapels, the results of such a ministry could only be of benefit to the people.

On Whit-Sundays, a Grand Procession of Faith was held by the Mission through the streets of Salford; in which the little-girls wore white and everyone else donned their “Sunday-best”. The Band, with the Boys’ Brigade, marched ahead, followed by the remainder of the faithful. It was a “Drum and Fife” Band and always made a great effort on such occasions. The smaller members had either Cymbals or Triangles, which they struck in unison with the rest of the Band, with great enthusiasm. At the head of the Band marched the Drum-Major, replete with silver-plated staff, which he twirled around his head, with style; occasionally flinging it into the air; whence, after turning end-over-end, once or twice, it would return under the influence of gravity, to be miraculously recovered by the Drum-Major, who grasped it firmly, as it descended from on high. This display of skill greatly impressed the onlookers and particularly the junior spectators. A large embroidered banner, proclaiming the identity of the marchers as members of the “Lees’ Mission Independent Chapel”, was carried behind the Band and followed by the senior members of the Congregation. As many as two-hundred people would march in this procession.

At Pentecost, of course, all the various denominations paraded in this manner, to celebrate the “giving of the Spirit”.

The founder of the Mission, Mr. James Lees was an impressive old man. I dimly remember him as tall, well-built and with a mass of thick, white hair. He was a charismatic figure and a powerful preacher. I recall nothing, in later years, of the specific doctrines of the Leader, although the Devil undoubtedly figured largely in all his pronouncements. The Calvinist seeds sown by the founder found fertile soil in the hearts of his flock.

In addition to its religious functions, the Mission organized Social and other activities, including Bachelors’ and Spinsters’ groups, which held concerts from time to time. There were Picnics to places of resort in the surrounding countryside; Camping for the Band and Boys’ Brigade.

I remember one picnic, when I was a very small child, when we took a train to Greenfields, a mining village on the outskirts of Stockport, in Cheshire. There were the usual games and sports and, in addition, several children, including myself, during a lull in the proceedings, visited the powerhouse of the nearby coal mine. We were astonished at the sight of the huge and beautifully maintained steam-engine, which powered the mining machinery.

Very popular were the “Tatie-Pie Suppers” which were arranged, usually in conjunction with other evening activities. The ladies prepared large brown dishes of beef and potato, covered with a wonderful thick pastry. The Mission pies threw off a most enticing, if worldly, aroma of steak and gravy and never disappointed the palate, in the final analysis. Mission Teas were universally held to be excellent; providing Ham and Corned-Beef Salad, Cakes, Fruit-salad and Cream and lots of other good things; to which we children looked forward with unmitigated pleasure.

The tiny members of the congregation were also called-upon to play their part in Concerts. On one occasion I was to play “Little Boy Blue”: dressed-up in a silk-suit and hat and required to recite the traditional Nursery Rhyme. I had practised my lines and was word-perfect. However, at the last minute I decided that the suit was too effeminate and declined to wear it. When the blue satin and lace were produced before me, I was horrified. It was an affront to my masculinity. “I am not going to put that on!” I cried. “It is too cissy!” This was behind the stage and about a half-hour before my cue. My mother said, “Come John! You will look very smart in the suit, which is a real little boy’s suit - look at the trousers”. I was adamant, “No, I won’t wear that.” There was much persuading and cajoling on the part of my mother and other Concert officials. To no avail! I stubbornly refused to wear the offending garments. It was only after my friend, Alan Morgan, agreed to substitute, that I relented and decided that I would go on stage, after all. Alan had, by now, already donned the knickerbockers, evidently unaffected by any sense of shame, in dressing thus. He chivalrously agreed to relinquish the role to me and undressed once more. I felt extremely self-conscious as I recited my piece:

“Little boy Blue, come blow your horn,   
 the Cows in the meadow, the sheep in the corn.  
 Where is the boy who looks after the sheep?   
 He’s in the haystack, fast asleep”.

The ordeal over, I was anxious to shed the satin trappings of effeminacy.

#### CHAPTER 11

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#### HODGE LANE WASH-HOUSE

Alan Morgan was the son of the Caretaker-Manager of the Hodge-Lane Washhouse. This was a large edifice, adjoining the Mission property and separated from it by a scrap-yard, in which all sorts of miscellaneous junk was stored. Mr. and Mrs. Morgan occupied a comfortable flat on the roof of the building. To me, it was a wonderful and luxurious residence. The Manager was also fortunate to have the use of a large open space at the rear of the washhouse, in which he grew fruit and vegetables. He had also built a small greenhouse, for growing tomatoes.

The Washhouse provided both bathing and laundry facilities for the people of the surrounding district. The baths were similar to domestic baths but were larger and had a dressing-room at each end. The attendant’s task was to clean and fill the bath with eight inches or so of hot water and, on busy days, to allow no more than fifteen minutes for one to finish scrubbing-up. After each customer had left the bathroom, he took a large tin of cleaning powder, into which he dipped a heavy cotton cloth. Then, with two or three deft sweeps of his hand, any scum remaining on the sides of the bath was removed. A quick rinse and the heavy-duty taps were turned-on for the next incumbent. A sudden rush of hot water filled the oversize bath in no time at all.

On quiet days, the bather could linger indefinitely, in the deep, warm water. When ordered out, the bath would be prepared for the next incumbent, whilst one dried and dressed at leisure.

The laundry facilities were located in a large, open area and were, originally, confined to the provision of tubs, scrubbers and boilers. The washing still had to be done by hand. When rinsing was completed, the clothing was mechanically mangled (such a blessing was this facility) and hung on drying racks: which pulled-out about ten feet from the wall, on rollers. When loaded with wet clothing, the rack was pushed into place. A blast of hot air, from the Boiler-House, ensured rapid drying of the clothes.

After World War II, industrial-type, modern washing machines were installed and were always in great demand. In fact, people had to book their washing period, from week to week, to ensure that they would be able to have the use of a machine. This was a great leap-forward and many people would push their old perambulators a considerable distance, loaded to the top with dirty washing, to take advantage of these modern facilities.

Of course, as copper-boilers in private houses gave way to washing machines, the drudgery of scrubbing, boiling and mangling laundry by hand was eased and the Public Wash Baths began to experience a decline.

Alan Morgan and I were good friends and I often visited the Wash-house. Naturally, Alan’s father did not encourage small boys to play in the building, as there was dangerous steam-driven machinery, with rubber belting which drove the mangles, used to remove excess water from clothing. Still, occasionally we boys would sneak past the observant Mr. Morgan and spend a few minutes in watching the washer-women at their heavy tasks or inspecting the wonderful steam-engine and boilers, which provided the power for the Wash-house. As we wandered through the laundry area, the women and girls would joke with us: glad of an opportunity to forget for a moment the steamy drudgery of their lives.

Sadly, the Washhouse is no more: having given way to the Motorway, which has swept all this away. Nothing now remains of this place and the nearby streets, which once pulsated with the life of the struggling but, generally, happy people of Salford. It is now Tarmacadam. The highway is bounded by a broad shrubbery: planted to provide some relief to the remaining inhabitants, from the noise of speeding traffic.

#### CHAPTER 12

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#### MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD

Such then was the background to life in this part of Salford. It must be stressed that other cultural groups in the Community, the Anglican, Catholic and Methodist Church bodies, each with its own distinct mores, played a part in the grand parade of life. In addition to the Churches, there were, of course, those varied lay organizations, established for the benefit of the Community as a whole and which helped to mould the character of its Citizenry.

Childhood recollections are valuable to us as they revive memories of past days, which can never be repeated. During the course of a lifetime there is so much change and this is particularly true in the case of the 20th Century, during which the technical revolution has had overwhelming consequences for everyone.

I remember very little of my early childhood. Once, we had been taken to Fleetwood for the day and I became separated from the other members of the family. I cannot have been more than three or four years of age. A little boy lost! I recall the relief of both myself and my mother, upon being reunited on the Railway Station Platform. I was later told of the distress and confusion, which my absence had created, and as a result of which, the family had missed the train home.

On another occasion, we left for a holiday in Wales, intending to stay at Mold for a week. Margery and I climbed up into the rear seat of our father’s (huge) Austin 7 motor-car (1926 vintage) and went to sleep during the journey from Salford. On awaking at Mold, I could observe no seaside and voiced my firm objections to taking a holiday at that place. After howling for a time, I was placated, firstly, by the meal of Welsh lamb, new-potatoes and green garden-peas, served by the Boarding-house proprietors: which I can still visualize in its wondrous aroma and flavour. (Oh! indeed! there is nothing in this wide world so delicious as such a meal, in such a place!) and, secondly, by the real pleasure of visiting a farmyard, in which a sow and piglets were on view.

Following a walk through the fields, I began to feel reassured about this holiday. In any event, a day or so later, we did visit the seaside at Rhyl, thereby fully consummating the holiday, so far as I was concerned.

I was an anxious child and often had terrifying dreams. One,recurring dream, was of columns of coloured lights, which marched relentlessly onwards, curving here and there, and which had neither beginning nor end. It seemed as if these winding, multicoloured spots were always there to disturb my rest, although they were not, in themselves frightening. Another recurring dream, which really frightened me, involved me in a sensation of personal expansion, as if I was about to take off and drift away from life. This dream returned to me even in later life, when I had forgotten about my childhood dreams, almost as an echo of those childhood experiences.

Lying a-bed one night in the front-room above the shop, the light from the street gas-lamp, which hung from a bracket on the corner of the house, shone into the bedroom; casting light and shade upon the walls and ceiling. A car with lighted headlights drove along Shah Street. I heard the acceleration of the engine, as the car approached the house. The car lights created moving shadows, which passed across the room, as the vehicle drove around the corner and away. I thought about the driver of the car and wondered what his errand might be, necessitating the passing of the corner, at this time. The sound of the motor gradually faded away into the night. These moving shadows and car sounds were a feature of the main bedroom of the house. If lying awake, my imagination converted the images into childish, visionary scenes.

Later childhood memories relate to my first attendance at school at the age of four years. The West-Liverpool Street Infant’s School is, alas, no-longer extant. The building fronted directly on to the street and was, externally, dirty and drab, containing about six classrooms. Entry was through a tiny play-ground, bounded by a high brick wall. My life-long interest in the fair sex commenced at this establishment and for some time I was a happy man, in the company of a young-lady who was seated by my side. She was a pretty, dark-haired child. My lasting memory of my Infant years was of parading hand-in-hand with my friend in the tiny yard. Margery also attended this Kindergarten and I have a surviving photo of Margery and myself, taken in the Infants’ school yard.

From this establishment, in due course, I graduated to the Primary School, a somewhat larger but still dark and sombre building, presided over by Mr. Murdoch: a Scot. This school was situated West of the Recreation Ground, in Liverpool Street: about two hundred yards from the Infant’s School. Mr. Murdoch was competent and severe; yet endowed with the gift of wisdom and the capacity to teach. “Jock” was rumoured to have a partiality for a dram or two; which would not have been surprising in a Scot, although I never personally observed any untoward conduct on the part of the Headmaster, in this regard.

I was a good scholar, at this stage in my career, and usually managed to compete for the Class-leadership with one or two of the other more intelligent children in the Class, amongst whom were my friends Alan Morgan and Harry Smith. The latter was the only child of a couple who lived nearby, in Shah Street. The father was a hard-working labouring man, who worked in some mysterious capacity for the Salford Council. He was a short, stocky man: very steady and reliable. He looked after his wife and child; devoting all his resources to their well-being. Mrs. Smith was a frail and delicate lady, who doted upon her child.

Both Harry and Alan eventually went on to the Grammar School and did well in their subsequent careers. As for me, sadly, my early promise was not realized in later years.

I did manage to shine in a literal sense, on one occasion in Primary school. My father, being an ex-Army man, inculcated in his children the need for tidiness, amongst which was the daily necessity for boot-polishing. The result was that I usually had a brightly shining pair of boots at school. One morning, Mr.Murdoch, addressing the scholars in the school-yard, summoned me to the front of the assembly. “Come out here, Roberts.....: yes, you lad!” I was alarmed and apprehensive, as Mr. Murdoch was renowned regarding his ability with the cane.

“Yes, Sir!” I shouted, running to the front of the assembled multitude. “Turn around and stand still.” (Indicating that I should face the gathering.) To my astonishment and relief, the Headmaster now pointed with his cane to my polished boots. “Can you all see these boots? Tomorrow morning, I want to see everyone’s boots shining like that”. I was both relieved and pleased to think that I had scored a point in my favour, for a change. “Go back to your place, now boy!” I scurried back to my class line.

Murdoch could hardly have appreciated the heartbreak, lurking beneath those shiny boots. On several occasions they had been presented for inspection and been rejected, for further processing, before finally being given the imprimatur of parental approval.

As a small child, I was to be lined-up one day in l935, with a host of other children, to be permitted the privilege of viewing “Their Majesties” as they drove down Broad Street, Salford, in a Rolls-Royce, on the occasion of a Silver Jubilee. We children were also presented with drinking-mugs and small flags, which we enthusiastically waved at Their Majesties, as they rode graciously by: actually condescending to wave to the assembled multitude.

#### Chapter 13

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#### THE COBBLER

My father was a Cobbler by trade; having been inducted into the mysteries of this calling whilst an Apprentice in the British Army. He pursued his occupation from a room at the rear of the shop. The workshop had a shutter, which opened out on to the side street, Duncan Terrace.

Customers could leave their worn footwear or collect their repaired boots and shoes by calling at the workshop, rather than the shop itself. Repairing boots was hard toil for the Cobbler and gave little return. During the 30’s, the charge to “Sole and Heel” a pair of boots or shoes was two-shillings and sixpence. Of this sum, the cost of leather to the Cobbler averaged two-shillings. For the considerable effort of repairing a pair of boots, the tradesman received sixpence.

As I grew-up, I spent many hours, after school or on Saturday mornings, watching father’s strong and practised hands as they worked the leather. After being cut to size, the new leather soles were soaked for a while in water to soften; after which they were put through a machine; rather like a mangle, which shaped the leather into the correct and slightly concave shape to fit the boots or shoes. After removing the old sole and heel, the Cobbler then trimmed the inner-sole and placed the new leather into position. Sometimes, he would use nails to secure the leather in place: taking a mouthful of nails and with the aid of a rasp, quickly and accurately knocking the nails into position: finishing-off with a good hammering. The new sole was then trimmed, waxed and dyed.

Prior to stitching a sole by hand, Dad first made his own linen thread. He stretched two or three strands across the workshop and twisted them together. This he sealed with Beeswax, to make a strong and waterproof cord. At each end of this length of cord he attached a boar’s bristle, for use as a needle, also using Beeswax for this purpose. He then scored the edge of the new sole, so that the stitches would not be immediately exposed to wear. He now stitched the soles into position, using an awl to pierce the leather and inner-sole. The replacement of heels was much simpler but also required a measure of skill, as badly worn heels needed to be built-up with leather inserts. If done incorrectly, the result was an eyesore: reflecting upon the skills of the workman.

George Roberts, as Cobblers often are, was somewhat of a philosopher. The long hours spent in repetitive toil, left his mind free to ruminate on the condition of the world. In his evening leisure hours he occasionally penned a little poetry and also gave expression to his ideas in literary form in a small way. His native intelligence would force its way to the surface of the clogging, repressive world in which he was obliged to spend his days. His mind refused to remain trapped amid the mundane tackle of his workshop: soaring to the heights of the sublime, as he pondered the mysteries of life.

#### Chapter 14

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#### BRADBURY’S OFF-LICENCE

During the first nine years of my existence, our Maternal Grandfather, John Jones, lived with us. He was by now a quiet and dignified old gentleman, contented with what life had afforded to him. In his 80’s he exhibited the slim physique of old people generally. He still possessed a shock of thick grey hair and a beard, heavily contaminated with Tobacco and Tea-stains. The periodic ritual of kissing Grandad “goodnight” or “goodbye” was distasteful to me, on this account. At this stage of his life, the old man was not active, except perhaps when disturbed by some antics of my own, which led to my being chased around the kitchen-table by the old man.

Grandfather smoked “Bruno Flake” Tobacco, produced by the Wills Company. This was five-pence halfpenny for a half-ounce. When Grandad wished to buy tobacco, the task of going to the shop usually fell to either myself or Margery. The lucky recipient of the sixpence would walk across to Bradbury’s shop, to purchase same; usually with permission to spend the halfpenny on sweets. Naturally, there was keen competition for the honour of going on Granddad’s errands, as the resultant purchases were not always shared between us. It must be confessed, that I was often untruthful, when claiming that it was my turn to go to the shop for Granddad’s tobacco; with the result that Margery justifiably complained that I was telling lies. Sometimes, Grandfather himself would do his own shopping, which was a disappointment to us both.

The shop was only about 75 yards away, on the corner of Shah Street and Hodge Lane. Half a minute after leaving home, I opened the shop-door: the tinkling of the bell announcing my presence. At first there was a momentarily lull, then the sound of footsteps was heard; which heralded the arrival of John Bradbury, the grown-up son of the proprietor. He was an adult, perhaps 35 years of age at this time: of extremely thin build: his face long and pale: the eyes large, soft and languid. John was emaciated; as though malnourished. It was evident that he was seriously handicapped, as he walked with a short, shuffling gait and took a long time to reach the counter, at which I was standing: looking up with awe and apprehension at the suffering man. John now said something to me but, as his speech was incomprehensible, I merely replied, “A half-ounce of Bruno Flake, please John”; placing the sixpence on the counter. John again said something, but as he spoke, it was evident that he was suffering from some form of facial, as well as physical paralysis, as he was quite unable to speak clearly. I was used to this and merely stared at him, not without a sense of compassion for his condition.

John now slowly turned to weigh out the tobacco, which he took from a large tin of Bruno Flake: a task which took him some time, as he had the greatest difficulty in selecting the individual layers of tobacco. These he placed on a sheet of tissue-paper on the scales: laboriously, one by one. When the half-ounce had been weighed, John slowly wrapped the tobacco, placed it in a paper bag and turned towards me. Something now happened to cause him to lose his balance and he rolled, slowly and inevitably, on to his back; still clutching the paper bag containing the tobacco. He went down with a peculiarly graceful manner and there was a distinct “thump” as his head struck the floor: although he did not appear to come to any harm.

(In fact, John Bradbury was reported to suffer from “Sleeping Sickness”, a mysterious disease, prevalent at that time. It was evident to me that the man was gravely handicapped, although his disability did not prevent him from serving in the shop.)

Mr Bradbury, Senior, who had been working in the cellar, now appeared at the top of the cellar steps. Seeing his son in this familiar position, he took him by the hand and with a swift jerk, drew him to an upright position, whence John went on with the task of serving me, as though nothing untoward had happened. This procedure took a little while, but as I was the only customer at that moment, it did not matter.

Mr. Bradbury was a dapper little man, about the late middle-age, plump and round. He sported a smartly-waxed moustache; of which he was very proud and which he twisted with great ceremony to a perfect point. He was red-faced, with an apoplectic tendency. Mr.Bradbury had rather a choleric disposition and I rarely saw him smile.

John now gave me the ha’penny change, and I said to John, “A hap’orth of “Dolly Mixture”, please, John.” These being also slowly weighed and placed in a paper bag, I paid my ha’penny and said, “Cheerio!” As I left the shop, John grunted something, which I took to be a salutation.

One might have suspected that potential customers would have been discouraged from visiting the premises by the peculiar medical condition suffered by John Bradbury. However, local people were used to him and were prepared to be patient, whilst he tended to their needs. His tendency to fall backwards, which threatened to crack his skull on the shelving, was alarming for new customers, but he never seemed to suffer injury from the fall. The father was always available in an emergency.

John’s medical condition remained static during the years preceding the Second World War. His father cared for him without assistance and kept the shop premises very clean. Customers came to the shop mainly for ale and tobacco but Bradbury’s also sold food and other minor items.

One day in l945 the shop failed to open. It was discovered that father and son had gone to their eternal home, together.

#### CHAPTER 15

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#### SAD TIMES

Mother endeavoured to maintain the house in a respectable condition; in addition to managing the shop during the day. Unfortunately, she was worn-out. I later remembered her as a plain, bespectacled woman with dark hair, tied back in a bun; wearing the drab and shapeless clothing of the period. She had large, dark eyes. I, particularly, recollected the dull and close-fitting hats, which mother and other women, wore and which did nothing to improve their appearance. Lipstick and rouge, that might have brightened my Mam’s life, were taboo, in this old-fashioned Society. In later years, I did not remember anything as to her personality: no doubt, having taken her very much for granted.

In late October l935, when I was almost seven years of age, mother developed a cold, after she had stood in the open-air, one cold, wet day, during a funeral service for a friend. Within a few days she was found to be suffering from Pneumonia: subsequently pronounced by Dr. Meyer to be terminal.

On 2nd November l935 our mother died. We children had been taken upstairs to say “Goodbye” to our mother, who lay in bed in the front room. She was able to smile weakly at us, with tenderness and love; her dark, wide eyes: giving visible expression to the thoughts which she could not utter in words. I looked at mother’s languid eyes and saw that she was pale and drawn. Someone lifted me up to kiss her “Goodbye”, which I did, without fully realizing that this was, indeed, the last time I would speak to my mother in this world. Two hours later she had gone to a better place.

We were taken to see her body, as she lay in her coffin, prior to the Funeral Service. The room had a strange but not unpleasant smell, which originated from the Coffin and its contents. Mother’s body was dressed,in the fashion of the day, in white-satin of an unnecessarily elaborate design. Perhaps this was considered to be requisite for the purposes of the Resurrection; in order that one might appear to be respectably dressed in the “new life”, beyond the grave. Her face was smooth and white, now peaceful and free from the cares of this world.

The image of my mother’s death was never to be erased from my memory. Perhaps this experience laid the foundation of my early speculations about death; which seemed, to me, to present an unfathomable void: a dreadful emptiness: perhaps “The Pit”, which inspired so much terror in the Psalmist of old and which was so often emphasized in the popular preaching of the Thirties. “Out of the depths have I cried to Thee, O Lord. O Lord! Hear my voice!”

One of my last memories of my Mother was of one of the Lees’ Mission Concerts, as she sang the Jerome Kern Song, “My Curly-headed Babby”, in a deep Contralto voice. She was dressed as a Black-Mammy and had a little black doll to nurse, as she sang.

I did not, at that time, fully appreciate the impact of my mother’s passing upon myself and my siblings. Margery was greatly upset by her mother’s death and wept copiously; much to my disgust, who put on a brave face at this time. We were not taken to the Funeral Service, as it was felt that we would have been too distressed. Following the ceremony, Margery went to reside with Uncle Harold and Aunty Grace: returning after a few weeks, when she had recovered to some extent from the distress caused by her mother’s death.

The loss of his wife was a great blow to Dad, who, although he had married more for security than for affection, had grown to love and cherish his wife and was a faithful husband to her. There was now thrust upon him the sole responsibility for the children, in addition to the tasks of Housekeeping, Shopkeeping and Cobbling. Many a lesser man would have thrown-in the towel and despatched the children to relatives; which procedure was, in fact, suggested by several of the female relations, of whom there was an abundance. But Dad determined to care for his children by himself, without assistance from his wife’s family: he being of an independent, not to suggest, stubborn disposition.

I never really understood how grandfather Jones suffered, following the loss of his daughter, who had been the only female child to survive from his twelve children. Needless to say, in his latter years, he had been wholly dependent upon her. After just over two years, he too had succumbed to the effects of old-age and grief, dying on 22 April l938, at the age of 84 years. Prior to his death, he confided to Dad that he realized that he had diverted too much of his resources to the Mission during his lifetime; a fact which he now regretted, as he was aware that the Business was insolvent. Whatever he had, he left to Dad. In effect, this was very little, as there were debts to be paid and the only assets consisted of the remaining Stock-in-Trade. Heavy weather lay ahead!

I remember my Grandfather’s passing, as the old man had been sick with Pneumonia for some days. One evening, as we were seated in the living-room, there came a strange wheezing, rattling sound from overhead, which we were subsequently told was “Granddad’s Death-Rattle”. The funeral ceremonies were held; we beholding the dead form of our Grandfather, dignified and gaunt in death; the large nose and nostrils more prominent, both from the tightness of the skin and the angle of the head lying back, without a pillow.

Whenever a person died, local children would gather to pay their respects to the deceased. Whilst this practice may appear ghoulish to modern minds, no child was ever turned away from a bier. It was considered that death is such an important factor in human experience, that children should be made aware of its inevitability. Indeed, in those days, it was something with which people were more familiar, as many families lost little ones to the ever prevalent diseases of the day, such as Scarlet-Fever and Diphtheria. Pneumonia and Tuberculosis also wrought havoc amongst people of all Classes, in the days before the advent of Antibiotics and, particularly, with the Poor.

Two or three months subsequent to Grandfather’s death, together with other neighbourhood children, we attended the laying-out of Mr. Roach, of Woodbine Street; solemnly waiting in line to spend a few moments, viewing the calm figure of the deceased. There was the now-familiar smell of death and varnish.

#### CHAPTER 16

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#### THE HADDINGTONS

In ensuing years, I subconsciously missed my mother; seeking every opportunity for female company, wherever that was available. I was fortunate in having many female relations of the Jones’ Clan, in addition to maternal neighbours of a kindly disposition. One of these lived across the way, in Duncan Terrace; Mrs. Haddington, by name. This lady was a Yorkshire-woman but had spent many years in Lancashire. She was short in stature and rather stout, being well into the late middle-age by now. She had herself raised a numerous brood, amongst whom were several girls. These young ladies were much older than I and, in addition to the maternal warmth provided by the mother, the girls themselves took an interest in me. I owed a great deal to the care and concern of these ladies, although I had no conscious awareness of my need for female companionship.

Sometimes, after school was over for the day, I would wander into the Haddington’s large terraced house, to spend a few minutes listening to the mother gossiping. Mr. Haddington, who was a labouring man of some description, was a large, silent Yorkshireman; distinguished by his membership of the “Royal Antediluvian Order of the Buffaloes!”: which Irrefutable Truth was proclaimed by a most elaborate certificate to this effect; proudly displayed upon the living-room wall. Mr. Haddington, on returning home from work, would throw himself into his personal chair, making short comment to his wife’s pronouncements. He was not unapproachable and would answer my questions in a calm and ponderous manner, as he pulled heavily on his pipe. His wife was the boss around here and the husband was content to leave the control of the domestic affairs in her capable hands. Mrs. Haddington was strict in matters of family discipline and I never presumed to step out of line, in her presence.

The three girls, were named, Eva, Doris and Ada. At the time of which I speak, circa 1938, Eva was already quite grown-up, as was Doris. The third girl, Ada, was the one to whom I became attached, as she exhibited towards me a tenderness and regard which touched me deeply and caused me to respond to her, with affection. She was about fifteen years of age when I was nine years: a handsome girl with brown hair and eyes and a nicely shaped face. Her elder sister Eva was tall and glamorous, whilst Doris was shorter, neat and warm-hearted. Doris was the serious member of the trio and attended the Lees’ Mission. She eventually married one of the boys from the Mission, Tommy Manning. The other two young ladies were of a fun-loving temperament.

The Haddington’s also had two sons, Jimmy and Tommy. Jimmy was a very interesting character, as he was the proud possessor of a motorbike. He was the elder of the two boys, now perhaps about thirty years of age and quite old, or so it appeared to me. He was dark haired, of medium height and build and with rugged features. One day, I was given a ride, as motorcycle pillion passenger, by Jimmy and, although very frightened when going around corners, I never forgot the experience. Jimmy became a Dispatch Rider during the war and was killed in an accident, whilst riding his motorcycle. His mother continued to mourn his loss for many years, saying to me, “I would never have believed that our Jimmy could have been killed riding his motor-bike; he was always so careful.” During the War, the Haddington’s moved away to Patricroft, and I lost regular contact with the family, although I saw individual members from time to time. When I married, I took my wife to see Mrs. Haddington, one Sunday morning, unannounced. She was pleased to see us, although now well advanced in years.

#### CHAPTER 17

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#### CYCLING

My father had always kept himself physically fit. He was keen for us to develop into healthy individuals. He decided that cycling should be the main recreational activity for the family, as this would enable us to escape the smoke-pall of the city, by riding into the surrounding countryside. When we were quite small, he provided Margery and me with a tiny blue bicycle, which he had re-constructed from scrap. Although useless for the purposes of transport, it served to teach us how to ride a bicycle. After one or two tumbles, we became quite proficient and, later, he re-conditioned larger bicycles, so that each of us had a bicycle. This enabled us to go for quite long trips. This was at a time before the increase in the number of cars made the roads too dangerous for cyclists. Dad was adept at renovating old-cycle frames, which he laboriously scraped, re-painted and provided with new accessories. Naturally, we were the envy of our peers, many of whom had no hope of obtaining such a luxury as a bicycle, even a second-hand one.

At the age of ten years, we took our first ride to Chester, a distance of forty miles from Manchester. The return trip, completed in one day, was quite an achievement for us. As we grew older, we would often travel long distances on bicycles, which sometimes involved a weekend away from home. On these occasions we would either camp or stay at one of the numerous Youth Hostels, scattered throughout England and Wales.

It was during these expeditions that I grew to love and appreciate the beautiful English countryside; at that stage not yet ruined by motor vehicles or the ruthless exploitation of the Tourist Trade. During the War, food rationing meant that little food was available in local shops, although many country towns had “British Restaurants”. These were Cafeterias, conducted by the Ministry of Health, at which a generally plain but nourishing meal could be purchased for a shilling. However, we could rarely afford such luxuries: taking the bulk of our rations with us, when we went away. We were able to purchase vegetables and locally produced fruit in the country and there was always fish or the odd rabbit in the shops. Tinned food was burdensome and necessitated the carrying of an unduly heavy load, when we were on a cycling/camping holiday. Youth Hostelling alleviated this problem, as there was no necessity to carry bedding and camping equipment.

In addition to cycling, dad provided us with Roller-skates and there were also the iron hoops, propelled and guided by a hook, which were a common child’s plaything and a slow-moving stock-in-trade of the Ironmonger’s shop. Though a simple toy, I had lots of fun in propelling the hoops over the flagstones of surrounding streets. There were times when I incurred the ire of pedestrians, with whom I almost collided, in my impetuous haste. Thus, my father, although hard on us, in some respects, and particularly after the death of our mother, provided us with facilities which many other children in the neighbourhood envied; their parents being wholly unable to afford the cost of such luxuries as bicycles or roller-skates. (My father, George Roberts, still cycling in Wales in his 70’s)



#### CHAPTER 18

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#### BY-GONE DAYS

Swimming was another activity in which we children were actively encouraged by our father. When we were still quite small, he started to take us, on Wednesday nights, Winter and Summer, to the Seedley Baths: which were situated on Seedley Road, about a mile from home. He instructed us in swimming and, before long, we were all competent swimmers. On one visit to the Urmston Baths, I went down the slippery dip. There was a rush down to the water and I received a shock, as I hit the surface with considerable force. This incident retarded my progress for a while, but it was not long before I was swimming strongly, once more. The Seedley Baths was considered to be not worth preserving and is now demolished. At the time of which we speak,(30s and 40s) the complex consisted of two swimming baths, one for mixed-bathing and one for male or female bathing. In addition, there were private baths for individuals, similar to those in the Hodge Lane Wash-house. The swimming baths were equipped with Spring-boards and, at one end, had a large, hot, communal bath, intended for cleaning purposes prior to swimming. We children would sit in these places for hours, chatting away together and enjoying the warmth of the hot water. None of us got out when we wanted to urinate: not that this mattered, as the water was changed periodically and all the children accepted the realities of the situation. From time to time we would take a plunge in the pool. Thus, the swimming pools attracted a particular type of child and provided essential social contacts for those who attended regularly, either on a weekly basis or at odd times. There was not the same emphasis on competitive sport in those days. Children were encouraged to swim for safety reasons, nor, indeed, were there modern facilities, such as Olympic Swimming Baths: considered essential nowadays for the training of swimmers.

Even when the new Swimming Baths were built at Urmston, just prior to the outbreak of the War, there was no thought of the need to design anything other than a playground for people to indulge their love of Swimming and Diving. The main pool consisted of a large circular pool with separate learners’ and Diving pools. It was a marvellous building, with a huge glass dome rising overhead, reminiscent of the Crystal Palace; with a wonderful echoing resonance, as the sound of laughter or the splash of water reverberated through the spacious dome. People would travel considerable distances to enjoy the pleasures of the Urmston Baths, not least we Roberts’ children, who lived five miles away from that facility.

When not otherwise occupied, Salford children would gather in the street to play games. These included such games as Hide and Seek, Hop-scotch and ball-games of various kinds. The girls developed great skill in the handling of one, two or even three balls, which they would bounce against the wall of a house repeatedly; often calling forth the wrath of the occupant, who would come to the door to discourage further activity of this kind. The girls repeated common rhymes as they struck the balls in time to the doggerel: “One, two, three, alera: one two, three, alera”. “Doctor Foster went to Gloucester: in a shower of rain: he fell a puddle right up to his middle and never went there again”.

Spinning-tops were also popular with children of both sexes and had the added virtue of being cheap or easily made. There were, of course, the periodic visits of Fairs and small-time Circuses, which came to Salford with their Catch-Penny stalls. They occupied waste land in Cross Lane, near the Market, which in my early childhood was open space. Prior to the War it was surrounded with a wall and made into a permanent Market-site. An impressive tiled Clock-tower was also erected.

In addition to the Shooting Galleries and Coconut Shies the side-shows provided slot-machines which took pennies and ha’pennies. For a penny one could buy a small tub of black peas from a man who specialised in this commodity. These would be eaten with the fingers as one wandered aimlessly through the dismal, muddy passageways of the Fairground.

At the corner of Cross Lane and Broad Street stood the Salford Hippodrome. This was a popular place of resort, producing folk-melodramas such as “Sweeney Todd the Barber”, “Maria Monk” and other ‘tasteful’ entertainments. At Christmas, Pantomime was the order of the day.

During a Saturday afternoon Matinee Performance of “Sweeney Todd”, when I was still a youngster, a tableau was displayed, revealing a naked young lady. She remained motionless: it being a necessary requirement if the display was not to provoke the ire of the authorities responsible for Public Morals. The response from the audience was by way of sustained whistles and catcalls. As the patrons were mostly children, the tableau was, perhaps, inappropriate, although we children were not particularly impressed by the display. I myself was rather amused by this rather ineffectual form of light pornography.

Roller-skating was another popular activity. There was a large, wooden-floored rink at Pendleton, well frequented and reasonably priced. The streets themselves; well-paved but uneven, also provided a good base for Roller-skating. In Manchester, there were several excellent rinks, if one cared to travel.

City children revealed great resourcefulness in developing activities for themselves, which were passed from one generation to the next. With the disappearance of the terraced house, these traditions are, perhaps, gone for ever. The advent of the Television-Set, which was undreamed-of in my childhood, has affected not only the literary ability of children; it has amputated so much of their cultural heritage: substituting in its place a commercialised, semi-literate and often barbarous barrage of TV propaganda, specifically designed for absorption by small children.

Gone are the traditional Nursery Rhymes and Folk songs of yester-year: there is no copyright subsisting in “Jack and Jill”. Instead it is “Bananas in Pyjamas”, “Tom the Tank Engine” and similar programmes: supported by unmelodious ditties, composed and presented with an eye to Royalties. Even worse, are the grotesque and monstrous cartoon characters, presented to the eyes and minds of little ones, by way of “entertainment”. One shudders at the thought of what distorted images of life are being developed in young minds. One recent (2004) example: My wife and I were caring for three of our grandchildren, the eldest of whom was 7 years old, the second about 3 years and the little one merely a baby. The 7yr old girl wished to watch an extremely ghoulish movie about an “Ant”, which clearly distressed the 3yr old to the extent that she started to cry. I came into the room and, observing what was happening, and viewing a few seconds of the “animated” movie, promptly switched the TV off. Our eldest grandchild, who was quite undisturbed by this horrific film, could not understand why I did so.

Children have no defences against this sort of rubbish: which they innocently accept as the genuine article: instead of a destructive substitute for our rich cultural heritage.

#### CHAPTER 19

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#### HOME SWEET HOME

Prior to the Second World War, the domestic activities of the Roberts’ family centred around the living room, which was roughly 15 ft x 12 ft in size. It was approached from the shop by a small passage, leading from the corner opposite the front entrance, past the cellar steps, which were on the left, and into the living room itself. On the right-hand wall of this room was the open fireplace, on the left of which there was an oven and, on the right, a four-gallon cast-iron kettle, which provided the hot water, needed by the family from time to time. There was no other form of water heating available, apart from the coal-fired copper boiler in the adjoining scullery. In front of the hearth stood a cast-iron fender with fire-irons. The cast-iron fireplace had to be black-leaded with Graphite regularly; this being one of the more onerous chores to be carried-out in the house.

Above the fireplace, on the mantelpiece, stood two bronze statuettes depicting the God Hermes in flight. These were, originally, stock-in-trade from the shop but had never sold. A plain deal table occupied the centre of the room. When not being used for meals, it was usually covered with a green-baize cloth: perfect for Tiddly-Winks. Against the far wall stood an old upright piano and facing that, on the left, was a horsehair sofa of antique vintage.

From the foot of the sofa a steep staircase led upstairs to the bedrooms. Two homemade fireside chairs, several plain dining-chairs and a Piano-stool, completed the furniture.

Lighting was by Gas; operated by pulling on a metal ring; at the same time applying a match to the Gas-Mantle. Electricity was eventually installed in l937. It was quite a novelty and a great leap-forward. However, gas remained as the most convenient cooking fuel.

The walls of the living room and the bedrooms were lined with floral wallpaper, in the traditional style. The floor was covered with oilcloth or “Linoleum”, which was the standard floor-covering, prior to the development of modern vinyl materials and wall-to-wall carpet. In front of the fireplace lay a small rug, hand-made from old woollen coats or other heavy garments. Set into the outer wall of the living room was a rectangular four-pane window, opening on to Duncan Terrace. Diagonally across the room from the entrance, another exit led to the small scullery, containing a stone-sink, cold-water tap, food-cupboard, plate-rack, copper-boiler and a Paraffin Cooking Stove. Most of the household cooking was done on this stove, prior to the installation of a Gas Cooker in l938. A rear door led from the scullery to the yard, part of which had been covered by Granddad Jones with a glassed roof, to provide a workshop for himself, in which he carried-on his Carpentry.

In the shed there also stood an old-fashioned clothes wringer, of the type with large wooden rollers. This was the sort of device on which convicts should be set to work, as it was calculated to break the spirit, as well as the back, of anyone called-upon to operate it, for any length of time. It was the lot of countless thousands of British women to have to spend each Monday, slaving over a washtub and operating these monstrous implements.

At the rear of the house was a small yard, bounded by a seven-foot wall, which divided the premises from the yard next door. On the left was the water closet. From this yard, a door led to the Back Entry: a narrow passage which divided the Lord Duncan Street terraces from the houses in the adjoining street, Lord Nelson Street. The wall between the adjoining premises was adorned by a mass of Virginia creeper and, in an attempt to provide a touch of the country, soil had been placed on top of the WC, in which, the season and inclination permitting, annual flowers were grown. The neighbourhood cats also found this a convenient place in which to perform their necessary ablutions: keeping the patch of soil well fertilized.

Behind the scullery and approached from the glassed-over yard, was the Cobbler’s shop used by my father.

Upstairs, were two large, and one small, bedrooms; that over the shop being occupied by Granddad during his lifetime and the other bedrooms providing sleeping accommodation for the husband, wife and the three children. The third bedroom was situated above the scullery and had only room for a single bed. However, the family managed to sleep in relative comfort.

#### CHAPTER 20

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#### TROUBLES

In the years subsequent to my mother’s death, I developed many problems of one kind or another, some of which may have been the result of emotional deprivation. I could never quite conform to my father’s rigid timetables, which were made necessary by the need to regulate a household, without the presence of a female controller. Whatever, the cause, I always seemed to be in trouble of one kind or another.

My father possessed a large reading-glass, which he found necessary when reading the newspaper, having injured his left eye with a hot soldering-iron, some years previously. I used to like playing with this glass and, one day, took the magnifier outside to examine something in the street. As I stooped to look, the glass fell from the metal surround and shattered on the stone pavement. The screw holding the lens in its metal frame had loosened, unbeknown to me. I did not dare to tell my father of this disaster, resulting in a parental outburst, when Dad ultimately discovered that his magnifier had no lens.

I also had a penchant for water. Even though Dad supplied me with rain-boots and raincoat, in wet weather, I invariably came home with socks and rain-boots soaking wet. I could never satisfactorily explain why this should happen, except that I liked to paddle in every puddle of water that lay in my path, to and from school. Such behaviour drove Dad to distraction; who was himself a tidy man: the product of his military training.

My troubles were made worse when, at about the age of twelve years, I started stealing out of the money-box in which my father’s business takings were kept. I could never explain what precipitated such behaviour on my part. Father kept the box under the stairs. It was of strong wooden construction, with a simple key. All we children knew where this key was kept, as our father trusted us in money matters. Inside the box, two-shilling pieces were stacked in piles. It was a gold mine! I commenced to take two-bob here and there, with which I would purchase goodies from the school tuck-shop for myself and school-chums. I found this an excellent way to make friends. My thieving snowballed, until I was raiding the box regularly. My father; first becoming suspicious, quickly realized that he was being robbed and cross-examined us; particularly myself.

After a lengthy and gruelling interrogation, during which I consistently denied my guilt, I was finally worn down and admitted stealing small sums. Even so, I dared not admit the full extent of my defalcations, which must have had a serious effect on my father’s financial position; always difficult. There was, however, no need, as Dad well knew how much money was missing. Thus, my merry-making came to an abrupt end, with both physical and other penalties being imposed upon me.

George and Margery were enjoined by their father to “keep an eye” on me, as it was clearly evident that I was not trustworthy. This led to periodic tale-telling, or so it appeared to me. If anything occurred, out of the ordinary, it was sure to be due to some sin of commission or omission on my part.

It was some time, subsequent to the discovery of my criminal activity, that, one night, Dad was discussing something with George. He said to him, “You are an optimist!” Seeking some attention for myself, I said, “What am I Dad?” My father replied, “You are a reprobate!” I said, “What’s a reprobate?” “You can look it up.” he answered. On discovering the meaning of this word, I realized that it was less than complimentary.

Throughout my remaining adolescent years, the sense of guilt associated with my ill-considered and reckless depredations on the family resources, remained to torment me. As I grew older, I realized that, so far as my father and siblings were concerned, I would always be suspect. I was in debt to my father and it was a debt that I could never repay.

In common with most lads from the industrial districts, I was a member of a local ”Gang”, which usually comprised the more adventurous and unruly boys from a particular street or school group. Amongst the activities which were undertaken to alleviate boredom, we would visit local stores, either Woolworths or the British Home Stores. Woolworths was still, at this time, a “3d and 6d” Store and proclaimed, proudly, that nothing in the store was priced at more than sixpence. Consequently, most items sold there were easily transportable. This included such things as stationery and small toys. “Dinky Toys” were a prime target and we became skilled at stealing such items from Woolworths. Fortunately, I was never actually caught, when engaged in these criminal activities, which today would inevitably land me in Court. Once, when detected in suspicious circumstances, I received a cuff from a local Bobby. The BHS shops had their display counters under glass, so that theft from that institution was impracticable.

In addition to such obviously criminal activity, I made a public nuisance of myself by smashing the windows of empty houses and street-lamps with my catapult. This was a lethal-weapon, made more so by the type of lead shot that I made, in order to achieve deadlier accuracy and effect. I obtained the lead from the ruins of the many bombed and derelict houses in the Salford district. Much of the domestic piping of those days was lead, rather than galvanized steel pipe.

I also revealed considerable resourcefulness in collecting firewood from bombed-out property. This activity was forbidden, as technically “looting”, but a shortage of coal meant that many homes could not be adequately warmed, in Winter. I made my contribution to household fuels by dragging heavy timbers for up to a quarter of a mile or so, depending upon the location of the derelict property. On arriving at home I would saw and chop this wood into suitable sizes for burning on the fire. In this way, the family was able to supplement the very limited Wartime supplies of coal, particularly in the colder months of the year. It could not then be alleged that I was either lazy or lacking in resourcefulness.

#### CHAPTER 21

THE JONES’ CLAN

I had several Uncles and Aunts, plus numerous Cousins; members of the Jones’ tribe. Foremost amongst the Uncles was Uncle Harold; a Watchmaker by trade, who was married but had no children of his own. He was the younger brother to my mother and, on her death, took over some of the responsibility for us children. Uncle Harold was of medium build: stocky with dark-brown hair and medium complexion. He had strong, handsome features. In temperament he was quiet and unassuming; God-fearing and honest to a fault. Though not fanatical in regard to religion, he had absorbed much that could be considered to be beneficial from his Christian background.

Aunty Grace was herself brought up in Pendleton, being one of the five female children of a Mr. and Mrs. Daniels. There was one boy born to this family. As her husband had been able to provide a comfortable, modern home for her in Flixton, a “posh” suburb of Manchester, Aunty Grace felt justified in adopting “airs and graces”. Although, basically, well meaning, she could not resist the temptation to consider herself superior to Salford people generally. From photographs, I deduced that she had been rather a beautiful girl in her youth. Fair-haired and complexioned: her hair was styled in the fashion of the 20’s and her pictures showed a lovely young woman of this era. “No wonder”, I thought, “that Uncle Harold fell in love with her at first sight”.

Aunty Grace’s sisters still lived in Pendleton and I occasionally made a foray to her mother’s home for a little attention. “Aunty Daniels”, as she was known to us children, was a woman of strong personality and strict principle. She had been obliged to raise a family of six children, without the proper support that should have been forthcoming from her husband. He was, reputedly, a “man-of-the-world!”, a “hail-fellow, well-met!”, type of man, who preferred the companionship of his mates to that of the domestic hearth. I do not personally remember him myself, as he was probably at work when I was at the house. Whilst his wife kept the secret to herself, she was often deprived of the means of maintaining the household, by her husband’s need to entertain his friends down at the local Pub. Being an astonishingly proud woman, Aunty Daniels never spoke of her problems and kept them to herself. I only learnt this story via family gossip, many years later.

The girls, who were all now married, were frequently to be seen at their mother’s home, where I would usually find one or more, in conversation with their mother. They displayed a genuine affection towards me and went out of their way to fuss me, whenever I appeared. I enjoyed this attention and would sit quietly, absorbing the feminine chatter or listening to the ticking of the household clock on the mantelpiece. After a while, becoming restless, I would excuse myself and ride my bicycle home again.

Throughout our developmental years, Uncle Harold displayed a tender and concerned interest in us children. On Birthdays and at Christmas he always presented us with expensive presents: far superior to those which Dad could afford. We looked forward with eager anticipation to the delivery of that particular gift. When I was 8 years old, I received a Toy Farmyard from my Uncle, complete with buildings, Hay-stack, fences and animals, all cast in lead. The following Christmas I was presented with a metal Shooting-Gallery, equipped with a cannon that fired steel balls. Another time, Uncle gave me a Toy Fort, with Leaden Soldiers. In addition to these splendid gifts, whenever I was short of pocket money, Uncle Harold was sure to come to the rescue with a small donation. Such generosity was often exploited by me in future years. I would visit my Uncle’s workshop, ostensibly to say “hello!” but generally to solicit a gift of cash; sufficient to gain admission to one of the Manchester Picture Theatres. The workshop was situated in one of the office buildings just off Market Street, Manchester, but was up two flights of stairs: not a place which the shopping public were likely to visit. Hence his work was mainly to the “Trade”, repairing watches for local Jewellers’ shops. The workshop was a tiny room, divided into a reception counter and a working area. Uncle sat facing the window and there was just room for two seats at the work bench. It was a stuffy place, pervaded by tobacco smoke, as both Uncle Harold and George (who was now his Apprentice) smoked, almost constantly, or so it appeared to me.

Uncle Bill Jones was several years the senior of Harold. He was an Industrial Chemist by profession and travelled for a firm of Chemical distributors. He was married to “Aunty Ruby”, a sweet-natured and loving, but suppressed lady, who had presented him with two children, Leslie and Muriel. Prior to the Great War, Bill was an unemployed youth. In common with many young men in his position, he enlisted in the Lancashire Fusiliers as a Regular Soldier. At the outbreak of War, he was duly sent to serve his Country in the trenches.

One Summer day during l916, Elizabeth Jones, who was acting as “Mother” to her numerous brothers, received a telegram in the usual War-Office format, informing her of the sad news that Private William Jones was, “missing, believed killed in action”, in France. She was overcome with grief at the terrible news of the death of her brother, in this most heartlessly destructive of all wars, as indeed, were her father and brothers. A memorial service was duly held at the Lees’ Mission: the usual condolences being tendered to the family by friends, who, themselves, were often grieving the death of their own sons and brothers. With the passage of the weeks, the pain and sense of loss in my future-mother’s heart began to assuage.

Some three months subsequent to the arrival of the fateful telegram; when Lizzie was tending to some paper work at the shop counter, the tinkling of the door-bell informed her that a Customer was entering the premises. She casually glanced up from her work to see Bill Jones standing in the doorway, in the uniform of a Lancashire Fusilier.

Bill had been in a trench with his Company, when a German shell landed nearby, killing many of his companions and slightly wounding Bill, who was almost buried alive. Somehow, in the blast, his identity disk had been torn from around his neck. When dug out of the shell-hole, he was found to be suffering from shell-shock and amnesia. Bill spent the next two months recovering in a Field-Hospital.

One day, he came to his senses in a hospital-bed and was addressed by the Orderly as Corporal James. He replied, “I am not Corporal James, I am Private William Jones”. There was some discussion as to who Bill really was, before he convinced the medical authorities that he was himself. After a period of convalescence, he returned home, on leave, unaware of the fact that he had been reported “Killed in Action”.

Bill survived the remaining War Years to take up a Scholarship at the Salford Technical College in Industrial Chemistry. He completed this course and went on to make a material success of his life. He taught himself to play the piano and became a highly-competent pianist and Teacher of Pianoforte. He married and eventually settled with his wife and children in a modern three-bedroom, semi-detached cottage at Swinton, on the outskirts of Salford. It was a matter worth noting that Bill was the only survivor of the Great War to have his name recorded on the Cenotaph at The Crescent, Salford, as one of those lads who were “killed in action”.

Bill’s wife, Aunty Ruby, was a long-suffering woman who, it appeared to me, was rather taken for granted by her husband. She displayed the tenderest affection for me; being one of my female comforters. I retained fond memories of the love that this really good woman had bestowed upon me.

Grandfather’s eldest son, John Jones, also served in the Great War and was deeply affected by the carnage and horrors of Trench Warfare. He was one of a group of men who, under the guidance of the Rev. T. Clayton, Anglican Padre, formed the “Toc H” Movement; opening a Rest-Centre for war-wearied soldiers in Talbot House, in Poperinghe in Belgium. After the War, John set himself up in business in the Ironmongery trade, in which he was highly successful. Eventually, his business employed four or five other persons. He was a pipe-smoker and died between the Wars from Cancer of the Throat. I remembered very little of Uncle Jack. His widow, Aunty Polly, lived in a charming old cottage at Prestwich, replete with a grand display of horse-brasses around the hearth. This was a world away from Salford, although perhaps no more than three or four miles, at the most, from the grime of Lord Duncan Street. I remembered visiting my Aunty Polly on one or two occasions. My recollection of her was of a frail, neat old lady in a dark dress and with white hair. She had one son, John (Junior) who took over his father’s business on his death and which he managed until the advent of World-War II.

Cousin John married and had two children, a boy and a girl, upon whom the parents lavished the totality of their affection. The lad, Bruce, was quite literally, “the apple of his father’s eye”. Unfortunately, during a Sunday-School picnic, the was drowned in a subterranean conduit at the age of 15 years, whilst playing with other youths. The shock of their loss affected the parents deeply. The mother suffered severely, being unable to conceal or assuage her grief, which overwhelmed her to the exclusion of all other concerns. This blow was felt the more severely by these parents, who had so much more to offer their children, in material terms, than the other members of this extended family.

There are two more of my maternal-Uncles, who are entitled to a place in our story so far. Harry Jones was the fourth son of John Jones, Senior, married to Aunty Fanny. The pair lived in the adjoining street to us, Lord Nelson Street. They occupied a terraced house, in which they had raised three sons and a daughter. Uncle Harry was considered to be the family “black-sheep” as he enjoyed an occasional glass of beer. This indulgence, of course, was not permitted to members of the Mission, so that Uncle Harry was suspect, if not actually ”excommunicant!”. As it happened, Harry was not of a deeply religious bent. He was a driver by occupation and worked for the firm of Jones’ of Pendleton; the business established by his elder brother. Harry made few demands on life. In appearance he was of short stature, about five feet five inches in height. He was stout in build with a ruddy complexion and a pot-belly. His wife, Aunty Fanny, was a pleasant-natured, rather empty-headed lady. She was thin and scrawny: somewhat taller than her husband. Aunty Fanny was an ardent member of the Lees’ Mission and would tolerate no music in her home on Sundays. I remember her chiefly for her insistence in voting “Conservative,” at election time: stoutly maintaining that her father had always voted Conservative. She wisely announced, “What was good enough for him, is good enough for me!” I could not accept this. It was, of course, an irrefutable argument.

I often went to see my Aunty as a child. I would sit at the deal table, with its green baize cloth: a common feature of living-rooms in those days. The legs of the table were clad in old stockings, to protect the woodwork from the scratching of the cat; a scrawny and nondescript Tabby, which found them convenient for the purpose of sharpening his claws. It was an old-fashioned, dull, drab and silent house; the only sound to be heard, being the relentless “tick-tock” of the mantel-clock.

One or twice, before World War 11, I accompanied Uncle Harry to the Salford Rugby League ground to watch “Salford” play football. I had no concept of the rules of Rugby League, nor did I become an enthusiastic supporter of the Club. On the often cold, frosty days of Winter, it was good to leave behind the ground and the roars of the fans, calling-out the name of their favourite son: “Barny Hudson!” My Uncle might give me a penny to buy some baked potatoes, piping-hot from the mobile-oven, waiting outside the ground. With salt, these made a welcome and tasty meal.

Harry had two sons, Frank and Harold, who were older than I, by about ten or fifteen years. Harold was the elder of the two and three or four years older than Frank. He was tall, dark-haired and serious in his disposition. Frank was slightly shorter in stature but still about 5ft 10” or so in height. He was of heavier build than his elder brother. They were both good-living young men and enthusiastic members of the Mission.

One Sunday morning, when I was about 14 years old, I was walking home down Duncan Terrace, when I passed a group of Mission evangelists, standing in a circle a hundred yards from my home. They were occupying the centre of the stone-cobbled street, just up the hill from the Iceworks and, as little traffic, other than the pedestrian kind, passed that way, there was no danger of obstruction by the group. The harmonium was placed in the centre of the party and played by an elderly lady. My two Cousins, Harold and Frank Jones, were amongst the worshippers. I paused for a few moments, to hear the words of Harold, who was preaching: vainly it seemed to me, to the assembled group of “believers”. I felt embarrassed for my cousins and moved-on down the street to my home. I thought about the hopelessness of such activity, although I admired the courage that prompted my cousins to engage in open-air preaching.

I was rather smug and self-satisfied and thought that this was a “ridiculous” proceeding. At this stage of my life I was a confirmed non-believer. Little did I realize that I, myself, was deeply tarred with this “religious brush”, although in perhaps a less extroverted manner. I always entertained a genuine respect for their devotion and sincerity. They were decent, law-abiding folk who were, indeed, the “Salt of the Earth!”

Uncle Harold and Aunty Grace were for many years, regular attenders at the Hodge Lane Mission. When they moved to Flixton, some five miles from Salford, they discontinued regular attendance at Sunday Services and only came to the Mission for important ceremonial occasions. Our father encouraged us children to attend the Sunday School and other Mission activities and this continued, following the death of our Mother and Grandfather.

Last of all the Jones’ Uncles to be mentioned in these pages was Frank: who was at an advanced age when I was a child. He lived in a large old house on Eccles New Road and had several children. The atmosphere here was severe, as Frank was an ardent Missionite and kept to strict principles. Uncle Frank’s house was a depressing place and one rarely visited by me, unless on family business. Whilst we Roberts’ children had some contact with his family, this was not so regular nor so intimate a relationship as was maintained with the other members of our mother’s family.

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#### CHAPTER 22

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#### SCANDALS

A year or so after his Wife’s passing, Dad, evidently, began to feel the loneliness of his position and sought feminine companionship in the shape of a Widow, who lived in one of the “Isle-of-Man Streets”, a short distance away. The lady herself was a handsome woman, in her early forties, with brown hair, dark eyes and a medium complexion. She was a Catholic and had two small sons, one of whom was about the same age as myself and the other a year or so younger. Her name was Mrs. Starkey. Dad visited her at home and we children also got to know both her and her boys; occasionally ourselves going to her house on errands, or for personal reasons. In fact, when the widow’s husband had died a year or so previously, Margery and I had been amongst those children who had performed the ritual of visiting the bier. I rather liked this lady.

Difficulties arose when news of this association became known to the Mission Fraternity. Dad had, in fact, reached the stage of “Popping the Question” to Mrs. Starkey, who had agreed to consider his proposal. This development caused great consternation amongst the family members and Uncle Harold was designated, as the closest relative, to remonstrate with Dad over his involvement with the lady. No doubt, the objection was, principally, to her religious affiliations, although there may have been other objections, of which we children never became aware. Perhaps, it may be that I was just too young to appreciate the ramifications of the dispute between Dad and Mother’s relations.

Uncle Harold came to the shop, one evening, to discuss the situation with Dad. We children were sent upstairs to bed, there being nowhere else for us to go. A heated argument now ensued between our Father and Uncle Harold. The latter had, evidently, been reduced to tears and we children assumed that there must have been a terrible row. We heard voices raised, down below, but could not hear what was actually said. We never discovered just what had caused our Uncle to become so distressed. Dad later told us that he had objected to being lectured by the Jones’ on the subject of his morals. Whilst there was now a decided cooling in the relationship between Dad and the various members of the Jones’ family; we children did not suffer materially. Our Uncle Harold still continued to support us, in many ways.

As a result of this row, we children were withdrawn from attendance at the Hodge Lane Mission. Thereafter, we rarely set foot within those hallowed premises. This was a relief to me, as I had never been particularly impressed by the Calvinist “Hell-fire and Brimstone!” doctrines, preached at that establishment. I had been influenced in my heretical views by my brother, George, who was clearly a rebel, so far as the acceptance of doctrine was concerned. This may be true, but I also recalled my own objections to many of the propositions which were put to me at Sunday-School, relative to the Creation of the World: Noah’s Ark, The Flood, the Old-Testament stories and Christian Doctrine, generally.

Perhaps, sadly for us, the love affair with Mrs. Starkey never materialized: that lady rejecting the proposal put to her by George. Perhaps she too, was pressured by relatives on her side. One can only speculate as to whether such a marriage would have been of benefit to the children of either party. Both Protestant and Catholic religious prejudice was still too ingrained for such an union to have any real prospect of success.

#### Chapter 23

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#### A CHORISTER

About two years prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, George became a member of the Manchester Cathedral Voluntary Choir. He was then about 13 years of age and remained with the Choir until advancing puberty obliged him to retire.

The Voluntary Choir was formed to relieve the burden on the Daily Choir, itself composed of Choristers who attended the Choir School on a full-time basis. The boys of the Daily Choir were drawn from within the ranks of the rather-better-off section of the Community; certainly not from the streets of Salford. The Voluntary Choir members attended for practice on Thursday evening each week. They were mainly children of working-class families; recruited as a result of notices sent to the various Council Schools in the Greater Manchester District. On Sundays they sang the Afternoon or Evening Service, depending upon the Season.

The fact that George was not a member of the Church of England was, evidently, not considered to be a problem. Indeed, the child himself gave no thought to the matter, nor apparently, did the Cathedral Precentor, Mr. Medgwicks, and the Choir-Master, Dr. Craddock, who were more interested in obtaining suitable singing voices, than in the question of religious affiliation. These gentlemen may have naturally assumed that those children who responded to the notice would be, at least, nominally of the Anglican persuasion.

There was an understandable measure of reciprocal contempt between the members of the Daily Choir and those of the Voluntary Choir. The former were required to don regulation attire, which consisted of an Eton-suit, complete with Mortar-Board. This dress was outmoded and archaic but considered essential to maintain the distinctiveness of the Choir School.

Elderly ladies, meeting one of these little darlings in the street, were overcome with pleasure at the sight of a ten-year-old, clad in long striped pants, Eton jacket and collar, dicky-bow and mortar-board. Naturally, to red-blooded, working-class Lancashire lads, there was something hardly masculine in such attire. On the other-hand, the Daily Choristers considered themselves to be far superior, in every respect, to the working-class “scum” in the Voluntary Choir and would hardly condescend to admit the existence of such riff-raff. There was little contact between the two groups, apart from those rare occasions, when both Choirs were required to attend a particularly important Service.

When I was nine or ten years of age, the Schools in the neighbourhood received a circular to the effect that more Choristers were needed for the Voluntary Choir. As I enjoyed singing, I nominated myself as a potential Chorister. I was given an audition and was accepted; as my brother had been previously. In subsequent years I attended regularly, although I was usually late for Choir Practice and often for Services, owing to an inability to appreciate the need for punctuality.

For some months after I joined the Voluntary Choir, it was conducted by Dr. Craddock, but his place was taken prior to the outbreak of the War by Mr. Norman Cocker. This gentleman was a great iconoclast. He was a lively and intelligent chap, still in his mid-thirties, who had the capacity to instil enthusiasm into his auditors. He was many years the junior of Dr. Craddock and Dr. Wilson; with a modern approach to Church Music.

My first recollection of Mr. Cocker was at the first afternoon Sunday Service, which he conducted. The members of the Choir were seated in temporary Choir Stalls, then set-up before the Rood Screen in the central aisle of the Cathedral. Mr. Cocker appeared before the Congregation. He spoke to the assembly, saying, “Good-afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen. I am Norman Cocker, the Leader of the Choir. I am a great believer in Congregational singing and I want you to join-in with the Choir in the singing of our wonderful hymns Please don’t be afraid to sing-up. The Choir is not here to entertain the Congregation but to lead the singing. So I want you to do your best!” These remarks came as a complete surprise to the assembly, many of whom were embarrassed by Mr. Cocker’s direct approach. Even the Choristers were shocked and several were displeased at the Choir-Master’s suggestion: feeling that there would be a lowering of musical standards. However, his attempts to encourage “audience participation”, were tolerably successful, once the people had become accustomed to his highly original manner.

It might be noted that many persons attended Services at Cathedral level, in order to enjoy the high-standard of singing, not really to participate in the music themselves or, perhaps, even to engage in worship. This was true in the case of the Services at which the Daily Choir officiated, in virtue of the lovely music produced, as a result of the exertions of the Choir-Master and Organist, who at this time was Dr. Archibald W. Wilson. Dr. Wilson was a perfectionist, who extracted the very last ounce of effort from his Choristers and who made no attempt to conceal his disgust if the rendering of some fine Anthem was anything less than perfect.

Dr. Wilson and Mr. Cocker complemented each other very well. The Doctor was an old-fashioned gentleman, of Scottish background; rather reserved in some respects and devoted to his music. The new Choirmaster was an altogether different breed of personality: extroverted and with the gift of communication. It must be conceded that Mr. Cocker’s task was difficult. He had to mould a motley group of lads, who had little or no musical background, into a Choir, which could, at the very least, establish a reasonable Choral standard. So far as the adult members of the Choir were concerned, they were well-experienced Choristers, who required no basic instruction. Norman Cocker’s enthusiasm for congregational participation may, to some extent, have been encouraged by the need to “drown the Choir”, although it was more probably due to his love of singing for its own sake and his desire for the ordinary members of the congregation to share in the real pleasures of singing.

For those who have been educated within the Non-Conformist Churches, the joys of singing are well-appreciated. The old-fashioned hymns in Sankey’s Hymn Book, (Sacred Songs and Solos) or Alexander’s, are well-loved, even today, and capable of inducing great spiritual inspiration. The hymns of the Church of England, (Ancient and Modern) developed over a period of hundreds of years, contain perhaps the most beautiful and inspiring of all hymns. In recent years, many of these hymns have been adopted by the Catholic Church, to great advantage, permitting an improvement in the presentation of Catholic Church Services, generally. Catholic traditionalists might feel that they have surrendered something in the process: becoming Anglicanized, to a degree.

During my time as a Chorister, I learned many of the hymns by heart and in later years draw much satisfaction from singing them to myself. In addition, my attendance at the Mission had given me a knowledge of some of the Chapel hymns. In addition to hymn-singing, there was always an anthem to be sung, as a special piece during the Service. This was a wise and well-loved tradition and, apart from the Sermon, provided the highlight of the Service. Naturally, the Choristers looked forward to the Anthem, with an admixture of pleasure and concern. This was an anxious time for the Choirmaster, who would respond with pleasure on the rendition of an harmonious piece of music. Had there been a disaster, the Choristers were told in no uncertain terms what he thought of their failure. As a rule, there were rarely occasions when criticism was justified. I myself loved to sing and derived great inspiration from my singing. I found it difficult to accept popular ideas as to the existence of “God” and had then no concept of a future-life. Whilst singing, there were times; within a rising chorus of song: lifting the music to a high crescendo, when I experienced what I would describe as “a spiritually profound sensation”. I felt myself to be literally rising from the physical plane to a spiritual level. I was, “In the Clouds”: a common enough expression, in itself; yet conveying some idea of this musical ecstasy; which must be a familiar sensation for those who share the experience of Choral or Operatic singing. I later became convinced that this state of rapture had given me a glimpse of spiritual-things. Music, therefore, is clearly an avenue of the Spirit for those who seek the Spiritual Communion.

During the School Summer holidays in August l939, I attended the Choristers’ Annual Camp at St. Bees’ Head, in Cumberland. The camping-ground was close to the beach, to the North of which a headland rose high above, with tall cliffs facing the Irish Sea. On a clear day one can see the Isle of Man from this vantage point. We boys were fortunate to enjoy good weather during our two-weeks’ holiday.

One day we travelled by train to Ravenglass; where we boarded the narrow-gauge railway to Eskdale; a distance of five or six miles from Ravenglass. It was another fine day and the countryside was beautiful. The engine was a tiny steam-powered locomotive and the excursion was such a novel experience for us city-bound children. As the miniature engine moved through the beautiful Cumberland countryside, each moment revealed, to the enraptured passengers, new scenes of unsurpassed loveliness.

On arriving at Eskdale, our party spent several hours picnicking and playing Cricket in the lush green meadows, before returning to Boot Station for the trip back to Ravenglass. On another day, two or three of us were taken for a spin in Dr Wilson’s Morris 10hp motor-car; travelling to Wastwater, where we beheld the glories of Great Gable and Scafell Pike.

During our spare time, we often fished from the rocks below the cliffs at St. Bees; using gear made from a penny packet of hooks and a ball of string. Whilst primitive, this was effective and various kinds of anonymous fish fell to the lure. We all affirmed that this was great fun.

A footpath led from the Camp to the headland and on, over the open fells. One evening, a group of us lads climbed the path, to where a shepherd was tending a small flock. He was an elderly Cumbrian man, of a friendly disposition. This gentleman spoke English with the Scandinavian-Cumbrian dialect; similar to that of the “Geordies”. We Manchester lads were quite unable to comprehend what he was saying.

As part of the l939 Christmas festivities, the Combined Cathedral Choirs and a number of other Choral Bodies in the Manchester district, together with the Halle’ Orchestra and Choir, produced Handel’s Messiah at the Free-Trade Hall. This was a great occasion. I was placed in the Gallery with the other Choristers and recall the Victorian splendour of the old hall; crowded with musicians, singers and audience. As the Hallelujah Chorus rose to its powerful climax, I was deeply moved by the beauty and grandeur of the occasion.

Sadly, it was the last performance of that Oratorio to be presented in the old hall. On Christmas Eve l940 the Free Trade Hall was destroyed by fire bombs. Though subsequently rebuilt, it was no longer the masterpiece of Victorian architecture, of former days. The glorious wrought-iron had gone for ever: converted to scrap for the War-Effort.

#### CHAPTER 24

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#### EVACUATION

My schooling had been interrupted for a period of some six months during l938, when I was found to be suffering from a “Nervous Disorder”. Just what was the extent and nature of this problem, I never discovered. I was never personally conscious of being ill. It was most probably the fact that I had developed one or two neurological symptoms, in the shape of stuttering and nervous tics, which gave cause for concern to my father. However, our family Doctor, a Jewish gentleman, who had practised in Cross Lane for many years, Dr. Meyer, suggested a period of recuperation at home. Amongst the herbal remedies recommended by other Wise Persons, was a nightly glass of a liquid made from Mistletoe, which was far from palatable but which I took, without complaint. I quite clearly remember the large bowl of grey liquid, with Mistletoe leaves and berries floating in its midst. I also think that at some time or other, during this period, I was dosed with a concoction of “Comfrey”, another poisonous herb. However, I don’t think that I suffered much harm from these administrations.

My absence from school did not seem to affect my scholastic ability at this stage and I eventually returned to lessons, without difficulty. When I was almost 11 years I passed the examination for admission to the Grammar School.

When the time came to choose between a choice of Central School or Grammar School, I decided that, as my brother was attending the Tootal Road Central School, I would also attend that establishment. Margery elected to attend the Girls’ Central School. Whilst our father gave us the choice, there was very little consideration given by us to our future educational potential and, certainly, we had no understanding of the principles involved. In hindsight, I understood that such a choice placed me at a disadvantage. Two of my friends, Harry and Alan, opted for the Grammar School. In each case, they were the sole offspring of their parents, who may well have been in a better financial position to pay for a Grammar School education. In my case and that of my siblings, this would certainly have been impossible for us all. Had I attended the Grammar School, my career might have taken a different course. Our father would have been faced with serious financial problems, in paying for a Grammar-School education and it may be true that he did not fully appreciate the importance of education in the modern world.

I was certainly a “disturbed child” and the immediate prognosis for me was bleak.

On Friday the 1 September l939, we children attended the Central School for the first time: only to be herded, unceremoniously, into groups, duly labelled, and placed on trains for Evacuation to Lancaster. The War was about to be declared and, in fear of the consequences of widespread bombing, the authorities had decided to evacuate all children, living in potential target areas. I thought that this was a great adventure: far-better than settling down to a new school year.

Equipped with small baggage, gas-mask and raincoat, we were sent off to Lancaster by train. We were fortunate to enjoy glorious Autumnal weather, at this time, as the task of allocating children to Foster-homes might well have been made far more difficult in wet conditions.

In due course, my siblings and I arrived at a modern housing-estate in Skerton, North Lancaster and were duly allocated to our respective Foster-homes. Children could not always be kept together in one Foster-Home and this resulted in my separation from my brother and sister. I was first conveyed by a lady placement worker to the home of a middle-aged lady, whose name I no longer recall, as my stay with her was to be brief, indeed. This lady gave me a cup of tea and, after some time, suggested that I go upstairs and wash, to which I was agreeable. The house was a modern, semi-detached Council-house, with an upstairs bathroom.

My new Foster-mother was unaware of the fact that I had been independent of female supervision for some years I had been accustomed to washing myself for a good many years and bitterly resented any attempts at motherly care. I felt myself to be more than capable of washing myself. She escorted me to the bathroom, where she assisted me to remove my pullover and shirt. I stood before the sink and turned on the water. I was about to wash myself when the good lady herself approached with soap and flannel and attacked my neck and ears, with determination. I was astonished and said to the lady, “Thank you but I can wash myself!” She was not to be disappointed, in her maternal aspirations, and ignored my remark, saying, “Your neck and ears are filthy: keep-still while I do them for you!” However, my manly pride was now aroused and I shook myself free of her grip. She also was not to be easily deterred and took a firmer hold of my neck. I now struggled, so vigorously, that it became evident that Foster-mother and child were incompatible and would not be able to live together. I dried myself and went downstairs, determined to get out of the place at once. I grabbed my belongings and fled the house: returning to the Allotment Officer, who was still encamped, with a crowd of children, in the nearby park.

My new foster-mother followed in my wake and explained to the young lady, in charge of placements, that she and I had not “hit it off”, as I was quite uncontrollable.

An alternative placement was now found and I moved to a charming modern bungalow, some distance from the Council Estate. The house was owned by a retired couple, a Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, who had two grown-up children. It was towards evening when I was escorted to the premises by the Placement Officer. I saw a beautiful flower garden, in front of a pretty house and thought that this “looked promising”. The door was opened by Mrs. Wilson, a sweet-natured lady, who smiled upon me in a sensitive, motherly way. When I was introduced, she invited me in to meet her husband. I now entered the hall and was escorted to the living-room, a clean, warmly furnished apartment, where Mr. Wilson was awaiting me.

The Wilson’s were such kindly, gentle-natured people, that I responded positively to them and was anxious to prove that I was a well-behaved child. My foster-mother showed me my bedroom, which was everything I could have wished for, in that regard.

The Wilson’s had two grown up children, a young lady and a young man, both, perhaps, in their twenties. Before I retired for the night, small gifts of pocket-money, in the form of sixpences from these young people, made me think that I was in a “Seventh-Heaven”.

I thought that this was a pretty-good foster-home and was determined to be on my best behaviour. However, I had no opportunity to discover whether this idyllic life would have lasted. George’s foster-mother, Mrs. Fryers, upon discovering that he had a younger brother, informed him that I was welcome to come to stay with them, if I wished to do so. George, therefore, made enquiries as to my whereabouts and came to see me the following day.

At about 10 o’clock the next morning, George arrived at the Bungalow and suggested that I should go to live with him, at his new Foster-home at Halton Road. Not without misgivings, I allowed myself to be persuaded that this would be the best course. I told my enraptured Foster-parents that I had decided to go to live with my elder brother. The Wilson’s expressed their genuine regret at seeing me depart, after such a short stay. However, I had made the decision and, packing my things, said goodbye to Mr. and Mrs. Wilson. The ensuing twelve months was a happy period in my life.

#### CHAPTER 25

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#### THE FRYERS’

The Fryers’ family resided in a three-storey terraced house, situated on the main road to Halton; a village several miles to the North of Lancaster. The front of the house opened on to a grand vista of the River Lune, which here is a broad tidal estuary, dammed by a weir, two-hundred yards or so in length.

Whilst the Fryers’ house was modest by all standards, to me, who was at this time a very small boy, it appeared to be huge. At the front of the house was a small yard, perhaps five feet in depth, although my impression was of a broad green lawn of considerable length. It was only when I returned as an adult, many years later, that I realized that my perception had been greatly distorted.

Here is a photo of the house, taken in l979:



We arrived at the front door of 41 Halton Road, where I was ceremoniously introduced to Mrs. Fryers by George. Mrs Fryers was a small, motherly person, about 5” 2” in height and in the mid-fifties at this time We now entered the hallway and were conducted within the spotless and sacrosanct wonders of the parlour: resplendent and luxurious. This room was the good lady’s justifiable pride and joy, being a large room, furnished in the highest fashion of the day, with a noble view across the main road to the River valley beyond. I sat down on the settee and was addressed in a kindly but firm manner by Mrs. Fryers. “So you have decided to come and stay with us, John?” “Yes, Mrs. Fryers”, said I, “If you will have me”. “Oh! One more mouth is neither here nor there” replied the good woman. “Of course, you will have to behave yourself, you know?” “Yes, Mrs. Fryers”, quoth I, endeavouring to appear virtuous. “You will have to use the back door as a rule and remember to wipe your feet when you enter”.

I was now introduced to Joseph, the Fryer’s 13 year-old son. “John, this is our Son, Joseph. I am sure you will get on well together”. Joe was a dark-eyed lad, with a sallow complexion. I particularly observed Joe’s dark eyes, which I, sub-consciously, thought indicated a “foreign” influence. Joe was two years older than I and slightly younger than George, who was then 14 years of age. “Joe will tell you what I expect of you and you will both be treated as members of the family”. “Now you must write home to your father and tell him that you are staying here with us. George will show you where you will sleep”.

I was then led to the attic, which was reached by a narrow, twisting stairway, leading up from the first-floor landing. It was quite a large room, containing a double-bed and some basic bedroom furniture. There was a skylight, which was too high for us to look out of. It had previously been Joe’s own bedroom but he was to sleep elsewhere during our stay.

Thereafter, we boys used the back door and never entered the parlour, except perhaps on very special occasions. Mrs. Fryers was one of those house-proud ladies, who jealously guarded the security of the best room in the house. The parlour door was on the right, half-way down the hall; from which the staircase continued to the upper floors. There was a door at the end of the hall, leading to the living-room.

Soon after 5 o’clock the two older girls returned home. They were named Winifred and Dorothy. Winifred was in her early twenties and was engaged to be married to a Manchester Commercial Traveller. She was a short, pleasant young woman. Dorothy was about 18 years of age; taller than Winifred and better-looking, with darker hair. Both girls were very kind to us newcomers.

Next to the parlour there was the large living-room, with a separate kitchen at the rear, in which Mrs. Fryers baked her own bread and also produced fabulously tasty Gingerbread and Carroway-Seed cake.

Mr. Fryers had his own personal armchair in the living-room, in which he sat after work or at week-ends. He kept his own counsel, being a silent man, whilst his spouse busied herself with the organization and management of the domestic affairs. The Pater-Familias was a tall, dark-haired, rather thin man, with a sallow complexion. He sported a heavy moustache. Mr. Fryers had lost most of his toes from Trench Feet (Frostbite) in The Great War. As a result, he shuffled rather than strode, when walking, being unable to do more than move his legs from the hip in a stiff, jerking gait. I remembered watching him walking slowly and awkwardly along, as he returned home from his work with the local Council. It was surprising to think that losing one’s toes would affect the ability to walk in this manner.

The Fryers family was what is colloquially described as a “Good Catholic family!” The mother herself had been raised a Protestant but had been baptised a Catholic upon her Marriage and now devoted herself to the business of raising her children in the Faith. She suggested that her new Foster-Children should attend their own (C of E) Church on the Sunday, following their intrusion into her world.

On that first Sunday morning of September l939, Margery accompanied us to the C of E Church in Skerton, which is a short distance from the bridge over the River Lune. We ascended the stairs and sat high up in the gallery during the Service, which commenced at about 10.30am. As we left the Church, at the conclusion of the Service, there appeared to be little wrong with our world. It was a lovely Autumn day, with clear blue skies and small birds singing.

I felt elated at the new experience of seeing all this greenery around about me: the tall trees and great expanse of verdure: what a world apart from filthy Salford! As we children walked contentedly along, we came to a Newsagent’s shop: one of a number of shops situated a hundred yards from the Church. “WAR DECLARED!” roared the poster! None of the Roberts’ children had the remotest concept of what this meant, nor what was in store for them and their Country. How could we? At this juncture we merely walked-on into the future and the new life.

The Catholic Community in Lancaster was a tightly knit and extremely healthy body. I was able to appreciate the degree of cohesion and security enjoyed by the Catholics here, as evidenced by the close support and control of the local Clergy. The Priest visited the Fryers’ home at least once a week; taking a personal interest in the family affairs. The children attended Confession on Saturday night, preparatory to taking Communion on the Sunday morning at early Mass.

The Fryers children were well adjusted, intelligent and happy. There had been an older Son, James, who had been killed whilst at sea; the result of an accident. At the time of which we speak, the mother was still mourning the loss of her son, a year or so previously. I was very touched by her tragedy.

Mrs. Fryers displayed a genuine affection for us boys and would, perhaps, tolerate behaviour from me, that she might not have put up with from her own. I have never forgotten the love she displayed towards George and myself. She, certainly, helped to fill the gap in my young life.

The Fryers’ had a little dog, named “Skip”, of a Belgian breed, which habitually raised one of its rear legs, whilst trotting along on the other three. Sometimes, the mother would talk sadly to the dog, “Where is James, Skip; where is he?”

#### CHAPTER 26

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#### LANCASTER LIFE

The day following the outbreak of War, we Roberts’ boys attended the Skerton Secondary Modern School. This was a modern complex, complete with a fully-equipped Gymnasium. Joe Fryers, who was the only child of the family remaining at school, attended the local Catholic High School.

There were problems at the new school, associated with overcrowding. Each Manchester school had been evacuated as an entity and, as a result, administrative problems must have been great, with two schools occupying one school-building. It was a case of the proverbial quart in a pint pot; with bodies everywhere and nowhere to put them. The Tootal Road teachers were still in command, however, and the necessary arrangements were made to accommodate the new arrivals: still technically a separate scholastic unit. Not that there was great application to studies, as everyone was unsettled and uncertain of the future.

I myself was too insecure a child to settle down here; even though the school buildings were of the very latest design. Within a few weeks many of the male teachers had enlisted in the Armed Forces. This led to Staff shortages and poor supervision of the scholars. I took advantage of this lack of discipline, to play truant.

As it transpired, many evacuees drifted back home after a relatively short interval, although it was some months before the trend became general. In the North of England, the impact of the War was not felt for another year, by which time most “Evacuees”, as the children were called, had returned to their homes. My siblings and I were destined to spend about twelve months in the Lancaster district, returning home to Salford in time to experience the 1940 Blitz.

For city children, life in Lancaster was wonderful. The town had much to offer in splendid architecture, with many fine Georgian buildings. There was lovely countryside within a short walking distance of our home. A few miles up the Lune Valley was the village of Halton, rather beautiful in its setting on the West bank of the river, which at this point had narrowed but was still a formidable stream, a hundred yards across.

At weekends, Joe Fryers acted as a guide, to introduce us to the surrounding district. Joe was a pleasant lad, solidly built, with the dark eyes and complexion of the Lancashire Irish. He showed no resentment at the intrusion of the two Evacuees into his life.

One Saturday afternoon, Joe suggested that we should walk to Halton, along the river-bank. We three boys set off soon after lunch, taking the road North for a hundred yards or so, when we turned into the riverside footpath. This was a lovely walk, with trees overhead and the broad River Lune on the right-hand side. Here it was a glorious, fast-flowing waterway. In places the path came perilously close to the river, which had washed away the bank, to produce a precipitous and somewhat dangerous place. We boys daringly trod this pathway, as the river ran deep and swift below. As it was, we were all good swimmers and there was, perhaps, little direct hazard to us.

The path continued-on, meandering through woods and meadows, all clothed in Autumnal profusion. How wonderful it was to be living in such a place! All was quiet: the only sounds, those of a singing lark and other birds of wood and meadow. A mile or so upstream, we passed under the aqueduct carrying the Preston to Carnforth canal across the Lune Valley. The construction of such a work would have been quite a feat of engineering, as the aqueduct rises to a hundred feet or so above the river. I gazed in admiration and wonder at this tall and slender structure.

After an hour or so of walking, we arrived in Halton, a charming riverside village, where the valley has narrowed and the Lune is no longer such a barrier. Here we crossed the river by a bridge and returned on the other bank. At one point, we left the river and ascended to the Canal, re-crossing the river by way of the aqueduct. We arrived home in time for tea, feeling both tired and exhilarated by the joy and freedom of the afternoon. This trip to Halton became a favourite weekend pastime.

We boys had not considered taking Margery with us on this walk: not wanting to be “saddled” with a girl. Margery had gone to the Fryers home in search of us, after we had left. Mrs. Fryers told her that we had gone to Halton and she hurried after us but, unfortunately, missed us. She was, understandably, upset at being abandoned in this manner. This was another example of the failure on the part of the male to consider his obligations to the female. Margery had been entitled to think that we would have contacted her, before embarking on our afternoon adventure.

On another occasion we three boys, accompanied by Margery, who was billeted a short distance away, went to the town for the day, walking a mile or so through side streets, after crossing the wide bridge over the river. At one place we passed a Spiritualist Chapel, situated about a hundred yards from the main road. Externally, it was a well-maintained building and differed in no essential respect from any other Non-Conformist religious establishment. Joe, however, pointed to the building with some awe, saying, “D’ye see that place. That is a place where the Devil is worshipped!” “Why would anybody want to worship him?” said I. “I dunno”, said Joe. I gave no further consideration to the truth or otherwise of the assertion. However, the recollection of this incident remained with me throughout my life. In later years I came to firm conclusions as to the validity of that assertion and decided that it was the product of ignorance and malice: not, of course, that of a thirteen-year old boy.

Whilst in the town that afternoon, we visited the Town-Hall and Art-Gallery, from which there was a view of one of the principle squares of Lancaster: with fine Georgian houses on all sides. Joe pointed to one three-storey sandstone building, saying, “See that house there? That is where Dr. Ruxton murdered his wife and her maid”. I remembered the great publicity given to the trial of the infamous Doctor, a Hindu,(or Muslim) who had killed his wife in the bathroom of the house. Their maid was unfortunate enough to discover him in the act and suffered the same fate. He dismembered their bodies: distributing the pieces over widespread parts of the Scottish Highlands.

The trial of the Doctor had taken place a year or two earlier, at the Lancaster Assizes and had received world-wide publicity, on account of the particularly gruesome nature of the crimes. This event, it appears, had “put Lancaster on the Map!” Later on, we went down and had a closer look at the stone-fronted house.

As one enters Lancaster from the Trough of Bowland, on the right-hand side is an imposing domed pavilion; constructed as a memorial to the well-beloved wife of a wealthy landowner. Surrounding the monument is a charming and delightfully landscaped Park, which is open to members of the Public. During trips to the town we boys would sometimes visit the park, climbing to the top of the monument. From here, there are fine views of the town and surrounding countryside. Sometimes we would play games amongst the shrubs; in which my imagination gave full reign to the most stupendous achievements of Pirates or Redskins. For me, this place was akin to an Earthly Paradise: the paths, which wound here and there throughout the gardens, were bordered by tall trees and shrubs, making an ideal place from which to ambush the enemy, whomsoever that might be. I retained, for many years, a residual memory of this fascinating place: revived on visiting Lancaster again after a break of 38 years in l979. Although now restored and improved in some respects, the Park still retains many of the features that so captivated an l l year-old child.

Perhaps it was because I had been largely brought up in an industrial town, that my fancy was stimulated in this way by the charm of the country. Perhaps too, my father’s decision to encourage his children to take up cycling had contributed to the development, in us all, of a deep love of all things rural. There was, of course, a marked contrast between the foul and depressing environment of the industrial cities and the lovely, verdure-clad hills of North Lancashire. In later years, I took every opportunity to leave the city at weekends, to gratify my need to escape the millstone-grit streets of Salford.

The Winter of l939/40 was severe. The hills surrounding Lancaster were clothed in a dazzling garment of snow. The river froze to a depth of eight inches: good for skating. The canal too provided solid support for the skaters except where, here and there, beneath an overbridge, the ice would not have formed more than an inch or so. Temperatures were cold but this did not deter us children, who often went out into the snow to make snowmen or to throw snowballs at each other. Joe Fryers made a toboggan from old packing-cases and we went wild with delight; coursing down the steep slopes of the nearby hills. Now and again, we were able to borrow a pair of ice skates with which to skate on the canal; sometimes sharing a pair of skates by using one skate each. I was unable to obtain possession of a skate, as the older boys would not part with them.

With the arrival of Spring, the river ice began to thaw. It broke up into slabs, which piled themselves in huge masses on the banks of the fast-flowing river. One fine Spring afternoon, we boys had gone to Halton for an outing and commenced to enjoy ourselves by clambering over the accumulated piles of ice to push large blocks into the river; watching as it gave way: fell into the water and moved away with the current. This was great but dangerous fun. I became too enthusiastic about this activity. I climbed on top of a pile of ice and using my feet, pushed a large slab that was suspended and about to go. It moved suddenly, causing me to fall from my position. I now found myself below the ice pile, in imminent danger of being precipitated into the water; which was deep, fast-flowing and, no doubt, extremely cold. Fortunately, I was standing upon a slab of ice that was still secure. George saw my predicament and came to the rescue. He was able to reach down to me and I was safely retrieved from a somewhat precarious post. Had I fallen into the river, it is probable that I would not have survived the almost freezing water.

On returning home from school, one afternoon, I wandered down to the Mill, which stood near the Weir on the West Bank of the River Lune. I found the head of a large salmon, with a goodly portion of the body, still attached, lying in shallow water. It seems that the fish had sliced itself on the thinning ice and had, shortly before, been retrieved by a passer-by, who cut off the rear portion; for some reason leaving the remainder. I joyfully collected the head and took it to my Foster-Mother. It was rather heavy for me, as I was still a small boy, but well worth the effort involved. Mrs. Fryers inspected the fish and decided that it was edible. The family thereafter enjoyed a delicious meal of fresh salmon, which was a rare treat for working-class folk.

Wednesday was baking-day. Mrs. Fryers took over sole command of the kitchen and, when we children returned from school, would not let us near. We were usually ordered out of the house to play. She prepared a huge bowl of dough, which, after kneading, was left near the fire for an hour or so to rise. It was important for the room to be warm enough to raise the dough. Then, after more kneading and warming, she would bake sufficient bread to last the family for a week. In addition, Mrs. Fryers baked the Gingerbread and Seedcake, which I enjoyed so much. Sometimes, the cake would collapse during baking, as a result of unforeseen and rapid cooling. This cake was considered useless for normal use but we boys would beg the “sad” cake from Mrs. Fryers and have a feast. Although I was still a very small boy, I performed prodigies with that sad-cake.

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#### Chapter 27

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#### SKERTON SECONDARY MODERN SCHOOL

Evacuation proved to be an educational disaster for me, as the lack of direct parental control, combined with the inability of the School authorities to adequately plan or supervise lessons, led to many of the evacuees playing truant. I was amongst these lapsed scholars and thought it was wonderful to be able to run across to the park and lounge-about all day, instead of attending “boring” lessons. The absence of so many male teachers led to a hopeless situation as regards School discipline. It is probable that the serious overcrowding of classes resulted in a casual attitude towards truanting on the part of the remaining teachers. Certainly, little was done to enforce attendance, even though the cane was always an effective persuader. Even after children had returned to Salford, the absence of teachers resulted in them spending much of their school time in activities not directly related to the process of learning. During the Summer months, we spent hours each day in cultivating vegetables in the large garden that surrounded a Doctor’s house, adjoining the School-yard. Here I learned to cut and compost turf and to trench the ground for vegetable production. At the time, I thought that this too was preferable to tedious study.

Whatever, the cause of my failure to apply myself to study, the fact was that I took an interest in very few school subjects. I fell behind in Mathematics, a subject in which I had previously done well. Indeed, I could not recall doing any Maths during the time I was in Lancaster. Upon returning to Salford, I found that I could not understand the subject being discussed by the teacher. The one redeeming factor in my learning processes was that I read books, including many of the Dickens novels. I also enjoyed adventure stories of the Rider-Haggard variety. I discovered the 19th Century author, George Borrow and eagerly devoured “Lavengro”, “Romany Rye”, “The Bible in Spain” and, of course, “Wild Wales”. Prior to the advent of the Television Age, reading was still the main form of relaxation for the majority of people.

The gymnasium at the Skerton school was an ultra-modern affair, the like of which the Salford children had never seen before. There were parallel bars, horses, and ropes descending from the ceiling. These were about two inches in diameter. I had developed strong thigh and calf muscles and could climb these ropes with great facility. I became well-known for my skill on the ropes. As the Salford and Skerton schools used the gym. at different times, my ability on the ropes was known only to the Salford boys. It appeared that there was also a Skerton lad, whose skill in this regard was highly praised. Someone suggested a competition between us , on which there was to be a certain amount of “gambling”. Both sides were confident that their champion would win the day and the supporters were loud in their praise of the two competitors.

On the appointed day and hour we lined up for the contest. When the signal was given, I was up, touched the ceiling, as required, and hit the floor again well before the other lad reached the top. This was, indeed, a great day for the Salford champion. In general athletics I showed no particular aptitude, perhaps owing to my poor eyesight.

One day, in the Summer of 1940, Mrs. Fryers became ill and it was decided that she was no-longer able to care for George and me. Dad had also been missing us greatly and he was anxious for us to come home. We children were also happy to return to Salford.

We were permitted upstairs, into the main bedroom, to say, “Good-bye!” to our Foster-Mother, who was confined to bed. She kissed us very tenderly as we parted.

The War in France at that time was still in the doldrums and nobody felt that there was any real threat of a major Air-attack on the towns of the North of England. We children, therefore, returned to our parental home in Salford and resumed the life we had previously known.

#### CHAPTER 28

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#### TOOTAL ROAD CENTRAL SCHOOL

I returned to Tootal Road Central School to continue my studies. However, it was some time before schooling resumed an orderly routine. I was a disturbed lad. I had developed a nervous tic, which took the form of pulling down my lower jaw and cheek muscles, which in turn exposed my lower eye-balls. This was quite involuntary, on my part, but could convey the impression to an onlooker that I was deliberately “pulling-faces”. One afternoon, I was seated in an English Lesson, blissfully unaware of my surroundings, when my reverie was suddenly interrupted. I was called to the front of the class by Mr. Wilkinson, who said, “You boy, come out here!” I was shocked and wondered what could possibly be the matter. “Me Sir?” cried I. “Yes, you sir!” I complied. “Hold out your hand!” said the man of letters. Up went the cane and descended with vigour upon the palm of my outstretched hand. “The other one,” quoth Mr. Wilkinson. When this second cut had been laid, I returned to my desk, my hands burning in exquisite agony, still in ignorance of the reason for my maltreatment.

As I had committed no conscious offence, I was dismayed and angered by the treatment I received, on that occasion. Feeling the injustice of this punishment, I, thereafter, harboured a deep and lasting hatred of the English teacher. This resentment overflowed into all my scholastic activities. I withdrew within myself and refused to work. In Mathematics I was hopeless, having spent a year, or more, avoiding constructive work. I steadfastly declined to attempt to learn the French language, even though the French Mistress, Miss Crompton, was a pleasant and concerned teacher. I had formed the opinion that the French were a cowardly and treacherous crew and was determined not to apply myself to the study of the French language.

I myself was not of an aggressive temperament. Of robust physique, I was not tall but was prepared to stand up for myself. I was well aware that to show timidity was to invite persecution by stronger lads. One day I was challenged by Bill Cunningham: a lad of heavier build than myself. Cunningham was a self-confident fellow, who was certain of his physical advantage. On this occasion he felt the need to establish his authority as the “Class Champion”. I saw no way of avoiding a fight, which took place in the school yard at lunch-time. We faced up to each other, with guard raised. Several punches were thrown by the combatants, most of which did no harm, until finally, we rolled together on the ground. The combat lasted for a few minutes, as we were determined to assert ourselves to the utmost. The fight ended when I was forced to concede defeat, as Cunningham was able to get me on my back. There was no harm done and I preserved my “tough” image with my peers.

I was not above joining with other boys in the bullying of the more timid lads, for whom school-life must have been a torment. On more than one occasion, a group of lads, of which I formed a part, known colloquially as a “Gang”, would hound one of the less aggressive scholars, who had been too timid to engage in the frequent scuffles, which were considered necessary to establish the “Pecking-Order” within the Peer-group.

One of the boys who was terrorized in this manner lived in the same street as me. He was one of triplets, the other two children being girls. He was a quiet-natured lad, with fair, curly hair. Now, curly hair was the hall-mark of a “Cissy” and the local boys never allowed him to forget this incontrovertible fact. Whilst I, personally, got along well with him, there were occasions when I could not resist the pack-urge to “gang-up” on him, with the other boys.

His mother complained to my father of my bullying and baiting her son. She was a tall, thin lady of, otherwise, pleasant enough temperament. Her maternal instincts were aroused by the continued persecution of her child. After one such incident, when he had been chased home by a group of three or four of boys, including myself, to the accompaniment of shouts of “Cissy”, “Mammy’s Curly headed Babby”, and other taunts, she turned up on the doorstep of the shop one evening, in a highly distressed state. “Mr Roberts”, said the enraged parent, “I wish you would put a stop to your John’s hounding of my Son. He has come home in tears again, after being attacked by John and those other horrid lads.” “He has done nothing to them and I don’t see why they should behave in this way!” Dad was somewhat taken aback by the force of the mother’s resentment, but was aware of the fact that the local boys tended to hound her lad and make life miserable for him. He was not, however, going to do very much about it. He said, “I will have a word with John, when he comes home, Mrs. Jones”. When I did return home, my father told me about the lady’s visit and said that I had better be careful of my behaviour, in future.

By one of those strange quirks of fate, my friend grew-up to be one of the tallest and strongest young-men in the neighbourhood; after which all risk of persecution ceased. Fortunately for the other lads, He retained his affable temperament and good nature: displaying no inclination, in later years, to revenge himself upon the tormentors of his childhood.

The Tootal-Road School-building consisted of a three-storey block. The ground floor housed an Infant’s School: the Second Floor the Girls’ Section of the Tootal Road Central School. The Boys’ School occupied the top floor of the building. Surrounding the whole, was a playground, which was itself divided into sections for the respective Sex and age groups of the children. Across the Boys’ playground was a separate building which was the home of the Woodwork Department. This was staffed, at the time of which we speak, by an aged but kindly gentleman named Mr. Hill. He would normally have retired long ago, but owing to the shortage of teachers, had decided to continue teaching, for the duration of the War. He was a tall man and wore a brown dust coat. He moved with the slow and careful motion of the elderly. Mr Hill was a skilled and competent Carpenter, who must have despaired at the feeble endeavours of his pupils to produce anything worth-while, under his tutelage. I was hopeless at Woodwork, as with most skills, but responded warmly to Mr. Hill’s kindness and long-sufferance. In later years, I recalled the first principle of Woodwork, repeated so often by Mr. Hill, even though I myself was never able to observe the maxim: “A place for everything and everything in its place!”

Another person for whom I formed a measure of affection, was the Resident Caretaker’s wife, Mrs. McKay. It was the responsibility of the Caretaker to maintain the premises in a secure condition and to supervise the cleaning of the school. Mrs. McKay was a warm-hearted and motherly woman; just the type of maternal figure that I needed. I occasionally wandered into her house, which was situate within the school grounds. I was always on my best behaviour on these visits. Mrs. McKay tolerated me because she appreciated that I needed her support and encouragement.

Amongst the teachers, there was no-one, apart from Miss Crompton, who displayed any tolerance towards me. As French Mistress, she taught the girls, including Margery Roberts: who was an excellent scholar and a pillar of propriety. It was a matter of concern that I had a certain basic intelligence, but appeared to be incapable of settling down to school or applying myself, in any way, to my studies. I was easily distracted; played truant on occasions; got into all manner of petty mischief and generally refused to work in class. Another female teacher commenced working at the school at this time: a Mrs. Hewitt, who taught English and History. This lady was, in years, about the later middle-age, well-built and a person of strong character. If not a Communist, she was an ardent Socialist and espoused the cause of the Russians, with enthusiasm. I thought that she was not a bad type of woman, as she certainly held strong democratic ideas.

Mrs. Hewitt was not the sort of person to tolerate nonsense from anyone. She was also inclined to Atheism and presented sound arguments in favour of her views; which also impressed me. At this stage in my development I was beginning to reject the traditional notions of my forefathers as to the existence of God and Creation, (although I had always been to some extent a sceptic). Mrs. Hewitt was also a Justice of the Peace and sat on the Bench of Magistrates.

Atheism was much in vogue, at this time. Platt Fields, a Manchester Park, was a favourite place for soap-box orators, many of whom were ardent Atheists. I went along, occasionally, to hear these people expound their theories, which were invariably logical and appealing. I had no difficulty in agreeing with their propositions. The speakers demonstrated the absurdity of traditional Theological beliefs, alluding conveniently to the glaring inconsistencies and contradictions in the traditional doctrines of the Churches and the hypocritical lifestyle of the Clergy, of all denominations.

#### CHAPTER 29

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#### THE DAILY CHOIR

In spite of my personal scepticism, I still derived a great measure of comfort from my attendance at the Cathedral. Shortly after my return from Lancaster, I wandered into the Cathedral one Saturday afternoon. Dr. Wilson was practising on the Organ. The tremendous harmony of Bach’s Toccata and Fugue resounded throughout the fine old church. I was curious to see the Organist playing and decided to climb the spiral staircase to the Organ-loft, which had been erected above the Medieval Rood Screen. This was an unwarranted intrusion into the privacy of the Director of the Daily Choir. It was, undoubtedly, another form of attention-seeking on my part.

Dr. Wilson subsequently noticed my presence and, turning, said, “Hello, what are you doing here?” I replied, “I thought I would come to see you play”. “Do you play yourself?” “No”, said Jack “I am in the Voluntary Choir”. “You appreciate good music then?” “Yes, sir!” The Doctor then pondered for a while before saying, “Would you like to join the Daily Choir?” I was surprised at this suggestion but did not hesitate to reply, “Yes, I would”. Dr. Wilson then said, “I will have a word with Mr. Medgwicks”.

An “audition” was arranged for me, at which the Doctor and Mr. Medgwicks, the Precentor, were present. I was asked to sing, “There is a green-hill far away”: a well-known hymn, which is useful for testing the ear of a singer. In a highly-excited mental state, I commenced to sing. My head spun, tremendously, and it seemed to me that I was rising out of myself, into a “vortex”, in which I had no control, whatsoever, over my faculties. Under such circumstances, it is surprising that I was able to sing at all. However, I was pronounced suitable for the Daily Choir and arrangements were made for me to commence singing with that august body.

I was subjected to a measure of contempt from the other members of the Daily Choir, although I never allowed this to trouble me to any great extent. I appreciated the high standard of singing in the Choir and did my best to sing as well as the other Choristers.

It must be admitted that my musical background was limited. I had not learned to play the piano and my knowledge of music was limited to the rudiments I had acquired during my earlier choral experience. However, once I had heard a piece of music, I usually had no difficulty in following the part. During Choir practice, which was held twice weekly for the Daily Choir and once for the Voluntary Choir, we boys were vigorously exercised in the “Tonic-Sol-fa.”

It was here that I learned one valuable and salutary lesson, not associated directly with my Choral activities. I accepted a watch for repair by Uncle Harold from another Chorister, one Hounditch. This lad was about the same age as myself: dark-haired, pale-faced and of similar height and build. The other boy lived in Flixton: a more respectable district of Manchester than Salford, and I wrongly assumed that he would be willing to pay for the watch repair. The watch was duly fixed by Uncle Harold and the cost of repairs pronounced to be “five-shillings”. I duly handed over the watch, advised my colleague as to the sum due and owing; but was never paid. Some weeks subsequent to returning the watch to Hounditch, one Saturday afternoon prior to Choir Practice, I said to the other lad, “When do you think you will be able to give me the money for the watch?”. He looked sheepishly at me and said, “I have paid you already”. As I was still waiting for his five-shillings, I was appalled by this pronouncement and was unable to say much in reply to this, unabashedly, false declaration, other than the words, “No, you are a liar: you certainly have not paid me!”. There was something in the other boy’s demeanour which told me that there was no prospect, whatever, of obtaining the sum due to Uncle Harold. I could see that there was nothing I could do, in the face of such a mean and scurrilous attitude on the part of someone who, evidently, considered himself to be superior, in so many ways, to me. I might have been tempted to engage in fisticuffs, to assert my rights but felt no desire to settle the matter in this way, even though I, myself, was physically stronger than the other lad.

I was ashamed to have to later tell my Uncle of the attitude of my acquaintance. Whilst I was not particularly virtuous, in the matter of personal honesty; in my view, an agreement of this nature was absolutely binding. The brazen refusal to pay for the repairs to the watch was downright fraud. I felt frustrated and helpless, as I had undertaken an obligation for my Uncle that I could not meet. I had been well and truly “conned!” The dishonesty of my acquaintance reflected also upon me. Would Uncle Harold not suspect that I had merely pocketed the cash?

Apart from the choral singing, associated with the Anglican Services, I gave little thought to doctrinal questions, raised in Sermons from time to time. Many of the preachers who periodically gave the sermon were uninspiring and obviously found the task to be one of great difficulty. However, at that time, the Dean of Manchester was Garfield Williams, a Calvinist: and a man of tremendous faith, strong personality and great talent. He preached a great deal on the Letters of Paul the Apostle. I enjoyed his preaching immensely and was impressed by his sincerity. Dean Williams would thunder forth his convictions with power and inspiration. Whilst I understood little of the discourse, nor, at that time, of the capacity of the human mind for inspirational speech, I realized that here was a most unusual character. Dean Williams would quote long passages from the beautiful writings of Paul: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, ‘For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter’. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!” (Romans Ch 8,vs 35-9) These words poured forth wonderfully from the Pulpit of Garfield Williams. At least one Chorister would live to remember the Dean, with affection.

One other preacher who was always welcome, in my eyes, was the Dean of Liverpool. Though I do not remember his name, his Sermons were always lively and interesting. To be able to inspire small boys to sit up and take notice, denotes a most unusual talent.

The Bishop of Manchester, at this time, was Guy Warman, a sweet-natured, benign old gentleman, over 80 years of age. He was white haired and frail, yet exhibiting an unfeigned gentleness of character. During Ordination or Confirmation Services, the Bishop would officiate in a becoming manner, dressed in red cassock and surplice, with red-banded cuffs: “Defend, O Lord! this Thy child in Thy heavenly sight: that he may continue Thine for ever. Daily increase in Thy Holy Spirit, more and more, until he come into thine everlasting Kingdom: Amen!” The prayer was repeated, endlessly, so it seemed to me, as the candidates knelt at the feet of the Bishop. I considered this to be a futile activity, on the part of those concerned. I myself was confirmed at one such ceremony, only because Dr. Wilson suggested it. However, I took Holy Communion only once; feeling that it was an empty, useless ritual.

From time to time, great men of the Church came to give the Sermon. Willam Temple, who was then Archbishop of York and a former Bishop of Manchester, preached on one occasion, also a former Moderator of the Church of Scotland. I recall nothing of the subject matter of their Sermons but, in my opinion, neither came up to the standard of Garfield Williams.

Although I had, at that time, no awareness of the doctrinal differences subsisting within the Church of England, the Manchester Cathedral was quite clearly “Low Church”. There was none of the extravagant and superficial ritual of the Anglo-Catholic Communion here: just a basic and relatively healthy Anglicanism. I would have had to admit that I enjoyed the limited ritual of the Church of England. When donning my red cassock and white surplice, I felt that I was assuming a new and virtuous personality: quite distinct from that of a rough and ignorant Salford lad. When appointed to carry the Cross, in procession, when I was l4 years old (and losing my voice), I felt highly virtuous and refined. In spite of my enjoyment of such ritual, my sensitivities would have been outraged by the accoutrements of Anglo-Catholicism, in the shape of Incense and Confessional Boxes: which I regarded as pure “Popery!” In later years, when I realized that there was such a thing as a “High Church”, I was indignant: believing that Catholics should be in the Catholic Church, not the Church of England.

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#### CHAPTER 30

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#### BOMBED-OUT

Towards the Summer of l940, the War situation became grave. With the fall of France, the German Air Offensive was extended to cover the major cities of England, including the North-Western towns of Liverpool and Manchester. Liverpool was a primary target, with Manchester a secondary objective of the Luftwaffe. In the weeks prior to Christmas 1940, Manchester was exposed to several air-raids, with random bombing and minor damage.

We children were obliged to spend the time during air-raids in the cellar, beneath the shop. The cellar was bitterly cold and damp, particularly at this Winter Season. It was not a place in which anyone could be made warm, comfortable or secure. This was the position with regard to most families, who had no other form of air-raid shelter, at that early period in the War. There was no effective shelter from bombs in domestic cellars, but they were below ground and provided a measure of protection from blast.

In the vicinity of Victoria Bridge, on the Manchester bank of the River Irwell, there are extensive subterranean caverns, carved out of the sandstone during the Middle Ages, for use as Warehouses; being conveniently situated well above the river. In my day the Irwell was a filthy open sewer: into which was poured daily the effluent from numerous Cotton-mills, Dye-works and other industrial enterprises. During the Middle-Ages, the river was an important Commercial artery.

These ancient riverside storehouses were now utilised as Air-Raid Shelters; providing excellent protection from aerial attack. I spent a lot of time here, in exploring the caverns, on my way to and from Choir Practice and Church Services. Provided with electric lighting, whitewashed and fitted with bunk beds, they were deep and secure. These shelters could have accommodated thousands of persons. Whether they were ever used by many people is to be doubted, as most people were at home when Manchester was bombed, which usually occurred at night.

On the night of Christmas Eve 1940, the Germans sent a bomber force in excess of two-hundred planes, to attack the industrial areas of Manchester and Salford, with the docks at Salford and the industrial estate at Trafford Park being a prime target, in addition to the business district of Manchester itself.

When the Air-raid warning sounded, at about 8pm, we collected our bedding and went down to the cellar. Dad had become a full-time Air-raid Warden and was required to be out on the streets, wearing his Tin Hat and doing whatever duties were allotted to him. We children were by now familiar with the procedure during Air Raids. In previous raids there had been a great deal of noise: not a little damage being occasioned to windows, by the nearby operation of Anti-Aircraft guns, which were long-barrelled 4” guns. These weapons exploded with a deafening roar, quite incomprehensible, unless experienced at first hand.

We had not been long in the cellar, when we heard the now familiar sound of the synchronised engines of the German bombers overhead. The humming of the Heinkel and Dornier engines rose and fell intermittently, in contrast to the sustained and level purr of British aeroplanes. Off went the guns. Then came the singular scream of falling bombs, which was not a high and sustained scream but sounded, to my ears, more like the noise made by a gigantic clapper, which increased rapidly, rising in pitch as the bomb fell faster and faster; to be followed by the subsequent detonation. On this night the attack continued, unabated, until past midnight. Several bombs fell within a radius of one or two hundred yards of the shop.

Meanwhile, we children huddled together in the cold and damp but relative security provided by the cellar steps. The bombs dropped that night were usually 250-Kilo bombs, which appeared to be the standard German bomb at this time. Tonight, the Germans also used their landmines for the first time: one-ton parachute bombs, which were silent killers. There was no warning noise, before these tremendous weapons of destruction exploded. The parachute bombs were indiscriminate weapons: as they drifted with the wind and on landing, flattened everything over a wide radius. Rows of Jerry-built terraced cottages, occupied by the working classes, disappeared in the blast from these diabolical weapons.

Several landmines exploded in the residential district, adjoining the Docks: not so far from where we sat: trembling with fear and excitement.

When the bombing was at its height, George and I crept timidly upstairs, to see what was happening. I was very frightened but unwilling to admit the fact to my elder brother. As George moved into the shop, with me following to the rear, our father, who had been standing in the doorway of the shop, turned and saw us. “Get back to the cellar!” he called-out. “It is far too dangerous for you lads to be up here. The falling shrapnel would cut you to pieces if you were hit.” I was glad to return to the comparative safety of the cellar. Margery remained, prostate with terror, in her place under the stairs.

One bomb exploded in one of the Isle of Man streets, not far away, demolishing a house and bursting the windows of surrounding property. Another landed in vacant land on the other side of the Washhouse. The blast from this bomb destroyed the windows and what remaining crockery lay on the shelves of the shop. A number of bombs fell in the vicinity but failed to explode, being either faulty or fitted with a detonation-delay device. Such delayed action weapons were intended to disrupt activity; demanding, as they did, the evacuation of personnel and the temporary abandonment of premises.

During the night, an order was sent out to evacuate the occupants of the homes in the vicinity of Lord Duncan Street, owing to the presence of unexploded bombs. We children were moved to the King’s Cinema, several hundred yards away from our home, and spent the rest of the night and early Christmas-Day in sleeping, as best we could, in the Cinema seats.

In the morning, we returned home, which, I subsequently discovered, was still threatened by five unexploded bombs. The combined effects of bombing and of Anti-aircraft shelling created a blanket of smoke and cordite fumes in the still air, which continued to hang about the narrow streets for days.

As window-glass was unobtainable, shattered windows were later covered with calico for the duration of the war. This allowed a limited amount of light into the rooms and kept out the Winter winds and rain.

It is a matter of Public Record that there was no RAF Fighter protection for the towns of the North of England; permitting the Luftwaffe to do as it pleased. The use of Anti-Aircraft Guns was a propaganda exercise, for the benefit of the Civilian population, which was ignorant of the fact that they were ineffective against Aircraft. The guns merely added to the terror of the people: increasing the public danger by peppering the city with chunks of jagged shrapnel.

Early on Christmas morning, I collected a good many pieces of shrapnel and the nose cones from shells, as souvenirs. Later, I decided to walk to the Cathedral, but hardly expected the Christmas-day Service to be held. There was nothing to rejoice about on this particular morning, unless it was to give thanks that one was still in the “land of the living.”

I was curious to observe for myself the result of the bombing and walked to Manchester, a distance of two miles from the shop. Much damage had been caused to residential property in Salford, mainly by High-Explosive bombs, no doubt intended for the Docks. I saw several terraced houses, which had been blown-up and, on walking along Liverpool Street towards Oldfield Road, I observed the remains of two domestic terraces, demolished by a Parachute bomb. A short street, about a hundred yards long and containing perhaps forty houses, had disappeared, leaving only a pile of bricks and timber.

On approaching the Victoria bridge, by which one crosses the River Irwell from Salford to Manchester, it became evident to me that damage had also been caused to the City itself. Crossing the bridge I saw that the Exchange Railway Station was burning on the left. Flames were leaping unrestrainedly from each window of the main Station building. Before me, on Deansgate, the Victoria Hotel, a large and ornate edifice, which occupied the whole block, was ablaze from end to end. The Shambles, the last remnant of Medieval Manchester, had gone; all but one or two small buildings.

I later discovered that a large area, in the business heart of Manchester itself, had been destroyed by firebombs, which nobody had been able to extinguish; as at that time there was no effective Civil Defence Force. These Incendiary bombs consisted of canisters, about 18 inches in length and 2 inches in diameter, with fins at one end and an impact cap on the other. The body of the Incendiary Bomb was composed of magnesium, which burnt fiercely, when ignited. At a later stage of development they were fitted with a small explosive charge, which caused them to burst, soon after they were ignited: spreading the flaming magnesium and increasing the effectiveness of the weapon. Thousands of Incendiaries were scattered from the bombers and, falling through the roofs of unattended buildings, created fires that spread rapidly to surrounding property.

Throughout my march, I walked through a dense pall of smoke and fumes, observing here and there the destructive force of high explosive. However, the greatest damage had obviously come from the Incendiary bombs, showered upon the commercial heart of the City, destroying many of the great warehouses. It was a debt to be repaid, with interest, by the RAF in its later devastation of Germany.

As I approached the Cathedral, it did not at first appear to have been affected by the general conflagration. However, on entering the church I was surprised to see that, inside the grand old pile, there was a deposit of soot an inch deep, or so it appeared, covering everything; pulpit, choir, floor; pews; chairs. The accumulated grime of centuries had been dislodged from the roof and lay like a carpet over the interior of the Cathedral. Dr. Wilson and the Head-Verger, Mr…………., were present, but I was the only Chorister to attend.

A bomb had fallen on the North Western transept, badly damaging the Regimental Chapel, in which the Colours of local Army Regiments were hung. Blast damage had been caused to other parts of the building, including the beautifully carved Gothic Choir, from which, here and there, chunks of wood had been gouged, as if the timber had been struck at random with pick-axes. The lovely medieval stained-glass windows had been destroyed; depriving the Cathedral of that subdued, mystical atmosphere, which is so essential in a Gothic building. The rest of the Cathedral did not appear to be structurally affected. Before the building could be used again, an architectural examination was required and a massive clean-up undertaken.

Dr. Wilson duly paid me my one-shilling and sixpence, for attending Church on that day, which I accepted, with delight.

For the next few months, the Cathedral Services were transferred to St. Ann’s Church; a lovely 18th Century Chapel, situate two hundred yards from the Cathedral. Services were held here very satisfactorily, whilst repairs were being made to the Cathedral. During one such service, I was called upon, without warning, to sing a solo hymn: “Lead us, Heavenly Father, lead us”, which I managed to render to the satisfaction of Dr. Wilson.

St. Ann’s Square, together with the fashionable district of King Street, had fortunately missed the destruction of the bombing, whilst large areas in and around the Piccadilly Gardens and Moseley Street had been burned-out.

My School had also been destroyed by fire on the Christmas Eve; at least the third floor, containing the Boys’ Central School, had been completely burnt-out, including a Library, regarded as the finest School-Library in Salford. Our school moved temporarily to the Halton Bank School, but later returned to the ground floor of the Tootal Road building. The infant children formerly taught there were now lodged in other premises.

Aunty Daniels, now in her 60’s, was seated in an above-ground Air-Raid shelter, with her family and several neighbours, during the Christmas Eve raid. The shelter had been erected just across the street from her home, a matter of fifty feet or so. A German bomb landed on her front doorstep; demolishing that house and those on either side. I later stood at the spot where the front door had been and noticed that one or two bricks at the base of the back-yard wall remained intact. Nothing whatever remained of Aunty Daniel’s three-storey terraced house, which had been crammed with furniture, much of it belonging to her married daughters. Miraculously, all the people in the shelter survived: one young woman with a seriously injured foot.

#### CHAPTER 31

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#### FUEL

Throughout the War, coke was, occasionally, available for domestic purchase at the Gas-works and people were glad to obtain even a small quantity of this fuel. One Winter afternoon in l942, I pushed an old pram through the streets of Salford, in the hope of obtaining a bushel of coke. The Gas-works was situated on the other side of Cross Lane, between Liverpool Street and Regent Road, perhaps a half a mile away. I steered my pram along Shah Street and, crossing Hodge Lane, followed the Railway line to Cross Lane, which I also crossed, near the Railway Station. By this time, it was then little used by the travelling Public, which preferred the, more convenient, trams and buses. I turned right; passed a Tobacconist’s shop and moved downhill for a hundred yards, to the traffic lights on the corner of Regent Road and Cross Lane. Turning left, I passed the “Peeping Tom” Public House, Burton’s the Tailors, Woolworth’s, The British Home Stores, “Thirty-Bob” Tailors and several other retail businesses, which then flourished here. Now turning left, I soon reached my destination. On arriving at the Gasworks yard, I joined a long queue, composed mainly of elderly men and women, all with a pram or trolley; waiting, with patient resignation, to be served. The day was overcast and bitterly cold. The people in the queue were quiet and subdued.

From time to time, someone would cough loudly. There was the occasional stamping of feet, as folk tried to warm themselves in the chill, damp air of the bare, black Gasworks-yard. They were working-class people; like myself: clad in the drab, grubby-looking, patched wartime clothing of the Poor. All were uniformly cold and wished they were anywhere but standing here, in just another queue. I blew into my hands and slapped them against my chest, in an attempt to get my blood circulating.

In the centre of the large open space, which constituted the Gas-works yard, was a coal-burning Gas-plant. This primarily produced coal gas for cooking and heating. Coal was baked in ovens to produce gas, which was then piped away to the Gasometers: a feature of the skyline of every town in those far-off days. The residue was Coke, used in steel-making and also burned in combustion stoves. With coal being in short supply, coke was eagerly sought for use in open fireplaces. Coke, when ignited, gives off Carbon Monoxide, which can be pretty deadly stuff. It will not burn without coal or timber to get it started, but once ignited it burns well, with a hot, smokeless flame. There was perhaps some danger from the gas released from burning coke, but most houses were so draughty that there was little chance of anyone being asphyxiated. Most of the gas, together with the heat, went up the chimney.

I waited patiently for an hour, during which time the queue in front gradually diminished. As I neared the Coke Ovens, I saw smoke and flame and felt the welcoming warmth of the furnace fires. Finally my turn came to be served. The attendant measured out my Bushel and tipped it into the perambulator. “Two bob, youngster”, said the Foreman in charge. “Thanks”, said I, tendering a half-crown and, taking my change, I joyfully departed; glad to be on my way home.

#### CHAPTER 32

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#### DOMESTIC ARRANGEMENTS

I continued to attend the Choir, not merely because of my love of singing but also, perhaps, because it gave me an opportunity to avoid, what to me, was the oppressive environment of the home. Although I did not appreciate this, at the time, it was, undoubtedly, my membership of the Choir that gave me a measure of stability and security. I had attained the position of Leading Boy Chorister, with the Voluntary Choir and this gave me a certain status. It was almost as though I was leading a “double life”: on the one hand, that of a Chorister and, on the other, the life of a child of the streets.

I had no fixed religious views at this period in my life. Indeed, I was an Agnostic. Deep below an iconoclastic exterior, there lurked a subconscious need for spiritual counsel and support. Whilst rejecting outward religious forms, I still needed the reassurance afforded me by my attendance at Church Services. This was some compensation for the sense of rejection, which I experienced at home.

Apart from the controls exercised by my father, there were allotted tasks to be performed daily and at weekly intervals. One of my jobs was the brown-stoning of the front doorstep and backyard. These were tasks, which, in any well-regulated household, so far as I was concerned, would have been performed by the women of the house. However, as there was only one female and she a small one, it was necessary for us lads to perform our share of the household tasks. I was also given the job of shopping for the weekly Food Rations and making daily purchases of fish, fruit and vegetables from the Greengrocer’s in Liverpool Street.

During the later War years, the family Ration Books were deposited with a local Grocer, Mrs. Roach, who kept a small shop and off-licence in Woodbine Street. She was a widow, whose husband had died a year or so prior to the commencement of hostilities. She had three children, two boys and a girl, who were all somewhat older than me. Harry Roach was a particularly bright lad, tall, red-haired and good-looking. He was one of the local Peer-group idols, always brimful of the confidence that I was lacking. The sister, Margaret, was a slim, quiet girl. The younger son, Andrew, was blind: local tradition claiming that he had upset a cup of hot tea over himself, as a child. Rumour further suggested that the neglect that gave rise to the disastrous “Cup of Tea” incident, had been of a paternal nature and had permanently impaired relations between the parents. I myself had observed that Mr Roach was of a quiet and subdued temperament; being kept in his rightful place by his more intelligent and rather dominant spouse.

Andrew attended the local Blind School and was an extraordinarily active lad, whose handicap did not in any way prevent him from participating in many normal, childhood activities. I often saw Andrew riding a bicycle up and down the entry behind the house, without any fear. The entry widened out at one point to provide a fair-sized play area for children and Andrew took full advantage of his knowledge of the area to display his cycling expertise. I was full of admiration for him.

One Saturday morning in 1941, I left home to purchase the weekly Rations for our family. These consisted of sugar, tea, butter, dried-eggs, bacon, margarine, jam, etc.. I took with me a basket and a One Pound Note. I ran briskly up the slight hill to Woodbine Street and entered Mrs. Roach’s shop. The premises consisted of a tiny room just around the corner from the Northern end of Duncan Terrace, fronting directly on to the street. The shop was lined with shelves, upon which were placed foodstuffs and other household wares. As I pushed open the door, the bell rang to announce my appearance. However, Mrs. Roach was already present, serving a lady customer. “Good morning, Mrs. Roach” said I. “Hello John” returned the shopkeeper. “I won’t be long”. “That’s all right Mrs. Roach”. Five minutes later she was free to attend to me. “Let me see: Sugar l lb., Butter 1/2lb., Tea 1/4lb., 8oz Dried-Eggs, 1/2lb Bacon, 1/2lb Margarine.” The sugar was already in l lb. bags but the butter was extracted from a large block, by the aid of two wooden paddles, which Mrs. Roach deftly manipulated to produce the required weight. She now wrapped the butter and placed it on the counter. A manually operated Bacon-slicing machine produced four rashers of Bacon, which came to just a half-pound: the full weekly ration for four persons.

As she turned the handle of the Bacon-Slicer, Mrs. Roach said to me, “How is your father John?” “Very well, thank you Mrs. Roach.” “Is he still doing the cobbling?” “Yes, when he can get leather.” She observed, “I have a pair of shoes which need heeling, I’ll bring them down when I have time.” “Dad should be able to do a pair of heels for you, as they won’t take much leather.”

The Ministry-of-Food Margarine was pre-wrapped in half-pound packets. I now said, “I would like a pound of salt as well as the milk, please.” All items being placed upon the counter, Mrs. Roach now deftly added up the cost. “That will be twelve and sixpence”. I handed over the Pound Note. “Seven and six change, Thank-you John!” “Thank-you Mrs. Roach!.” Packing my bag, I said, “Cheerio!” to the shopkeeper and left the shop. I went straight home and placed the Rations in the kitchen-cupboard.

I had now to buy the bread, meat and vegetables before my shopping was complete. I ran up Fitzwarren Street to the Liverpool-Street shops. The Bakery and Cake Shop was near the Co-operative Society Store, on the corner, across from the Liverpool Street Recreation Ground. Bread and cakes could be purchased there, but the latter items were only available in small quantities and usually at short notice, so that there was a rush when cakes were on sale. I purchased a two-pound white loaf for four-pence half-penny and now walked past the Co-op to the Butcher’s.

Len the Butcher was very conceited. He must have been either unfit for military service or exempt, as normally, he would have been in the Armed Forces. He was in his mid-30’s, fairly tall, smart and well-groomed. “A bit of a “Brylcream” boy”, I thought. Len had no time for urchins of my ilk. I now walked into the shop, whistling continuously, a nondescript tune. Len was then serving another customer and I would have to wait for some time, as there were two other women waiting to be served, when I entered. I whistled for a minute or so, until Len turned around from the bench, where he had been trimming a small piece of beef, and said, in stentorian tones, “Will you kindly stop making that racket, lad?” His angry visage clearly indicated that he had been irritated by my whistling. I was surprised, as I had not been at all conscious, either of my whistling or of the fact that I was giving offence. Len now weighed the meat and, wrapping it firstly in a piece of clean paper and then newspaper, spoke to the lady he was then serving: “That will be four and sixpence, please, Mrs. White.” “Thank you, Len”, said that lady, “There is five shillings.” “Sixpence change, Ma’am,” said Len, handing her a small silver coin. “Good-day to you!” “Good day, Len!”: she left the shop.

When my turn came to be served, I said politely, “Have you got a piece of beef, Len?” He replied, “Yes, I think we can manage that. Will this be all right?” (Producing a small piece of Beef, about 4 inches square.). “That will be fine!” Having received the meat, for which I paid five-shillings, I now said, “So long, Len!” and went next door-but-one to the Greengrocers. On the way I passed the almost empty window of Telford’s Cycle shop, which under Wartime stringencies, was no longer the glory of yester-year. There were no ultra-modern racing cycles and fancy equipment. Such items as tyres and tubes and even brake blocks were in short supply.

The lack of meat in the diet was made up in fish, purchased from the combined Green-grocery and Fishmonger’s shop. This was conducted by Mr. Bailey and his daughter, Doris. Doris was about thirty-five years of age, at this time; a rather plain but sensible young woman, who had never married. She was small in stature with light brown hair. Doris treated me very kindly, as, indeed, did her father, a tall, elderly man who had served his Country in the First World-War.

There was usually an adequate supply of vegetables and fish to be obtained from the Bailey’s, together with the occasional rabbit. Apart from the domestic variety, rabbits were imported during the War from Australia, where they were gutted and deep-frozen in huge blocks. This not only helped to control the Rabbit population “Down Under”, but provided a valuable source of Protein for the British population. Potatoes were the staple food, after bread and, as a rule, were freely available.

I now entered Bailey’s shop to find Mr. Bailey and Doris, serving two middle-aged female customers. “Good-morning Doris!, Hello Mr. Bailey!” The daughter responded with a kindly smile and, “How are you, John?” “Very well, thanks, Doris!” I watched, as Mr. Bailey cut one-inch steaks from a large codfish, for his lady customer. As he wrapped the fish in clean paper and newspaper, Mr. Bailey said, “That will be a shilling, thank-you, Madam.” Putting the shilling in the till, he turned and surveyed the world outside his shop. The father was now in his late fifties, a big man with a mass of thick grey hair. His face was lined and rugged but kindly and contented.

Doris now approached her small customer, “Well John, what can I do for you?” I replied, “I’ll have ten pound of King Edwards, please Doris: a cabbage, two pounds of onions and two pounds of carrots.” Doris weighed the potatoes and tipped them directly into my bag, from the scales; doing the same with the onions and carrots. As the shop was now empty, I said, “Any chance of getting a rabbit, Doris?” She now bent down below the counter and produced the complete but gutted article. She cut off the paws and swiftly stripped the skin from tail to head. Doris said, “Shall I cut it up for you?” “Please, Doris.” She cut the rabbit into pieces, using a knife and cleaver, and wrapped it in a small piece of greasepaper and then newspaper. Doris now added up the cost of the items, “Spuds, l shilling, Cabbage, sixpence, Onions, sixpence, carrots fivepence, Two and six for the Rabbit. Four and eleven please John”. I handed over five shillings, receiving a penny change. “See you later!” “Cheerio, John!”, said Doris. I now retraced my steps homewards, the major Saturday task complete.

Cleaning the house, preparing vegetables, washing dishes etc., were all tasks for which there was a roster. This discipline had a beneficial effect upon us, as it made us self-reliant.

In l938, our father had stopped us bringing Comic Books into the house, as this activity, or lack of it, greatly interfered with the running of the household. As a result, my siblings and I commenced reading better forms of literature: developing habits which stood us in good stead in later years. I grew to be very self-satisfied with my attitude towards “Comics” and contemptuous of other children, who spent hours burying themselves in such Comic papers as, “The Hotspur”, the “Rover”, “Dandy” and the “Beano”.

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#### CHAPTER 33

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#### EXPELLED.

It was my evident interest in good books that drove my teachers to distraction, as they observed my failure to respond, in class. After more than one teacher had complained to the Head of my indifferent attitude in class, I was called to the Headmaster’s office. Mr. Beamish was seated at his imposing desk, as I knocked on his door, which was open. “Come in Roberts”, said the Head. “sit down there”, indicating a chair. “What are we to do with you, boy?” “I don’t know Sir”, quoth I. “I am quite unable to reach you Roberts: just what is the matter? Are you not happy in this school?” “Yes, Sir” I lied. “I have had more trouble with you, than with any other boy in the whole of my school career! This cannot continue. Unless you knuckle down to work, you will have to leave the School. Do you understand?” “Yes, Sir!” “You may go!” As I departed I was relieved that I had not been caned.

I did not, at that time, see how I could have been such a trouble to the Headmaster but, as I grew older, felt that this outburst was an expression of the frustration felt by the Head over my failure to work to my ability. Whilst Mr. Beamish was only the Headmaster of a Central School, there is no doubt that he was well-qualified to teach and was a sincere, dedicated teacher. I recall him as a man somewhat above the middle height, thinly-built and dressed in an old-fashioned, but immaculate, style, with “Spats”. If somewhat pompous, this was perhaps illustrative of the role he played as Headmaster, rather than a basic attribute of his character.

When I was l4 years of age and during a relaxed period, one afternoon, the teacher in charge of the Class played a gramophone record. It was of the aria, “Your tiny hand is frozen!” from “La Boheme” by Puccini, sung by Jussi Bjurling, the great Swedish Tenor. I was struck by the beauty of the music and now awoke to the existence of Opera. Whenever I now hear this Aria, my thoughts turn to the unhappy days of my childhood and the ray of light that came into my life, at that time; in the realisation that here was something of great loveliness.

There were one or two other boys listening to the record, perhaps more intelligent and sophisticated. It is, perhaps, doubtful whether they were so deeply affected as I was. My teacher would have had no idea that one of his pupils had been reached to the depths, by the singing of Bjurling; as I kept my feelings to myself.

Whilst I grew to love the music of Verdi and Puccini, it was not until I was much older, that I heard a recording of Maria Callas singing the “Mad Scene” from, “I Puritani”: an Opera by Bellini. Once more, my world was illumined by a flash of brilliant artistry. The music encapsulated an aspect of the Divine world itself. I now began to take an interest in the Operas of Bellini and Donizetti, whose music filled me with a reverential delight. Here, indeed, was a “Highway to Paradise!”

Before I finished school, at the ripe old age of 14 years and 6 months, my voice began to

break. This caused me no small embarrassment. I continued to attend Church Services for some weeks but felt that I had become redundant. Without giving notice of my intention, I stopped attending Services. When it had become apparent that I would not be returning to the Choir, Mr. Cocker sent me a warm letter, in acknowledgement of my Services: which I read, not without a sense of shame, and discarded.

Before School commenced one morning, I was discovered by the Headmaster in the Boys’ Toilet Block, in the act of lighting a “Stink Bomb”. This was composed of a few inches of celluloid film, rolled in paper which, once lit and extinguished, continued to smoulder; producing dense and noxious fumes. This pastime had been popular with the boys in recent weeks and had come to the attention of the Headmaster who, for reasons of his own, disapproved of such conduct upon school grounds. I went to the toilet, before school commenced, where I met two boys, Bill Robinson and Albert Baron. I rolled and lit a stink-bomb. Blowing out the flame, I dropped it on to the floor of the toilet cubicle, in which I was then standing. It produced the anticipated cloud of acrid smoke: much to our amusement.

From where I stood in a toilet cubicle, I did not observe the entrance of the Headmaster to the Toilet Block. The first indication of complications arose, when I saw Bill, with a look of apprehension on his face, suddenly stamp his foot on the smoking artefact. This action came as a surprise and annoyance to me and I cried, “What did you do that for, you Rat!?” However, I soon discovered the cause of Bill’s concern, as the triumphant face of Mr. Beamish now presented itself in the doorway of the cubicle. “What do you think you are doing, boy!?” “Lighting a Stink Bomb, Sir!”

The Head evidently considered such relatively harmless behaviour to be a serious breach of discipline. At any rate he took me in charge and, grabbing me by the collar marched me to the School Hall, wherein Morning Assembly was then taking place. I was told to bend over and, duly complying, the Headmaster then laid six hefty strokes of the cane upon my posterior. I had not the advantage of underpants and my short pants would have been rather thin. I heard the swish of the half-inch rattan, as it descended; then felt the supple cane slicing (as it seemed) into the soft flesh of my buttocks: to be followed immediately by an intense and prolonged burning sensation. After the second stroke, the fire in my backside burned like “hell”. I began to experience an increasing apprehension as to how long this torment was to continue. I thought, “What have I done to deserve this?” The cane descended again and again: the Headmaster warming to his task with a fierce determination.

The Head was enjoying himself. This was his vengeance for years of frustration. “All right for that bugger: he’s not at the receiving end!” thought I. The flogging was painful enough to produce genuine tears in my eyes: who was rather too preoccupied with my own miseries, to listen to the subsequent eloquence of the Headmaster, who advised all like-minded miscreants that they would receive similar treatment, if detected in the commission of such anti-social behaviour.

In retrospect, it seemed to me that this incident, over a relatively trivial matter, was magnified, disproportionately, by the Head, both as an excuse to vent his spleen and to eject me from the school. It constituted the climax of my School-career and the Headmaster told me “to go!”

It was now that I was faced with the task of obtaining employment. But what was to be “suitable employment” for a lad in my position? I had no hope of obtaining work in an office, as I was hopeless with pen and ink. Being left-handed, neat writing was impossible for me. My school books, which were smudged and dotted all over with ink-blots, testified to my incapacity in this essential field. I had no knowledge of book-keeping. What was I to do?

#### CHAPTER 34

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#### THE MIDLAND HOTEL

My father was unable to offer me any advice. He realized that finding appropriate employment for me would be difficult. George Roberts had little confidence in my capacity to undertake any form of a career.

Uncle Harold was prepared to take me as his second Apprentice. However, I was not interested in Watch-making. In this decision I was influenced to some extent by my brother, George, who was himself apprenticed to Uncle Harold and did not want me to be in the same firm, perhaps, for reasons of his own. I felt that I ought to try to establish a career for myself in some other field.

As I enjoyed good food, I decided to seek work as a Trainee-Cook. I answered an advertisement in the “Manchester Evening News”, for Trainee Cooks to work in the kitchen of the Midland Hotel: then the most luxurious establishment of the kind in Manchester. After an interview with the Head-Chef: a conceited but immaculate Frenchman, named M. Grailleaux, I was given a job in the Vegetable Section.

The Midland Hotel, at that time, was owned by the L.N.E.R. and so, technically, at least, I became a Railway Employee.

On a Monday morning, around-about July l943, at 9am, I duly reported to the Staff Entrance of the Hotel, situated on the Western side of the building. There was an office occupied by an elderly man, who performed the duties of Time-clerk. From here I was directed down a long, tiled passageway to the Kitchen. Here I reported to the Head Chef. M. Grailleaux glanced superciliously at me and, having more important business to attend-to, left me standing for five minutes, before conducting me to the Veg. Corner. Here, I was cursorily introduced to Mr. Olsen: “Dis is your new boy, Roberts, Monsieur Olsen!” said the Chef, and abruptly disappeared. Mr. Olsen took me to the Cooks’ changing room, which was a rambling affair, containing toilets, urinal, wash-basins and a locker for each individual. After changing into my new white, double-fronted chef’s coat, replete with silver buttons, and cook’s hat, I reported to Mr. Olsen, who set me to work, forthwith, in assisting in the preparation of vegetables. Spinach was on the menu and he called me over to him. “You have to wash the spinach: so—“, demonstrating the operation by dipping a Spinach plant vigorously into cold water, several times. “Carry-on with that for now”. This I now took up with gusto. When the Spinach had been boiled, I was directed to rinse it in cold water: after which I then squeezed it into balls, removing as much water as possible. Then the Spinach was put through a mincing machine. Prior to being served, Mr. Olsen mixed finely chopped garlic with the Spinach and fried it on top of the stove.

Olsen was, of course, a Swede: a large, loud, ruddy-faced, ignorant, over-bearing fellow. I discovered nothing appealing in his nature but did not expect to be feather-bedded. As I was a willing and reliable worker, my Boss had little to complain about. My duties varied from preparing such vegetables as were available, from day to day, usually Carrots, Turnips, Spinach, Cabbage, Cauliflower, etc.; depending upon the season. There were also two female kitchen hands, middle-aged ladies, who had to prepare potatoes each day. This was carried-out with the aid of an old-fashioned potato-scrubbing machine, rather like a modern clothes spin-dryer. The cylinder was lined with a harsh abrasive, which removed more potato than peel. I thought it was incredibly wasteful, particularly in Wartime. However, it saved the tedious work of hand-peeling “Spuds”. After being processed by the machine, the potatoes were trimmed by hand. I often assisted with this task. The work in this Section was wet and, as I was careless about myself, I was frequently soaked from the waist down.

Cooking was carried out in large copper pots. There were several coal-burning ranges for cooking, in the traditional manner, which became extremely hot. This was welcome in the colder months but, in Summer, the heat in the kitchen was often unbearable. There were also a number of steamers, which were used by the different “Corners” in the kitchen. These were the Roast Corner, the Soup Corner, the Fish Corner, as well as the Veg. Corner. The Pastry Corner was a separate establishment, up a flight of stairs, at the end of the main kitchen.

I found my work to be interesting, although I was kept very busy. Working hours were from 10am to 2pm and from 5pm to 8 or 9pm. During the afternoons, I could please myself what I did and I usually wandered around the town, to occupy these hours. Sometimes, I would visit the Central Library, which was across the way, in St. Peter’s Square. This is a magnificent building, fortunately undamaged during the air-raids. The Library is circular in shape; the building having been designed after the Roman Pantheon, being, perhaps, larger in diameter than its prototype. Below the dome in the main hall runs an inscription, thus: “Get unto thyself Wisdom and with thy getting, get understanding: Embrace her and She shall promote thee: a Crown of Glory shall she deliver unto thee!” This is, of course, a paraphrase from Chapter 4 of the Book of Proverbs and is certainly appropriate for a Central Reference Library.

Although not a very wise or clever child, I enjoyed the tranquillity of the great reading room. There was a silence here and a peace, which gave welcome relief from the hustle and bustle of the external world. The building itself is quite beautiful and is approached by a broad flight of steps, leading to a gallery running the circumference of the building. A further flight leads to the main Reference Library, which occupies the central area beneath the huge dome. The slightest sound produces an echo, which reverberates like the tinkling of a bell: lending an unusual and rather devotional atmosphere to this great central hall. In later years the gallery has been appropriated for office space, restricting passageway for the Public; thereby detracting from one’s enjoyment of the building.

At other times, I would wander down to the Shudehill Book Market, where one could browse through piles of cheap books, of every possible description. There were many volumes of tattered and decayed works of antiquity on sale, which had been neglected or had deteriorated as a result of the normal processes of decay. Sometimes, I purchased a sixpenny book but, usually, was content to rummage through the piles of literature.

One afternoon whilst at the Library, I met Dr. Wilson, who was descending the main staircase. On spotting me, the Choirmaster stopped and said, “Hello, John! How are you keeping?” “Very well, thank you Dr. Wilson.” The Doctor’s manner was friendly and concerned. “What are you doing with yourself, these days?” “I am working as an Apprentice Chef at the Midland.” I answered; not feeling convinced that this would impress the good Doctor. “Oh! I see: will you be returning to the Choir, when your voice matures, do you think?” “Oh, Yes, I think so”, said I, being anxious to please. I now said, “Cheerio” to Dr. Wilson and went on my way. I had no intention of resuming membership of the Choir, as my feelings of inferiority were overwhelming.

I lacked both confidence and conviction. In addition, I had become a confirmed Agnostic and had no interest in resuming the externally religious life of a Chorister.

Now that I was working, I met all manner of interesting characters. This was particularly true of hotel work. The Kitchen Staff was composed mainly of foreigners, of several nationalities: Italians: the Deputy-Chef was a big, rather ignorant Italian, named Joe, who swore a great deal. He bore the responsibility for the success or otherwise of the overall Kitchen output. I still visualize him, running through the kitchen, calling out, “Deux Poisson, Deux Poisson, Deux!”

There was another Italian in charge of the Roast Corner: Luigi, a jolly, fat little man, like a Friar, who had missed his vocation. During the afternoon recess, Luigi spent his time in the Staff Bar, consuming several pints of the weak, War-time Beer.

There was the usual complement of cleaners and dish-washers: often itinerant workers, who only remained at the hotel for a short period, before moving-on to something else. One morning, I entered the Male Locker-room to find seated on one of the benches, a short, rugged-looking man of about forty years of age. He was fair-haired with a matching complexion and blue-grey eyes. I said, “How do!” to the stranger, offering my hand, “I am John Roberts”. The newcomer replied, “My name is McKay but you can call me ‘Mac’”. I was curious, “Are you a Yank?” as Mac spoke with a North American accent. “No, I am Scots-Canadian. I am a Merchant-Seaman and am having a break from a seaman’s life.” I said, “I bet you have a pretty tough time of I, these days.” “You can say that again: it’s a real goddam shemozzle out there!” said Mac. I now asked, “What will you be doing here, Mac?” “I’m a kitchen-hand: I’ll be washing the pans.” “That’s a rotten job.” I observed. “Well, I won’t be here that goddam long.” Mac’s task was to clean the huge copper pans, which were required daily by the various Kitchen corners. In spite of his short stature, he was extremely tough, strong-minded and determined in his manner. He had been a Merchant-Mariner for some years and had travelled the world.

A couple of days later, I questioned Mac about life in Canada. “What’s it like in the Wild West, Mac?” “It’s one hell-uv-a a big Country.” drawled my friend. “Grand mountains and broad plains: lots of space for everyman: not like this crowded little joint.”

Mac informed me, inter-alia, that out on the plains, Cowboys had traditionally used Sea-boots, when copulating with sheep. I was uncertain whether this statement was true, or whether Mac was, “Having me on!”

One lunch-time, when I came into the Locker-room, I found Mac in an angry frame of mind. On seeing me, his sharp eyes spitting fire, he cried out, “That cock-sucking sun-of-a-bitch Grailleaux!. He had the goddam hide to tell me I wasn’t cleaning the pans properly. I told him he’d better get me some decent hot water and I’ll do the job properly then. I can’t do nothin’ with cold water and grease.” I had never heard this type of highly spiced language before and was both shocked and amused. I said, “I can imagine how you feel. The place is always in a filthy, greasy state whenever there is no hot water. All the cleaners complain about the hopeless situation.”

When annoyed, McKay would spit out some quaint remark, liberally interspersed with “Goddams”. Whilst a rough, colourful person, he was always straight with me.

Mac’s job was not the most rewarding occupation, being wet and greasy. Like so many of the kitchen-hands, he did not stay long at the Hotel. One morning he was no longer there.

Another character, who was employed as a Cleaner, was a man named Meredith. Of Welsh ancestry, he was of medium build and complexion and about forty years of age at this time. He was agreeable and chatty with me. One day, as I was about to go down the Pantry stairs, Meredith, who had been mopping the passageway, said to me, “Hey Johnny! Are you a Packet of Blue?” I did not understand this question and responded, “What do you mean: a packet of blue?” Mr. Meredith then interpreted for me, “Are you a Jew?” I said, “No!” His friend then added, “With your dark hair and complexion and that big nose of yours, I thought that you were probably Jewish.” “Not that I am aware!” I replied. Some of the Italian Cooks thought that I might have been of Italian extraction and were surprised when I denied any such antecedents.

For a short time a gentle-natured Irishman, named O’Neill, came to work in the kitchen as a Cleaner. Mr. O’Neill was about the middle-height, slim build and with a fair complexion. He had sensitive blue eyes. O’Neill was an introspective man; deeply concerned with the troubles of the world, and particularly those of Ireland. I was having my lunch in the Fish Corner, one afternoon, when O’Neill passed. I said, “Hello, Mr. O’Neill, how are you today?” The cleaner paused and sat down on the same bench, placing his bucket and broom nearby. “Oh! the same as ever I am, indeed, blessed be God!. One has to be thankful for small mercies.” “How long have you been over here?” “For a few years now.” “I’m surprised that you should come to live in a filthy hole like Manchester, when you could live in the pristine air of Ireland, Mr. O’Neill. Couldn’t you get work there?” “It was not wholly that fact that persuaded me to leave Ireland.” responded the Irishman. “I couldn’t stand the atmosphere of bigotry and hatred that pervaded the place. My countrymen are a pack of paranoid maniacs. If they are not everlastingly fighting amongst themselves, they don’t consider they are living at all.” “The Irish certainly seem to be a rough and tumble lot.” I replied. O’Neill now added, “If it was not for the steadying influence of the women, they would have gone to the Devil long ago. There are basically two types of Irishmen: the intelligent, studious, introspective and poetic souls, who usually end up in the Church, and those of a thoroughly self-indulgent, shallow, jolly, irresponsible and sometimes downright bloody-minded and murderous mentality.” “Well, John, I’d better be moving along: still have one or two things to do. I’ll see you later.” Retrieving his brush and bucket, O’Neill disappeared into the servery.

Perhaps Mr. O’Neill anticipated the tragedy that was to take place in Ireland during the next half century. He was a Southerner and a Catholic.

One afternoon, as I was in the process of chopping a large and solid block of salt with a steel paddle, the metal blade struck an unprotected light bulb, above my head. As the floor was wet, there was a natural earth for the electric current; which promptly knocked me out. I was momentarily stunned and revived, to find myself sitting on the floor, the object of a torrent of abuse from Mr. Olsen: who was, understandably, upset at the prospect of having to extract pieces of glass from nearby vegetable containers. One of the Potato-hands, came to my assistance and Mr. Olsen generously allowed me to rest for a while, to recover.

After six months of boiling potatoes and steaming cauliflowers, I was transferred to the Fish-Corner. Here I was required to cook Lobsters; which were still plentiful, in spite of the War: bake potatoes for savoury fish dishes and poach and fry the various types of fish that came into the Kitchen. There was, of course, Haddock, Silver-Hake and Cod. Occasionally, Halibut and Turbot were served, which I tasted for the first time in my life and declared to be “delicious”, as indeed they are. The Fish-Cook was an Englishman, which fact did not, evidently, constitute a handicap to the attainment of culinary skills. His name was Bill. He was a sensible, hard-working chap, with none of the emotive excitability of the foreigner. Bill taught me as much as possible regarding the preparation of fish and, for my part, I worked conscientiously.

Each morning, I went to the Veg. Corner and collected about twenty pounds of washed, jacket potatoes. These I baked in a Gas oven for an hour or so. Whilst waiting for the potatoes, I prepared a Lobster Sauce; using the eggs from Female Lobsters for both colouring and flavouring. When the potatoes were ready, I sliced them in half and scooped out some of the potato, leaving space for several pieces of boiled Lobster, which were then covered with the pink sauce and grilled. These were served as an Entree. Lobsters were plentiful, (although expensive), as indeed, were all varieties of fish during the War. I had never seen such shellfish before I came to work at the hotel and some were very large indeed, with huge and dangerous claws. They were all alive and kicking when they arrived from the Market and were killed by immersing in boiling water, in the large, steam-heated boilers used for this purpose.

The Head-Chef, M. Grailleaux, gossip affirmed, had, before the War, posted a notice on the door of his office, which stated, quite truthfully as it happened: “If you smoke or drink, you smell: stay out of here!” As most of the Cooks both smoked and drank, they took exception to such a statement. M. Grailleaux was a polished, rather distant individual; about fifty years of age, tall and always immaculately attired, in spotless Chef’s hat and jacket, with regulation check trousers. From time to time, he would be involved in the preparation of a special dish for some important personage but, otherwise, left the routine tasks to his inferiors. He would occasionally pass majestically through the kitchen, pausing to taste a particular dish, usually without comment. I never recalled direct communication between myself and the Head Chef during my time at the Hotel, unless the latter wished to ascertain the whereabouts of my superiors.

The Bar set aside for the use of the Staff was at the rear of the hotel, facing the Central Railway Station. Being under age, I only visited this place if I had to convey a message to one of the older workers, who may have been regaling himself during the afternoon break.

Following a stint at the Fish Corner, I spent some months in the Soup Corner. The Chef in charge of this part of the kitchen was a Frenchman, Louis. He was a quiet, well-disposed, gentlemanly chap; with no bombast or aggression in his nature, as was the case with some of the other Cooks. About 5’ 7” in height; in build, he was slight, with dark hair and a fair complexion. Without being too communicative, he was very considerate to me. Louis was handicapped, during these war years, as he was quite unable to obtain the necessary ingredients to enable him to produce excellent soup. When “Prince” Bernhardt, an important Dutchman, was staying at the Midland, I watched Louis carefully skim the surface of a small dish of soup; using blotting paper to remove all traces of grease. Even now he was not satisfied and became upset. “It is tasteless”, he affirmed. “There is nothing I can do with this!”

There were two huge steam-heated boilers, provided for the use of the Soup Corner, in which lentils were boiled for hours, together with ham-bones and anything else that would contribute to the flavour of the stock. There were only two types of soup at this time, Minestrone and Thick soup: the latter being made from the boiled Lentils and Ham-shanks. After boiling, the mixture was passed through a large sieve, using a paddle to force it through. The result was Thick Soup. Hey Presto!

After twelve months or so in the main Kitchen, I was moved to the Hors D’oeuvres Section, in the Pantry. A charming lady was in charge of this Section: Mrs. Green. She was dark-haired and handsome; being of Italian extraction. She had married an Englishman, now deceased. This lady had been brought up in England and was, so far as I was concerned, English. At the time of which we speak, she was about 40 years of age.

Mrs. Green was a woman of a loving disposition and dealt very kindly with me, showing me every mark of affection. As usual, I did my best in this job, involving the preparation of various salads; which also were in limited supply, owing to War shortages. As the work in this section was wet, I often soaked myself, washing salads.

After two months in the Hors D’oeuvres corner, I was given the task of helping the Fishmonger, Charlie Eyres. Charlie was of Derbyshire stock and lived in Wilmslow, on the Southern outskirts of Manchester. He was about 5 feet 10 inches in height, medium build and of fresh complexion. At this time he was about forty-five years of age. He was very proud of his origins and claimed that his family was of “Old Derbyshire” stock. He took an interest in me and showed me the best way to prepare fish for the pan.

One day Charlie was speaking to me about his cycling activities and said, “There is a bike at home but the gears are not working”. As I fancied myself as an amateur cycle mechanic, I said, “I’ll come up to your place and have a look at it, if you like”. Charlie made no objection to this and, on my next day off, I rode my bicycle the fourteen miles to Wilmslow, where I spent some hours in the backyard, pulling the Sturmey-Archer gear to pieces. I was baffled by the mechanism and, although I returned to Charlie’s place on several subsequent occasions, I never managed to fix the gears. It was not very pleasant, spending time in the backyard, in bitterly cold weather. In the end I had to admit defeat and, to tell the truth, wished that I had never offered to look at it, in the first place. Charlie never criticised me about my failure but I had to admit, if only to myself, that I had been a fool to waste so much time and effort on a bicycle, from which I had nothing to gain, even if I had managed to repair the Sturmey-Archer gears.

On the other side of the pantry worked the two Butchers, who prepared meat for the Roast Corner, which cooked all the meats and sauces. The Pantry itself was quite a large room, approached down a short flight of steps from the main kitchen. On the left was the Hors D’oeuvres Section. Directly ahead, against the opposite wall, the Fishmonger had his fridge and table. On the right a large refrigerator ran the length of the room. In the right-hand corner sat the Butchers. These gentlemen were both Frenchmen: fat and rather jolly. During a tea-break, one morning, I sat at the table used by the Butchers, listening to their conversation, which was in French and English. I understood none of the French. One said to me, “If I could live my life over again, undoubtedly, I would be a Millionaire.” Said the second, “That is true: we would both be Millionaires, knowing what we know now.” I thought this a fascinating idea but could not see how it could have been possible. Later, I realised that if one had had the foresight, one could easily adopt a course leading to the accumulation of wealth. Unfortunately, with hindsight, it is too late to take advantage of opportunities for profit.

Next to the Butchery and adjacent to the stairs leading up to the main Kitchen, the Kitchen Clerk had his desk. This was a rather old-fashioned high desk with a stool to match. The Kitchen Clerk himself, named George Smith, was aged about forty years, always dressed in a suit and tie. Smith adopted a superior attitude towards the Kitchen Staff, particularly towards the juvenile members. In his own eyes he was an important personage. His task was to purchase all foodstuffs for the use of the Hotel and, to this end, spent most of his working day at the City Markets. I had nothing to do with him, personally, but made no attempt to disguise my contempt for this older man.

An elderly Italian worked in the Pantry, preparing meats and salads. His name was Frank: a tall, quiet-natured and rather pleasant old fellow. Each morning Frank made Wartime Mayonnaise. He first reconstituted a quantity of dried-egg with cold water, adding vinegar and salt. He placed the bowl over a larger bowl of boiling water and then slowly stirred the mixture of eggs and vinegar, muttering and grumbling to himself, over the shortage of necessary ingredients. With luck he would produce something approaching Mayonnaise. All the older men told me how good it had been in the “Old days”. As it was, the Pantry was then stocked by whatever goods could be purchased by the Kitchen-Clerk. I saw all manner of meats brought into the Pantry. There were Swans, Geese, Goats, Pheasant, Grouse, Snipe and small birds of every description, even song-birds, which all went on the table under fancy names. The Swan-meat, which was black, was served as “Braised Goose”. The Goat-meat, also black, was served as “Lamb Stew”. As it was, it had to be called something and “Roast Swan” or “Goat Stew” would hardly have seemed appropriate for “The Midland”. After all, the “Toffs” were still feeding there, from time to time. Whilst Swans were protected animals in England, there did not seem to be any similar prohibition in Ireland, where much of the game was said to have originated. Grouse, snipe and pigeons were usually rotten. The task of drawing and plucking these birds, stinking as they were, was unpleasant. It was one of the tasks performed by the Pantry Staff.

When employed within the Pantry, I had to remain on duty between the hours of 2pm and 5pm: when the bulk of the Kitchen-Staff was not at work.

Although a conscientious worker, I allowed myself to be flattered by one or two of the Waiters, who, during the afternoon, visited the Pantry to obtain light salads for guests. One of these people asked me to let him have a supply of the bacon, which had been prepared by the Kitchen Clerk for the following morning’s Breakfast Menu and left in the Fridge for that purpose. I had not been warned of my responsibilities in safeguarding the food supplies. Although I was well aware of the fact that I had no business to touch the bacon, I did not hesitate to give the Waiter a few slices, probably a half-pound or so. It was unfortunate that there was no older person in the Pantry, at that time, to supervise me, but that was the position. I was a 15 year-old youth who had not yet learned to discriminate between people. These incidents occurred on several occasions over a period of a month or more.

One day, during Nov l944, I received a Notice, informing me that my services had been terminated. No explanation was given.

A short time, previously, as I was leaving work for the day, I had been stopped at the desk near the Staff Entrance. I was not in possession of any stolen food and thought that this was unusual. However, I had thought no more about it.

I deduced that the Kitchen-Clerk had reported that food was missing and blamed me for the losses, quite justifiably, as it happened. He probably suspected that I was taking food home myself as, during and after the War, a little extra Bacon would have been most acceptable in any household. I was never told why I was being sacked, nor did I make formal representations. I knew that I had incurred the enmity of Mr. Smith; not only on account of missing foodstuffs but because of a contemptuous attitude towards him, whom I regarded as a pompous, conceited character. The two Butchers suggested to me that I should apologise to the Clerk, perhaps not realizing that it was for specific default that I was being dismissed. I declined to do so, as I felt that it would not make any difference to the situation. In addition, my pride would not permit me to demean myself in such a manner.

On leaving “The Midland”, I was able to obtain similar work in the kitchen of “The Queen’s” Hotel, situate some distance away from St. Peter’s Square, near Piccadilly Gardens. Here I worked mainly in the Roast-Corner, with a fat and friendly Italian Cook, named “Benny”. Benny showed me how to seal a piece of beef by brazing it over the stove, prior to roasting in the Oven. Once, some rotten hares were delivered to the Roast Department. They were complete with blood and guts. The blood was used to make the sauce for “Jugged Hair”: not an appealing dish, thought I, although it tasted well.

I also spent about two weeks in the Pastry-Corner, working for a French Pastrycook, named Pierre, who was a bright and humorous chap; though at times coarse in his language. Pierre was about forty years old, with dark-hair and complexion, and a heavy blue chin. He was highly skilled in the preparation of Puff-Pastry. I watched him take a mouthful of water and roll the pastry, at the same time spraying water from his mouth, as he carefully folded it over. He said, “You have to do this six times: no more no less”. The pastry never failed to rise. Pierre showed me how to make pancakes: standing before an array of three gas rings. I myself became an expert at the production of these comestibles, at which task I spent many hours; tossing the pancakes alternately in three skillets.

Pierre was an easy boss and I enjoyed my stay in the Pastry Corner. One afternoon, as Pierre was preparing pastry for the following day, he spoke aloud his thoughts: perhaps to amuse me, “Ah! Well, that is another day over. I’ll go home: have a ‘Blow Through!’ and relax”. I did not reply to this remark, as I understood that it was in the nature of a soliloquy.

My career as a Cook came to an end after six months working in this Kitchen. The Head Chef discovered that I could not speak French. He was most indignant at such ignorance, on the part of one of his kitchen staff. I was, indeed, ignorant. Had I possessed a measure of maturity, my life as a “Commie” Cook might have been prolonged and my outlook broadened by a smattering of French; which I could have quite easily acquired in the company of Frenchmen. I was not dismissed. However, I was now unhappy and insecure. I felt that I did not belong in this environment: amongst foreigners.

Soon after my conversation with the Chef, I gave notice and left the Hotel business once and for all: never to return to this life, which to be honest, I found to be interesting and instructive. In fact, one of the waitresses at the Grand, a tall, handsome woman of about thirty years said, to me, “Oh! you’ll be back, John. Once you work in the hotel trade you never leave it. It gets in your blood.” I understood what she meant by this remark.

#### CHAPTER 35

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#### ROMANCE

One evening, when I was l5 years of age, I went by myself to the Dominion Cinema, which was situated at the bottom of Regent Road; a short tram ride from Cross Lane and about a mile from my home. I was seated in the Stalls, about halfway down and two or three seats from the aisle on my left. There was no other person nearby, as the attendance that night was poor. Shortly after the show had commenced, a young lady was led by the female usher to occupy the seat next to me. I thought this was strange, as there were plenty of vacant seats nearby. The girl went out of her way to introduce herself to me, during the Interval, much to my surprise and not a little pleasure.

It was not considered proper conduct, in those days, for a young lady to go out of her way to “pick up” a boy in such a manner. When the lights went on, she glanced in my direction and said, “Do you come here often?” “Yes”, I replied, “About once a week, if there is a good film showing. What about you?” “Oh! I usually come every week with my girl-friend but tonight, as you see, I am alone”. She added, “I am Ellen Crowden: what is your name?” I told her my name, to which she responded, giving me a gentle nudge with her right elbow, “That is a plain name, I can hardly forget that.” She now smiled sweetly in my direction and I began to realize that she was, “setting her cap” at me. I was excited by her attentions and began to enjoy her company. I was surprised when she later told me that she had requested the girl to sit her next to a, “nice young man”.

After the picture-show, I walked Ellen to her home, which was close to Ordsall Park, a short distance from the Cinema. It was a chill, damp night as we walked through the back streets to her home. She informed me that she worked as a Clerk for the Manchester Firm, Lewis’s: that she was 16 years of age and did not have a regular Boy-friend.

Ellen was relatively sophisticated, as young women tend to be, in relation to boys of their own age. She was a round-faced dumpling of a girl; not particularly pretty but sensible and intelligent. Her hair was light-brown: her complexion rustic and freckled. Physically she was robust and full-breasted. In later life she would, perhaps, experience problems in regard to her weight.

Ellen subsequently initiated me into the delights of “Sex”: not sexual intercourse, but the magical experience of being in warm and intimate contact with a female. This girl was not only capable of great affection but had a need herself, perhaps as great as mine, for the companionship of a member of the opposite Sex. She took me into the now obsolete Air-raid shelters, which had been erected in the narrow entries between the rows of terraces: (too late, as it transpired, to be of any use during the Blitz).

This first physical contact, with such an intensely sensual girl, enveloped me in such a feeling of blissful rapture; as to transport me to some higher realm, altogether. The warmth of her body: her tenderness; her kisses, her feminine possessiveness; created in me a sensation that was entirely novel and possessed something of the Spiritual. She held me close and kissed me tenderly. Indeed, she became possessively fond of me, even though I was still really only a boy. I, ultimately, began to resent her demand for my exclusive attention. Being a “sensible” girl, she did not permit either herself or me to go too far, in regard to love-making. This would have been hazardous from more than one viewpoint.

The local “Bobbies” kept the Shelters under observation, as they were ideally suited to the purposes of love-making. One dark and dismal night, Ellen and I were “necking” in one of these shelters, when a Special-Constable made his rounds. He flashed his torch-light upon us and called out, “Now then, what’s going on here?” “Nothing”, I replied, feeling very embarrassed. “We are only having a talk”. Ellen said nothing. “Well, you had better get out of it now!” said the Copper. We, accordingly, left the privacy of the shelter and wandered off: the Constable wending his way to the next shelter, in the hope of disturbing lovers, in possibly more compromising circumstances. My pride was severely injured and I felt “guilty”, in being found alone in the shelter with Ellen.

I was not particularly nice to Ellen. Indeed, I was never “in love” with her; never infatuated, as was the case with some my later amours. Sometimes, I would not turn up, after I had arranged to meet her. Indeed, her possessiveness began to irritate me, intensely. Her assumption that I belonged to her, was ridiculous. Whilst Ellen had been exciting, she was not the type of girl that I could fall in love with, nor did I envisage the development of a long-term relationship with her. I suspected that she had been describing the delights of our “affair” to her friend, Angela: a dark-haired, rather fat young lady, of about the same age as Ellen. Without any form of encouragement on my part, Angela suddenly developed a fondness for me, which led to friction between the two girls. It was a flattering and novel experience to have girls fighting over me, even though neither could be regarded as “beautiful”. As it was, I was not interested in either young lady. At this juncture, Ellen joined the Women’s Land Army: an organization of disciplined Agricultural Workers, who were sent wherever labour was needed in the Country. They wore a uniform consisting of a khaki shirt, pullover and Corduroy knee-breeches, with boots and leggings; finished off with a broad-brimmed felt hat. This type of life suited the buxom Ellen, as she was a strong, healthy girl. When she was posted away to commence her training, I took advantage of the opportunity to seek other pleasures.

#### CHAPTER 36

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#### SOCIAL LIFE

I now faced a traumatic period in my life. I had no job and, under the Labour Regulations then prevailing, I could have been directed to undertake any form of manual work. In fact, after reporting to the Labour Exchange, I was directed to work at the CWS. Glass Factory, in Pendleton. As I entered this building, it appeared to me that I had returned to the Dark Ages. The glass-making equipment was situated in a vast brick vault, blackened by years of soot and smoke. The furnace occupied only a small part in the centre of the building. Perhaps it had been constructed in this way to facilitate dissipation of the great heat generated in the glass furnace. The job offered to me involved removing red-hot milk-bottles from an endless production-line, with a long-handled implement, and placing them in racks to cool. It would have been soul-destroying monotony itself. The Manager showed me over the plant, including the Furnace, into which scrap glass was fed, to be converted into bottles. The heat and glow of the furnace, beneath the dark overhanging pile of the factory building, suggested to me the burning fires of Hell itself. I did not report for duty at the Glassworks, deciding to look for some other work.

During my evening hours, particularly at weekends, when not actually touring the Countryside, I attended local Dance Halls. Ballroom Dancing was a favourite pastime for young people, at that time, and provided an opportunity for both boys and girls to enjoy the company of members of the opposite Sex. Hence, the two cheap Dance Halls in Regent Road Salford, named “The Academy” and “The Palais”, were popular with local youth of both Sexes. For One and Sixpence or Two Shillings, the youngsters could Dance until eleven o’clock, to the recorded music of fashionable Dance-Bands or, at week-ends, to live Bands. On Saturday nights Dances were held in numerous Public Halls, all over the Manchester district. There were two excellent and economical Dance Halls in the centre of Manchester, where, for the modest charge of two-shillings, one could dance the afternoon and evening away, in style, to music provided by first-class Dance Bands. These establishments were, respectively, “The Plaza” and “The Ritz”, both situated in Oxford Street. Ballroom Dancing was not only a delightful activity, enabling the participants to develop a measure of personal grace and a sense of harmony, but served to increase the self-confidence of insecure young-people. Having attained competence in such dances as The Quick-step, Slow Fox-trot, Waltz, Tango, Rumba, Samba, etc., a young man would not hesitate to approach an attractive young lady, as the music commenced, with an invitation to dance. It did not matter that she was a perfect stranger: convention permitted an approach, as many girls were anxious to be able to dance with the available boys and, especially with those who were good dancers. I myself had learned basic Ballroom-dancing at school, as some enlightened teacher had decided to commence dancing-classes for boys and girls in the Girls’ School hall, after school-hours.

I soon grew to love this activity, particularly, whenever I found a partner who suited my own aggressive and irregular style of dancing.

One young lady I met at the Buille-Hill Park Saturday-night dance, which, after the War, was held in the Kiosk-Restaurant. Her name was Janice and she was some years older than I. Her boyfriend was away, serving with the RAF at this time. Janice was a pretty brunette, five feet or so in height; petite and with a charming figure. She danced delightfully: adapting perfectly to my style; so much so, that both enjoyed each other’s partnership and would prefer to dance together, throughout the evening. This was a purely platonic friendship, so far as both parties were concerned. Janice lived in Langworthy Road and, as this was on my way home, I usually accompanied her to her door. Even though we got along together so well, I did not become infatuated with Janice, as I so often did with my other lady-friends.

I would occasionally go to Hurley’s Milk Bar for a Vimto (a Blackcurrant type cordial drink) or a Milk-shake, if I was in funds. This establishment was conducted by Mr. and Mrs. Hurley, in premises in Eccles New Road, just a step away from the “Ship Hotel”: the latter establishment being a popular place of resort for Seamen and their “lady-friends!” The “Ship” was situated on the North Western corner of Cross Lane and Eccles New Road. Next to The Ship, in Cross Lane, stood the Palace Cinema and Theatre, both of which were then Cinemas and drew many patrons, including youngsters. The Milk-Bar was thus favourably placed to attract local teenagers, who occasionally spent hours at that establishment; discussing various, usually trivial topics.

#### CHAPTER 37

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#### THE ABATTOIRS

It was whilst attending the Hurley’s Milk-Bar, that I became acquainted with several youths who worked at the Manchester Abattoirs in Water Street, just over the River Irwell from Salford. They told me that work was available as an “Offal-Boy” at the Abattoirs and that the wages were good. I had originally started work at a Pound a week at The Midland Hotel and this had been increased to about Thirty-shillings, whilst I was working at The Queens Hotel. Wages for a lad at the Abattoir were said to be in the region of Two-pounds a week and, when Piece-Rates were taken into account, would generally be higher than this. I, thereupon, made enquiries at the Abattoirs and obtained a job as an Offal-Boy with Gang No. 3. (A Jew Gang!).

A Gang consisted of a group of four or five men, with a boy to do the dangerous and heavy work. Each Gang occupied a Slaughterhouse, in which animals were killed. A slaughterhouse was a room about 30 ft. by 25 ft., with tiled walls and stone-flagged floor. There were about forty of these places, probably erected well before the turn of the 20th Century. They were built in a long row, the whole length of the Abattoirs complex and extended for about two hundred yards in all. In front of this row, there was a narrow street, with granite sets of the usual type, into which the refuse produced by each slaughterhouse would be deposited, to be cleaned up by other workers.

Across the other side of this street were the Markets, wherein the carcasses of cattle, sheep and calves were hung, after processing. Behind each slaughterhouse was a stall, in which the animals to be killed would be kept until slaughter. My job was, inter alia, to assist in bringing cattle into the position in which they could most conveniently be killed by the Rabbi, a Jewish Priest, whose task was to ritually kill each animal by cutting its throat with a large, razor-like instrument, maintained by the Rabbi in an extremely serviceable condition for this purpose.

On my first morning, there were thirty beasts to be killed by our Gang, that day. One of the men, Charlie by name, opened the door leading to the stall and coaxed the first beast into position. It was a great Scottish Bullock, weighing almost a Ton. Charlie showed me what to do. My task would be to rope the animal by placing a noose over its head, which was accomplished, without difficulty, as the animal was hornless. The rope ran through a ring in the wall, from where he took the rope to a double-hook, set into the wall some ten feet away from the ring. Here he rapidly pulled-in the slack of the rope, until the beast was secure; winding the rope around the double-hook several times to prevent undue movement of the animal. Charlie now turned the beast by a vigorous twisting of its tail and tripped it, by kicking its left fore-leg. When it was on its side, another slaughterman, whose name was Harold, placed a wooden-handled iron instrument over its head, by which he was able to turn its head back to expose the throat. The Rabbi then advanced and, following a short incantation, with a single deft slice of the knife, cut the beast to the bone.

A sudden rush of blood, now shot out; pumped with great force from the severed arteries. It caught the Rabbi and his assistant and spattered the wall above his head. Now being released from the head restraint, the poor animal rose to its feet; shaking its head: its great eyes wide and mournful, as its life-blood continued to gush forth; pulsating with the accelerated heart-beat. It was now given the Coup-de-Grace by Charlie, using a Pole-axe: a sharp metal spike fitted to the end of a pick-axe handle. Penetrating the brain, the Pole-axe immediately rendered the creature unconscious. The flow of blood now easing; the dead beast was dragged away from the killing place and turned on its back for skinning. The way was now clear for the slaughter of the next and subsequent beasts, which continued for the remainder of the morning.

The killing of Beasts in this manner was, obviously, both painful for the animal itself and dangerous and messy for those concerned in the slaughter. The beasts themselves were usually terrified at finding themselves in this place. The sight and smell of blood increased their alarm, until they were in a highly unpredictable state. The task of roping the animals was hazardous, as when roped and moved into position for killing, they had to be secured quickly to prevent sudden movement, with consequent danger from horns as well as hoofs. The terror thus displayed by the animals was now communicated to me, who found myself in command of a rope, facing a wildly thrashing bullock or cow, often with long and dangerous horns. The terror of the animals was not reduced by the cruelty of the older hands, whose impatience and irritability often found expression in such conduct as tail-breaking and eye-stabbing, to induce stubborn animals to move.

On observing the nature of my duties for the first time, I began to wonder what I was doing there. I should have left at the first opportunity, as the work was both depressing and arduous, but for some reason I stuck to it.

There were compensatory factors, as the men were able to obtain cuts of neck-beef and skirt, which they trimmed from each beast as it was killed, and shared between themselves, at the end of the day. I was entitled to whatever was left of this “Duck”, as it was termed, after the older men had taken their share. I often had several pounds of scrag-end and skirt to take home. This, after washing, to remove grass and other particles deposited during the killing of the animal, made a welcome addition to the meat ration. From time to time, I was able to supply relatives or neighbours with a small quantity of meat, which I sold at four shillings per pound. Thus I became a minor Black-Marketeer.

When killing sheep, the Rabbi would cut the throats of a few animals, for ceremonial purposes, but would then leave the rest to be slaughtered by the men themselves. Most of this work fell to me: who would place the sheep on a cradle, which was a low, rectangular and slightly concave platform, with bars running across. I would stick the sheep with my stabbing knife. After cutting its throat I would break the neck and wait for the animal to cease struggling. Calves were hung against the wall and treated in a similar manner. All this was done, contrary to the law, which demanded the humane slaughter of animals, with the aid of a Captive-bolt Pistol, except those ritually killed. Although these weapons were available, their use was considered to be too time-consuming. Cutting the throat of an animal was easier. Whilst the Rabbi’s themselves should have done the killing, it was a matter of practical necessity that the men should do the bulk of the work.

There were three Jew Gangs in the complex, at that time. The animals supplied for Jewish consumption were of a superior quality to those killed for the population at large, owing mainly to the Jewish insistence on high grade meat. They would only take the fore-quarter meat for Jewish consumption, this being declared to be “Kosher” and sealed with the lead seal of the Rabbi. The rear-quarter meat went to the Gentile meat trade. Apart from one Jewish man, Mr Lobb, who was the Foreman of the No. 4 Gang, so far as I was aware, there were no Jews actually working in the Gangs. Mr. Lobb was one of the more humane and decent types working here. Many of the men were depraved, drunken individuals, who revealed to me the depths of human degradation.

There were four men working in the Number 3 Gang. These consisted of the Foreman, John Seagrave, Harold Hattersley, “Big Fred” and Charlie. The Foreman was a sensible and intelligent person, not completely depraved and who yet retained some measure of human sensitivity. John was about forty-five years old, at this time; fairly tall, dark haired and of light build. He lived in Flixton, a better class residential suburb of Manchester. His family had operated Butcher’s Shops in the Manchester district for some years. Mr. Hattersley was also a man of considerable intelligence and ability who had, as a result of an addiction to liquor, become depraved and degraded.

Big Fred was a Yorkshireman, then approaching the retiring age and exhibiting the dour, rather humourless nature of his type. Charlie was a lively fellow, about forty years, fair-complexioned and talkative. He was an ignorant, foul-mouthed and brutish person, who is chiefly remembered by me for his quaint descriptions of his wife. “The Old Whore: The Slut: etc..” This tendency to disparage his wife was shared by Harold, who would publicly make the most outrageous observations about his spouse. Harold worked hard at his job, at which he was highly skilled. When he had finished work for the day, which was often soon after lunch, it was his custom to repair to a nearby Pub, where he would drink himself into an alcoholic stupor. It was reported that he could drink thirty pints of beer at a sitting. One has to remember that post-war beer was only about 3% alcohol. Even considering this factor, such a consumption of beer, at one sitting, is astonishing.

There was a fifth person working with the No. 3 Gang, named Sammy, but he was employed by a firm of Offal Processors and was not a member of the Gang itself. His task was to clean and prepare entrails for the Sausage Industry and to separate glands for Pharmaceutical purposes. Sammy was a quiet, rather uncommunicative person: perhaps unimpressed by the vulgarity and cruelty of his co-workers.

When a beast was killed, it was turned over on its back on the floor: slit down the middle and skinned. The most skilful butchers were allocated this task, as damage to the hide meant loss of money for the Gang. Income from the killing was shared between the members at a fixed scale. Thus if hides were damaged, the whole Gang suffered.

After skinning the flanks of the beast, it was lifted by means of a rusty and antiquated hoist, operated by me, to a vertical position, facing head-downwards. This was hard work, as the dead cattle weighed anything from a half to one ton.

Big Fred then stripped the rest of the hide from the back of the animal, allowing the weight of the hide to assist in dragging the skin to the ground, where it was finally removed and deposited outside in the street. He then cut open the chest-cavity and removed first the belly and gut, then the lungs and heart. Fred then split the carcass with a large cleaver, taking care to cut the bone evenly down the centre of the spinal cord. The belly then passed to me, who made a large slice on one side and two small cuts some distance away. I now tipped the fluid and steaming contents of the belly into the gutter outside. When the carcass was ready, I pushed the split carcasses, which were hanging upon railed hooks, across the road into the Market area.

The task of killing and dressing cattle continued, with a short morning-break of about 15 minutes, until the work was completed. Thirty cattle was a good day’s work. Sometimes, additional cattle, sheep or calves would become available for slaughter and this work would also be done, usually after lunch.

On most days the gang would work right through, finishing about 2pm. I was usually physically shattered by then. If there was additional killing that day, I would return home in a state of utter exhaustion: cycling slowly and painfully up the hill towards Oldfield Road, from where my journey home was on level ground. How happy was I to see the end of my torment for the day.

My overalls and boots became coated with the dried blood of the animals, killed at the slaughterhouse. A pair of boots soon rotted from the accelerated decay caused by the combined effects of blood and water. The choice of footwear was always a problem for me. I tried Clogs but the wooden soles were too hard for my feet, being inflexible. They also deteriorated rapidly. Rubber boots were slippery and dangerous, in the wet conditions underfoot. Inevitably, my feet were wet throughout the day, causing me no small discomfort. There were no bathing or other facilities, apart from toilets, at the Abattoirs, nor was protective clothing of any description available for the use of the workers. I went home in my working clothes.

When killing sheep and calves, the Gang might process a hundred and fifty or more animals. Whilst the men would skin the animals, I had to remove the lungs and gut and complete the dressing of the meat. The carcasses then had to be lifted across the shoulders manually and placed on hooks some 7 feet above the ground. Some of the carcasses weighed 50lbs or more and I found it to be heavy labour, as I carried them across the road and endeavoured to place them on the hooks provided. Being of short stature, I had difficulty lifting heavy carcasses sufficiently high to catch the hooks. Often, I would make the effort of lifting several times, before succeeding in securing my burden.

From time to time and, usually when other killing had been completed, diseased or dying animals were brought in for slaughter. This work was usually undertaken by Harold, assisted by me or one or more of the other lads. These beasts were often in the final throes of Bovine Tuberculosis or Anthrax and were in a terrible state. The bodies stank awfully. The meat was invariably condemned,

One afternoon, I was cleaning the slaughterhouse, after one or two diseased cattle had been butchered. One of the other Offal lads, Alex, by name, was watching the work in progress. He was a tall youth, whom I had known during my school days. His own Gang had finished work for the day. He was seen to busy himself on the head of a beast that had suffered from Bovine TB; which he had retrieved from the yard outside. Alex stripped the Tuberculous “Grape” from inside the head, which in spite of his activity, still did not look particularly appealing to me. He now ran across the street to the Market and returned with one of the Kosher heads; sealed by the Rabbi. Alex removed the seal and threaded the string through a hole that he made in the condemned head. He re-tied the seal; pushing the knot into the flesh to give the impression that it was the original Kosher head. The substitute head was then returned to the Market, where, presumably, there were no attendants or inspectors, then present. Alex took the good head away.

I assumed that he must have cut up the head in order to take it home. He would probably have had difficulty in getting past the main gate with a full-sized beast head in his possession. Although the gate-men were well aware of the fact that Slaughtermen took small quantities of meat home for their own purposes, they would not have allowed the theft of such an obvious thing as a beast’s head. I thought that such substituting activity was “hitting below the belt”, but said nothing, as I had no intention of “Dobbing-in” my acquaintance. Of course, none of the Market Inspectors were aware of what was happening, as there would have been “Hell to Pay!” There was also an element of resentment on the part of us Gentile lads towards the privileged Jews. It was tempered, on this occasion, by the thought that someone would be eating this diseased meat, in the belief that it was the genuine Kosher article. We Offal Boys had a good laugh at this joke. A proper inspection of the seal would undoubtedly have revealed that it had been cut and re-tied. It was the first and only occasion, during my sojourn at the Abattoirs, that such a substitution was made, at least to my knowledge.

After killing was over for the day, the slaughterhouse had to be washed down and left clean for the following day’s work. This task mainly fell to me, with occasional assistance from the men.

Now and again, I would be sent to summon a Rabbi to perform his necessary duties. The Rabbi’s little room, was situated some distance from the No. 3 Slaughterhouse, at the rear of the Complex. There were about three Rabbi’s officiating at any given time. One of these gentlemen, Mr. Mendel, took an interest in me and gave me a quiet word of encouragement, now and again. Mendel, was a round-faced, kindly and intelligent man, about forty-five years of age. He was very considerate towards me: perhaps realizing that I was unsuited to the trade I had undertaken. I was intrigued to see the Rabbi’s commencing the day’s work with prayer. They spent some time in arranging phylacteries and prayer-blanket and would then go through the appropriate ritual. They were not disturbed by the presence of a Gentile lad. There was a strange contrast between this sincere devotion and the grim reality of the Slaughterhouse to come. No doubt, the ceremony derived from the recognition of the sanctity of life: perhaps rooted in a superstitious belief that prayer is efficacious in warding-off the evil consequences of the killing of God’s creatures. In the case of the Jews, the ritual was undoubtedly connected to the original Temple Sacrifices, which had involved the large-scale slaughter of animals.

One of the Rabbi’s, named “Yaffi”, was a sensitive and withdrawn man: evidently a devout Orthodox Jew of Eastern-European origin. Yaffi was tall, slender in build, with the black hair and eyes of the Jew. His face was sallow and drawn; though well chiselled and handsome. He consistently wore a sad and mournful countenance.

Yaffi had no time for the ignorant and lewd butchers, with whom he had to work. They too displayed a reciprocal contempt for this gentleman and would abuse him in his presence: using the most foul language. I remembered my first encounter with Yaffi. When his long black-suited form entered the Slaughterhouse, Charlie said aloud, “Don’t tell me we’ve got this bloody loony today, we’ll get bugger-all done with him.” Yaffi said nothing, nor did his face reveal whether he had heard the remark. He now occupied himself in the preparation of his razor: spending several minutes in carefully honing the shining blade upon an oil stone.

When the first beast was ready for his professional attention, he was still putting the finishing touches to the sharpening of his knife. With evident apprehension, he now approached the animal: leaning over with his knife extended. I saw his lips moving, as he murmured the formal prayers, at which task he was certainly long-winded: irritating Charlie by his fussiness. “Come on, get on with it you Jewish C……t!” quoth Charlie, “We can’t be here all day!” No response from Yaffi. I wondered whether he understood English, or the particular form of English then being uttered by Charlie. Yaffi, perhaps owing to a poor command of English, tolerated this behaviour with amazing composure. When he had completed his prayers and not before, he applied his knife to the throat. His task completed, he withdrew to the end of the room, as if to distance himself, as far as possible, from the contaminating presence of the infidel.

Later, there were a number of calves to be killed, by the process of hanging them by the rear legs from hooks and cutting their throats. Yaffi insisted in killing each animal in turn, using a smaller version of his killing knife and repeating the proper formula. His back curved over the waiting calf, as he muttered the requisite Hebrew incantation, endlessly, it seemed to me. Charlie now became exasperated and, exclaiming, “Bugger this!”, began to cut the throat of a calf himself. Yaffi called out, “No! No! you must not do that!”: waving his knife about in an highly agitated manner. He now became quite incomprehensible to me, as he remonstrated with the Slaughterman, who also couldn’t understand the Jew. Charlie ignored him and continued to cut the throats of several calves, which I had hung upon hooks against the wall. “If we wait for you and your bloody mumbo-jumbo, we will be here all day!” said Charlie. “Bugger-off and let us get on with the job!” Yaffi saw that he was making no impression on his auditors and, turning abruptly, he recovered his equipment and left the building.

The other Rabbi’s were more flexible in relation to ritual procedures, particularly in regard to the smaller animals. Mr. Mendel would ceremonially slaughter the first two or three of the smaller animals, leaving the men to kill the remainder. This task largely fell to me, who, having overcome my initial reluctance to kill God’s Creatures, now devoted myself, unhesitatingly, to the task. I reconciled my conflicts, in this regard, by informing myself that if I did not do it, some other lad would.

It was on a Wednesday afternoon about 2.30pm. I rode my bicycle slowly and laboriously uphill from the Abattoirs; worn-out after the day’s exertions. I had about five pounds weight of neck-end and skirt strips, which I carried in the lining of my jacket. Most of the Butchers carried their “Duck” in this manner. On reaching the top of the hill at Oldfield Road, my way now became easier, as Regent Road runs very slightly downhill towards Cross Lane. On arriving at the backyard door, I put my hand through the hole in the door and slid back the bolt. I pushed the cycle into the shed and now removed my boots and overalls, before entering the house. In the scullery, I took off my jacket and, removing the meat from my coat, put it in a bowl of water to soak. My jacket I hung on a hook on the wall of the shed. Once in the living-room, I fell into one of Grandfather’s home-made and uncomfortable armchairs, where I remained for an half-hour: too tired to move. There was no-one else in the house, as the other occupants were still at work.

After recovering my strength, I found a towel and some clean, dry clothing, socks and shoes, which I placed in a canvas bag. Leaving the house, I walked to the Hodge Lane Baths, the entrance to which was only about a hundred yards away from my home. Mr. Morgan was standing at the Cashier’s window. “Hello Mr. Morgan”, said I, placing my sixpence on the counter. “How Do, John! Here’s your ticket lad.” responded the Manager. I took the ticket and walked towards the Bath Department. I was eagerly looking forward to a hot, steaming bath. Today being mid-week, I could take as long as I wished, to soak away the cares of the day.

As I lay in the deep hot water, I thought what a torment I had brought upon myself, by taking this bloody-awful job. How tired I became and how much like an old man before my time. What a delight was this simple pleasure of an hot bath. How easy had been my life in the Hotel trade. I will go dancing to The Academy tonight and forget the agony of my working life. The hot bath, combined with my anticipation of the forthcoming pleasures of the evening, restored the energies of youth. As I dressed myself in clean, dry clothing, I thought to myself, “How wonderful!, just to be clean, warm and dry”.

#### CHAPTER 38

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#### ESCAPE

On Fridays, the Gang often finished work by lunch time. This gave me a long Week-end, as no killing was done on Saturdays. After having a bath, I would pack my saddlebag quickly and ride into the countryside for the weekend. My travels took me all over the North of England and Wales. I was a member of the Youth Hostels Association, and stayed at Hostels on these Friday and Saturday nights. The nightly charge in those days was one shilling (5 pence), which made week-end outings possible for young people.

On one such Friday, I left home at lunch-time, bound for Ludlow, in the Welsh-Border County of Shropshire: a lovely part of England. I intended to stay for the night at the Youth Hostel.

My route lay, initially, along the Chester Road, turning off at Northwich for Middlewich, Nantwich and Whitchurch. There were no Motorways in those far off, austere times, and the highways were merely single-lane, each way, sealed roads. There was little motor traffic and I had the highway to myself for most of the trip. On leaving Altrincham, I found myself in the familiar but charming Cheshire countryside. I rode slowly up the hill at Bowdon, after which my route lay through undulating and easily traversable country. After cycling for four hours, I entered a wayside cafe in Whitchurch, first padlocking my cycle to a steel road-sign, outside the Cafe. I ordered a pot of tea and cheese sandwiches, for which I paid a shilling. These I consumed, greedily, and soon restored my flagging energies. Thirty minutes later I was again on the road, heading for Shrewsbury, with renewed vigour. I had another fifty miles to travel if I was to reach Ludlow that night. I passed through charming and unspoilt countryside, which, although at times hilly, presented no insurmountable obstacle to my progress. After another hour and a half I reached Shrewsbury, the County town of Shropshire but did not stop. Only thirty miles to Ludlow!

I rode-on for another two hours, until I arrived in the ancient and picturesque town of Ludlow. I now discovered that the Youth Hostel, situate in an ancient Inn, was closed. It was, by now, well past Eleven o’clock at night and I found myself in a dark, chill town, with no immediate prospect of obtaining lodging for the night. A solitary Policeman noticed me and called out, “Well, well, what are you up to at this time of night, my lad?” Weary and disconsolate, I replied, “I had hoped to stay at the Youth Hostel but it is closed. Do you know of any place I can stay for the night?” “I’ll see what I can do, if you will come with me”. The Policeman now took me back down the main street to a lodging-house, conducted by an elderly but sweet-natured and extremely sociable lady, named Mrs. Pierce. Her house was on the main road leading into the town and was an ancient stone building of some three or four stories in height.

The Policeman knocked on the front door, which, after a minute or so, was opened by Mrs. Pierce. She stood in the doorway for a moment, observing the Officer and me. “Well, what have we here at this hour of the night?” said the good lady. She was a woman of about five feet three inches in height and of ample figure. “I found this lad looking for a place to stay, Mrs. Pierce. Can you fix him up for the night?” “Do you mind sharing a bed with a Truck Driver?” “No”, I replied. “Well, in that case, I think I can fit you in. Come inside lad”. “Thank you, Mrs. Pierce” said I.

Whilst, nowadays such an arrangement would be unacceptable, I was tired and anxious to get a bed: even half a bed would do. I was profuse in my acknowledgement of the Policeman’s assistance and glad to accompany Mrs. Pierce upstairs to her living-room. There was a cold leg of mutton and bread and butter on the table and the good lady told me to “Tuck-in”: which I did, with a will.

There were two or three other men seated around the table; all local men: none of whom appeared anxious to get to bed. Mrs. Pierce questioned me about my trips. I told her that I loved the Shropshire Countryside and that my Grandfather came from Ruyton-of-the-Eleven-Towns.

The bedroom was at the top of the house: the other occupant of the bed, in which I slept, was already sound asleep when I came into the room, at about one o’clock in the morning. I slept well. It seems that Truck Drivers were accustomed to sharing beds, if no other accommodation was available. So far as I was concerned, it was a case of “Any Port in a Storm”. By the time I awoke, my bed-mate had long since departed.

Mrs. Pierce made me a breakfast of eggs and bacon, which was a real treat at that time. When I had paid eight shillings for my lodging, I thanked and said farewell to my hostess, and departed.

The depressing nature of my work was such that these country jaunts became an absolute necessity for me. I was a lonely figure, as I rode my cycle for mile after mile; usually heading off towards the hills of North Wales. My love for the country compelled me to leave behind the foul and unwholesome environment of Manchester, on every possible occasion.

My elder brother, George, had joined the Naval Air Service and was sent to Canada, for training as a Pilot. He sent me a blue serge Canadian Jacket with a zip down the front. It was ideal for cycling in the colder weather. Such a garment was a rarity in those Utility times, and I was very proud of my Jacket, which was often admired by my associates.

In all Seasons, I rode off on my cycle, warmly clad around the chest, but wearing only shorts. My bare legs never felt the effects of the cold, although, during the Winter months; frost sometimes chilled my fingers and toes to the point of causing me severe discomfort. In common with many lads of my generation, my expertise in cycle travel was such that I could cover over a hundred miles in a day, with only one stop for refreshment at about the half-way point, before continuing my ride. The steady and continuous pace of about 15 to 20 miles per hour, depending upon wind speed and direction, ate up the distance amazingly. There were times when motorists, who had passed me, many miles away, earlier in the day, would express surprise at seeing me at night, in the same place as themselves.

The bulk of the traffic on the roads, at this time, was of a military nature. One afternoon, when riding from Salford to North Wales, I came across a convoy of US “Ducks”: amphibious vehicles, which had a recess at the rear, in which the “screw” was housed. This provided a natural shelter for a cyclist, travelling in the lea of the vehicle. I promptly availed myself of this facility and rode, tucked-in to the rear of the last vehicle in the convoy: much to the amusement of the Marines who were travelling in the vehicle. When I and the convoy finally parted, on the outskirts of Chester, the Yanks gave me a resounding cheer, to which I responded, by waving happily. Whilst a dangerous activity, it enabled me to make excellent time. My technique was to listen carefully to the whine of the differential, to detect a change of pitch that might indicate a deceleration of the vehicle. As I had excellent brakes on my bicycle, I did not consider the situation beyond my control. I often took advantage of relatively slow-moving vehicles, in this manner.

Cycling is, after walking, the best way to observe the countryside. It is a silent activity that does not disturb wildlife unduly. When riding along, I often saw rabbits, a solitary hare, squirrels or the occasional fox, as well as other animals and birds; even the odd grass-snake, sunning itself on a warm road, would slide away on the sudden appearance of the bicycle. The relatively slow pace of cycle travel also permitted more detailed observation of the countryside than that obtained from fast-moving motor cars.

One Summer Sunday morning in l945, I left a Youth Hostel situated in Long Mynedd, near Welshpool on the Welsh Border. The morning was cold, crisp and clear. I rode along in perfect silence and solitude, at an effortless pace, as my way lay Eastward, down the crest of this long and lovely hill. A light mist lay blanketed across the valley to the North. The scene was one of tranquil loveliness. I now experienced a sensation of spiritual exaltation, which gave me an insight into deep and compelling mysteries. The beauty around me was revealed to me as the living revelation of the Divine, at work in the forms of the physical world. At this moment I understood the feelings of the poet William Cowper, who expressed himself in the following words:

“O Nature! whose Elysian scenes disclose,  
His bright perfections, at whose word they rose.

Next to that Power which formed thee and sustains, be Thou the great inspirer of my strains.   
 Still, as I touch the lyre, do thou expand thy genuine charms and guide an artless hand.  
 That I may catch a fire but rarely known:  
 give useful light, though I should miss renown. and; pouring on thy page; whose every line  
bears proof of an Intelligence Divine,  
 may find a heart enriched by what it pays,  
that builds its glory on its Maker’s praise!”

William Cowper.

This is an extract from “Retirement” (The Task), which I had memorized from a sixpenny book of poems by Collins, Gray, Goldsmith and Cowper: purchased one afternoon from one of the Bookstalls in Shudehill Market. As a schoolboy I had no time for poetry: but at the mature age of 15 years, I suddenly awoke to its beauties. I did not, perhaps, appreciate at the time of my Long Mynedd experience, the nature and depth of my insight but, in later life, I recognized that I had been permitted an inspirational glimpse into this wonderful truth.

#### CHAPTER 39

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#### A WELSH EPISODE

When I was 16yrs of age, I found myself, one week-end, in Penmaenmawr, North Wales. I had often been there before. In more prosperous days my family had made it the venue of its regular Annual Holiday: staying at a Boarding-house, conducted by an English couple, named Turner, who had formerly lived in Salford. They had had the good sense and the resources to enable them to get away from the foul environment of the City. The Turner’s Boarding-house was situated on the Main Road, above a Butcher’s shop.

I remembered, in later years, my childhood experiences at the Boarding house: the spotless linen tablecloth, with its grand array of cutlery: the shining water-jug and glassware: the ritual of meals and the pleasure of being waited-upon by the Proprietress. Our mother told us that it was a Welsh custom to drink cold water at mealtimes.

I recalled the morning sounds I could hear, as I gradually awoke: the clink of milk-bottles and the murmur of conversation: the occasional hum of a motor-car engine. This was still a peaceful place and these morning sounds were pleasant and agreeable: promising new pleasures; as one gradually realised that one was still at the Seaside.

During one such holiday, when I was about four years old and had nothing to do, I was amusing myself by spitting from the landing on to the hats and coats of the guests, hanging below. This was great fun. However, a tall, elderly and rather unsportsmanlike gentleman, (I concluded) happened to enter the lobby at this time and, spotting me, said, “What are you doing!?” I replied, “Nothing!” and ran into our room. However, there was first-hand evidence of my culpability. This incident caused my mother no small embarrassment, as I had been caught in the act.

Holidays here, were always enjoyable, except perhaps when the weather turned foul. On one fine July day the family walked to Conway; (Conwy) a distance of about three miles over the hills. The scenery was delightful: at first the footpath led through woods and later meadows. Then it climbed upwards and came on to rolling moorland, with views across to Anglesey on the left and, behind, the grand hills of Snowdonia. We children amused ourselves on the way, by collecting Bilberries, rather like the American Blueberries in appearance and taste, but smaller, which could either be eaten on the spot or made into a delicious Bilberry pie.

On another occasion, we went for a picnic to Abba Falls. We would probably have driven in Dad’s little Austin 7 car to Abba; from where we walked two miles up the valley to the Falls. Here we lunched: we children scrambling amongst the boulders and rocks scattered around the base of the Falls. Abba is still one of the loveliest walks in Wales. One leaves the village to climb easily and steadily to the falls: a charming spot, where the stream leaves the heights and makes an abrupt descent to the head of the valley, cascading in a silver ribbon to the pool below. Nowadays, there is a car-park, about a mile above the village, which considerably shortens the walk to and from the Falls. Abba has been discovered to be the possible seat of one of the ancient Kings of Wales; although a superficial glance at the village gives no indication of its regal origins.

It was my childhood memories that endeared this district to me, quite apart from its situation on the fringe of Snowdonia. Several times, during the War years I went camping to Penmaenmawr, once with my father; pitching the tent close to the seafront at Jones’ Farm, which was about a mile from the village, on the Conwy Road, looking across to the hamlet of Dwygyfylchi and the rising hills beyond. The ground was hard and I slept on a sheet of Barrage-balloon cloth, which was waterproof. This was a useful and abundant material, when the need for Barrage-balloons had past. For bedding, I had a home-made sleeping-bag, sewn by Dad from two old and rather thin woollen blankets. It was often bitterly cold at night and I sometimes lay awake, wondering what on earth I was doing here, willingly freezing; wishing myself home in a warm bed.

My excursions with my father were never a success. These were usually made on one of two tandem-cycles, which Dad had acquired. Tandem cycling is faster, as there is only wind-resistance for one person but the pedal-power of two. Hence, a speed over 20 to 25 miles an hour was possible and, of course, downhill, a much faster rate of travel. However, one is literally tied to one’s fellow passenger on a Tandem and cannot escape. As my father and I disagreed on practically everything, there was bound to be trouble. No-matter how well intentioned we may have been, on setting-out on our journeys, we, inevitably, ended each day with the recollection of numerous disagreements, over petty things. Thus, as I grew older, I commenced travelling by myself, which I found gave me the necessary freedom to make decisions for myself alone.

When I commenced work, of course, I had the means to provide for myself at holiday or excursion times. I often made the decision to head for Wales and, particularly, for the mountainous regions of the North. Thus, before I became a member of the YHA, I sometimes decided to go camping on the Headland at Penmaenmawr.

Occasionally, I went shopping to the village, where meat and groceries were available. There was a Cinema at Llanfairfechan, a mile or two from Penmaenmawr, on the Bangor road. If there was a film showing, which appealed to me, I might ride over for the Saturday afternoon Matinee.

When passing through Penmaenmawr one morning, when I was l6yrs of age, I entered a small Baker’s shop, situate on the Llanfairfechan side of the village. I left my cycle against a steel post, outside the shop; removing my purse from my pocket, as I pushed open the door. There was no other customer present at the time. A girl, of about my own age, was serving behind the counter. She said to me, in an extraordinarily sweet Welsh accent, smiling disarmingly as she spoke, “Hello, what can I do for you?” I was immediately smitten by this young lady, whose voice was music to my ears. I replied, “A small cob and a meat pie, if you please”. Having been supplied with these items, the girl said, “That will be ten pence, please”. I presented a shilling and received tuppence change. Emboldened by my agreeable reception by the fair nymph, and the fact that we were alone, I now spoke: “You live in a lovely place, here.” “Yes, but it is too quiet.” replied Joyce; for that was her name. “Do you think so”, quoth I. “Yes”, replied the Angel, “There is absolutely nothing to do here”. “I am camping at Jones’ Farm up the road. My family used to come to Penmaenmawr every year, when I was a child and I am rather fond of the place. We used to stay at the Boarding House over the Butchery across the way”. “Oh! That would have been nice for you.” she said. Joyce was a slender, fair-haired and fair-complexioned young lady, about the same height as I: with grey-blue eyes and a sweet, gentle nature. I was enthralled.

Joyce, aged 15 years, was probably attracted to me, because I was a strange face. She was, perhaps, thrilled by the novelty of my attentions. The local boys were never so ardent as I, in their addresses to her. I was a new and, at that stage, a welcome intrusion into the monotonous routine of village life.

Joyce agreed to meet me at the shopping arcade, that evening, at seven o’clock. I stayed in the village until evening and was at the shops by a quarter to Seven. She was waiting for me. She took my arm, as it was now October and already dark. We walked leisurely down to the beach. There were no other pedestrians about, as the night was cold and clear. On arriving at the Sea-front, we sat in one of the beach shelters. I told Joyce about myself and she informed me that she had been born in Hoylake, on the Wirrall, spending her early years in that town, but had lived in Wales for the last ten years of her life. I kissed Joyce, which was perhaps the first time a boy had done so. It was lovely. We now engaged in mild and harmless, but thrilling petting. We were both too naive and inhibited to do more than kiss and cuddle. After an hour or so, Joyce, who had told her mother that she was going out to visit a girl friend, said , “I will have to be going home now or my mother will be worrying about me”. I walked Joyce to her home and kissed her “Goodnight”, very lovingly.

During the next two months, I rode my cycle to Penmaenmawr nearly every week-end. There ensued very pleasant evenings on the beach, when we repeated the activity of our first night alone together in the beach-sheds. I lay, stretched out on a bench seat with my head in Joyces lap, whilst she chattered about herself. Oh! The delights of this fair company. Occasionally, we would go to the Cinema at Llanfairfechan, where Joyce’s new companion caused not a little gossip amongst her girl friends.

As it was inevitable that our relationship would become common knowledge, in such a small village, Joyce wisely told her mother about her new boy-friend. I was invited to her home, where she could keep an eye on us. This lady was a widow, who also had a married Son. The mother herself had married an Englishman, although she was Welsh and spoke Welsh as a native, as did most of the local people, except the English imports. On the death of her husband, prior to the War, she had returned with her two children to live in Wales. The family now occupied a small but comfortable terraced cottage, situate on one of the, incredibly steep, hillside streets, leading up from the main road.

Joyce’s mother was kind to me and permitted me to sit in her living- room, whilst she attended to her other tasks. I told her my history and made myself quite at home: perhaps a little too freely for her peace of mind.

At Sunday lunch-time I rode reluctantly back to Salford. However, nothing daunted, I rode my cycle to Penmaenmawr on the Fridays, to spend the week-end with my Sweetheart. Each time, I packed some meat, liver or hearts in my saddle-bag for the family. I was invited to stay at her home, which was convenient for me and a wise move on her part.

Our romance ended when Joyce wrote to me, asking me not to come again. My sustained interest in her had alarmed her mother, who naturally wished to protect her from too romantic an involvement, at such an early age. Joyce, herself, had also recovered from her temporary passion for my company. It was a shattering blow to my self-confidence. I had fondly imagined this romance continuing for ever. My juvenile pride took a buffeting; but I consoled myself with the thought that I would no longer need to ride a hundred miles by bicycle to see the young lady.

There may well have been certain aspects of my personality, at this time, that did not endear me to these ladies: apart from the mother’s natural concern for her teenage daughter. I was still immature, in many respects, and becoming hardened by my work in the Abattoirs.

#### CHAPTER 40

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#### BOOZING

The boundless energy of youth must eventually wear itself out, if forced to the limit and this is what happened in my case. I worked hard during the day and at night I would often spend two or three nights a week at local Dance Halls, “Tripping the light fantastic!” with the girls. At weekends, I gave myself no rest, pursuing the search for that elusive peace of mind, which had always evaded me. I had also started drinking, although still under age. Supervision in Hotels was lax and I was rarely challenged as to my age. I was, thus, able to drink, usually to excess; as youth knows no restraint, when it comes to self-abuse.

Even whilst cycling, I would occasionally stop at Country hotels and ask for a glass of beer. One day I entered an Inn in Stourbridge and confidently approached the Bar. “A pint of Mild, please!” I called to the Landlord. This gentleman was about forty years of age: a gruff-looking chap. He eyed me, contemptuously, and with a cynical sneer, said, “Get out lad!” I was indignant, “I am 18 years old”, I lied. “And I’m 99!” quoth the Landlord: “There is the door, out you go!” I blushed to the roots and, realizing the futility of my demand, turned and left As I rode off on my cycle, I made many abusive imprecations against the Landlord: my ears burning with shame and indignation. My pride had been severely singed, on this occasion, but the incident did not deter me from drinking.

That same year I was touring South Wales and spent a night at the isolated Youth Hostel at Llanddeusant. The Warden of the Hostel informed me that there was an Inn about two miles away, on the other side of the valley. I decided to walk to the Pub. Leaving the Hostel in daylight, I walked about a mile down a narrow lane; crossed a bridge over the stream at the bottom of the valley and ascended the hill on the other side. On reaching a cross-roads, on high, desolate and wind-swept moors, I came to the Inn, which was an ancient stone building, unpainted and drab.

When I entered the Inn, I found myself in a scantily furnished room, in which were seated four farm labourers, as well as the Landlord. A good fire was burning in the hearth. There was a settle on each side of the fireplace; for the added comfort of the customers. I said, “Good Evening!” to the Inn-keeper, who stood behind a small Bar. “A pint of mild, please!” The latter, a large, middle-aged Welshman, looked hard at me but did not say anything to me. He then pulled a pint of beer and handed it to me. “A shilling please”. “Thanks!” said the drinker, handing over the cash. I took my ale and sat down on a wooden bench, trying to appear self-confident and relaxed. I took a pull at my ale and looked around at the company.

They were all, ruddy-faced Welsh countrymen, contentedly regaling themselves in their favourite activity. All were middle-aged, robust looking, poorly but adequately dressed and quite at home in the primitive but warm environment of this simple alehouse. Perhaps my presence inhibited the flow of conversation, as no-one spoke for some minutes, following their muted response to my initial greeting. Finally, one pleasant natured man said to me, “I suppose you are staying at the Hostel?” “Yes, I am touring South Wales at the moment. This is a lovely, although a lonely spot”. “Yes, indeed,” said another fellow, “It is very quiet here. We don’t see many visitors these days”. Conversation now resumed among the men and I sat quietly, listening to their quaint English, spoken with a lilting Welsh accent. I was surprised to note that they were not speaking Welsh and concluded that this was as a courtesy to myself.

From time to time I renewed my order for a pint of mild beer. As the alcohol took effect, I lapsed into a warm and pleasant feeling of relative security and reverie. “What a different life to mine, these Welsh farmers lead: trapped as I am in an eternal round of blood and shit!” The night passed quickly, without unpleasantness or disturbance of any kind. By Ten-thirty o’clock, I had drunk about four pints of Mild Beer and decided that I had better head back to the Youth Hostel, it being about closing time. Bidding the company, “Goodnight”, I stepped out into the night. I was astonished to find myself in utter darkness. The only immediate indicator as to my intended direction was the dim light from the Inn, which soon vanished from sight. I had no way of navigating, other than by touch.

Being a non-smoker, I did not have a box of matches or a lighter, which might have assisted me, in finding my way back to the Youth hostel. I had a rough idea as to my direction and, with outstretched hands, feeling with my feet, made my way over the crossroads and downhill towards the stream. I hoped that, as my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I might have been able to see something, however dimly. In this I was disappointed, as only an impenetrable blackness surrounded me.

The lane, along which I had to make my way, was lined with overgrown hedgerows, which, meeting overhead, reduced the possibility of any residual light that might otherwise have pierced the darkness. I managed to feel my way along the lane to the bottom of the hill, but had difficulty finding the bridge, which I traversed on hands and knees. After an hour or so of slow, stumbling progress, I reached the Hostel safely and was glad to fall into my bunk. As I was the only inmate of the Hostel that night, there was no fear of my disturbing anyone by my late return.

#### CHAPTER 41

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#### SICKNESS

One day, in early l946, I stabbed myself in the first joint of my left thumb, whilst slicing open the carcass of a sheep. This injury was not serious, in itself, and after being dressed I returned to work. I often suffered minor cuts to the fingers and even stabbed myself in the leg, once or twice, when dressing sheep or calves. My scars still testify to my time at the Abattoirs. A day or so later, I went to work but was not feeling well: with a slight fever. Under my left armpit were small lumps, which later in the day became greatly enlarged. My temperature and discomfort increased and I had to finish work early. I went to see Dr. Meyer, who had a Surgery on Cross Lane, near the Railway Station. This gentleman prescribed Sulphur drugs and told me to go to bed.

I spent the next week or so at home, lying on my back: a very sick boy. One night, as I lay asleep, it seemed to me that I was leaving the Earth behind: shooting up into the Stratosphere, just as a modern Astronaut might do, in a Space-Rocket. I saw the globe of the Earth, falling rapidly away beneath me. I was determined not to leave this dear old World and struggled, violently, to return. I was, evidently, successful, as I awoke in my bed. The next morning, I was visited by the Doctor, who ordered my immediate admission to Hospital.

I was conveyed by ambulance to Hope Hospital, Salford and spent the next six weeks in the Surgical Ward. An abscess under my left armpit was incised and two drains inserted. This action reduced my fever but I made very little progress, during ensuing weeks. It was not until it was decided to give me a course of the new wonder-drug, Penicillin, which had recently been made available for civilian use, that I made rapid and substantial progress.

Administration of the drug in those days was by way of injection into the buttocks. A large syringe was used, in which was a quantity of brown liquid, like weak tea, without milk. Almost immediately, after the first injection, my fever began to subside. Over the next five days, I received forty injections into my now skeletal posterior: towards the end of which period I began to dread the time for my next needle, as I was very sore. Matron, on her rounds, smiled benignly at me and expressed her pleasure at the improvement in my condition, by saying to me, “How are we today, John?” “Much better, thank you, Matron!” “We were beginning to be concerned about you, you know!” I felt reassured and pleased. Matron was the very embodiment of the “Grand Dame”; resplendent in a gorgeous Maroon-velvet gown, which covered her substantial figure, from neck to toe: surmounted by a white linen ruff. There was no doubt that she was Queen of this Castle, as she swept by each bed in stately grandeur. Whilst I had always felt that I would recover, it was comforting to see the increased confidence displayed by my Doctors and Nurses.

In fact, I enjoyed the attention I received at the hospital. Two Nurses, in particular, paid me a lot of attention. Nurse Roberts: Welsh; good-looking, dark-haired and intelligent. Nurse Gallagher: a petite, black-locked, charming Irish girl. Both nurses fussed me when they were on duty. They chattered lightly, as they gave me my periodic bed-bath, which necessitated turning me on my side, as they sponged me down. I was accustomed by now to the Nurses’ familiarity with my body and felt no embarrassment. Much of their time was occupied in the mundane tasks of fetching and carrying bedpans and urine bottles. “Nurse, can I have a bottle?” was the constant cry, which kept the girls running to and fro.

In retrospect, I thought about the often unpleasant nature of a Nurse’s occupation and the real measure of dedication which these women display, in their service to the Community. The fact that they become accustomed to the dirty work of Hospital life, does not in any way reduce the value of their contribution.

Amongst the other patients in Ward N.E.3 were several who suffered from Arthritis and were in severe pain. One of these was in the bed next to me. He was a man of about 40 years of age, named Kenneth. He told me that he had been in the hospital for three months. We talked about many subjects for hours together. These contacts were valuable to me, as they increased my knowledge of human nature, so that my stay in hospital was not a total loss. Many patients came in for minor operations, for such things as Piles.

Once, an elderly patient, in a bed opposite, died whilst I was in the Ward. Nurses rushed about with screens but the old man had gone. He had been too ill to communicate with the other patients. As a rule, the terminal patients were moved to other Wards, before they departed this life.

One surprise visitor was Harold Hattersley, who popped-in one day. I was pleased to think that he had taken the trouble to come to Eccles to see me.

My first steps, on leaving my bed, were weak and tottering, but I was delighted when I was able to stagger down the Ward to the toilet, without having to call for bottles and bedpans. What a joy was this capacity for simple movement. Even the simplest of daily activities now became a subject of wonder and enjoyment. I rapidly recovered my strength, as I began to eat and my alimentary system to function, once more. The older patients teased me over my capacity for dispatching second-helpings of potatoes and cabbage.

Three weeks after I had completed my course of Penicillin injections, I was declared, “fit to go home!”

#### CHAPTER 42

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#### RECOVERY

Arrangements were now made for me to undergo a period of convalescence, through the auspices of the “Penny-a-Week” Hospital and Saturday Fund. I took a train to Llandudno Junction and found myself approaching a charming and substantial building in Deganwy, which bore the name, “Plas Mariandar”: situated on the outskirts of Llandudno. A large and well-kept garden surrounded the house, which was set in a modern, well-to-do residential area; with leafy, tree-lined streets. “Plas Mariandar” was a Convalescent Home for men who were recovering from diverse disorders of the flesh. Most of the occupants were elderly or middle-aged men and I was the only youth. The routine was far from onerous. Meals were served in the Dining-room between fixed times and one had to be out of bed at a reasonable hour. Otherwise, the patients were free to do whatever they chose. There were the usual indoor facilities, such as Snooker and Ping-pong. To the North lay the “Great Orme”, a high promontory, providing excellent walking, with views across the Irish Sea.

I shared a dining-table with two older men, who were recovering from surgical procedures. The first was a tallish, fair-skinned, rather balding man, evidently unmarried: the latter dark-haired and of medium height. Neither were excessively communicative; perhaps still anxious and depressed following illness.

Whilst no improper approaches were made to me, at Plas Mariandar, in later years I felt that one of my table-mates probably had homosexual inclinations. It must be stated, that at this stage of my life, I had given no thought to the question of homosexuality, even though I had met one or two “queer” people. It was not until I had been in the Army for some time, that I was given to understand by an older man, a Regular-Army Sergeant, who had served in India, that such conduct actually took place between men. I was then incredulous and revolted. At the age of 17 years I was extremely naive.

During my stay at Llandudno, I rapidly recovered my strength. This was a welcome respite for me and a completely different world from anything I had then experienced. The food at Plas Mariandar was wholesome and plentiful; the house and environment luxurious. It almost seemed that my sickness had been a “blessing” in disguise. The episode had given me a chance to think about my future. I did not relish the prospect of a return to work at the Abattoirs.

Back in Salford, I resumed my social activities, including Dancing. I attended the Annual Hospital Dance at the Nurses Home, during which I danced with the charming Nurse Roberts. I was my old self once more: a smug and self-opinionated youth. The young lady was unimpressed by my arrogance.

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#### CHAPTER 43

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#### NORA

One Saturday night I went to the Higher Broughton Town Hall; where well-patronised Dances were held. During the evening, I noticed one young lady, with dark brown hair, large and winsome eyes and a snub nose, who was sitting in company with several other girls, on the side of the Hall, waiting for a dancing partner. There was something about her that attracted me, although, apart from her eyes, she was in no way “beautiful”. I now walked up to her and, bowing slightly, said, “Would you like to dance?” She smiled at me and said, “Yes”. She now stood and I myself stood back to allow her to walk to the floor. She was about five feet three inches in height: just right for me. Away we now tripped to the beat of a “Quick-Step”. The young lady was of slight build and danced quite compatibly with me, so that I at once felt at ease with her. “My name is John, what is yours?” “Nora!, actually Honora but Nora for short”. “Do you come here often?” “As a rule whenever they have a Saturday-night Dance.” “The Band is OK”, said I. “Yes, it keeps good time”. I now said, “Do you live in Higher Broughton?” “Yes”, said Nora, “Not far from here”. The Dance ended; I escorted Nora back to her seat and said “Thanks”. “Thank you, John”. Later-on I asked Nora to dance again and we chatted throughout the “Slow Fox-Trot”. Nora was intelligent and vivacious and evidently quite pleased to have a competent dancing partner. She told me that she was 19 years of age and was engaged to a young man who was then serving in the RAF.

At eleven o’clock, when the Dance ended, I escorted Nora home, which was only about a hundred and fifty yards from the Town Hall. The family occupied a quite large terraced house. Nora would not permit me to kiss her “goodnight”, with which I was content.

I commenced attending the Broughton Town Hall dances on a regular basis. In spite of the fact that Nora did not encourage me to form a romantic attachment to her, I quickly became quite infatuated with her. This was surprising, as her features were not likely to attract a discerning male. She was, however, a highly sympathetic young lady; very understanding with me. I found her every word and gesture to be intriguing. Whilst, perhaps, flattered by my attentions, she seemed not displeased by my growing dependence upon her.

Nora’s father, Mr. Tombestone, was a slim, dark-haired, funereal character, who conducted a Car-Hire Service. Her mother was a dumpling of a lady; now about fifty-five years old, with the same features as Nora, herself, which gave me an indication of what Nora herself might be like, in thirty years or so. Still, I was not discouraged; rather was I quite captivated by the young lady. She was vivacious: warm and gentle towards me. I found her conversation to be intelligent and hung upon her every phrase and gesture.

Eventually, Nora convinced me that I was wasting my time, in hoping for a more express demonstration of affection, than that which she was able to bestow upon me and which, to be truthful, was a genuine, tender and sisterly regard. Once I clearly understood this, my infatuation subsided and I soon forgot the charming Nora.

After six months away from work, I returned to the Abattoirs. However, I had not recovered my full strength and found the work to be utterly distasteful and repugnant. I sought a solution to this problem and decided that I would join the Army; as my father had been a soldier before me.

At the age of 17 years and 6 months, on the 7th August l946, I signed up for Five years with the Regular Army and 7 years with the Reserve. It was to be one or two months more before I would actually join a Regiment.

#### CHAPTER 44

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#### HARRY COTTON

There was a young man who occasionally attended Hurley’s Milk Bar in those days and with whom I became friendly. He was Harry Cotton. Harry was a year or so older than I, somewhat taller but of a light build. His face was pale and freckled: his hair curly and mousy. Harry had been born with a cleft-palate, which had been but imperfectly remedied; leaving him with a speech impediment which, at times, made it difficult to comprehend fully what he was saying. He also had a club foot. Harry was rather a forlorn character, shabbily dressed and unprepossessing. He was accustomed to being “left out” of things. He told me that he had been “orphaned” and fostered with his Aunt, with whom he still lived. However, his relationship with this lady was less than cordial.

Harry worked in a Butcher’s shop, conducted by his Uncle in Pendleton. In addition to his physical defects, Harry always seemed to have a “runny nose”, which increased his somewhat repellent appearance. In spite of his physical defects, Harry was a friendly, sweet-natured and likeable person and I went out of my way to be sociable with him. As a result, Harry responded warmly to my toleration. Occasionally, we would ride our cycles together, although I still preferred to ride by myself, as I did not, particularly, wish to keep regular company with Harry. At times, I felt rather guilty at my neglect of my friend, but did not wish to admit to Harry that I found his company to be “embarrassing”.

Harry at one stage had a girlfriend. She was a short, fat, dark-haired and unprepossessing female, who exercised a domineering influence over him. I did not like her and wondered how on earth Harry could put up with such a woman. However, in spite of her overbearing treatment of Harry, she filled the ever-present need for affection and companionship, which this love-starved soul so desperately sought.

After I joined the Army, I lost contact with Harry. Several years later and whilst I was in Egypt, I received news that my friend had “Committed Suicide!” Though not surprised to hear that this was the way things turned out for Harry, I was saddened by the thought that he had really never had a chance to grasp the happiness, to which, as a human being, he was entitled. Perhaps loneliness and despair had so crushed him, that he felt that there was no other way of resolving his problems. Harry’s trouble was simply that he was an unpresentable lad, who could not seem to please anyone, for any part of the time, even though he went out of his way to be sociable.

(Here is a rather poor picture of Harry with two cycling friends, taken whilst touring)

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#### X CHAPTER 45

#### TERESA

Whilst chatting at the Hurley’s Milk Bar one evening, in the Spring of l946, i noticed two girls sitting together, sipping Milk Shakes. They were sisters of Irish extraction; Mary and Teresa (Bridget) Roach. Mary was the elder of the two, some eighteen months older than I. Teresa was about my own age. Mary was a pretty girl, full-chested and with a mass of lovely auburn hair. She had a broad Irish face, turned-up nose, dimpled chin, full lips and fair complexion. Teresa, at this time, was a thin girl, with straight dark brown hair; large eyes of matching hue and a sallow complexion. Teresa was also full-breasted. Her nose was large and unattractive, although adding to her features a suggestion of strength of character. She had not, at this stage blossomed into the attractive woman of her maturer years. Mary was then engaged in an animated conversation with a tall, red-haired youth, named Michael: whilst her sister sat, in apparent indifference, at her side. The elder sister was bright-eyed and alert to the attention she was receiving from Michael. I walked across to the girls and said, “Hello! I’m John. I haven’t seen you ladies here before”. Mary said, “Oh, we come here now and again: I’m Mary and this is Teresa, my sister.” I glanced at the other girl and saw a pale, languorous face and two large brown eyes. I said, “Hello, Teresa!”. She looked up at me, shyly and, smiling weakly, responded with “Hello!” I was now standing facing the girls, as Michael and Mary talked about the picture show, which they were going to see later at the Palace Cinema. When they had finished their milk-shakes, the sisters rose and said, “Cheerio!” to us boys, as they left the Milk-Bar. When they had gone, red-headed Michael said to me, “That Mary is a good looker, for sure”. “She is very attractive!”, I affirmed!”

In ensuing weeks, I saw the two sisters in Hurley’s several times. Mary was usually the centre of attention, from the boys who frequented the Milk-Bar. She revealed no interest, whatsoever, in me, who, whilst, perhaps, presentable in appearance and of good physique, was only of short stature. Michael was taller than me by three or four inches. I learned that Mary worked as a Machinist at a local factory, whereas Teresa was a Shorthand-Typist: a step up the intellectual ladder, it would seem. The latter was of a shy disposition; reserved and unwilling, or unable, to engage in the light chatter of the young people who frequented the Hurley’s establishment. Teresa was not impressed by the specimens of the male gender whom she observed around about her. She, therefore, had little incentive to respond to the conversation of the boys she met, which was mainly centred around their work, girls and sporting interests: the latter predominating largely in their list of personal priorities. Teresa felt a degree of intellectual superiority towards the four or five lads who were clustered around about Mary and herself: all admiring the bright eyes and luxuriant auburn locks of her vivacious, if vacant minded sister.

I was, initially, attracted to Mary, as she was both pretty and extroverted: much less reserved than her younger sister. I realized that I had little chance of making any impression on Mary. I saw that Teresa, on the other hand, had a more penetrating intellect. After seeing the girls on several occasions, I decided that Teresa was not unattractive and was intelligent to boot. I now diverted my romantic inclinations in the direction of the younger sister.

I was an arrogant, ignorant, self-opinionated, juvenile boor at this stage of my life. Knowing nothing; I thought of myself as a “radical”. Teresa, perhaps, because there was no-one else around, who was remotely intelligent, responded to my approaches and agreed to go out with me. I took her, rather surprisingly, to the Lord Duncan Street Spiritualist Church.

(Reproduced below are three snaps of Teresa, at 8yrs, 17 and 24yrs of age:



#### CHAPTER 46

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#### SPIRITUALISM

My interest in Spiritualism had developed shortly after my illness. My father and Margery had commenced attending the Raby Street, Spiritualist Church, Manchester: mainly as a result of certain psychic experiences of our father. They also held several sessions at home, with an Alphabet Board, in which a glass was used to spell out messages from the “Other Side”. I, who had very firm ideas as to the non-existence of God or of a future-state, initially scoffed, vehemently, at this superstitious activity. However, as I was present on some of these occasions, there being nowhere else to go, apart from the bedroom, it became evident to me that the rapid gyrations of the glass, which spelt out messages at a tremendous rate, were not the result of conscious manipulation by either Dad or Margery.

I gradually became interested in the proceedings and commenced attending the Raby Street Church. At this stage I was still not convinced as to the truth of the survival of the personality after death. However, I was sufficiently interested to commence sitting in a “Developing Circle”, conducted on Wednesday nights at the Raby Street Church by one of the senior members of that Church, a Mr………. It might be stated that this Church was the principle Spiritualist Church in Manchester, at that time, situated in Moss Side; a district now largely populated by people of West Indian background. At the time of which we speak, there were only a few Blacks living there, one of whom, a lady named Mrs. Brown, attended my group. During these “Circles” as they are known, (The word “Seance” is not generally used in the Movement) the members of the Class would sit to develop their own individual Spiritual (or Psychic) Gifts. I myself had no subjective experiences during the first few weeks of my attendance; which is understandable, as I was still working at the Abattoir at this time and was a worldly and not particularly agreeable character.

When I was approaching 17 years of age, I went to bed one night, as usual and after sleeping for some hours, “awoke” in the darkness, to a feeling that some person was present in the room, as well as myself. Whilst apprehensive, I was not actually afraid. I was lying on my back and, without alarm, felt two hands resting, one on each foot. The hands moved up my body to my chest. I sat up in bed and heard my mother’s voice say to me, “John, my darling baby!”: at the same time feeling the pressure of her body as she gave me a loving hug. I responded by returning the hug, but did not say anything to her, nor did I open my eyes. I awoke in the morning, to realize that I had been given personal proof of “survival after death!”

Whilst this was a subjective, dream experience, certainly not involving anything in the nature of the physical, I had actually heard my mother’s deep contralto voice speaking to me, for the first time in ten years. This was indeed, the evidence I was seeking, not only as to the survival of the human soul after death but, so far as I was concerned, of the Existence of “God” and of a Divinely Ordained Universe. Gone was the apprehension and fear of the unknown: the “Void” was no longer. The realization had come to me that Death is not Annihilation but a Re-awakening.

The following Wednesday, I went to the Raby Street Developing Class, as usual. During the meeting, our leader addressed me, saying, “There is a lady with you”. Immediately, I felt a sensation, which I would later describe as a “Blanket of Love”, laid over me from head to toe. The man continued to speak but I heard little of what he said, being immersed in my own emotional response. Towards the end of the discourse, he said to me. “When your mother comes to you, do not be afraid. You have nothing to fear.” This was a confirmation to me of the fact that my mother had visited me and of the truth of the reality of Spirit: nor did I ever again doubt the validity of these things. In later years, though often lacking in self-confidence and, at times depressed, I never lost sight of these essential truths: truths which have supported me through emotional trials and irrational torments: magnified, so often, out of due proportion by my all-too-vivid imagination.

I now began to understand the significance of the doctrine of the Resurrection. I formed the conclusion that, if the human personality survives the physical death, there must be a Superintending Intellect directing the affairs of the Universe. Immortality cannot be explained by reference to cosmic accident. This was the object of my mother’s return that night. Theories of Cause and Effect, operating irrationally and coincidentally, just do not fit into a Universe, in which Mankind enjoys a form of immortality, whatever its nature. There was now, no doubt whatever in my mind, as to the Immortality of the Soul; hence I had to revise my views as to the “existence” of God. During a lifetime, subsequent to this experience, I have had an opportunity to think about and formulate my ideas on this vital subject. Just what is my concept of God, compared to those of my fellows, took me many years to determine. In the meantime, my feet had been placed upon a firm foundation. There was to be no sudden transition in my case from ignorant pessimism to informed optimism. However, I had taken the first step!

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#### CHAPTER 47

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#### ALWAYS TOGETHER!

I rapidly developed an attachment to Teresa Roach. In matters of the heart it was “all or nothing” with me. There was something in my constitution, no doubt connected with maternal deprivation, that drew me to the company of women. Romantic attachments for me were very serious things, so that my fondness for Teresa became an overpowering obsession.

She had been “delicate” in her youth. One of six surviving children of an Irish Widow, she had lost her father from Tuberculosis at the age of three years. Her mother had raised the family single-handedly, relying on meagre Social Security handouts and, on the outbreak of War, from her earnings; firstly as a Shop-cleaner and then as the Manageress of the same Greengrocery. She was a woman of firm determination, as she had been compelled to be, by her experiences, and was intelligent, although barely literate. At that time, working-class Irish-women were not regarded as worthy of an education. This was, perhaps, regrettable but she had passed on to her fourth daughter, named after herself, the intelligence which a beneficent Nature had bestowed upon her.

I very soon grew to feel that there was nothing in life for me but Teresa. This was unfortunate for both young people, as I had signed-on for 5 years with the Regular Army and was due to join my Training Regiment on 12 September l946. In one respect, the enforced separation proved to be beneficial, as it gave us a chance to mature, before forming a more binding relationship.

There was also the question of religious affiliation, as Teresa was a Catholic, although what some people might consider to be “Lapsed”. Certainly, she perhaps was not obeying the directions of the Church in attending a Spiritualist Church with me: (a Mortal Sin?). Mrs. Roach could not complain about this, as she herself occasionally attended a, “One-man Room” conducted by a well-known Salford Clairvoyant: one Norman England, whose premises were on the corner of Ellor Street and Cross Lane. This gentleman was an effeminate character, but well-patronised. Teresa’s mother, herself a Catholic, liked occasionally to have her fortune told, although she would have indignantly rejected the suggestion that she had attended either another Religious Service or the Devil’s Meeting-House.

Services at the Lord Duncan Street Spiritualist Church were usually conducted by two elderly ladies. The Sunday afternoon Meeting, at which Teresa and I were present, opened with an hymn, followed by an opening prayer, asking for the blessing of Almighty God upon the proceedings. At this stage there did not appear to be any evidence of “Black-Magic or Devil-worship”. After a second hymn, a lady read a passage from the Bible, l Corinthians, Ch 2, following which another lady gave an Address; both instructive and elevating in its theme. It was about the Love of God and the duty of communal responsibility thrust upon all of us, as his Children. Nothing diabolical here! Following the Address, there was another hymn and a collection was made for the Church. Then the speaker purported to give messages from the Spirit Side of Life to the persons present, picking them out at random from the company. At one stage, this lady spoke to Teresa and me. In speaking to us, she said, “You will always be together!” This was a ridiculous thing to say to two young people and appeared doubly so to us, as it was the first occasion on which we had ever been alone in each other’s company. Teresa was not impressed, whilst I thought it was a wonderful prognostication.

As things transpired, the prediction was proved, at an early date, to be groundless. I received my Marching Orders within a few days; directing me to report to a Training Regiment at Retford, Nottinghamshire.

There was one bright aspect of my situation: I was now free from the torment of life at the Abattoirs. I had given a week’s notice, at the expiration of which I had happily said “Goodbye” to the Members of the Gang and to the Jewish Slaughterers. I would never return to this place of blood and torment.

My parting with Teresa, at the Manchester Central Station was, emotionally, the most painful experience of my life. I then wished, as I often did during the ensuing six years, that I had never enlisted. I now understood the meaning of the words: “Parting is such sweet sorrow!” as my young-lady, in tears, waved good-bye to me, as I entered the train. I myself was so distressed, that I sat down in my corner-seat, overwhelmed by emotion and forgot to wave to her from the compartment. It was a dreary moment in my life.

#### CHAPTER 48

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#### RETFORD

A 3-ton Army Chevrolet truck was waiting at Retford station, to convey the recruits to the Training Camp. On arriving at the Guardroom, with several other young men, I was interviewed by a Sergeant, who took my particulars. After about ten minutes, we recruits were taken to the Quartermaster’s Stores, where we were issued with two suits of battle-dress, denims, boots and other personal items. We were then taken to our quarters: a large empty barrack-room, with little furniture, apart from personal lockers for each recruit. There was no pretence of comfort, whatever, with straw palliasses laid on the floor, for beds. In lieu of a pillow, we were issued with bolsters, which were both hard and filthy. We were also issued with two coarse Army Blankets, but no sheets, as these were reserved for superior ranks.

I found the discipline of Army Life very hard to take. The first three months of Military Training are, undoubtedly, the most difficult of all. The Camp at Retford was an Infantry Training Centre and new recruits were subjected to a regime of terror, from day one.

Reveille was sounded at 5.30am the following morning, when the recruits in my intake were noisily ordered out of bed, “on peril of our lives!” Corporal Tweedy marched into the Barrack-Room, shouting out, “Wakey-Wakey!, Let’s have you! Out you get - jump to it or I’ll have you!” Alarmed by these peremptory commands, most of the youngsters stirred and showed reluctant signs of movement. The slower ones were rudely disturbed when the Corporal promptly pulled back their bedding, remarking “Come on lad, you are in the army now! Out you get and quick smart! You have two minutes to be dressed and standing by your beds!”

This was a totally new and unwelcome situation for all the boys, but one that, evidently, had to be tolerated, if life was to be made as easy as possible. We, therefore, dressed as quickly as we could. This done, we heard the command, “Stand by your beds! Attention! You have five minutes to wash and shave and be back here standing by your beds!” I thought that this was a pretty tough sort of treatment. This bloke was a real bastard! In fact the Corporal was merely playing the game of “Soldiers”. Shouting and threatening, was the basis of this activity and so long as the recruits accepted their situation, things went fairly well. On returning from the ablution block, we were told that we had 30 minutes for breakfast, after which we would be instructed in Barrack-Room procedures.

When we returned from a meal of Porridge, bread, butter and tea, we were lectured on bed-making and how to lay out our equipment. Beds had to be made-up to precise dimensions and were repeatedly pulled to pieces by the Sergeant in charge of the Platoon. Boots were to be polished to rigorous military standards and required sustained work to be brought up to scratch. Webbing equipment was required to be “blancoed”: a wet, messy business, in which a khaki chalk-block was moistened and rubbed on to damp canvas and then smoothed over with a cloth; after which it was hung out to dry. The man who invented Blanco was a “sociopath” of the first calibre.

After this instruction, we new soldiers were ordered out on to the Parade Ground. “On Parade!” was the command. Sergeant Parkin had entered the Barrack Room: “Let’s have you, outside! We are going to have some drill. Jump to it: at the double!”

Assisted by Cpl Tweedie, Parkin lined-up his recruits in three rows and measured us off, according to height. We were then instructed in the normal Infantry Commands. “Right Marker”: was the pivot on which the Company would march. We all lined-up in relation to this man. When we had learned to respond to such commands as “Left-turn; Right-Turn; and About-turn”: we were marched across the parade ground and taught to “Left-wheel” and “Right- wheel”. Later, we were issued with Lee-Enfield Mark II Rifles. Now came the really hard work of drilling for hours with these heavy weapons, carried on the right shoulder. We learnt to Shoulder Arms: Slope Arms; Present Arms for Inspection: Present Arms (as a Salute) and other necessary Rifle Drill commands.

At four o’clock in the afternoon, we recruits were free to work on our equipment: which had to be maintained at a high standard. 4.30pm was Tea-time, when we walked over to the Cookhouse with a tin mug and rectangular steel food container: into which our “Army grub” was slopped by the indifferent Cookhouse Orderlies. I found the food to be revolting: in many instances, it was a case of good food being ruined by incompetent preparation. Often it was cold and greasy. It was evident that most Army Cooks had never boiled a potato in their lives, before going into the Forces.

The major part of most days was spent in drill; designed to break the hearts of even the most hardened of the Rookies. We were intimidated to the utmost degree. Everything was done, “at the Double”. We were given very few minutes to change into Physical Training gear: it was all rush and bustle, from which there was no respite. Sgt Parkin, who was a West-Country man, would single out a recruit on Parade and say to him, “You are a Bloody Gobbin!: what are you!?” “A bloody Gobbin, Sergeant!”, came the reply. In addition to drill, there were strenuous athletic activities, including long-distance running; which came as a relief from the strain of the parade-ground. We were also trained in the use of the Lee-Enfield Rifle, which was then the standard weapon of the British Infantryman.

On arriving one day at the Rifle Range, for the first time, to practise shooting, I found the noise of the gunfire to be distressing. My nose bled and I suffered a minor nervous collapse; the symptoms of which were perspiration and tremor and which may have been related to my wartime experiences. After sitting for a while, I recovered myself and was able to participate in the shooting, although I found that operating a Lee-Enfield Rifle, with the bolt on the right-hand side, was difficult. I was short-sighted in the right eye and had to shoot, using my left-eye, with the rifle in my left shoulder. Each time I wished to open the bolt of the rifle, I had to lower the weapon and use my right hand to manipulate the bolt.

In addition to Rifle-shooting, we were trained in the lobbing of Hand-grenades, which, although small, are extremely noisy, diabolical weapons. We had to fuse the Grenades, a task that was done in a sand-bagged area, adjacent to the throwing range. Cpl Tweedie was in charge of this tuition. He showed each lad how to prepare his grenades. The base-plug had to be unscrewed and the fuse and detonator carefully inserted: following which, the base-plug was then re-fitted. The grenade was now “armed”. When throwing grenades, they had to be lobbed, rather than merely “chucked” and observation made of the place at which they landed, before ducking below the sand-bagged parapet. The fuses were timed to delay detonation for 5 seconds, which was plenty of time in which to lob the weapon a safe distance. If the fuse was damaged, however, this safety period could be reduced: hence the need for extremely careful handling of the fuse itself.

The Grenades exploded with a deafening roar, quite beyond description: the cast-iron base-plug of the grenade screaming wildly, as it flew overhead.

After several weeks of Primary Training, my mates and I were allowed a 36-hour pass. This enabled us to go home for the weekend. Though I had written to Teresa frequently, I was anxious to be with her, once more. I had a mate, Ginger Warburton, who also came from Manchester, to accompany me on the journey. The latter was a tall, well-built lad, red-haired and fresh complexioned. He was a quiet, simple-natured youth, with whom I got along well.

My delight at seeing Teresa, and the pleasure of her company during the weekend, was soured by the necessity of leaving her, to return to Camp by Midnight on Sunday.

During the final weeks at Retford, I was able to obtain several 36 hour passes. One Sunday night, Ginger and I caught a train from Manchester, to return to Camp but, for some reason it failed to stop at either Retford or Worksop. We found ourselves deposited at Grantham, on a freezing Winter night; well past the midnight hour and with no prospect of a train to Retford, before morning. We decided to try to get a lift on the Great North Road. However, at that time of night, there was little traffic. After waiting for some time, we were fortunate to be offered a lift in a Circus Lorry, loaded with animal cages. We spent the next few hours in an open cage, moving along the highway at about fifteen miles per hour and exposed to the Icy blast, which chilled us to the marrow. In the morning we arrived at Camp, dejected and cold; only to be paraded before the Company Commander. However, in spite of the threat of punishment, some compassion was shown to the recruits and we were dismissed with a caution.

After my 3 months of Primary Training was completed, I was interviewed by an Army Psychiatrist, who had, no doubt, been asked to see me, following the incident at the Rifle-Range. He asked me whether I liked Army life. I, being unwilling to admit that I hated it, replied that I was happy in the Service. Shortly after this, we were given a fortnight’s leave, pending transfer to another Training Regiment. As I had indicated a preference for the Royal Armoured Corps, I was sent to Catterick Camp, near Richmond, North Yorkshire. Here I was to spend 6 months, in training as a Driver Mechanic, or so I thought.

#### CHAPTER 49

#### CATTERICK CAMP

The 62nd Training Regiment, (RAC) was situated some miles South of the charming town of Richmond, on the North Yorkshire Moors. In Summer, the high moorland, hereabouts, is picturesque. During the Winter of l946, it was a frozen wasteland. The new arrivals were lodged in Barrack-rooms designed to be heated by two back-to-back open fires. However, only Coke was supplied to the troops and it was impossible to ignite this material without the use of coal, to provide the necessary heat. The rooms, therefore, were unheated, at a time when the temperature was well-below Zero and when the surrounding Moors were covered with three feet of snow. To make matters worse, there was no hot water available for washing or bathing. When our evening tasks were completed, we happily piled everything we could possibly find, on top of our two army blankets and got into bed, to remain there, in relative warmth, until Reveille compelled us to face the trials of Army life, once more.

The discipline at this Camp, for the new arrivals, was possibly more severe than it had been at the Infantry Camp. However, that part of the training which did not involve the parade-ground was very interesting for me. I was disappointed, on reading Squadron Orders, to discover that I had been rejected for training as a Driver-Mechanic. However, something in the Intelligence and Aptitude test that I had taken, had indicated that I would be suitable for Clerical work. I could hardly believe my eyes, when I thus discovered that I would spend the latter part of my stay at Catterick in one of the Camp Offices; learning the mysteries of book-work.

In the meantime, I was taught how to handle a Pistol, Sten-gun, Bren-Gun and a PIAT (a primitive anti-tank weapon), and even took a course in Tank Gunnery. Nobody bothered to ascertain whether I could see through my right eye, and I was obliged to use this eye, in order to aim the 75mm gun.

For Gunnery Practice, we Trainees were conveyed in Army Trucks to Warcop Fell, an isolated but lovely spot on the North Yorkshire Moors. We spent three days here. Whilst on the firing range I made such a mess of things, that the Gunnery Officer commented on my incompetence over the Inter-com. I, thereupon, gave the weapon “maximum elevation” in an endeavour to avoid killing more sheep.

One of the National Servicemen stationed at Catterick Camp was a Birmingham man, some years older than I, whose National Service period of two years had evidently been deferred for some time, one Trooper Wilkins. He was the owner of a Morris l0 car, which he parked in the Camp. This was extraordinary affluence to me, who had never had an associate who possessed such a luxury. Wilkins had a girlfriend, working at the Cadbury’s Factory who was able to obtain plentiful supplies of chocolate, which was still severely rationed at this time. Wilkins kept a store of this delectable commodity in a suitcase under his bed. He used this as “currency”; persuading several of the younger soldiers to work for him, cleaning kit, in return for one or two bars of chocolate. I never saw him sharing any of the chocolate, gratuitously, with his mates. I myself was not too proud to perform servile work for Wilkins, in return for a block of chocolate.

There was another lad who had been earmarked for Clerical work with me. This was “Paddy” Barnett, an Ulster lad, originally from Londonderry but latterly from Newtownards. He was a big, fair-haired, fresh-faced lad. Paddy was a well-disposed young man but rather simple-minded, in some respects. I was to spend the greater part of my Army life in the company of this lad. In fact, to some extent, I took Paddy under “my wing”, assisting him whenever he got into scrapes, which he was prone to do. Ginger Warburton was also present on this course, but soon after we lads commenced training at Catterick, Ginger was discharged, as “medically unfit”. He had forgotten to tell the Military authorities that he suffered from Epilepsy. One night Ginger and Paddy were absent from the Barrack Room and did not return until late the following day. They were in a dirty and untidy state. They gave the excuse that they had been out walking on the Moors when Ginger had suffered a fit. Whether this was true or not, the other lads never discovered, but I suspected that they had been involved in mischief, of some kind. It is quite likely that they had got drunk in town and spent the night in a ditch.

As part of our extra-military duties, we were given the task of distributing coal to the Catterick Married Quarters. This would have been heavy work, at the best of times, but as the surrounding streets were blanketed with deep snow, the task of carrying steel tubs, filled with coal, was doubly arduous. However, even this task was preferable to parade-ground drill, which, happily, was much curtailed.

After about six weeks in Camp, during which time we lads had no hot water, I decided that I had better have a bath. I went to the deserted bath-room and ran a bath of cold water. When it is considered that there was then about three-feet of snow covering the surrounding countryside, it will be appreciated that the water was, truly, cold. I undressed and, by degrees, lowered myself into the freezing water. I then gave myself a good scrubbing. By the time I had completed my ablutions, my skin was a bright-red colour. Needless to add, there was no other soldier in the ablution block, at the time.

When Paddy and I were to report to the Squadron Office for Clerical Training, we were rather apprehensive. Neither of us had done any work of this nature. However, we had no great difficulties to overcome. I realized that if I was to do well in this job, I had to learn to type. I, therefore, borrowed a Pitman’s Typing Book from Teresa, whilst home on leave. I made little progress at this stage of my clerical career.

#### CHAPTER 50

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#### FORT GOMER

On completion of my 6-month’s Secondary Training at Catterick Camp, I was posted to Gosport, across the harbour from Portsmouth. It was an entirely different world from that of the wild and windswept moors of Yorkshire. The unit, at which I was to be the Quartermaster’s Clerk, was called S.A.E. or Specialised Armour Establishment. It had been busy developing amphibious tanks for the Royal Armoured Corps, during the War, but was now in the throes of being run-down. SAE was still playing about with Amphibious Tanks, but little research was done. In fact, it was a dangerous activity for the men involved, as Sherman Tanks were rather heavy things to take to sea, when only surrounded by a Canvas flotation device. In addition, the emergency breathing apparatus, then in use, was in an early stage of development and was unreliable.

I enjoyed the train journey to Portsmouth. The Southern-Railway Electric trains were much cleaner, quieter and faster than the old Steamers operating in the North. The journey through the charming countryside of Surrey, the South Downs and Hampshire was delightful.

As I passed through Godalming and Haslemere, I thought to myself, “This is where the wealth generated in the Mills and Factories of the North ends up: in the pockets of privileged Southerners, living here in luxury”.

On arrival in the Naval town of Portsmouth, I walked a short distance down to the Gosport Ferry terminal. On landing on the Gosport side of the harbour, I took the Lee-on-Solent bus, which deposited me, ten minutes later, at the entrance-gate, leading to Fort Gomer.

It was dark when I arrived, perhaps 9 or 10 o’clock at night. There was a short walk, past wartime huts, down to the entrance to the Fort itself. As I approached the moat, I thought that I was entering something out of the history books, as a passage led across a bridge, which could have been a drawbridge, leading to an ancient castle. Beyond the bridge was an arched passage leading to the Guardroom beyond.

A sentry was on duty at the entrance to the passageway but, as I approached, he appeared to be relaxed and at his ease. I was not challenged and the guard simply said, “How do!” as I came near. “Hello!” said I: “I’ve just been posted here. Who do I have to see?” The sentry said, “The Guardroom is on the right, just along there. You had better see the Corporal of the Guard. He will show you where to doss for the night”.

I, accordingly, entered the Guardroom, where I saw the Corporal in charge of the Guard. This chap was very friendly: there was a striking contrast between his manner and that of the Training NCO’s, whom I had seen at my earlier postings. He escorted me to a Barrack-room, where I deposited my kit by a bed, and then took me to the cookhouse, for supper.

I was at once impressed by the easy-going atmosphere of the place. There did not appear to be much in the way of “Bull-shit” here. I was introduced to the cook, who immediately set about fixing my eggs and chips. He was a chatty, effeminate fellow, who exerted great influence on the other blokes, as he could always be trusted to produce a bit of grub, after hours, for his friends. He held the rank of Corporal Cook. The boys called him, “Brenda”, a nickname that in no way displeased him. He was of medium height and light build, of fresh complexion with mousy hair. I thoroughly enjoyed my first decent Army meal.

As I was eating my supper, Brenda came out of the kitchen and sat down facing me. “What is your trade, John?” “I am a Clerk,” replied our young man. “Oh! I suppose you will be working in the Orderly Room or the QM’s office?” “I don’t know.” Brenda shrugged his shoulders, “You’ll be all right here. They are a pretty good lot.” “It looks pretty good”, said I. “After being at Catterick Camp, anything would have to be better than that.” “Ye-es, I should think so”, shrugged Cpl Brenda.

I spent my first night at Fort Gomer, sleeping in one of the Barrack-rooms, with a number of other young-men. The following day, I reported to the Sgt-Major’s Office and was told to go to the Quartermaster’s Office, which was behind the Guardroom.

It was here that I worked for the next 18 months. The QM was a Scot, Captain Robertson. He was a large, pleasant-natured man, in his early fifties. The Quartermaster-Sergeant, Sgt. White, was about the same age as his boss and had been a Regular Soldier since before the war. He was a tough character but treated me with consideration and even kindness, although a terror to strangers. My duties here were not arduous, by any means. Sgt. White had a room of his own, a short distance from the Fort, in one of the huts erected outside the main building during the war, for the accommodation of Yanks. Sometimes, if I had nothing to do in the evening, I would call on Sgt White and we would have a cup of tea: the water being boiled on a Spirit-stove.

Sgt. White told me many stories about Army life. It was he who informed me that, in Colonial days, in India, when a Regiment served a ten-year stint of duty, some of the men would form homosexual relationships. Whilst I was incredulous, I was beginning to think that there was some truth in the Sergeant’s tales. Here at Fort Gomer, there was the presence of Brenda, to illustrate what I had been told by my Sergeant, although one could not really take Brenda seriously. He was certainly a harmless individual. It was whilst talking to the Sergeant one evening that the latter said to me, “You are a strange fellow. There is something about you that is different from other youngsters”. I then told the Sergeant that I was a Spiritualist. The Sergeant agreed that this may have had something to do with it. Actually, I would probably have given such an impression, independently of my religious affiliations, as I was not in the habit of communicating my philosophical or religious views to other people, unless, of course, the topic arose in conversation. It was probably my solitariness, that singled me out from my fellows.

As Quartermaster’s Clerk, I was excused Guard Duty. I was required to serve as duty-clerk about once a week. This was no hardship, as it merely required me to be present at the office. As I slept next to the office, there was really no inconvenience involved in this particular duty.

Fort Gomer had been built during the Napoleonic Wars: one of a series of forts, erected, at great expense, to defend Portsmouth. The walls of the Fort were eleven feet thick: solid brickwork.

Surrounding the Fort was a wide and deep moat, providing a secure habitat for large black rats. These creatures would emerge at night, to forage in the Barrack-rooms occupied by the troops. They could be heard scurrying around under the beds in the dark.

The Barrack Rooms were actually built into the walls of the Fort. They were large, arched chambers, about 60 ft by 20 ft. There was a large window on the inner side of each room but not on the external side. Without electric light, they must have been dark and dismal places.

One Saturday afternoon, I had been lingering in the Cookhouse after lunch, when Brenda and I entered into conversation. I said, “I am going to the pictures in Portsmouth NAAFI Canteen this afternoon.” Brenda said, “I will come with you if you like”. As I had no objection to Brenda’s company, I said, “Sure, you can come if you wish”. We later caught the bus and ferry to Portsmouth. There was a picture theatre in the NAAFI Canteen Building. During the show, Brenda placed his hand on my knee, which I politely removed, saying, “Cut that out!” The incident did not disturb me and I was rather amused by the other fellow’s behaviour. However, I began to realize that there were, indeed, such people as “Pufters” in the community. I was not particularly disturbed by this revelation; in fact, I did not think very much about it. As I myself was staunchly heterosexual in outlook, it was difficult for me to conceive a situation, in which one man could contemplate sexually explicit behaviour, with another of his own sex. The very idea was revolting.

Fort Gomer was situated only a short distance from the shore of the Solent, through which, at high tide, sea-going vessels would sail, including the s.s. Queen Mary and s.s. Queen Elizabeth. When off-duty, we lads would sometimes wander down to the water’s edge to fish or to swim. The great ships were a noble sight, as they passed silently down the channel.

We would fish from the jetties, which at low tide were exposed high and dry. For bait we used lug-worms, dug from the mud. These were about an inch thick and several feet in length. My fishing was never particularly successful. Swimming was hazardous, in virtue of the amount of untreated sewage which regularly found its way into the waters of the Solent.

Sometimes, I would take a stroll along the sand to “Lee-on-Solent”; a small seaside resort a mile or so from Fort Gomer. On pay-days, we usually headed for Portsmouth, after work, usually to the NAAFI Canteen. Sometimes, we would treat ourselves to a beer or two, in one of the Public Houses in Gosport.

There was a Spiritualist Church in Portsmouth , called the “Portsmouth Temple”. It was a substantial, well-designed building and, at that date, was well-supported by its membership.

I made enquiries and went along one Sunday afternoon to a service. On entering the building, I was at once impressed by the substantial nature of the place and its neat, well-maintained interior. In or near the entrance vestibule, were two large oil paintings: purporting to depict historical characters (Painted by a Psychic-artist). One of these was a portrait of “Cleopatra”. Whilst the paintings were well-executed and pleasing to the eye, I was sceptical as to the identification of the pictures, as portraying exactly the persons whom they were supposed to represent.

I became a member of the Church, whilst I was stationed in the district and made friends with several of the local Spiritualists. I attended Sunday Services and Developing Circles there and was often surprised by the things I observed. There was one old lady in our group, who was an excellent trance medium. One night she reacted in a strange manner to the spirit who came to her. It seems that this soul had passed as a result of a head injury, or suffered from something like Epilepsy, prior to passing, as she began to cry-out and hold her head. Her actions indicated that she might possibly have fallen backwards. Two people, husband and wife, who were present at the circle, declared that they recognized the spirit as that of their son, as they were familiar with the strange behaviour exhibited by the medium. Such experiences cannot, of course, constitute evidence at an objective level, no-matter how convincing they may be to the individual directly concerned. In this case, it transpired that the Son had died as a result of falling back on to his head. There were other aspects of this incident that were communicated to the other sitters but of which I retained no recollection. I myself had no subjective experiences of any kind, at this stage of my involvement in the Spiritualist Movement. There was another young man who attended my group. His name was John and he was a local youth, about the same age as I. John was a quiet, reserved lad but of an easy disposition. He appeared to be genuinely interested in developing his own psychic (or spiritual) gifts.

There was an older man, Laurie Wilson, aged about 40 years, who attended the group and took an interest in me. He invited me home to afternoon-tea, one day. He lived with his wife and family in a large, terraced house, in an older part of Portsmouth. It was well-furnished and very comfortable. It made a welcome change from the environment of the Fort and the NAAFI Canteen, to sit in a comfortable armchair in civilized surroundings, sipping tea and nibbling cream cakes. Laurie was active in the Spiritualist Movement in Portsmouth.

This town had been the home of Helen Duncan, a Scotswoman who was a Physical Medium. It seems that Mrs. Duncan was but poorly educated and, perhaps, somewhat mercenary. She was in the habit of charging a fee for her services. It was this weakness which led to her being prosecuted under the, now defunct, Witchcraft Act, during the War for, allegedly, pretending to call-up Spirits.

Mrs Duncan had made the mistake of informing the parents of a sailor upon one of His Majesty’s ships, that her son’s ship had been sunk and he, himself, along with numbers of his comrades, had passed into Spirit. This information was given prior to the release of the news concerning the loss of the vessel, in combat. Enquiries made by the parents brought the fact of Mrs. Duncan’s ability to the notice of the Wartime authorities, who were concerned at possible embarrassment to be caused, if such secret information was prematurely released. Mrs. Duncan was, therefore, raided by the Police during one of her Seances, as a result of which she suffered severe shock, leading to her early demise.

After a farce of a Trial, Mrs. Duncan was convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for a period of two-years. She offered to demonstrate her art. This would, undoubtedly, have led to her acquittal. Unfortunately, this proposal was rejected by the Court. She was not even given the chance to demonstrate the validity of her gifts.

This was a baseless prosecution of a highly gifted woman; whose only shortcoming was that she was, perhaps, too ignorant to appreciate that so far as spiritual-gifts are concerned, lucre should play no part in the proceedings. Her story was recorded in a work entitled, “The Case of Helen Duncan”, which is probably still available from local Libraries. The Prosecution case was based on the absurd hypothesis that she swallowed large quantities of cheese-cloth, which she then regurgitated to produce “Ectoplasm”, with which to clothe her “Spirit” figures.

The Quartermaster’s Store was well provided with junior NCO’s. There were, in fact, three. Cpl Roy Grainger had been with the 15th/19th Hussars in Germany and had been wounded whilst driving a tank. He had been fortunate to survive, although his hearing was permanently impaired. He was from Keighley, Yorkshire. I developed a liking for Roy, who had a confident, extroverted temperament but no brashness or self- assertiveness about him. He was a tall, well-built and good-looking young man with fair-hair and fresh complexion. His colleague was a rather “flash” fellow from Birmingham, named Fred ……... Fred was somewhat shorter than Roy, with gingerish, close-curled hair and complexion to match. In civilian life he had been a Barber. I remembered him chiefly from a habit he had of calling out, “Never mind my sweaty Knicks!....”

The third member of this trio, an Old-Soldier, was an Irishman called Pat O’Neil. He had been in the 8th Hussars, an Irish Regiment and proudly sported his Irish Harp badge. Pat was a very smart fellow and had been in France at the time of Dunkirk. He could not conceal his disgust, when describing the rout of the British and French Armies. “We were sent to France to fight German tanks with Bren-Gun Carriers”, would you believe?” Pat figuratively described the retreat before the advancing German Army, “Everyone was running for the beaches: Officers and Men from the Colonels down to the ranks!” “It was a complete and utter shambles.” he said. “If the Germans had not eased-off, we would have been wiped-out, Ha, Ha!” He smiled at his recollection of these events. “The whole British Army on the run!” According to Pat, there was nothing whatever dignified about the evacuation. I was rather taken with Pat’s frank, open and easy-going manner. He was about the medium height, slight build, fair-haired and with the fresh complexion of the Irish. Pat had his own quarters within the Store itself.

The rest of the Quartermaster’s Staff slept in a large room, on the other side of the passage from the Quartermaster’s Store, which gave them a measure of privacy not enjoyed by the other rankers. Sgt. White and I had an office next to the Store. The QM himself, when he was present, had his desk in an alcove, leading off from the main office.

Sometimes we would lay traps for the rats, which we could hear running around at night. One morning, I awoke to find a black rat sitting on the rear wheel of my bicycle. The rat had been stunned by a trap and was about as large as a cat.

After hours, if in funds, the other fellows would sit around, playing “Napoleon” and chatting. I, perhaps because I was only a Trooper and always hard-up, was not attracted to this activity, which I considered to be akin to “theft” from one’s mates. This tendency in my fellows was alien to my nature. During my years in the Army, I saw how often boys, who had little enough by way of pocket-money, would lose a week’s pay in one sitting at cards and by playing “Double or Quits” would often be in debt to their alleged friends, for months ahead. They never seemed to learn. I had to agree with my future mother-in-law, Mrs Bridget Roach, who had asserted that a pack of cards was “The Devil’s Bible!” Being an Irishwoman, no doubt, she had first-hand experience of the impact of this activity and other forms of gambling, upon household finances.

The Telephone Exchange for the Fort was situated in the Q.M.’s Stores and I got to know the Operator, who was a Trooper named Tom. Tom was also affected by the easy-going atmosphere of the Fort and was casual about making trunk-calls for his mates. The Telephone Exchange was manually operated, as were most Exchanges at that time. I occasionally rang Teresa, to tell her that I still loved her and spend some minutes in direct contact. One day, there came a query from somewhere in the Upper Echelons, as to the cost of trunk calls. This created a stir for a while, which eventually subsided, although the abuse of the system was subsequently curtailed. On one occasion, Tom invited me home to Houndslow, Middlesex, for a week-end. His family lived in a terraced house near the town centre. There was a Spiritualist Church there, which I attended on the Saturday night or Sunday morning, but I recall nothing of the proceedings.

In the Summer of l947, I arranged for Teresa and a young-lady friend, named Kathleen O’Brien, to come to Portsmouth for their annual holidays. I was able to find boarding-house accommodation at Southsea for them. They had the benefit of glorious Summer weather and, although we were strictly limited in funds, it was sufficient for Teresa and I, that we were together.

Portsmouth is an altogether “different world” from grimy Manchester. The town has much to offer, not only in its glorious harbour and the relatively unpolluted environment, but in the chance to visit places of interest: including the “Victory”, Nelson’s flagship, which is preserved in the Naval Dockyard. There were the usual seaside attractions of Portsmouth’s resort, Southsea and the natural pleasure of being at the coast. A forty-minute and pleasant ferry trip across the Solent, lay the town of Ryde and the Isle of Wight. There was dancing in the NAAFI Canteen and also at the other regular Dance Halls, within the City itself.

Of course, there was no “Monkey-Business” between us, who had an understanding about the undesirability of Sex before marriage. No-matter how keen I may have been to get Teresa into bed, I fully realized that there was no hope of this, prior to a certain event. Inevitably, such an arrangement was in the best interests of both parties, as we were still too young and I, at least, was too immature, to undertake the responsibilities of marriage.

Their holiday came to an inevitable end and Teresa and Kathleen duly returned to Manchester, to resume the tedious round of office routine; whilst I continued to make the best of a “bad bargain”.

Once a week, I was required to accompany Corporal Pat to Southampton, to collect the weekly meat supply for the personnel residing in Fort Gomer. This included a trip to Netley Hospital to deliver meat to that establishment. It meant a day away from clerical duties and was a welcome outing. As the truck rambled through the Hampshire lanes, here and there were charming coastal scenes, with many moored pleasure craft, awaiting the week-end attentions of their proud owners. I thought to myself that this was the place for Good-Living.

All good things, indeed, come to an end. The War itself had ended and with it the need for experimental facilities such as Specialised Armour Establishment. I discovered that I was to be transferred to a Regiment: the 16th/5th Lancers, then stationed at Lulworth and being brought up to strength, prior to being posted to Egypt.

On leaving SAE, I had two weeks’ leave, during which time I became engaged to Teresa. Uncle Harold sold me a very nice cluster diamond ring for the bargain price of Twenty-five Pounds. This had been purchased by him, originally, as a dress-ring for his wife, but for some reason it did not suit her. However, it made a very nice engagement ring for Teresa.

During this holiday, Teresa and I visited Mary Roach, who was dying from Tuberculosis in Ladywell Sanatorium, Eccles. Mary lay in the hospital bed, deceptively pretty, with flushed cheeks and tired eyes. I tried to offer Mary some words of comfort, as it was known that she was terminally ill. I said to her, “You know Mary, death is not the end of life, so that you need not be afraid.” It was easy for me to be complacent. However, the mention of the dreaded word caused her great distress and I regretted my imprudent remarks.

After an idyllic fortnight, I returned once more to Army life and took the train to Lulworth Camp. Here I was directed to report to the Orderly Room.

The Orderly Room was situated in a typical Army hut, containing rudimentary office furniture. As it was only a temporary station for the Regiment, things were in “a shambles.”

I introduced myself to the Staff-Sergeant in charge of the office: Mr. Eric Adams. Eric was a fairly tall, heavily built man, dark-haired and about forty years old. He was already beginning to lose his dark hair but was self-assured and intelligent. I said, “I am Trooper Roberts, Sergeant”. Eric said, “Welcome to the 16th/5th, Trooper Roberts. (shaking hands with the newcomer) I hope that you will be happy working here with us.” “I hope so too, Sgt”. There were two other clerks in the office at the time, Corporal Maxwell and Trooper Hull. I was introduced to these two young men. Eric showed me to a desk, on which was the standard issue “Imperial” typewriter. “Here’s where you will be working. I propose to give you the general typing work, for the time-being. That will include typing Part One Orders.” I immediately became alarmed and said: “I am hopeless at typing, Sgt”. “Oh I wouldn’t worry too much: you will soon get the hang of it.” Mr. Adams had probably read a report, which indicated that I had tried to learn to type in the approved manner: using all my fingers, instead of just the usual two. As it turned-out, within a week or so, I was typing as if I had been doing it all my life.

Lulworth Camp, as any person who is familiar with the Geography of Dorset knows, is situated in a delightful part of the Dorset Coast and takes its name from Lulworth Cove, which is a spectacularly beautiful natural harbour. Rolling chalk downs, dotted with thatched hamlets, here sweep down to the English Channel. The traveller comes upon a perfectly circular Cove of Limestone Cliffs, with the village of Lulworth Cove, itself a delight to the eye, situated on its Western edge. The Camp is situate one or two miles to the North of the Cove; adjacent to the Wool Railway Station: which serves both Lulworth and the Army Tank Depot of Bovington, to the North of the Railway.

During the next few weeks, I was able to enjoy the surrounding countryside to some extent, which served to allay my concern at the prospect of leaving behind Old England, for the unknown and distant land of Egypt.

The 16th/5th Lancers Regiment was a bulwark of the British Militarist tradition, as indeed are all the Cavalry Regiments. Its Colonel-in-Chief was the Princess Elizabeth, newly appointed to that post; which was considered by the regimental officers to be a “great honour” to the Regiment. Prior to the embarkation, this lady came down to make a Regimental Inspection. I happened to be on duty in the Orderly-Room, at the time, and managed to avoid this unpleasant and, to me, wholly unnecessary proceeding.

My lack of interest in the institution of Monarchy, did not prevent me from observing the actual ceremony of inspection, by peeping out of the Orderly-Room window, as Elizabeth moved formally amongst the ranks.

I was now 19 years of age and still had some way to travel, before I could affirm that I had truly learned life’s primary lessons. Unbeknown to myself, I had taken my first steps in a path of personal progression.

Here are three photo’s of myself and friends, at Fort Gomer in 47 and Fanara in Egypt in 1948 or

49.



### CHAPTER 51

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### Embarkation

The time arrived for the Regiment to set-sail for Egypt. There was an atmosphere of excitement amongst the lads, many of whom, including myself, had not been overseas before. Some of the older men had been with the Regiment in Germany and come home with tales of the wonderful life to be experienced there. Not a few of the Other Ranks had contracted V.D., several times, whilst on the Continent: their “Part III Pay-Books” testifying to the nature of the illness and the number of times they had been infected. This was a matter of “pride” with one or two of the lads. The miracle of Penicillin ensured that there would be no serious or long-term disabilities, resulting from their indiscretions.

The Regiment embarked at Liverpool on the Troopship, “C……..”, a small vessel of about 10,000 tons. It seemed quite large to me, who had never been to sea before. The ship sailed at 9pm: the voyage down-river and into the Channel, being smooth and uneventful. The boys slept soundly enough that night, swinging gently in their hammocks.

We OR’s (Other Ranks), were quartered in troop-decks: large open areas, below decks, in which a hundred men were accommodated. There were long tables, set quite close together, at which we ate, attended to personal correspondence and other activities. We slung our hammocks above the tables and our kit was stowed on shelves, lining the sides of the ship. Hammocks were a novelty but sleeping in them was a less-than-comfortable experience.

The seas remained calm until the ship was under way in the Atlantic, when it was dwarfed by the huge waves, which rose high above the bows of the vessel.

Subsequent nights were chaotic, as the majority of the boys were violently sick. The floor of the troop-deck and the steps leading to the toilets and upper decks became covered in vomit, as we rushed to the toilets to be sick, but were unable to prevent ourselves heaving, where we ran. Those already in their hammocks, who were managing to hold-out, were pushed by other people getting in and out of hammocks and themselves forced to vacate, lest they vomit over their own bedding and mates in adjoining hammocks. The sight and smell was intolerable but there was nothing we could do about the situation.

The first morning, there was a roll-call and work to be allocated to the men. This was made more painful by the fact that everyone was still seasick. Gradually, as we adjusted to the motion of the ship, life became more tolerable. The number of seasick soldiers decreased, until everyone began to enjoy the trip.

I was required to work in the ship’s office, typing passenger lists and generally making myself useful. I found that work helped me to overcome my sickness, more readily, although the initial effort required great strength of mind.

In heavy weather, the task of serving and eating meals was made difficult, if not amusing, as we sat on each side of the mess-tables, which were about twelve feet in length. Food was brought to the mess-tables in large containers and served there. The plates slid first to one end of the table and then to the other; making it almost impossible to keep a plate stationary, in front of its designated owner.

One afternoon, after my duties were completed, I went out on deck, to observe the ship pitching and rolling tremendously in the Atlantic breakers. The vessel headed bow-first into a watery abyss, whilst mountainous waves rose all about her. It seemed that she was doomed to be engulfed by the towering waves. Then, with a shudder and the thrust of her powerful engines, the bow gradually rose, to a surprisingly steep angle, to crest the next great wave, before once more descending into the trough ahead. As she thus plunged and rose, the ship was also rolling: first to the Port and then to the Starboard side. In this manner the vessel moved relentlessly-on, through the heaving waters.

As we sailed down the coast of Portugal, now in calmer seas, we passed many small sailing vessels, netting Sardines, several miles from shore. I was standing at the rails with my mates, Max and Ginger, in bright sunshine. I thought that it was a hazardous occupation for the fishermen and said, “You’d have to be a hardy type, to risk your life, every day, fishing for a living in those tiny boats.” It was rather a pretty sight, as the fishermen spread their purse-seine nets and gradually drew together to close the net.

After sailing for five days the ship passed Gibraltar, without putting into Port, and entered the Mediterranean Sea. The massive bulk of “The Rock” was on the Port bow and the mountains of North Africa to the Starboard. In two days, we arrived at Malta, where the vessel remained for 24 hours. The view of Valletta harbour was intriguing, with the sun-drenched bastions and ramparts of the town, forming a backdrop to the harbour, with its complement of British Naval ships. We were not permitted to go ashore, which was a disappointment to us: who were rather tired of the confinement of the ship.

The journey from Malta to Port Said was uneventful and calm. The ship entered the Canal, passing the statue of Ferdinand de Lesseps, on the evening of the tenth day after leaving Liverpool.

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### Chapter 52

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### Egypt

As we new arrivals were assembled on deck, the evening before disembarkation, the Provost Sergeant lectured the lads about life in Egypt, with particular reference to the thieving propensities of the Egyptians. “You will need to be careful whenever you are walking in the street, as the Gippo’s are adept at picking pockets. They will pinch anything they can get their hands on.”

Perhaps it had not occurred to the Military authorities that private soldiers in H.M. Forces have precious little worth stealing. Be that as it may, the following day, the Sergeant was walking along a street in Port Said, when his watch was deftly removed from his wrist by a street urchin. Everyone but the Provost Sergeant himself, thought that this was highly amusing.

That night, as the ship lay at its berth in the Canal, I wandered out upon the deck. Another and larger passenger vessel lay at anchor, nearby. It was called the s.s.”Johannes van Oldenvarneveldt”, which name was emblazoned in large letters right across the superstructure of the ship. It was on its way to the Far East. Many years later, this ship, renamed the “Cythera”, caught fire whilst steaming in the Indian Ocean and was burnt-out.

### Chapter 53

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### Fanara Camp

The next morning, the soldiers filed down the gangway and boarded a naked Egyptian train, with plain wooden seats, which was to convey us to Fayid. This town is situated on the Great Bitter Lake and a mile or so from Fanara Camp. The train passed through Ismaelia, a major city on the Canal itself. Ismaelia, named after the Khedive Ismael, who ruled Egypt, when the Canal was constructed, contains some impressive buildings and fine Public Gardens. The Egyptian character, as observed for the first time by me, appeared to be barbarous and argumentative in the extreme. Several people were observed by me, at the Railway Station, to be arguing violently (and incomprehensibly to me), in their strange, guttural Arabic. There was much shaking of fists and gesticulating. It appeared to me that there was an imminent danger of the antagonists coming to blows. However, nothing in the nature of a physical assault took place and it transpired that such behaviour was the Egyptian equivalent of polite social intercourse.

Beyond the city limits, there was much evidence of the extreme poverty of the poorer classes, who lived in overcrowded, mud-dwellings, with a minimum of comfort. In many cases, houses were built out of discarded petrol tins, of which there would have been an abundance: used and abandoned by the British, during the Second World War. The cans were filled with sand, to give strength to the dwelling.

The Camp at Fanara occupied about a square Kilometre in extent and was of a rough, rectangular shape, bordered on all sides by a high, barbed-wire fence. It fronted the main Port Said-Suez road. The surrounding country was sandy desert; devoid of topsoil or vegetation of any kind, apart from the irrigated areas around the villages, which had been erected nearby and were served by the Sweet-Water Canal. Here, the Egyptian villagers had planted date palms and grew wheat and other crops, as well as raising sheep and other small farm animals for their sustenance. The camp itself was erected on bare sandy ground. Behind the camp, lay open, desert country stretching away to a range of hills some five miles distant to the West.

On the Eastern bank of the Suez Canal lay the Sinai desert, a barren and endless wasteland, extending into Arabia itself.

There were several small traders’ shops in Fanara, situate on the Suez Road, together with an Open-Air Cinema. There was also a Canteen conducted by a Baptist organization, which was situated South of the Camp. Across the way, was a small hut maintained by the “Toc H” Society, for the purpose of providing entertainment and refreshments for the Troops. Inside the camp itself there was, in addition to the Officers’ and Sergeants’ Messes, a Cookhouse for the Other Ranks and a NAAFI Canteen, which sold Egyptian Beer. The Gyppo Beer was called “Stella” and was, reputedly made from onions. It was a noxious, although potent brew, which produced severe hangovers when drunk to excess, which I discovered to my cost. Towards the latter end of the two-year stay at Fanara, high-quality English Beer, namely, “Simmond’s Export”, became available and proved to be very popular with the Troops.

Next to the Cookhouse, was a privately conducted Dobhi or Laundry, together with a Tuck-shop, at which one could purchase sweets and cigarettes. The proprietors of the sweet-shop must have been unfamiliar with the generally loose moral standards of the British soldier. Some days after our arrival at Fanara, I walked up to the shop. The owner had instituted a credit system, whereby we could purchase supplies on “tic”, by signing our names in a book provided for this purpose. I inspected this book and was surprised, and not a little amused, to note that purchases had been made by such well-known identities as “Donald Duck!”, Shirley Temple!”, “Snow-White!” and other fictitious characters. Whilst everyone laughed about this deceit, the net result was that the Regiment paid the sum owing to the Contractor: the amount being deducted from the men’s pay as “Barrack Damages”. Thus the innocent paid for the fraud of the guilty, as there was no way of discovering the identity of the defaulters. In this case the action was justified, but the device of “Barrack Damages” was quite frequently used to defraud us of our meagre, hard-won pay. At this point in my military career, I had about ten-shillings each week to spend on pocket-money. This was insufficient to provide me with the funds necessary to keep me in booze, (to drown the sorrows induced by isolation and acute depression) and the occasional meal, at either the NAAFI Canteen or the Baptist Canteen, outside the Camp. When heavily raided by the authorities to pay for alleged Barrack damages, the pay was hardly worth collecting. I was outraged by such treatment at the hands of my superiors, who displayed a callous disregard of our basic rights. In fact, we had none.

The Dobhi did all the washing for the troops and officers, on a contract basis. The contract dhobi was washed but barely ironed and never starched, so that it was usually shabby If one wished to have something professionally laundered, one had to pay an additional sum. I never availed myself of this extra facility, with the result that I was never smartly turned-out.

Three snaps of Fanara Camp, Egypt (in 1948),: Self, Dennis Collins and Self, and a view of the Camp, with the lines and the Orderly Room buildings on the far left. The Dhobi building is in the left foreground and the Cookhouse on the right:



### Chapter 54

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### The Orderly- Room

The Orderly-Room was situated near the entrance to the Camp and adjoined the Officers’ Mess, for convenience. It consisted of a “T” shaped, stone-built building, housing the Clerks and Senior Officers’ Rooms; the Commanding Officer’s Office, 2i/c’s Office and, most importantly, the Adjutant’s Office.

Mr. Adams had an office of his own, which formed the junction between the two main Regimental Offices. The Regimental Sergeant-Major also had his office in this building.

The RSM, Warrant-Officer, lst Class, Robertson, was a firm but kindly man, who kept the proper distance between himself and the Other Ranks. In appearance he was somewhat above the middle-height; broad in the build and sporting a substantial moustache, as befits an RSM. I had a genuine respect for him and was treated very kindly by Mr. Robertson.

My desk was in the larger of the two general offices. The room was rectangular and contained five or six trestle tables, metal cabinets for storing files and other rudimentary office equipment. There was also a single army bed for the use of the Duty-Clerk, who slept on the premises. On my desk were to be found my Imperial typewriter: three wire trays for papers and writing equipment. Eric Adams supplied me with large numbers of hand-written letters and other memoranda, which kept me busy, throughout the working day. The production of daily Part 1 Orders occupied me for an hour or so. These were typed and duplicated by lunchtime, for distribution and posting on notice-boards, for the information of everyone in the Regiment.

Duplicating was done initially on a hand-rolled duplicating pad, which was messy and laborious work. Later-on a “Gestetner” duplicator was supplied, which made the task of running-off large numbers of copies much easier, although this occasionally broke-down and had to be fixed by the Clerks themselves.

I was an excellent typist, by now, and was highly regarded by Mr. Adams, both for my skill and application to my duties. In his annual report for the year, Eric referred to my “astonishing” output of work. I was duly flattered.

During the hot weather, working hours were set at 7am to 2pm, to enable the soldiers to enjoy the hot afternoons, relaxing in their tents, unless on specific duties. I went to the Orderly Room at 7am, to commence my daily duties. After some time, I was given the task of controlling the issue of Part II Orders, which covered such things as personnel movement, promotions, postings, etc. and required the exercise of a measure of intelligence. It was in these duties that I excelled and made myself an indispensable part of the Orderly Room Staff.

If I had not been such a scruffy individual, I would have been promoted at an early date. As it was, I remained a Trooper for a year or more, when I was finally promoted to the rank of Lance-Corporal, at the insistence of Mr. Adams. On one occasion, the RSM called me into his office, in which he had a full-length mirror. He said to me, “Look at yourself: concertina trousers!” I had to admit that I was an untidy cove, with stained and unpressed shirt and trousers.

Chapter 55

THE LINES

The Other Ranks, that is personnel of the rank of Corporal and below, were accommodated in 6-man tents, which were rather like small marquees. They had been erected in rows, referred to as “The Lines”. I was fortunate, in that our tent only housed four of the Orderly-room Staff: myself, Max, Ginger, and Fred. (The latter was a lad from Birmingham, doing his two-year Military Service stint.) Each lad had a bed in the corner and a locker for personal effects. There was a camp electricity system, providing electric-light for the tents, but there was no provision for hot-water. We performed our ablutions in the open-air at long cement troughs, which were equipped with cold-water taps. As beards were still soft, shaving in cold-water was not a serious problem.

The tents provided adequate accommodation for the men, particularly in the hot Egyptian Summer weather. In the Winter, when bitterly cold winds blew over the Desert, it was not a pleasant life.

Several weeks after we had settled-in to camp routine, we awoke one morning, to find that the wind was blowing strongly: so strongly in fact that the air was full of a fine dust, which reduced visibility to almost zero. This was a dust-storm, which effectively brought most activities to a standstill. Nothing could be done until the wind eased. The wind continued all that day and we merely lay on our beds, under blankets, waiting for the wind to abate. However, we had to eat and when walking to the Cookhouse, sharp stones were flung against our legs by the wind and stung unpleasantly. As I waited in the queue to have my pannikin filled with food, a rim of sand formed around the extremities of the tin. My mug of tea also contained a residue of this material. These were things that I learned to take in my stride.

The following morning, when we clerks were finally able to return to the Orderly-Room, we discovered an inch or so of fine sand covering everything, inside and out. There was thus a considerable amount of cleaning to be done and no vacuum cleaners to make the job easier.

In Winter, when the need for hot water became imperative, the more technically-minded lads invented a system of water-heating, involving the adaptation of the electric light supply. A flex was led to a bucket of water. One wire was attached to a tin can, which had been pierced, to allow water to flow through it. The other was attached to the side of the galvanized bucket, which was placed, off the ground, on four crossed pieces of wood. In this way the water in the bucket was heated. On one occasion, one of the camp dogs came into our tent and seeing the water, decided to take a drink. Shortly thereafter, the animal gave a loud yelp and rushed howling from the tent.

All personnel had been warned of the curious malady known as “Gyppy Tum”, which usually affected foreigners visiting Egypt. This was the local form of Dysentery, which the Regiment experienced soon after arriving at Fanara. One by one we were stricken by this distressing and painful sickness, which necessitated frequent visits to the latrines. To counteract the effects of Dysentery, we were given large doses of Sulphur drugs; being required to swallow a handful of tablets at a time; which were, to some extent, efficacious. The more serious cases were admitted to the Sick Bay. I spent at least one period in the Sick-Bay Tent.

The Camp water came from the “Sweet-Water Canal”, channelled from the Nile Delta. It had to be heavily chlorinated before being piped to the camps. On turning-on a tap, one saw a sudden rush of white, cloudy water, attended by the familiar smell of Chloride-of-Lime. We were assured that the water was potable. Indeed, there was nothing else to drink, apart from Soft-drinks or Beer. The hotter Summer weather increased water consumption considerably, as it was possible to dehydrate very quickly, in the dry Mediterranean climate. Everyone had a “Chatty”: a porous earthenware jar, in which water would gradually cool, due to the cooling effect of evaporation.

### Chapter 56

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### Army Grub

The food supplied to us was of such poor quality that I, by the frequency of my complaints to the Orderly Officer, became regarded as a troublemaker. Conditions at the Cookhouse were disgusting. Outside the cookhouse were placed two cement tubs, supposed to be filled with hot water, treated with Soda, to enable the soldiers to clean their mess-tins. Rarely, indeed, were the occasions when they contained hot or clean water or soda, to kill the grease. We were often obliged to use sand to scour our Mess-Tins and cutlery. It is not surprising that there was Dysentery in the Camp.

In addition, it was common-knowledge that food supplies, such as Butter, Tea and Sugar were siphoned-off by the Cookhouse Staff and by the senior NCO’s, who had access to the Ration Stores. I formed the opinion that a good deal of food was sold to local Egyptians, but never saw direct evidence of this. Suffice it to say, that during my three- years with the Regiment in the Near-East, my teeth rotted to the stage where I, subsequently, needed extensive dental work. This was due to the lack of fresh fruit and vegetables during this time. Dates were available, when in season, but these were one of the few fruits which I found not to my taste.

I remain convinced to this day, that the poor food provided to the Other Ranks in the British Army was due, primarily, to the fact that the Cooking Staff were drawn from the ranks of the least intelligent of Military personnel and, secondly, to the rank dishonesty of those involved in the purchase and preparation of the supplies. Much of the food placed before us, was uneatable. For instance, Goat meat was served, which was largely composed of grissle and was found to be equally incapable of being cut with a knife or chewed with the teeth. Bread was often lacking; the soldiers being served with hard-biscuit in lieu. Indeed, the food was so atrocious that we would eagerly await the arrival of pay-day, in order that we might be able to afford the luxury of a meal of Eggs and Chips, at one of the external Canteens. If bacon was provided, it was cooked in water and served half-raw and wet: the accompanying eggs cooked solid, with a black ring fringing the white of the egg. Happy were those odd occasions when a hot breakfast of properly cooked eggs and bacon were provided. There was even the odd occasion when one could dip one’s slice of bread in hot bacon fat.

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### Chapter 57

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### The Boys

There were several other young fellows, working in the Orderly-Room with me, whom I have yet to mention. There was, of course, Cpl. Maxwell, “Max”” to the other boys. He was later to be promoted to Sergeant. He was a year or so older than I, a Yorkshireman, from Hull. He was a jolly, faired-haired young man. He was tall, of light build and intelligent, as were most of the people working here. Max was a sensitive young fellow, with no aggressive tendencies. He was bubbling over with enthusiasm for life. Then there was Johnny Baldwin, a Trooper, like me, from Sussex. John was about the medium height, round-faced and fair-complexioned. He had an easy, retiring disposition. “Ginger” Hull was a West Countryman, from Somerset. He was, as his nickname implied, a red-head and endowed with the corresponding temperament, to boot. He was stockily but strongly built. Ginger, like all the other members of the Orderly-Room Staff, was basically well-disposed, but he could throw the most fearful tantrums and was completely unpredictable in his response to stressful situations. When annoyed, he would rage inwardly and externally, growing red-faced in his anger and muttering severely outrageous remarks.

All these young men were Regular Soldiers, that is, had signed-on for “Five and Seven”. There were other clerks employed in the Orderly Room, from time to time. These were the National Servicemen, who were doing their two years Military Service. One of these was Telata-zubrick, so called by the lads, being the Arabic equivalent of his English name (Treblecock). He was a sweet-natured, cultivated young man, of about the middle-height and dark-haired, who had somehow avoided “Officer-Training School.” After spending some few months in the Orderly Room, he was promoted to the rank of “Local-Paid-Sergeant” and appointed “Regimental Education Officer”. This was a marvellous sinecure for him, as it involved little work. Although his promotion was posted in Regimental Part-Two Orders, he was not permitted by the Commanding Officer to wear a Sergeant’s stripes on his uniform. He thus remained, for practical purposes, a Lance-Corporal, although paid a Sergeant’s stipend. This was an outrageous denial of his rights, but he was in no position to argue. When leaving the Regiment, at the conclusion of his two-year’s National Service, he sewed three-stripes on to his uniform sleeves, to have the benefit of Sergeant’s Mess privileges, for the last week or so of his Army life. We Orderly Room people told him that he was fully entitled to do so. On leaving the Army, Telata-zubrick intended to commence studies at Oxford; which to me was something: “not quite of this world!”

Another charming and friendly lad doing his two-year stint was John Garrett, who also had rejected the opportunity to go to Officers’ Training School. He was a charming lad, somewhat above the middle height and good looking, with a broad, fresh English face. He worked as an Orderly Room Clerk, throughout his stay with the Regiment and was good company for me and the other Clerks, although his social background was far superior to that of most of the other lads working there. He was Public-School educated, yet somewhere or other, he had imbibed egalitarian ideas, which were quite incompatible with his background.

Some few weeks after the arrival in Egypt, another Corporal came to join the Orderly-Room Staff. He was Cpl. Dennis Collins. Dennis was a Londoner and ardent supporter of Chelsea Football Club. He was about 5 ft 8 inches tall, light build, dark; thinning hair and a sallow complexion. He had the quick-witted temperament of the Londoner and was an intelligent and lively companion. Dennis was never short of a word, in repartee. I was very impressed by this alert young man, who was perhaps five or six years older than I. Dennis was a two-finger typist but astonished everyone by the speed with which he produced the written word. Had he used all ten fingers, he would have really made the machine zip.

### Chapter 58

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### Solomon

During the working morning, we Orderly-Room boys took about a half-hour’s break from the rigours of paper-shuffling. One morning, when we were in funds, Johnny Baldwin and I walked over to the Baptist Canteen, which was only a couple of minutes’ walk from the Orderly Room. This Canteen was managed by Europeans and employed a number of Sudanese, to wait at table. As we entered the premises, we were greeted by the English manageress, a middle-aged and rather plain but sweet-natured lady, Mrs. …….., who said, “Hello boys! How are you today?” “Good-morning”, said I, “Very well thank you”. “You can sit down anywhere and someone will serve you”. We walked to one of the small but clean tables, laid with linen table-cloths. The waiters were black-skinned; tall, dignified and handsome fellows; dressed in white gallabia, red fez and sandals. They were Coptic-Christians. I was impressed by these Waiters, one of whom now approached. We boys were surprised by his greeting: “Jesus loves you!” This was a novel form of address and, coming from anyone else, might have seemed rather trite; but from this coal-black shining face, there flowed something which indicated that, within this heart, there flowed a deep sincerity and a genuine love of his fellow men. I responded by saying, “Hello! I am John Roberts and this is John Baldwin. What is your name?” “Solomon!” came the reply, accompanied by a slight bow. “Pleased to meet you, Solomon”. “We would like tea and cakes for two, please.” The man now moved away and shortly returned with a tray containing our refreshments, which cost us five piastres each. There were a number of other soldiers present and Solomon went off to attend to his new customers.

In succeeding months I saw quite a lot of Solomon, who always maintained this same approach and served us with a loving consideration. Of all the people I had met throughout my short life, I could, with complete honesty, affirm that I had never known a truer “Christian” than this simple Sudani. Yet, there passed between us, no more than a few words of everyday conversation, as Solomon’s English was severely limited. He radiated such a joy and happiness; such a wonderful trust in his Maker; such a love for his fellow-men. I, in common with many of my colleagues, felt some embarrassment at the warmth of Solomon’s greeting; yet the impression he made upon us and, perhaps, rather more deeply upon me, was to last for the rest of our lives.

The Toc H Canteen was a smaller affair, yet still a welcome change from the NAAFI. This was situate just across from the Main Gate and fairly close to the Orderly-Room. I went over there sometimes for morning tea and biscuits. The Canteen was conducted by a middle-aged man, named “Ted”, rather short and plump, with a fresh English face. He was very jolly and extroverted. Sometimes, he would organize Concert Parties and in one of these I was recruited to take part in a “sketch”. My role was to walk across the stage wearing a fez and gallabia and carrying a bucket. I was required to adopt a mournful visage. When questioned by an onlooker as to what I was doing, my response is to be, “I’m taking the Can Back!” (“Taking the can back” was a Wartime colloquialism, meaning: “being blamed for something unjustly.” It was a familiar military expression).

I duly presented myself for rehearsals and, on the Saturday night of the Concert, managed to raise, what sounded like genuine laughter from the audience. The Concert was an amateurish affair yet, like all similar productions, was well-received. The introductory chorus, sung by all the cast, was an adaptation of the old song, “Roll away Clouds!” as follows:

“Here we are boys, Here we are boys.   
 Talbot House, Talbot House,   
 Welcomes you-oo tonight!”

For recreation, the lads either played the usual games, Soccer and Cricket, although I, myself, did not participate in competitive sports. I preferred to go down to the Great Bitter Lake, to swim during the afternoons or at week-ends, unless on duty. There was very little there, apart from the broad expanse of the Lake, through which merchant vessels would slowly make their way.

The way to the Lake led through Fayid village, which was itself situated on the “Sweet Water” Canal, as were indeed all the Canal villages; that being the only water supply. It was a filthy sewer, containing not only human refuse but dead dogs, donkeys, etc. On at least one occasion, whilst the Regiment was stationed here, an armoured-car went off the road and landed in the canal. On returning to camp, the crew received numerous injections, designed to counteract the otherwise fatal consequences of their immersion.

As I walked through the village, I observed the Egyptian menfolk sitting around, playing cards, whilst out in the fields, a short distance away, their women were labouring to produce the crops necessary to feed the family. I reflected that the men were on rather a “good thing!”

The houses were the usual single-storey, flat-roofed buildings, painted white. In the village centre there were one or two traders, including a Butchery, which sold lamb or goat meat. Each carcase hanging in the shop was densely covered in a black garment of flies, which stirred momentarily, as one passed-by, then reassured, settled down once more to the routine of dining.

As I lay on the beach, I watched the ships passing slowly by and reflected that, one day, I too would be sailing back home to “Blighty”. The water in the lake was highly saline and swimming was easy. One could stay in the water for long periods, without undue fatigue. Sometimes I swam out to the navigation buoys, a good way offshore.

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### Chapter 59

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### “Shit Bints!”

There was little contact with women for us, during our stay in Egypt; unless we were foolish enough to employ the services of the Egyptian prostitutes, called “Shit Bints” by the British lads. For about ten or fifteen Piastres, one could enjoy the favours of one of these ladies for a few minutes. I myself, although always keen on the company of women, avoided prostitutes for two reasons: firstly, I had a vague notion that sex between men and women was something that should involve a measure of affection and reciprocation: secondly, I was not going to throw away money, in this fashion. The disease-factor might also have been present, in my reasoning. As a lad, I had often travelled on the tram, along Regent Road, Salford. At one particular tram-stop, I, occasionally, saw persons alighting from the tram who suffered from varying degrees of facial disfigurement. This was the stop for the local V.D. Clinic. It was rumoured that these disfigured people were suffering from the “Pox” and were on their way to the Clinic, for treatment. Suffice to say, I could never report on the experience of sex with a Shit-Bint. Perhaps, more than any other factor, I possessed an innate sense of the essential dignity of Womankind: that prostitution was a gross degradation of Woman: that sex in such circumstances is disgraceful for male and female alike.

One of my colleagues was Sid C…..n; a small dark lad of distinctly Semite appearance. When asked about his Jewish ancestry, Sid stoutly protested that he was not Jewish and could not be persuaded that he was a member of that race. One Saturday afternoon, I returned from a solo excursion to the Lake and spoke to my friend: “What have you been doing today, Sid?” “I went to Ismailia with Johnny. I was feeling a bit randy and decided to have sex with a ‘shit-bint’. We had it under a cart in a little side-street. I was going great guns but just as I was about to finish, she pushed me off. That really gave me the shits! It was a waste of fifteen Ackers”. “That was a dirty trick to play on you, Sid!” quoth I. “She obviously didn’t want to get pregnant!”

I rather liked this quiet-natured lad, who was a Londoner but very simple and gullible in many ways. He was, undoubtedly, Jewish, by race, but had been raised in the East-End of London and may have been the product of a Jewish family that had somehow lost its roots. Sid liked to gamble, at cards, with the other fellows in his tent, with the result that he was continually in debt to them. I felt the injustice of this very keenly, but could do nothing to influence him to avoid these activities.

As for the majority of the lads; they trusted to their good right hands to relieve the tension of the Sex-drive; a fact which was amply demonstrated by the heavy deposit of a creamy-looking substance that had accumulated on the wall of the latrine-block, near the Regimental Headquarters. It represented the sexual labours of hundreds of youths over a lengthy period of time. These same latrine blocks were primitive in the extreme; consisting of a deep pit, dug by local natives, over which a wooden construction was erected, providing a measure of privacy from external gaze. Within, it was a case of the occupants sitting cheek-to-cheek, which did not bother us, in any way, and to which we quickly became accustomed. The latrines were the haunt of “Shit Beetles”: large, red beetles, usually three or four inches in length, with extremely long antennae: perhaps 12 inches or more, which ran about, all over the inside of the pit, feeding on the human detritus. Occasionally, one of these beetles would stray too close to one of the sitters, either tickling him with their antennae or actually hitching a ride upon his genitalia. This experience, although alarming, was in no way dangerous, as the beetles were quite harmless.

### Chapter 60

### The NAAFI Canteen

It is a Friday night: I have received my liberal pay of ten-shillings, which constituted the princely sum, which a private soldier in Her Brittanic Majesty’s Army was paid in l949, if fortunate not to have further deductions made for Barrack-damages. Immediately after work, at about 4pm, I hastened to the Canteen. Several other youths are already there; amongst them Ginger Hull, Johnny Baldwin and Jim Critchley, the Orderly Room Dispatch-Rider/Messenger. I approached the counter and spoke to Abdul, the Canteen Manager. “Eggs and chips, bread and butter and a bottle of Stella, please Abdul!” Abdul turned to the kitchen hatch and bawled something in Arabic. I paid for my meal and beer and headed for the table, at which my friends were sitting. “Thank goodness that is another bloody week over. This place gives me the shits!: I have had it right up to here! You slave all week for this fuckin’ Regiment and nobody gives a stuff whether you live or die!” “We’re all in the same fuckin’ boat”, said Ginger. “You bust your guts for them for ten bob a week and they have the hide to stop you barrack-damages when you’re livin’ in a bloody tent.” “That is just an excuse to rip you-off.” I replied . “What they’re actually doin’ is thieving off us blokes, when they know there’s nothin’ you can do about it. They know we are stuck out here in this bloody hell-hole!”

The conversation continued in this vein, until the effects of the beer began to ease the tensions bursting within the hearts and minds of these isolated lads. By the time we had drunk about three large bottles of beer we were now feeling much happier. John Baldwin, always a sentimental bloke, now commenced singing a popular ditty, which was taken up throughout the Canteen, by the assembled soldiers. It was sung to the tune of the Egyptian National Anthem and went as follows:

“King Farouk!, King Farouk!, hang your bollocks on a Hook,   
 Staniswa, pull your wire, King Farouk, Bahdin.   
 Queen Farida, Queen of all the Wogs.   
 Queen Farida, f....d by all the dogs:   
 Queen Farida’s happy now ‘cos she’s in the family way.   
 Staniswa, pull your wire, King Farouk, Bahdin”.

After singing this resounding Chorus, several times, we then went-on to sing several other and, perhaps, even bawdier songs. Thus the evening was whiled away in a relatively harmless, boozy indulgence.

The British soldier’s version of the “Gippo” National Anthem was most uncomplimentary to King Farouk: who was regarded with contempt, even by his own people. It was also grossly and unjustifiably disrespectful of his Queen, who was, reportedly, badly treated by Farouk and foully calumniated in this song. Nor, indeed, could the ditty be said to reveal a poetic sensitivity on the part of its composer. It is common knowledge that Farouk knew of the popularity of this version with the British Troops, which in itself tended to undermine any residual goodwill that might, otherwise, have existed between the British and the Egyptians.

I spent all the evening drinking in the Canteen, by which time most of my weekly pay had been consumed. Thereafter, my evenings would be dry, until the following Friday. By the time we had consumed four or five large bottles of Stella, we lads exhibited the usual effects of alcohol consumption; some becoming sentimental; others waxing musical or argumentative and aggressive. Fortunately, there were very few of the latter type in the Regiment, which generally made for peace and harmony amongst the Other Ranks.

The Regimental Bully was a Glaswegian named, Rob Cowie, a tall, dark-haired and strongly-built lad. He came into the Canteen during the evening, attended by a retinue of hangers-on: who sheltered behind the “tough-guy” image of the Scot. They ordered beer and sat together at a nearby table. Cowie became loud and belligerent in his cups. He vociferously joined in the musical entertainments, himself having a particularly extensive repertoire of bawdy songs; which made my hair curl. His favourite song was, of course, “I belong to Glasgie”, which I also enjoyed singing: it being one of Harry Lauder’s old songs”. Cowie would roar out:

“I belong to Glasgie   
 Dear auld Glasgie toun”   
 But there’s somethin’ the matter wi’ Glasgie, for its goin’ roond and roond.   
 I’m on’y a common auld workin’ lad   
 as anyone ‘ere can see   
 but when I’ve ‘ad a couple o’ buckits on a Sa’u’dy : Glasgie belongs to me!”

To his credit, it must be affirmed that Cowie never interfered with the Orderly-Room Personnel. I felt that this was because the Orderly-Room boys were close to the RSM. They, on their part, studiously avoided offending the Scot.

I, myself, always a sensitive fellow, usually became pleasantly mellow when drinking; never aggressive. There were very few occasions when I drank to such an extent that I suffered amnesia, so that, as a rule I was always in command of myself. This could not always be said of many of the lads, who would drink anything containing alcohol, often to the stage where they became totally incapable of any form of self-control. This was one of the less acceptable results of excessive drinking. Some of the less intelligent fellows thought it great fun if they could piss in another lad’s beer, whilst he was momentarily away from the room, so that it became a wise precaution for a person to take his bottle, as well as his glass of beer along with him, when he went to the latrines. Such is the measure of human degradation, occasioned by too much booze, combined with isolation from the traditional disciplines of social life. Of course, upon reflection, one cannot really blame the alcohol itself, as this merely releases the natural inhibitions, that restrain the more degenerate aspects of human nature.

When the evening drew to a close, the befuddled youths repaired to their respective tents, to sleep off the effects of their indulgence. For me there was a free day on the morrow. I looked forward with pleasure to lying abed, to suit myself.

Snaps: showing myself in Egypt. Also Paddy Barnett

A room with white walls

Description generated with high confidence

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### Chapter 61

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### Duty-Clerk

The Orderly-Room Clerks were required to perform the functions of “Duty Clerk” about once each week. This meant that they remained at the office and slept there overnight, in case of emergencies arising, which would require the attention of the Orderly Room Staff. Generally, there was little to disturb the Duty-Clerk, although on one occasion, when I was settling down to sleep at about 10pm, the Regimental 2i/c, a Major M………. came into the office. Rather hesitantly, it seemed to me, he approached me, who was now in bed. “Are you the duty clerk?” “Yes, Sir!”, said I, still lying in my bed. “You type, do you not?”, quoth this gentleman. I was reluctant to lie to a senior officer, and replied, “Yes, Sir!” “I have here something which is urgent and is needed by the CO tomorrow morning. I would like you to type it for me”. I felt, inwardly, like suggesting to the “gent”. what he could do with his document but, being a cowardly fellow, decided that discretion was the better part. The document consisted of ten to fifteen pages of poorly written scribble.

I spent the next two hours, in very poor light, straining my eyes to type this material for the half-witted Officer; who had been too indolent to do the little work required of him; leaving it to the last minute. I inwardly raged at this demand made upon me by someone who, as a rule, had nothing to do with me. I had already done a good day’s work and felt that I was entitled to my rest. But this was the Army and intelligent Other Ranks had to accept orders from pathologically selfish and sometimes incompetent officers. I derived no comfort from my complaints the following day to Mr. Adams, who was sympathetic but not in a position to rectify the situation.

### Chapter 62

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### Self-Education

Whilst languishing in Egypt, I decided that I had better do something to improve myself. I, therefore, wrote to the Pitman’s Correspondence School, enrolling in a course of Basic Shorthand. The cost of the correspondence course was paid for by the military authorities. I had to send in test papers from time to time, which I completed under the supervision of Mr. Adams; receiving in due course a Certificate. Eric had said to me, “Do you want to do these tests in the proper manner or merely fill in the answers at your leisure”. I replied, “I would rather do the thing properly”. Eric, therefore, took the time and trouble to “supervise” me, in completing the test papers. The skill thus acquired, was something which, in later years, I put to good use. I also made a half-hearted attempt to do my “Forces Preliminary Exam”, but still lacked the confidence in myself to persevere. Nor, indeed, did I have any idea as to the value of such a qualification in Civilian life. I passed the English Examination but failed the Mathematics and History Exams. After that, I made no further attempt to improve my educational standard.

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### Chapter 63

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### Cairo

On the 18th February 1950, a number of friends, including Paddy Revell, the RHQ Dispatch Rider, Jim Critchley and I, took week-end leave and went off to Cairo. To leave the Canal Zone we were required to have civilian clothing. I did have a shirt and trousers but no jacket. Johnny Baldwin had a decent tweed sports coat, that was too large for him. It was even a couple of sizes too large for me. I bought the coat for a Pound, which was a good deal for us both.

We “tourists” took the train from Ismaelia to Cairo and stayed at the National Hotel for two nights. We enjoyed the most delicious food we had ever tasted. This was a second-class establishment but still luxurious to us, who had been roughing-it for so long and who, in any event, had never known such luxury or comfort in our lives. The National Hotel was destroyed during Fundamentalist riots, some years later.

As this was a guided tour, we went to the Mohammed Ali Mosque; a glorious marble edifice, which occupies a prominent position in Old Cairo. Although only built in the 19th Century by the Khedive of Egypt, it is a truly beautiful building, with graceful minarets and domes in purest alabaster. We also visited the Cairo Museum, viewing with awe and amazement the display of Tutankamen’s treasure. On the second day, we took a tour of the Sphinx and Pyramids; penetrating to the King’s Chamber of the Great Pyramid. I was overwhelmed by the sheer size of the colossal edifice that is the Cheop’s Pyramid, rising over four-hundred feet above the plain.

I showed no interest in visiting the Mousky Bazaar, which evidently had certain attractions of an erotic nature. This was in a part of Old Cairo, which was a “No-Go” area for British Soldiers; perhaps wisely so. On the Sunday evening, we tourists returned by train to Camp, feeling well pleased with ourselves.

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### Chapter 64

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### Port Said

For long-term holidays, there were other opportunities to visit places of interest, such as Palestine, the Upper Nile Valley, and Cyprus. There was also a holiday camp at Port Fouad, across the Canal from Port Said, to which I went for short holidays, on several occasions, during my time in Egypt. This was a welcome respite from the rigours of Camp life.

There were a number of recreational activities available at Port Said for British troops. One could go to the NAAFI Canteen; which was a substantial building; offering a measure of comfort not otherwise available to us. We could play Snooker and table-tennis. There was, of course, a cafe and bar, whenever we were in funds. As I was a lonely character, I adopted a practice of spending a certain amount of money each day on entertainment and refreshment. In doing so, I ensured that at no time would I be in the position of being penniless and having to borrow money from my colleagues.

The beach at Port Said was adjacent to the town and we English lads enjoyed lazing in the sun or swaggering along the sands, as if we owned the world. One afternoon, I was walking by myself on the promenade near the beach, when an Egyptian rode up on a sparkling Triumph motor-cycle and asked me, pleasantly, if I would like a ride. Although warned about the activities of Egyptian Con-men, I could not resist the temptation and was taken on a run into the Old Town of Port Said, which was Out of Bounds to British soldiers. On arriving at a Cafe, my Egyptian friend demanded payment of Fifty piastres (ten-shillings), which was about all the money I had in my possession, at the time. Realizing that I had been duped, I did not argue, but paid the cash and ran swiftly through the streets, until I found myself in a safe district.

Another morning I was in the street, not far from the NAAFI Canteen, when a large American limousine drove up and stopped The driver was an Egyptian male, well-built, of about 40 years of age, dressed in European suit and tie, who smiled at me and said, “How are you? Would you like to have a look around the town?” The person appeared to be a highly prosperous and relatively respectable person and I, who was still extremely naive and impressionable, answered in the affirmative: not realizing that I might be placing myself in a compromising situation. I went around the vehicle and entered the passenger’s side, which was on the right of this car. My new acquaintance now drove out of the town and along the beach road in the direction of Alexandria. I had no intention of becoming an Egyptian’s “Bum-boy” and, becoming alarmed, requested my friend to drive me back to the town. On arriving in Port Said, my new acquaintance asked me to meet him the following day. I agreed to this proposal, but decided that “enough was enough”. The man must have been a wealthy and influential Egyptian, perhaps a merchant or politician, as he appeared to be known to the Military personnel at the check-point. The car he drove was the very latest American model. I saw no more of this gentleman. There were, no doubt, lots of other English lads upon whom he and his friends might prey.

The “Golden-Sands” Holiday Camp, at Port Fouad, provided tents in which to sleep and other facilities, such as Tennis and indoor activities for the lads. Regular Dances were held in the main hall, attended by local maidens, of whom many were of Greek, Italian or French origin. The girls were chaperoned by their mothers, of course, and attended for the purpose of improving their knowledge of the English language. I loved Ballroom Dancing, and found these occasions to be most welcome: indeed, the highlight of the holiday. They provided an opportunity for the enjoyment of female companionship, which was not to be missed.

Pornography was freely available in Port Said, if one was inclined that way. On arriving, one day, at my tent at the Holiday Camp, I discovered in a drawer in the dressing table, a number of photographs of ladies in various revealing poses, which I thought were in rather poor taste. Once, whilst sitting on the Ferry Boat to Port Said, I was surprised to find a book thrust into my face, entitled, “My Lady’s Cunt!” I was shocked and, it goes without saying, did not purchase the book. As a result, I am unable to comment on its contents. Whilst in Egypt I did read the locally produced version of “Lady Chatterley’s Lover”, which was then banned in the United Kingdom. By contemporary standards, of course, the book is innocuous.

### Chapter 65

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### Cyprus

By mid-August l949, I had accumulated over a month’s recreation leave. I decided to go to Cyprus for a holiday. This was to be quite an adventure, as it entailed travelling by Corvette from Port Said to Famagusta. The Journey was uncomfortable, as the vessel, being an ex-Naval ship, was narrow in the beam and rolled tremendously, so that the passengers were very seasick. At least, I myself was ill. I was, therefore, both pleased and relieved on arrival at Famagusta, the next morning. The holiday camp was situated to the South of the town, which itself was ancient and picturesque: being surrounded by a massive city wall, with many quaint and interesting buildings. Perhaps the most impressive of these is a Gothic Cathedral; built by the Crusaders but now bereft of its towers and sporting a tall Minaret; from which the Muezzin calls the faithful to prayer. The building has been a mosque for hundreds of years.

The atmosphere here was tranquil: the climate perfect and the blue waters of the Mediterranean, inviting. Soon after my arrival I went swimming in the harbour. I dived as deeply as possible, to see, as best I could without goggles, the strange and beautiful underwater world around about me. On opening my eyes, I saw a wonderful blue light, in this clearest of waters. I stayed below until both the pain in my ears and a need for air, forced me to the surface, once again.

The Camp, itself, provided hutted accommodation for the holiday-makers; limited in comfort but adequate and satisfactory from my point of view. It was certainly a great improvement on the tented accommodation of the Holiday Camp at Port Fuad. I had come alone, on this holiday, and was determined to see as much as possible of this beautiful island. I had brought with me about Fifteen pounds or so in holiday-pay, which had to last me for a month. I, therefore, allowed myself ten-shillings a day for pocket-money; depositing the balance of my funds in the Camp Office. I adhered strictly to this programme and found myself in a comparatively privileged position; as I was always able to afford whatever necessary expense was required to make my holiday enjoyable. Some of the other lads were spendthrift and wasteful of their funds: finding themselves half-way through their holiday, with nothing left to spend. This was perhaps, owing to an over-indulgence with the girls of Famagusta: Bar-girls, who were prepared to act as magnets to attract young men to the premises of their employers, where they could imbibe the varied and cheap liquors which were available. To the young, sex-starved boys from Egypt and Palestine, this was an irresistible lure. Many a pleasant evening was spent by me and other acquaintance, in entertaining and being stimulated by these young ladies.

Gossip suggested that many of the lads expended their resources prematurely, in taking the girls home for more intimate activities. I had usually spent my allotted daily allowance, before the night was far advanced, and was thus neither tempted nor, indeed, able to oblige the young ladies to a greater extent than the purchase of an occasional glass of wine, (or perhaps coloured water, in the case of the girls). However, these females were young, agreeable and some of them were very pretty. I could not deny that I enjoyed myself in their company. Someone had suggested to me that Cyprus is called, “White-Slave Island”: in that female children, who have been abducted from Countries throughout Europe and Asia, are brought there to be exploited through Prostitution. Whilst I was incredulous that such wickedness was possible, there were certainly girls here of various nationalities and all shades of complexion, which suggested to me that they might very well have come here from all over the Globe.

The Camp management organized tours for the holiday-makers and I went on one of these, which included a visit to Nicosia, Kyrenia and St. Hilarion’s Castle, which lies in the hills above Nicosia. There was none of the obvious hostility, that later developed between Turk and Greek, although the Greek Terrorist movement was getting itself into high gear, sponsored by that supreme hypocrite, Archbishop Makarios. I was not concerned with local politics and made as much as possible of the pleasures of the scene.

As the bus passed through the central plain of Cyprus, I observed that the harvest was in full swing. In each village, groups of men and girls were threshing grain in the village square. Nicosia, itself a charming town, is set upon a high and commanding position in the Central Plain and is the natural centre of Government. To the North, runs a chain of hills which stretch from East to West of the Island, capped here and there, by the ruins of medieval castles: the most impressive of which is that of St. Hilarion. This castle is regarded as one of the finest examples of Crusader architecture; being built upon a tremendous crag; with several magnificent tiers of defensive walls. It was regarded as impregnable, until the advent of gunpowder made it vulnerable to cannon-fire from surrounding hills. From the height of the tallest rampart, one can clearly see the jousting ground, far below, at which the local heroes competed for the hearts of the maidens of the day.

Kyrenia castle, which lies on the North coast of the Island, was at first a Phoenician Castle, then a Crusader fortress. Following this, the Turks occupied it for hundreds of years and subsequently the British, during the Colonial period, used it as an administrative centre. In one of its dark places is to be found a deep pit into which, it is reported, the Turks flung the bodies of those who had been tortured to death in the Castle dungeons. Architecturally, this castle is interesting, as one can clearly see the developing styles of military architecture, which were used in the enlargement of the Castle throughout the Centuries. Needless to add, Kyrenia is a beautiful seaside town, full of the charming atmosphere that permeates this, once blessed, isle; an isle of mountains and contrasting beauties, both natural and man-made. All blend perfectly, to present a prospect to delight the eye and stimulate the mind: a place rich in the history of both East and West.

Famagusta itself can lay claim to much that is of interest. Just North of the town lies the ancient city of Salamis which was famous for its great Temple. The ruins of the city stretch for a considerable distance, testifying to the importance of the place in the time of St. Paul. It was here that the Apostle landed in the course of his travels.

I was able to hire a bicycle at the holiday-camp and this enabled me to travel through the adjacent countryside. Whilst inspecting the site of Salamis, I entered into conversation with the Greek-Cypriot Ranger, a gentleman of about the age of thirty years, who was apparently in charge of the site. There was no other person present at the time. I accepted an invitation from this chap to visit his observation tower, for a better view of the site. Once there, I was subjected to an homosexual proposition, which I promptly declined.

It was, no doubt, my preference for my own company, that brought me into contact with homosexual men, from time to time; as they tend to prey on unattached youths. My own Army companions generally had no interest, whatever, in the things that delighted me.

On another day, I rode my bicycle to a castle, built at the extremity of the chain of Northern Hills, situate some miles from Famagusta. It was a hot and dusty ride. However, my efforts were rewarded by the view from the ancient and ruined ramparts, as I looked over the fertile Central Plain of Cyprus; dotted here and there with farms and hamlets.

When not otherwise occupied during my holiday, I would occasionally take a walk along the narrow country lanes in the vicinity of Famagusta. On one of these excursions, I found a small coffee-shop and bar, surrounded by one or two of the neat, well-maintained Cypriot houses. The proprietor of this bar sold the potent Cyprus Brandy and Commandaria Wine, which is a pleasant, rich red wine, rather like a sweet Port. The atmosphere here was peaceful and relaxing. I sat in the front of the premises, in the shade of palms and citrus trees, enjoying the simple rustic environment. I drank one or two glasses of Brandy and sat by myself; now and again chatting to the proprietor or his wife. This lady had two little girls, aged about three and four years. They were lively, charming children, named Eva and Mira; full of mischief. I made a fuss of them, whenever they were around. They also had a little mongrel dog named “Stuka”. There was a large Grape-fruit tree nearby, which was heavy with ripe fruit. One day, whilst I was sitting, observing them, Eva, who was the elder, plucked one of the fruit for use as a ball. The children then had a merry time with it, chattering and giggling as they played.

I returned to the bar on several occasions during my stay at the Camp. Sometimes I would drink too much of the cheap Brandy and suffered the next morning, when I awoke with a severe hangover. However, at this time I had developed a fair tolerance to alcohol and soon recovered from my indisposition. In fact, my financial resources were too limited to permit too great an indulgence in booze.

One evening, I had stayed late at the bar, drinking Brandy, to the stage where I was mildly but not badly affected. I had become quite friendly with the Proprietor and his wife. Also present, on this occasion, was a Greek-Cypriot man, somewhat older than I but an agreeable fellow, who was the brother of the proprietress.

As darkness approached, I was anxious to get back to camp; as the lanes were narrow and winding. On a moonless night, it would have been difficult to find my way, as there was no street-lighting. When I decided to leave, I said, “Well, I’d better be getting back to Camp”. My new friend now said, “You can stay at my place if you like. It is not far from here”. “It’s very kind of you.” said I. After all, I had spent that last two years exclusively with men and thought nothing of this suggestion. We said, “Goodnight” to the Bar-keeper and walked off together down the lane.

In a couple of minutes we reached one of the typical flat- roofed, white-painted Cypriot houses. My friend showed me to a bedroom, in which was a double bed. There did not appear to be other persons about and I assumed that they were in bed asleep. I partly undressed and lay on the bed. However, my head had not touched the pillow, before my friend approached me as if he had been a bitch on heat; slobbering over me in a rather unmanly fashion. I, thereupon, decided that this was no place for me. I jumped up, said to my companion, “What the hell do you think I am?” and commenced to dress myself. My host now became frightened and, kneeling at the other side of the bed, started to cringe and whine, pleading, “Please don’t hurt me!” I replied, “I am not going to touch you, but I’m certainly not staying here a moment longer.” Indeed, my only urge was to leave this unmanly and embarrassing situation behind me. Even though I had consumed a quantity of liquor, I was not badly affected and had sufficient awareness, of my position, to realize that I had made a fool of myself.

In fact, I was, again, more amused at finding myself in such a ridiculous position, than angry at the other person involved. After-all, I had asked for it. It took me a minute to put on my boots and shirt, following which I left the cottage, without further ado, and made my way, uneventfully, through the lanes for the mile or so back to the Holiday Camp. I might, perhaps, be excused if, as a result of my experiences, I concluded and afterwards affirmed that Greek Cypriots were a “Pack of Pufters”. I never went back to the little bar.

I had only slight contact with Turkish Cypriots, whilst in Cyprus, except when visiting shops in Famagusta town. They appeared, to me, to be quiet, law-abiding people, who wished to spend their lives peaceably, without disturbance, as indeed should be the right of every man or woman, regardless of racial or religious affiliations.

Whilst on the Island, I somehow got to know Mary White, a lady who acted as a kind of Fairy-Godmother to the English soldiers, holidaying on the Island. Mrs. White was an English lady, about 40 years of age, at this time, and a great attraction to the boys, who hung around her like bees around a honey-pot. Whilst not, perhaps, a beautiful woman, there was something motherly and attractive in her personality. She made the lads feel at home. Even though she was much older than most of the boys, who were about 18 or l9 years in the main. There was keen competition for her company. It may have been the comparative luxury of her hotel surroundings, that attracted us but whatever it was, we enjoyed sitting and listening to her light feminine chatter. She was staying in a small harbourside hotel, which had a separate swimming pool. We English boys congregated here, to sit and perhaps have a glass of refreshment. Mrs White was not ungenerous to us; many, indeed, were penniless.

One day, I was hanging around this lady, when she mentioned that she had hired a sailing craft for the day. I thought it would be good fun to “have a go” at sailing. She asked me if I had done any sailing and, lying, I said that I had. She, therefore, said that I could borrow the boat. Off I went, with no idea how to manage such a craft. I managed to get the vessel away from the shore but, thereafter, the boat, which was quite a large, broad-bottomed craft, did what it wanted to do, independently of anything I demanded of it. The result of my enterprise was that I managed to damage one of the stay-wires supporting the mast, when the vessel rammed another boat in the harbour. I was obliged to leave the craft and make my way back home. Mrs. White did not reprimand me when I, rather shamefacedly, saw her, the following day. She said that it had cost her ten-shillings to repair the damage. I did not offer to make good the expense.

A Norwegian chap was keeping company with Mary at this time. He was named Arne Brynne and was on the Staff of the Norwegian Embassy in Cairo. Arne was a tall, slim and good-natured fellow; but like many Scandinavians, uninhibited, at least for those days.

I returned to Egypt, quite satisfied with my holiday in Cyprus; which had given me a glimpse of the charm of this Island, with its rich historical treasures. It is sad to reflect that since that time of peace and prosperity, Cyprus has seen bloodshed: firstly from the murderous activities of Terrorists and, latterly, as a result of the invasion by Turkish Troops; which may well have been necessary to protect the Turkish-Cypriots from maltreatment at the hands of the Greek-Cypriot extremists. The present division of Cyprus is the direct result of the lunatic insistence of the Greek Cypriots for “Enosis” or Union with Greece; a nation with which, it was affirmed by Arne, the Cypriots have no affinity apart from a mutual language. He suggested that they are Levantines, racially descended from the Phoenicians.

### Chapter 66

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### Back to Tedium

There was little to interrupt the daily routine of life in the Canal Zone. At one stage there was momentary excitement, when the Jews were threatening to enter Egypt through Akaba. The Regiment was placed on an Active-Service footing, for a week or so. The Orderly-Room had to be put on a mobile basis at such times and was equipped for this purpose with a specially fitted-out 3-ton “Chevy” truck, which one of the clerks learned to drive. I might have been wise to undertake driving lessons myself, but I had now been in the Army for a number of years and adopted the “old-soldier’s” principle, that one never volunteers for anything in the Army, as this always leads to extra work, with no compensating factors, by way of additional earnings. As it transpired, the Jews did not attempt to invade Egypt, at that stage, and the emergency passed, without incident.

British soldiers had little contact with the local Egyptians, mainly owing to language difficulties. I had, in a dedicated moment, learnt the Arabic Alphabet, which I found similar to shorthand, in that the vowels, which are not shown in printed Arabic, are represented by short signs over and under the consonants. I obtained a “Teach yourself Arabic” book, which I studied. The first few chapters were relatively easy but I soon became hopelessly lost. I could never make myself intelligible to the local Egyptians, to whom I tried to speak, and, eventually, gave up the struggle.

There was one old Sais (or Groom) named “Said”, who had served the British Army for many years and was Head Groom to the Officers of the Regiment. He was now in his mid-Sixties and was quite at home, talking to us English lads. He was a typical thick-set Egyptian and seemed to enjoy our company. He had a tent of his own within the camp, some short distance from the Lines. I got to know him quite well and would, occasionally, visit his tent for a chat and a glass or two of Ouzo, which Said himself drank, although a Moslem. On one such visit, the subject turned to “Lawrence of Arabia.” Said told me that he had known Lawrence. He said, “The Arabs really loved him, you know, they really loved him!” There was some gossip about this old man amongst the boys, but I was satisfied that it was purely malicious.

From time to time, Stonemasons were employed to build additions to the Regimental buildings. I was intrigued by the traditional skills they displayed, as they worked each individual stone. Heavy stones were lifted into place, to the accompaniment of song and with the aid of a rudimentary block-and-tackle. The foreman commenced to sing a refrain in his high-pitched and, to my ear, unmelodious Arabic. At the commencement of the Chorus, the men pulled together on the rope, singing together as they did so. Up went the heavy sandstone block, weighing, perhaps, half a ton; to be manipulated into position by the two or three persons working on the wall. I remarked to myself that they must have been practising these arts, since the time of the Ancient Kings of Egypt.

Towards the end of our stay at Fanara Camp, one afternoon, several of us were lounging-about in the tent occupied by the Orderly-Room Other-Ranks. Max and Johnny were “fooling-about” on Fred’s bed. Myself, Ginger and John Garrett were also present at this time. None of the other lads were unduly concerned at this “petting”, although we thought that it was rather unmanly. After some minutes of unabated cuddling on the part of the other two, accompanied by much grunting and groaning, I began to be concerned that matters might be going beyond the bounds of propriety. I, therefore, said, “Come on now, cut that out, this is going a bit too far.” Max then got up from Johnny’s bed and sat on another bed. This was the only occasion on which I had cause to suspect that there was, perhaps, more to the relationship between these two young men, than I had previously realized. What, perhaps, was surprising, was that this episode of “heavy petting” between two males, had taken place in broad-daylight, in a tent in which there were several other, non-involved males. Perhaps it was the fact that the extended and close relationship of all these lads permitted behaviour which, in other circumstances, would be considered quite inappropriate. The incident brought home to me the fact that innocent “romping” of this nature could conceal underlying homosexual propensities.

### Chapter 67

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### Wallt Smith

There were four other young men whom I remember, during this period at Fanara Camp. One was a Liverpool National-Serviceman named Wally Smith: another a Dublin Irishman, Stephen Flanagan.

Walter was a “peculiar” cove, who combined, in his strange, introspective nature, the combined acquisitive tendencies of the Jew, the Scot and the Yorkshireman. He was somewhat above the medium-height, plump, dark-haired, baby-faced and of pale complexion. Although from Liverpool, he was not a Catholic but a Calvinistic Non-Conformist, of some description. He was posted to the Regiment during l949 and sent to work in the Orderly-Room.

Wally dossed in my tent, as Max had been promoted to Sergeant, by this time. He chatted freely to me, who was a sensitive auditor. He informed me that his father was a Liverpool Councillor and quite well-known. Wally said, “I, also, am interested in Politics and have embarrassed my father once or twice, as we have the same name. I used to write to important people, expressing my own views, of course, which did not always coincide with my father’s.” Wally laughed as he said this. I thought this was hilarious. He was very short-sighted and wore thick glasses, without which he was practically blind. This had not interfered with his call-up for National Service. When writing, his characters were always about a half-inch high and childish, which the poor lad could not help. The other fellows thought it was “funny”, because Wally had such weird ideas, about which he was very emphatic.

He was extremely mean and would conserve his funds religiously; spending nothing if he could avoid it, except on food: complaining, with some degree of rectitude, about the atrocious food served in the Cookhouse. He never drank, except on one occasion, when funds had been deducted from the men’s pay, quite improperly, to pay for a grand Regimental function of some kind or other; at which the drink would be free of charge. Wally, thereupon, without considering the consequences, decided that he would drink his share of the “Grog”. The other fellows anticipated this evening with malicious pleasure, as it was evident that he was “in for a shock”.

The big night duly arrived and we repaired to the NAAFI Canteen. Wally, true to his word, consumed beer with gusto, rapidly knocking back several bottles of Stella. His personality decidedly improved during the initial phase of his drinking-bout and he became chatty and friendly. I was surprised to see that he could actually drink so much of the Stella Beer. However, it was not long before he became violently ill and was forced to retire. The other lads, including myself, had encouraged him to drink to excess and were gratified to observe his drunken condition. The next morning Wally, well hung-over, was most contrite and vowed emphatically never to drink again. Whilst cured of the possibility of becoming an alcoholic, he remained a glutton, stuffing himself with goodies, which the other lads could not afford; having expended their resources on riotous-living. I myself was, generally, tolerant of Wally and found him an interesting character. He would sometimes confide in me, whereas, the other lads could not abide him.

During his training at Catterick Camp, he had evidently been cleaning his rifle and got the pull-through stuck in the barrel. He cleared this by the simple expedient of putting a bullet, which he happened to have handy, in the breach and pulling the trigger. He did this outside the hut, of course. He cleared the barrel but found himself charged with two quite serious offences: discharging a rifle in camp and possessing a bullet. Wally could not understand what all the fuss was about. Nor had he appreciated the very real danger of death or serious injury to himself from such an action. He got 28 days CB for his trouble, which hardly endeared him to the joys of Army life.

### Chapter 68

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### Stephen Flanagan

The Irishman, Flanagan, was a thoroughly disturbed character; lacking the normally gay and carefree characteristics of the Irish. He was a “rebel”: evidently descended from Rebel stock. In appearance he was fair-skinned, with auburn hair, blue eyes: somewhat above the middle height. He was not a bad-looking lad. Why he had enlisted in the British Army, one could never determine, unless, like myself, he had been in a totally dejected and confused state of mind, at the time. He had an utter hatred of all things “English” and sang rebel songs, such as “Kevin Barry”; which I remembered for years after: “British Soldiers tortured Kevin - just because he would not tell, the names of his companions, etc.,etc.”. I was, perhaps, the only person in the Regiment who could talk to Stephen. He was aggressive and argumentative, in his cups, and would fight anyone, when aroused. I often had to steer him out of conflict situations. For some reason, Flanagan would speak to me, when he would tolerate nobody else.

Only on one occasion did the Irishman and I come near to blows over some trivial matter. I probably recognized in Stephen, some of my own deep-rooted emotional problems, which I, myself, had managed to suppress; whilst Stephen was incapable of doing so. It was evident that he had been raised in an atmosphere in which there was much preaching of hatred against the British: perhaps his father had been a member of an IRA cell. Whatever the explanation, it became clear to me that with such a capacity for hatred and anger, Stephen had problems. Perhaps, active members of the IRA develop similar personality problems, which they demonstrate in their irrational and murderous activities. Certainly, I thought to myself, “Here is IRA killer-material!” Flanagan did not stay long in my company, being transferred to another Squadron, before the Regiment moved to Libya.

Albert William Augustus Beauchamp was a ruddy-faced National Serviceman, who worked in the Orderly-Room for a year or so. He was a bright, chatty young man, from the Home Counties and, in spite of his elaborate title, was not, evidently, of particularly exalted Stock. There was, however, no edge to his character, which was affable and agreeable.

John Garrett was a tall, good-looking young man, also from the Southern Counties, who had been well educated. He was another decent lad, who could perhaps have been considered as Officer material. However, he was a Trooper Clerk for some months. It was he who learned to drive the 3-ton truck, which constituted the Orderly-Room, when the Regiment was required to assume a mobile role.

I was, therefore, fortunate throughout these years, in having companions who were, in the main, really decent lads. Being only human, they were prone to minor error. On one occasion, Johnny served some time in the “Clink” for foolishly forging a pay Credit Slip, which showed his account in credit, to some extent, when, in fact, it was in debit. This slip was forwarded to the Squadron Pay Clerk, who paid him the additional money, only to receive a “Please explain?” from the Pay Corps HQ in London. Of course, his defalcation came out and he was duly punished. There was no escape from the consequences of this crime, as it involved extra-Regimental matters. If it had been a purely internal matter, he might have got off with less than 28 days Detention. We all agreed that it was a “crazy” thing to do.

For some time it had been believed that the Regiment was to relieve the 15/19th Hussars, which was then stationed at Khartoum in the Sudan. However, at the last moment, The War Office determined that the 16th/5th Lancers would be posted to Barce, in Libya.

We were all pleased at the prospect of moving to Cyrenaica; as Khartoum was regarded as one of the worst possible postings; combining extreme heat, with total isolation.

There was one distressing aspect of the move from Egypt to Libya. There were a number of regimental dogs, which roamed the camp and were much beloved by many of the boys. I myself was very attached to two or three of these animals; my favourite dog being “Sam”, a wonderful creature, which appeared to be a cross between a Dalmation and a Greyhound. Sam was intelligent and affectionate towards me and would bound swiftly up to me, when called; his long legs rapidly covering the distance. All the camp dogs had a natural revulsion towards “Egyptians” and would bark loudly, if one approached. This greatly amused and gratified the British Soldiers, who considered themselves to be far superior, in status, to the indigenes. Sadly, all the dogs were shot before the move, as they could not be taken to Libya.

### Chapter 69

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### Cyrenaica

One day, I found myself on board a Troopship, bound initially for Tobruk, where the vessel was to remain for a day or so, unloading supplies. On arrival there, we were allowed ashore and had occasion to observe the devastation occasioned by the heavy fighting that had taken place, some years previously. The harbour was still littered with the wrecks of many sunken vessels, including an Italian battleship. After unloading its Cargo, the ship sailed for Benghazi, the principle City of Cyrenaica, where the Regiment disembarked for Barce.

At this time, Libya still had a King or Emir, who was more-or-less subject to control by the British, although nominally independent. Benghazi was a town of moderate size, with several imposing buildings, including the Royal Palace and the Cathedral, which was built in rather similar fashion to a Mosque, being circular in design. It would have been conveniently converted to serve the Islamic Faith.

Barce, or El Marg, as it is known to the Berbers, was at one time a railway terminal on the line from Benghazi. It is situated on the plateau, which rises about a thousand feet above the coastal strip and continues for some hundreds of miles towards the Egyptian Border. The Barracks had been constructed by the Italian Army, before the War, and was still in good repair. It was situated a mile or so from the town and constituted a great improvement on the primitive conditions under which the Regiment was housed in Egypt. The Other Ranks were lodged in substantial Barrack Rooms, with one or two small rooms, adjacent thereto, one of which I was able to appropriate for myself, as at this time, I was a Lance-Corporal. I had a key to this room, which I carefully locked, to keep out intruders.

One morning, as I lay in bed, long after Reveille had sounded, the Commanding Officer decided to make an early-morning inspection. I had locked the door of my room the previous night and was dozing lazily, when I heard the sound of heavy boots, clattering on the cement floor of the Barrack-room vestibule. A voice rang out, “Stand by your beds”. It was the Squadron Sergeant Major, who accompanied the CO and the RSM. “Oh my gosh!”, thought I, here am I, still in bed and my room in a pig-stye condition. Now I am going to cop it.” I was not in a position to face an inspection. The door of my room rattled and a loud knock sounded. I recognized the voice of the Commanding Officer, “What is this room?” Neither of the Warrant Officers knew who or what the room contained. I laid low. I made the risky decision not to open the door, hoping that no-one else had a key.

I thought about hiding in a large packing-case, which was adjacent to my bed but decided against that. There was a window, but it was small and high-up in the wall. There was no possible avenue of escape.

“Has anyone a key to this room?” called the Commanding Officer. Evidently, nobody had and, after a pause, the group of VIP’s marched-off, leaving me to recover from my half-minute or so of mental anguish. I dressed, hurriedly and, again locking the door to my room, took myself off to the Orderly-Room, as fast as possible. My crime, had I been discovered, would have been tantamount to disobeying an Order of my CO, so it was highly probable that I would have ended up in the Guard-house, if someone had possessed a second key to the room.

The Orderly-Room was some two hundred yards distant from the Barrack-room blocks and was a single-storey building, with a broad veranda on one side. Adjacent to the main office was a large room, in which the officers maintained a Sandpit, used for tactical training purposes by these gentlemen, from time to time. The Orderly-Room Staff used the room as a Dormitory for the Duty Clerk and Duty Dispatch-Rider and also as a Refreshment Room and entertainment area.

We Orderly-Room boys spent many happy hours there, drinking “Simmonds” Export English Bottled Beer. If in an aggressive mood, we would relieve our frustration by throwing the empty bottles against the substantial stone wall, at the end of the room. This resulted in numerous circular indentations to the plaster. After some months of this treatment, it must have been apparent to even the most indifferent eye, what was happening in this room. However, nothing was said about the damage to the wall. The sand-trap, we found useful as an urinal, which served the dual purpose of enabling us to relieve ourselves, without the necessity of having to go outside and allowed us to express our contempt for the elite gentlemen, who would later be stirring-up the sand with their swagger-sticks, in the belief that they were doing something constructive and useful.

It was following a bout of heavy drinking that I committed an act of cruelty upon a colleague that I have long lived to regret. This person was Corporal Pellegrini, a pleasant lad of Italian extraction. He was a quiet, self-effacing person, with whom I, normally, got along very well. However, he was “Italian” and, for some reason or other, this was a handicap to him. He was generally regarded as a “weak” character and, accordingly, to some extent was treated with indifference by the other members of the Orderly Room Staff.

After consuming several bottles of beer one evening, I decided that I would play a “trick” on “Pell”, as he was called. I bent a number of straight pins and placed these in the seat of his chair, so that he would sit on them in the morning and get a painful shock. The following day, the unsuspecting lad came along and threw himself into his chair, without noticing the trap, thus set for him. One can only speculate on the nature of the experience he underwent at that moment. When asked by me, later in the day, whether he had sat on the pins, without any form of reproach, he said that he had not seen them and had thrown himself into his chair. He did not dwell on the pain he suffered, as a result of my “sick” humour. To my credit, I did experience a sense of guilt and knew that I would never be able to redress the cowardly wrong I had committed on that occasion: a wrong that I could probably have rectified in the morning, before it had achieved its objective.

The following snaps show: The RHQ Barce, My desk, Barce Railway Station (with Salvation Army Canteen) and myself and lady-friends, Mirula and Evula.(Famagusta Aug l949).



### Chapter 70

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### Barbarism

The location of the Barracks was pleasant, situated on the great plain of Barce. Some five miles or so from the camp was a range of hills, topped, at one point, by a monument in Italian marble: commemorating the burying-place of a number of Italian soldiers, who had been killed, fighting the Berber natives during the annexation of Libya by Italy. One Saturday afternoon I walked over the plain to these hills; in order to inspect the monument.

The Italian monument itself was a grand affair, consisting of a small marble chapel and altar, built above a large vault, in which the bodies of the soldiers lay. There was a tall tower rising above, which was visible for many miles around. The view from the top of the tower, reached by a spiral staircase, was magnificent: as the Plain below stretched far away into the distance. A mile or so from here, was a disused granary, with the words, “Ente Colonazzione Libya”, inscribed thereon. Dotted across the plain, in rows, were the little farm-houses, which had been occupied by the Italian settlers. Every five miles or so, there was a cluster of houses and a granary, indicating a local village centre. Here and there, a larger settlement indicated the existence of a more important town. One could see that the whole scheme had been carefully planned and executed. I reflected that it was a pity that the Italians had been ejected from Libya and the place allowed to go to the dogs. This was one of the great mistakes, subsequent to the War.

The graves of the dead had been respected by the Muslim Berber population, but not by the barbarous British, who broke into the tombs, searching for valuables. There were two or three other lads present when I arrived, who had removed skulls from the tombs and were displaying them on the walkway. Several of my Regimental colleagues were photographed with their heads protruding from the entrance to the mausoleum, with a number of skulls, removed from smashed coffins, lined up in grisly array. This

was a great novelty for them.

I myself had some respect for the dead: believing that if I interfered with their bodies, I might one day have to answer to the people; here represented by their worldly remains. However, I dropped into the tomb to inspect the damage. There was a passageway, which led all round the building, lined with the tombs. I saw that some of the marble panels, fronting the coffins, had been smashed. Bodies had been pulled out of their resting-places and left lying here and there in the passageway, so that one had to step over them to pass. I thought that this was pretty barbarous. Some of this sacrilege had, undoubtedly, been committed by previous occupants of the barracks, but there was no doubt that my own Regimental associates were responsible, to some extent, for this uncivilized disrespect for the dead.

The Regimental Catholic Padre, who was a Franciscan named Fr. Warneken, was incensed, on discovering what had been happening at the Monument. He lectured his flock strongly and was particularly distressed upon discovering that at least some of his boys had been involved in the desecration. The Anglican and Non-Conformist Padres, also, had harsh words to say upon the subject, to those nominal members of their own denominations; although, as confession was not practised in their Churches, they would not have had the benefit of first-hand evidence of sacrilege, as did the Catholic Padre.

On another Saturday afternoon, I wandered down a nearby wadi, absorbed by curiosity. At one point, several miles from the Barracks, there was a tomb or monument cut into the rock, with rough columns, carved in Classical style; which had probably been excavated during the days of Ancient Cyrene. I sat there for a half-hour or so, ruminating upon the world as I found it. On several subsequent occasions I returned to this place to meditate on my life.

A view of the Italian War Memorial, Barce, Libya:

 Barce Railway Station: 

Here is a view from the ancient tomb: Self, overlooking Barce Plain.

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### Chapter 71

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### Daily News

One day, Mr Adams suggested to me that, as I could write shorthand, I might care to publish a Daily Newspaper for the Regiment. This would involve me in early-rising, to record the BBC Overseas News at about 6am. Whilst this aspect of the proposal did not appeal to me, I agreed to undertake the task. I, therefore, rose at 5.45am and ran over to the Orderly Room, where there was a short-wave radio. Tuning-in to the BBC Overseas Service, I recorded the latest news. At the time the Korean War was raging, so that there was much to report about the progress of the war. Later in the morning, I transcribed and edited my notes, to produce a News-Sheet. This was distributed throughout the Camp and was, generally, well-received.

Whilst the weather, during the Summer months, was hot, the evening rapidly grew cool and the nights were often bitterly cold. At sunrise the plain of Barce was, invariably, carpeted with a delicate mist, giving a haunting touch of loveliness to the red and green hills in the distance. I loved these beautiful Barce mornings. There was something here, which reminded me of mist-laden mornings in the English Countryside. The similitude did not last, however. As the sun rose higher, the mist dispersed and the day became hot and dry. Occasionally a flock of Barbary Sheep would pass the Orderly-Room, attended by one or two of Berber shepherds. Camel-ticks came with the flock. These were armour-plated bugs, which took hold upon the flesh, with grim determination, and could not be killed without the aid of something like a hammer. It was always a relief when the flock had passed, without releasing a swarm of these horrid creatures.

There was little in the way of interesting wild life here at Barce, apart from the Chamelion, which many of the boys kept as pets. They were harmless and attractive creatures, with eyes that would turn in a full-circle and an ability to change colour, from a light brown to almost black. Whilst walking across the red soil plains, one occasionally came across tortoises, just like the little animals that were sold in pet-shops in England. We sometimes marked them with paint and let them go: to find them later, a considerable distance from where they were released.

When the Regiment had been at Barce for some months, another Sergeant was posted to the Regimental Orderly Room. This was Sgt. Green. Mr Adams himself was now a WOII (Warrant Officer, Second Class). Sgt. Green was married to a charming Greek lady, who impressed me greatly with her intelligence, good-looks and extremely sweet disposition. The Sergeant himself was about thirty-two years of age, of medium build and with fair complexion. He was a pleasant and considerate NCO, with no fancy ideas about his own superiority.

Eric Adams was also married at this stage and living in Married Quarters. Mrs. Adams gave birth to a son whilst the Regiment was at Barce. This was the occasion for a party at the Adams’ home, attended by the Orderly-room Staff. These gatherings were welcome as, not only did they provide an opportunity for the lads to partake of good food and liberal refreshment, but they gave temporary relief from the ever-present divisions of rank. At such functions, one had an opportunity to evaluate the characters of the people with whom one was working, on a personal and more natural level. The wives of the married personal were also present at these functions, providing much-needed female companionship.

The old Railway Station at Barce was now serving as a Salvation-Army Canteen. Believe it or not: this last place on Earth: sixty miles from Benghazi, had its own little oasis, to which we hungry lads could repair on pay-days, to partake, for a modest sum, of the most delicious meal of Eggs and Chips, with Peas, Bread and Butter thrown in; together with a nice pot of tea. The Canteen was upstairs, above the old Station Office. There was little else in Barce, apart from one street with houses on each side and a small Mosque, in which, on Saturdays, the local population could be observed in prayer: oblivious to the profane gaze of the Infidel standing outside. I sometimes paused whilst passing the Mosque and gazed respectfully at the Muslims, arranged in rows inside, as they made their obeisance to their Creator.

At weekends, or for short holidays, we would visit various coastal resorts, such as Cyrene, Tolmeta and Appollonia, where there were lovely Mediterranean beaches. Here, we could bask in the clear blue waters, free of charge; without the need for an abundance of wealth, to enable us to partake of the pleasures of life. At Appollonia there is a swimming-pool carved from the rock which, in all probability, had been there for many centuries. It was called, “Cleopatra’s Pool”.

Cyrene itself stands on the escarpment, a mile or two from the sea and is a ruin. It contains many splendid Greek architectural gems and has a beautiful setting on the hillside. There are baths and fountains, which were erected by the Greeks, two-thousand five hundred years ago, and are still fed by their original subterranean streams. This is the home of the “Venus of Cyrene”, a statue of the Goddess, which is at present in the National Museum in Rome. Tolmeta is a prodigious ruin, which was once the home of thousands of citizens. The remains of its streets and buildings stretch for miles. Here and there are the bases of pillars, seven feet or more in diameter, testifying to the size of the columns, which they originally supported and of which no vestige remains. The sheer extent of these ruins confirms the suggestion that in the days of Greece and Rome, Cyrenaica supported a population of millions.

One Saturday, I took a trip to Appollonia, some miles from Camp. As our truck pulled into the town square, I saw a number of British soldiers forming a queue; as if lining-up for a Cinema show. It transpired that these lads were anxious to obtain the services of one of the local “ladies of leisure”, who was then available for hire. I was not impressed.

Mr. Adams, whose talents were many and versatile, was called-upon to organize a Race-Meeting, to be held between the Regiment and the local Berber Tribesmen. The Berbers were great horsemen and were keen to compete with the Englishmen. Eric Adams, with his usual efficiency, designed a Totalisator system, for use in connection with the Races, which were to be held in the vicinity of Barce. We Orderly-Room Staff were required to operate the Betting Room. Tickets were designed by Mr. Adams and produced on the Gestetner Machine. A lot of work went into the production of the betting-tickets, which were numbered and stamped with the Orderly-Room stamp. Dennis typed the tickets and ran them off on the Duplicator. I had no idea, myself, as to the mechanics of the system, which Eric Adams must have researched pretty well, to be able to contrive such an efficient Totalisator. All the Orderly-Room boys were kept busy in the production of the tickets. Race-Day would have been unthinkable unless the spectators were able to have a bet.

On the day in question, the Races went off without a hitch: we Orderly-Room boys being guilty of insider-betting. We observed which horses the Berbers were backing and arranged for our friends to back the same horses, on our own behalf. We made a few extra pence for ourselves, to which, indeed, we felt entitled, as we had all worked hard in establishing and running the system.

Towards the end of the day, I was able to escape from the Totalisator Booth, to watch the last few races. The wild Berber horsemen were an impressive sight, as they lined-up at the start of each race; their horses plunging and rearing, in anticipation of the contest. The British Officers were completely outclassed by their native opponents and lost all the races to the locals. This did not prevent everyone from enjoying themselves.

### Chapter 72

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### Conversion!

I had now been away from England for over two years and was looking forward to my return, in l951. My catchword at this time was, “Roll-on ‘51!” My engagement to Teresa had been terminated by her, some months after my arrival in Egypt, no doubt, because she did not wish to bind herself to a memory. I readily understood her position and agreed that it was unfair to expect her to remain single and unattached for three years. However, I still entertained a fond regard for Teresa and hoped that, upon my return, we might be able to start again, where we had “left off”. There was the problem of religion and I was aware of the fact that she would wish to marry in the Catholic Church, particularly as her mother, who was a bigoted Irishwoman, would not consider her daughter to be married, unless the ceremony was performed by a Catholic Priest.

Teresa herself was not irreligious but was not a “devout” Catholic. As a girl of only eleven years, she had resented what she herself regarded as “priestly interference” in her personal life. Whilst an Evacuee, she had enrolled in a secular High School in Helmshore, Lancashire. The local Priest had attempted to force her to leave that school and attend the local Catholic School. As the latter school was grossly inferior to the Town High School, which was a brand-new establishment, Teresa positively refused to change schools. Being a strong-willed girl, nothing could make her do something contrary to her own inclination; especially in such matters as education. Her experiences had resulted in her withdrawing herself from the mainstream of Catholic life.

I realized that in a “mixed-marriage”, I would be required to give a commitment regarding the religious upbringing of any offspring of the marriage. During the Winter of l950, the Catholic Padre, Fr. Warneken, announced that he would be arranging a Pilgrimage to Rome for the forthcoming Declaration by Pope Pius XII of the Assumption of the Virgin. I thought this would be an opportunity to see Rome, so I approached the Padre and suggested that, as I had a girlfriend who was Catholic, I would like to change from CE to RC. After being lectured by Fr. Warneken, as to motive, I was accepted as a Catholic proselyte. I did not bother to explain to the Priest that I was a “Spiritualist”, as this was, quite obviously, taboo. I, therefore, stopped going on CE Church Parade and commenced attending RC Parade, which was less formal, owing to the smaller number of Catholics in the Camp.

At the same time that I was going through the motions of changing my religion to “Catholic”, another Orderly-Room Clerk, Paddy Revell, was in the process of being converted to the CE Faith. He wished to divorce his wife, which he affirmed he could not do as a Catholic. He was probably rather confused regarding the precise legal technicalities. Paddy was a rather debauched Irishman, about thirty-five years of age at this time. He was tall and slim in build, with reddish, wiry hair and a heavy moustache. He had enlisted to get away from the responsibilities of family life. He also drank uncontrollably, when in funds, but was accepted by the younger men. In fact, he was not unpleasant company as, in common with most Irishmen, he had the “gift of the gab” and a sense of humour. Paddy came back to the Barrack Room from his first CE Church parade, unimpressed by the Anglican Service. I did not comment but thought to myself that the CE Service was a great improvement on the Catholic Mass, which nobody could understand.

To assist me in the processes of my conversion to Catholicism, the Priest had requisitioned the services of a local Catholic layman, a New Zealander and the British Consul at Barce, Earl Wilkes. This chap was an educated and intelligent man, who made me welcome in his home, which was a cottage close to the town. There was a Convent of Italian Nuns nearby, who conducted a small hospital in the neighbourhood. Mr. Wilkes conscientiously went through the Catechism with me and also entertained me with tea and cakes (made by the Nuns), which I thought was pretty good. In return for this entertainment, I was, subsequently, able to repay the New Zealander by taking home a small number of coins, which had been excavated in the district and which included Roman and Greek copper coins; and which may have had some value. I consigned these to an address in the South of England and, in due course, received an acknowledgement from Mr. Wilkes.

After several weeks’ instruction in the mysteries of the Faith, I took myself off to Benghazi Cathedral, where, with due ceremony and blood-curdling oaths, which I took with severe and private reservations and my “fingers crossed”, I was duly “baptised” into the Faith. Fr. Warneken explained that this was just in case I had not been baptised before. I received a certificate to this effect. Whilst I was not wholly sincere in this proceeding, it served the triple purpose of giving me a distraction from the boredom of Camp life; preparing the way for the resolution of any problems in marrying Teresa and also opened the door to Rome for me. The fact that several Protestants went on the pilgrimage meant that the trip was not confined to Catholics alone. The experience was interesting and instructive for me. I rationalized my position, by satisfying myself that this was merely an exercise on my part and did not affect my real position, in regard to religious or spiritual matters. So far as my relationship with my Creator was concerned, nothing could affect the true position in that regard. Everything else was superficial and of no consequence.

The other lads in the Orderly Room had known of my interest in Spiritualism for some time. During our sojourn at Barce, on one or two occasions, I conducted a “Circle”, at which several of the boys were present: using the alphabet and glass routine. The rapid gyrations of the glass convinced them that there was something quite inexplicable in the proceedings. Several messages were received from the glass, the substance of which I quickly forgot.

Subsequent to my return home, and somewhat to my embarrassment, I attended a Spiritualist Meeting at the Lord Duncan Street Church. On this occasion, a lady spoke to me confidentially and said that I had a “Catholic Priest” with me: implying that I myself was a Catholic. This did indicate to me that I may well have had a helper of the Catholic persuasion, at the time of my “Conversion”. Years later, I received impressions from at least one spirit-person who impressed me as being a Monk, or a Friar. I also felt that I have several Spirit helpers, who have been clergymen of various denominations.

Benghasi Cathedral: 

### Chapter 73

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### Roma

The Pilgrimage to Rome was a time of great excitement for everyone concerned. I made friends with a German Carpenter, who was then employed on contract-work for the British in Cyrenaica. Alphonse Reimann, had been captured on the Russian front during the War but had miraculously survived, to return to Germany. He was a deeply introspective man, originally from East Prussia. I formed a genuine affection for him. There may have been something in my genetic background, which attracted me to people like Alphonse. I recognized a sensitive and intelligent nature, here, and was able to communicate my ideas and to receive an appropriate response from my friend, even though the latter’s command of English was limited. I myself knew no German, whatever, at this, although, subsequently, I attended night-school for a year, to gain a smattering of the language.

We Pilgrims flew from Benghazi in a broad-bodied, two-engined transport plane, which had been converted to carry passengers. The noise from the engines was deafening, but as this was the first time I had ever been in an aeroplane, my excitement, at the prospect of Air-travel, overcame any possible objection to the lack of comfort on the flight, which, in any event, was of only a short duration. After an hour or so, the plane landed in Malta. The party was conveyed to the Tigne Court Hotel, situated on the harbour, a short distance from the centre of Valetta. After a meal, I spent the evening lounging in the vicinity of the hotel. The following day, we flew by Dakota to Catania, in Sicily; a large, rather decayed city, full of grand baroque palaces, now falling to ruin. We travelled by taxi from the Airport to the City; itself a hair-raising adventure, as I had never travelled so fast in a motor-car. The taxi-driver seemed to have no worldly care for either himself or his passengers, as he flung the car at break-neck speed into bends and corners, with almost total abandon. I was both thrilled and terrified by the experience. It was with great relief that I arrived at the hotel, in one piece.

The hotel at which we spent the night was a former Palazzo, ancient and dilapidated, with huge bedrooms, reflecting a departed splendour. My room lay at the end of a long and rambling corridor, which seemed to continue, interminably. It was large and sparsely furnished and contained a once magnificent chandelier. French windows led to a balcony, overlooking the main street of Catania. Nearby stood the grand but equally crumbling Cathedral.

The food served at the hotel was, to say the least, wonderful, after the foul slop dished-up in Camp at Barce. There, the staple diet was hard-biscuit, in lieu of bread, which was often, not available. For meat the Barbary sheep or Goat-meat was even worse than that served in Egypt: being black, tough and tasteless. Here in Sicily, tender veal was served; topped with a delicious sauce and pasta, with fresh bread. Between meals, I walked the streets of Catania, observing seamstresses at work, behind half-shuttered windows and doors: evidently busily engaged in cottage industry, of some nature. The town displayed all the evidence of past grandeur, with fine buildings, which had been allowed to fall into decay.

Our party re-assembled the following day, to commence the train journey to Rome. I was impressed by the fast Sicilian electric-trains, which were a great improvement on anything I had seen previously. They were brightly painted and well-maintained. From Catania station, our group travelled to Messina, observing the effects of the lava flows from Mt. Etna, which had swallowed large areas, including houses, streets and gardens: in some instances stopping short of buildings by a few feet, in their slow, destructive and irresistible march to the sea.

After crossing the ferry to the Italian mainland, in bright sunshine, we boarded another train for Rome. This took us through charming and hilly countryside, passing, although unfortunately, not stopping-at, the ancient city of Pompei, which was destroyed about 70 A.D. by volcanic activity from nearby Vesuvius. At Naples station, I purchased delicious rice-balls from a platform vendor, which had been made with rich Italian cheese. Eventually, the train arrived at Rome and we passengers transferred by bus to our accommodation. My party was lodged in the basement of a building in the Via del Conciliazione. We slept on camp beds, in dormitory style accommodation. It was Winter and the building was cold.  This was hardly better than a Barrack-room and we Pilgrims were not too pleased with the facilities. However, we were told that accommodation was at a premium in Rome, at that time, and that this was all there was available. It did not disturb me, unduly, as I had been “sleeping rough” for the last few years.

Our party went through the various proceedings dictated by the Pilgrimage, attending the appropriate churches, including St. Peter’s Basilica, which was a noble edifice: dwarfing in the vastness of its scale the tiny homo-sapiens who wandered about below. I was much impressed by the richness of the artistic masterpieces on every hand, particularly the Michaelangelo sculptures. I declined to kiss St. Peter’s foot, a practice that was both unhygienic and superstitious. Nor did I comprehend the behaviour of certain individuals, who were seated in booths; holding out long rods with which they would tap devout pilgrims upon the shoulder. Nobody else, who was present, seemed to understand the purpose of this rather fatuous proceeding: perhaps it had something to do with the “Fishers of men” text. Also present on most of these excursions was Alphonse, with whom I kept company during this holiday. Alphonse incurred the wrath of the Basilica police, by taking photographs inside the building. I managed to convey to him that this was not permitted and that he had better not persist in such activity.

In due course, we visited the National Museum of Rome, with its rich treasures; including the lovely statue of the Venus of Cyrene, in which I took an especial interest, not least on account of its delightful feminine proportions.

We also saw the Sistine Chapel and the paintings by Raphael; together with other artistic wonders on display. I was particularly interested in the Jesu church, which has richly gilded decorations. Next to the Church is a museum, commemorating the life of Ignatius Loyola. He spent much of his time here, in meditation and study. There were other places of interest, including the Pantheon: that great monument of Pagan architecture and, of course, the Forum of Rome, Arch of Titus, Colosseum, Hadrian’s Tomb, Baths of Diocletian, Catacombs, etc.. In fact, there was so much to see here, that one could, surely, spend months in Rome, not just a week or so.

In one of the Tourist shops on the Via del Conciliazione, there were employed several girls. One of these young ladies evidently took a fancy to me, although there was no possibility of much communication between us, as I spoke no Italian, nor the young lady English. From time to time, when browsing, I would attempt to communicate with her, but really, there was little need for spoken language. She was a pretty, dark-haired Italian girl. When the time came for me to return to North Africa, this young lady gave me her card, on which was endorsed the words, “Anna Maria C….i.” Stenodatilograffa”, with, in her own hand on the reverse, in Italian, the words, “Good journey and may God Bless you”. I was rather touched by this tender farewell. One of my Orderly-Room colleagues, “Bambi” by nickname, had also been attracted to the girl, although I did not, at any stage, indicate to Bambi that I myself had shown a passing interest in her. This latter young man was a fair, rather delicate type of lad, who had been given this nickname by Max; who may have had a “sneaking regard” for him. Nobody attributed anything improper or unnatural to the lad on account of this rather questionable appellation. Bambi became soured with me, when he began to suspect that I was not fully “sincere”, in my “conversion” to the Faith. I did not expressly indicate anything to the contrary, but my conversation itself, perhaps, indicated a less than total commitment to my new religion

One afternoon, whilst alone on the Castle St. Angelo (Hadrian’s Tomb), I observed two young Italian girls, one of whom I thought was the most exquisite creature I had ever seen. She was dark-haired with deep black, Italian eyes and the most perfectly formed features. She was obviously well-to-do, dressed in a charming two-piece blue, Winter suit. Her friend appeared to be a companion to her. There was something wonderfully vivacious and appealing in this girl, to whom I was strongly attracted; although I had the good-sense not to try to communicate with her. I felt that to do so would be improper, as I myself was a penniless English Soldier, in a foreign land. I, therefore, contented myself with stealing occasional glances at the girl, who apparently, had not noticed my presence; until they inevitably moved to some other part of the building. For a short while, the glories of Rome were eclipsed by the sight of an even greater glory: the feminine human form and nature, in all its sublime loveliness. Perhaps my response to the appearance of this girl may have been exaggerated, as a result of my deprivation from female company for so long. I retained an impression of perfect beauty, for years after, when many another of life’s experiences had been forgotten. After all, one does see beautiful women from time to time. Even in old age, men derive pleasure from the sight of lovely women: who, themselves, delight in presenting themselves in the most attractive manner. The image may now have faded, yet the memory remains, as a reflection of youth’s overwhelming demand for the companionship of those of the opposite Sex.

One Pilgrimage came to an end but the other continued, unabated. I returned to Barce for a few more months, continuing the routine of producing Part II Orders and generally shuffling papers, as is the lot of the Orderly-Room Clerk.

I was promoted to Corporal, towards the end of my three-year term. I concluded that this promotion was a device to induce me to sign-on for a further period of Regular Army Service, but I had had enough of the injustice and inequality of Army Life. I hated the very idea of the 16th/5th Lancers, with its embodiment of the concepts of Class cleavage, which to me were anathema. I had seen enough of the slobbering effeminates, who were designated “Cavalry Officers”, with their Colognes and Rouges: whom I regarded as a bunch of “Cissies”. I had once had occasion to visit the tent of an officer in Fanara, in which there was a dressing-table, of which any lady would have been proud: it was so laden with those effeminate accoutrements: scents, puffs, pomades and powders galore. There were few officers for whom I entertained any regard. One of these had been Lieutenant Warwick; Assistant-Adjutant, a charming and considerate officer; well liked by all the Orderly-Room boys. He had committed suicide over a Mess-fund deficiency, occasioned, rumour stated, through gambling with his fellow officers. His sister had been a Lady-in-Waiting, so that he had a much superior social-standing. Why on earth would a person who had the world at his feet, wish to take his own life, over such a thing as a minor defalcation? This also happened in the case of a Sergeant who embezzled some of the Mess funds, whilst Sergeants’ Mess Treasurer. Sgt ………. was a decent chap, who had probably been gambling with his “good-mates” in the Sergeants’ Mess and got himself into debt. Access to weaponry was easy, and the process of blowing one’s brains out was not so hard, when acutely depressed and under the influence of liquor.

The Adjutant for most of my stay with the Regiment was Captain Stephenson, a tall, gentlemanly fellow who was both intelligent and capable. He had complete trust in Eric Adams and left the day-to-day running of the office in his hands. He occasionally interceded for us, when the over-zealous Squadron Sergeant-Major attempted to persecute us over alleged breaches of discipline, such as lying in bed in the morning until late or failing to comply with some petty Squadron instruction. It was a matter of continual complaint by this ignorant man, that the Orderly-Room Staff were privileged, as indeed we were. He was wholly unable to appreciate that the efficient management of the Regiment depended upon the Clerks being reasonably contented and happy, as we worked very hard for our few privileges.

During the period in Egypt, Mr. Adams had been recommended for and awarded the British Empire Medal. After this, the boys in the Orderly Room referred to him as “BEM”, which became a nickname for him. I was quite contemptuous of this award; considering it to be merely another blast of hot-air from the Monarchist Establishment. Many years later, this minor point was brought home remarkably to me, as evidence of survival. Not that, at that time, I personally needed such evidence: merely the pleasure of knowing that Mr. Adams had returned to let me know that he was still around and still interested in what I was doing. At a Spiritualist meeting in Wollongong, Australia, forty years later, I was asked by the speaker if I knew anyone named “Adam”. I replied in the affirmative. She then described him as being, “In uniform” and pointing to his breast, as to a medal. This latter aspect had wholly eluded me, at the time, until I recalled the matter of the BEM. I was very pleased to receive this communication, as I had developed a genuine affection for Eric, during the years with the Regiment: a regard, which I would only reluctantly have admitted. That my feeling was reciprocated, I only really discovered, when, on climbing aboard a truck for the trip back to England, I said “good-bye” to Eric, with a genuine and mutual regret.

But the time had passed and I was close to departure for home.

The Korean War had brought a declaration from the War Ministry that those serving as Regulars in the Forces, would be required to serve an extra year, which had greatly annoyed me. Still, there was nothing that I could do about that. It was, however, with much joy that I packed my kit for the journey home. I sailed away from Benghazi one bright, sunny day in June l95l, looking forward to the return to Salford and Teresa.

### Chapter 74

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### Back to Blighty

On my return to England, I was posted, first, to the Armoured Corps Depot, Bovington, Dorset: from where I was sent on three months leave. I arrived home to find Salford little changed during the three years of my absence. I promptly visited Teresa, who, although pleased to see me, was reluctant to enter into any formal commitment. She had been keeping company for some time with another lad, named “Ernie”, although I did not discover the extent of her involvement with him. He was taller than me; fresh-faced and a decent type of Salford lad. I had about Eighty Pounds in cash, when I returned home, so that I was able to enjoy myself, at least until my money had been spent. I took up cycling again and went Youth-Hostelling in North Wales.

I also spent a lot of time, hanging-around, drinking, and generally indulging myself. My brother, George, had married and was the father of a boy, aged about three years, David, and a baby girl, Barbara, now aged 11 months. George was still living at home with Dad and Margery, together with his wife and children.

It should be mentioned that, whilst I had been overseas, the family had exchanged houses with Mrs. Dove, who had wished to convert the shop premises to the purposes of a “Fish and Chip” shop. Her previous premises had been demolished, to make way for a new block of high-rise flats. The new flats, which were named after the post-war Prime Minister, Clement Atlee, were built on the site of a large Georgian house, which had, for many years, been a tenement dwelling for a number of poor families, known as Tatton’s Yard. The stables surrounding the house had been used for garaging cars and, partly, as an Ice Works.

A corner of the stables, facing upon Duncan Terrace, had been converted to a “Fish and Chip” Shop, the business having been purchased, prior to the War, by Mrs. Dove: who also conducted a rather dingy corner-shop on the opposite corner of Lord Nelson Street. Mrs. Dove was a large, fat lady, who had not impressed me, greatly, during the years of our acquaintance. Her grocer’s shop was to the rear of our hardware, “Pot-shop”. Mrs. Dove had not kept a particularly “spruce” establishment. Our family had never purchased much from her, in the way of groceries, except, perhaps, the odd bottle of milk. However, her “chip-shop” was well-maintained and clean. Once or twice a week, prior to the advent of the War, we children had enjoyed an evening meal, consisting of a pennyworth of chips and a pennyworth of peas. This provided a cheap and satisfying meal for us. Occasionally, as we grew older, this would be supplemented by a piece of fish, either Silver-Hake or Haddock, which cost 3d a serving, or Cod, which was 2d. During the War, of course, there were shortages of cooking oil, which meant that such establishments only opened for business on certain days of the week. Fortunately, there was plenty of fish and potatoes, so that a meal of fish and chips was usually obtainable throughout the War, at one chip-shop or another.

### Chapter 75

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### 91 Duncan Terrace

The Roberts’ family now lived in a three-bedroom terraced house at 91 Duncan Terrace, Salford 5, which was just across the street from Dad’s old workshop. He had given up Cobbling, by this time, and was permanently employed by Metropolitan-Vickers Electrical Co. as a “Pusher” or Production Clerk. His job was to chase Orders for his superiors. He remained at this job until he was retired at age 65yrs. Had he been permitted to stay-on for a few more weeks, he would have qualified for a Twenty-year Pension from the Company. However, this privilege was denied him, although he had served the Company, conscientiously, during his years at Trafford Park.

What had been the parlour in the new home was now filled with George’s junk from his workshop and the yard, so that this room was uninhabitable. George and Margery endeavoured to persuade their father to sell his boot-repairing machinery, which would have brought him a reasonable sum of money. However, he refused to do so, in the fatuous belief that he might need to return to his trade, at some time in the future. As a result, the equipment gradually deteriorated and rusted, to the stage where it had to be thrown out, as being of no use to anyone.

The family, therefore, lived principally in the Living-Room, to which a small scullery was attached. Behind was the usual yard, flagged and surrounded by a high wall. There was a small garden at the rear, on which George erected a tiny greenhouse. He produced a few vegetables and tomatoes here during the Summer season. In front of the house there was also a small garden, in which George grew annual flowers, to provide some colour in this drab neighbourhood. Upstairs, were two large and one small bedrooms. Downstairs there was a cellar, the brick walls of which had originally been white-washed but were now sadly deteriorated. Opposite the stairs was the coal-hole, separated by a wall from the cellar proper . Most cellared houses had a round iron grid below the front step. This was about 18 inches in diameter and could be removed from inside, to permit coal bags to be emptied into the cellar from the street, thus avoiding the obvious risk of accident, if they had to be carried through the house on the Coal-Merchant’s back. In the cellar proper there was a table for scrubbing clothes, a fireplace and copper-boiler. It was very damp, as the only fire ever lit here was to heat water for the boiler. I reflected that the cellar may well have been a place of abode for people, when the house was first built: when folk, who could afford nothing better, might rent a cellar, in which to lay their heads. If a fire had been lit, it would not perhaps have been so cold and damp; but still, hardly the place for anyone to dwell; as little daylight entered from the tiny cellar-window. A tin-bath hung upon a hook on one wall of the cellar. This was used, occasionally, by family members, although we found it more convenient to attend the Public Wash-house nearby. Bathing in this tin-bath was by no means as comfortable as the facilities at the Washhouse, as even when one lay in hot deep suds, the cold could be keenly felt, rising from the stone flags underneath the bath. This necessitated constant movement to re-warm chilled areas.

The household washing was done in the cellar, by soaking, scrubbing and boiling in a coal-fired copper-boiler; after which it had to be rinsed and mangled by hand. This was hard-labour; later relieved by the modernization of the Hodge Lane Washhouse: the chimney of which towered above the rear yard: belching out soot and smoke over the surrounding houses. Once the modern washing-machines were installed in the Washhouse, it rapidly became a regular place of resort for most of the washerwomen and the occasional washerman, resident in the district. Margery had a machine booked each Saturday morning, when she would do the family washing.

The family now consisted of George Roberts, George (jnr) and Mona, his wife, their two children, Margery and, latterly, myself. Mona did the bulk of the domestic work, as Margery was employed as a Stenographer by the Salford Council. Mona was a rather plain, but lively and intensely vociferous girl, who had spent her working-life as a mill-hand in one of the Salford cotton mills. She was a “sloppy” housekeeper and deficient, in my view, in her standard of child-care.

I did not criticise Mona myself, as there was plenty of this forthcoming from Margery and from Dad, both of whom freely expressed their displeasure. None-the-less, it was convenient for them to have Mona to do the scrubbing and cleaning of the house, quite apart from her minor domestic and maternal shortcomings. As it appeared to me that there was now someone else in the home, who could be criticised, apart from myself, I was not affected unduly by the tensions within the home. In any event, I knew that I was merely “on holiday” and would be posted away in the near future. For her part, Mona could “give” as well as “take” and was very free with her remarks about the shortcomings of her persecutors.

Throughout my holiday, I had continued to press my attentions upon Teresa. I was, therefore, delighted when she indicated to me that she would marry me, in preference to her other suitor: who, perhaps, lacked my aggressive insistence.  He, also, may not have been so keen as I, to enter into the binding commitment of matrimony, although Teresa told me that Ernie had asked her to marry him, on several occasions. I, therefore, returned to the RAC Depot, Bovington, very pleased with myself.

Nephew David at 91 Duncan Terrace Salford,5. Dog: Vicki!



### Chapter 76

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### Cloud’s Hill

I spent some weeks here, working in one of the Depot offices. I was billeted in a large, three-storey Barrack Block, one of several constructed between the wars. They were substantial and spacious, although clearly not designed to provide any measure of comfort for the soldiers. At week-ends, I enjoyed walking through the Dorset countryside and again visited Lulworth Cove.

One crisp Sunday morning, when I was feeling rather bored with myself, I took a walk along the main road, running North from the Camp. There was a tranquillity and calmness prevailing here: the air was cold, fresh and clear. At a point a mile or so from the Depot, I turned off to the right, where a footpath climbed a hill. At the summit I had an excellent view of the surrounding countryside, which was open heath-land; well-suited to Tank-training and, evidently, third-rate agricultural land. I continued-on and, after walking for another half-mile, descended by the path leading back to the road. Here I came upon a small and delightfully situated cottage, standing in its own grounds, a short distance from the road. A plaque above the door of the cottage, which was then unoccupied, informed me that this had been the last place of residence of T.E. Lawrence, (Lawrence of Arabia), who had been killed whilst travelling by motor-cycle to Bovington Camp, a year or so prior to World War II. I was intrigued by this discovery, although it had no particular significance for me, at that time. I had enjoyed my walk, which had given a boost to my rather flagging spirits. At this point in my life, there was little to which I could look forward, with confidence.

On Saturday nights, a Dance was held at the Town Hall at Poole, which in those far-off days, was still a charming, unspoilt, sea-side town. On the quayside, there were some fine old buildings and in the town itself, a medieval Guildhall. It was pleasant to meander down the main street, which had all the character of a fishing-village. A bus service conveyed the soldiers from the Camp and for those lads who were able to dance, an enjoyable evening was assured. I attended several of these Saturday-night dances during my stay at the Depot, usually dancing with one young lady, in particular, who in common with many of the local girls, came into the town from outlying country villages. This young lady, whose name I no longer recall, was petite in stature, being about 5ft 2 inches in height and an excellent dancer. She was dark-haired and attractive; with a fair complexion. I felt that she was attracted to me but, in common with many lads stationed at Bovington, I was only on a temporary posting and there was really no opportunity for involvement in any deep emotional way; even if I had been so inclined. Bus timetables and the distance between Poole and Bovington Camp, meant that couples who met at these country functions would need to be particularly determined to maintain or renew acquaintances made at such gatherings. My renewed commitment to Teresa meant that I was reluctant to enter into relationships with other girls. I felt sorry for my friend, as I realized that she was probably seeking a romantic attachment. Many of the boys, who attended the Saturday-night Dance at Poole, would have been in a similar position to me: the few weeks of the posting to Bovington passing, before there was an opportunity to forge lasting ties.

Twenty-eight years later, I returned to Dorset with Teresa and our two youngest children, Ted and Margaret. I was wholly unable to recognize this once appealing sea-side town. We drove along in the Kombi-Van, which I had purchased for the holiday, and as we approached Poole, observed on either side, rows of high-rise buildings, where previously there had been fields and meadows. In place of the picturesque houses and pretty public park, fronting the main street, there rose a monstrous shopping complex of concrete; rising several stories above street-level. The Guildhall has been preserved, submerged in piles of architectural junk. As I had enthusiastically described Poole as a quaint and picturesque village, to my wife and children, they were both surprised and disappointed, at being unable to detect anything remotely suggestive of “charm” about the place. I could not identify anything I had known in l951. Admittedly, on the quayside there remained a vestige of the fishing-town of my youth, but little else to remind me of the pleasant hours spent here on the Summer Evenings, long ago. This was “progress!”

Self at Bovington, l951: 

### Chapter 77

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### Carlisle

Several weeks after my return to Bovington, I was posted to the 67th Training Regiment, RAC, at Carlisle.

At Hadrian’s Camp I was lodged in a barrack-room, a short distance from the “C” Squadron Office, in which I became the Squadron Clerk. Being still a Corporal, I had a small room of my own and had nothing to do with the other occupants of the hut. My Company Commander was Captain T.W. Muir, a lively and intelligent but rather shallow man, who is chiefly remembered by me for a habit, which he had, of exclaiming of anyone who did not meet with his approval: “He wants a squib up his arse!” He was tall, with dark hair and complexion to match. Although a Scot, he spoke with the refined accent of the Public-School-educated Englishman. He treated me fairly and seemed to appreciate my competence. My duties here, were not nearly so onerous as those in my last Regiment and I settled down well to the easy routine of life. Work finished about 4pm each day, following which, if in funds, I would either visit the Canteen or go into town for a beer. There was an excellent NAAFI Canteen in Carlisle, just up the main street from the Bridge. The hotels in Carlisle were State-owned and rather sterile affairs: clean and well-maintained but devoid of the hustle and bustle to be found in many privately-owned establishments. Actually, I approved of the State-owned Pubs and thought that there ought to be a great many more of them about. In addition to local ales, they sold “Draught Bass!”, which I considered to be by far the best beer obtainable in England at that time. This is still an excellent brew, although there may be one or two other Burton Ales, that can surpass it for ale-excellence.

Suffice it to say, at this period in my life, it was, perhaps, only the enforced limitation of funds that prevented me from becoming thoroughly addicted to drink. I found myself looking forward to the end of the working day, so that I could dash off to the Pub to partake of a pint or two of my favourite liquor. This was in retrospect a “bad sign”. It transpired that I did not become an “Alcoholic” and for some years, following-upon my marriage, I abstained completely from booze.

Carlisle, as is well-known, is situated on the North-Western extremity of England, close to the border with Scotland, on the Solway Firth. It boasts a Norman Castle and a Cathedral of equal antiquity. There is a well-preserved and ancient Tithe Barn within the Cathedral close. A portion of the city walls still remains, to remind the visitor of its once precarious situation, adjacent to the lands of the once barbarous and warlike, but still parochial, Scots. Its population consists mainly, of the descendants of Danish and Norwegian warriors, who sailed their Viking Long-Boats up the rivers of the North of England, slaughtering and enslaving the indigenous inhabitants, as they proceeded. There was an extensive trade in British slaves: many of whom ended up as eunuchs in the seraglios of Eastern Potentates.

The people of Carlisle had adopted the clannish insularity of the Lowland Scots, their neighbours. Like the latter, they bitterly resented the intrusion into their territory of the “alien” Southerner. The natural result of this attitude was that “foreigners” found it difficult to enter into the social and cultural life of the Carlisle Community. The soldiers had no difficulty, for they had their own community within the Camp and had no need to mix with the locals. The married soldiers were usually paid a living-wage, unlike many of the civilian workers, whose pay levels reflected the general economic principle that the farther away from London, one resides, the less his or her weekly wage-packet will be. Thus, the wage for a male Clerk or Shop-Assistant in Carlisle would, in l951, have averaged Five-pounds ten-shillings per week, as against Ten pounds or more in London and perhaps six or seven-pounds in Manchester. This suited employers very well, who could thus hire labour at the cheapest possible rate. As Carlisle was a small town, there was little work available and plenty of willing-hands to do the job, for minimum wages. However, I was not immediately concerned about the prospect of obtaining work in Carlisle, as I still had twelve months or so to serve, to complete my Army Service.

### Chapter 28

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### Matrimony

As Teresa had agreed to marry me, I arranged to take some leave, which would allow me time to return to Salford; go through the nuptial process and spend ten days in Keswick, on Honeymoon. I had, by now, expended what funds I had accumulated, whilst overseas, so that I had to marry on a shoestring budget. The marriage itself was a rush affair, with only two of Teresa’s relatives present to witness the ceremony: hastily performed by a crabbed Irish Priest, Father Delaney. He suspiciously examined the “Certificate of Baptism”, which I produced, as evidence of my conversion to the “Faith”, and, apparently, accepted its authenticity, as he made no further demur. He emphatically told me that, “in this Church there is no Di-vorce: no Di-vorce!”, almost as if he expected me to be knocking on his door the following week, demanding an annulment. The ceremony itself took two or three minutes, and was performed by Father Delaney, in truncated Latin, at an incredible rate. It was, however, sufficient to complete the nuptial tie: following which we repaired to the Sacristy to sign the Marriage Register. At this point, the Priest asked me to pay ten-shillings by way of fee; but I declined, on the grounds that I had already paid this sum, which Father Delaney well knew. I felt that the “old fox” was trying to get a second bite at the cherry. The plain fact was that I was almost penniless, having only the sum of Ten-Pounds, with which to pay the Boarding-house keeper during the honeymoon. The witnesses to the wedding, were John Granger, boy-friend to Teresa’s younger sister, Christine and Elizabeth, (Betty) Teresa’s older sister. There was no “reception”: not even a photograph of this unhistoric event. After the ceremony, I took my bride back to Duncan Terrace; where we remained until the time came for us to catch the late train to Keswick.

Did ever a marriage have such an inauspicious beginning? My father affirmed that we would not last together for 6 months and this was the general concensus amongst the family members, on both sides. However, in spite of this handicap, our marriage was to last for over fifty years and, were it not for the fact that every story must come to an end, might last indefinitely. This is not to suggest that the course of true love, in this case, always ran free from the stresses and strains of matrimony: quite the reverse.

I had arranged to catch the early morning train, to save on Boarding-house fees for an extra night. The steam-train chugged leisurely through the morning mist, which covered the vales of the Lake District, and did not seem to be in a hurry to reach its destination. Rabbits were seen here and there, quietly feeding in the deep green meadows. We newly-weds arrived in Keswick at about 6am and carried our bags to the Guesthouse, which was on the main street, in the centre of town.

The landlady had been apprised of our early arrival and was expecting us; showing us to our room. It was here that Teresa proved, quite conclusively, to me that she had kept her resolve to retain her virginity until marriage: which is not to suggest that such things are necessarily so important. At the time of which we speak, chastity was still prized, as an essential prerequisite in a bride. Not so today, except in more conservative societies. Promiscuity is, nowadays, increasingly hazardous, having regard to the risk of contracting sexually transmitted disease, so that the virginity of either party is conducive towards the health and happiness of both husband and wife.

We paid for our lodgings, in advance, which left us with little in the way of funds; thereby removing the temptation to indulge in riotous extravagance on this honeymoon. Instead, we spent the time, between meals, in roving the hills and by-ways of Keswick and Borrowdale: amid some of the loveliest country in England. In those days, Keswick was only half its present size: the Tourist-boom having resulted in a considerable extension of its boundaries. On returning to the town, in 1979, after an absence of almost thirty-years, I hardly recognized the place at which I had spent my first few days of married life. The encroachments of “Tourism” have destroyed and defaced much that is lovely in Britain. ( Famous beauty spots, which once were open to the world for the mere effort of travelling thereto, are now enclosed by high wire fences; admission to be obtained after payment of an extortionate fee. This in places like “High Force” or the “Swallow Falls”? It is outrageous! God’s free gifts to humanity, appropriated and exploited in such a fashion! )

Notwithstanding our penurious condition, we enjoyed our holiday; treading the footpaths of Borrowdale or wandering nearby fells.

I had arranged for accommodation for myself and Teresa in lodgings with a Mrs. Grogan, an elderly Carlisle lady, whose family had lived in the district for generations. Now that I was married, I had the right to live outside Camp and also received an additional allowance, to enable me to support my wife. This I was able to do quite well, although Teresa herself was keen to get a new job, having given up her last position to come to Carlisle with me.

### Chapter 79

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### Lodgings

I travelled to Camp by bicycle each day; the distance being about two miles. Hadrian’s Camp was situated on the Brampton Road, on the Northern bank of the River Eden and occupied at least a part of the site of the Roman Wall: hence its name. There was no visible evidence of the Wall at this spot. I was delighted to be able to leave the oppressive atmosphere of the Camp; to lead a more normal life in lodgings, although this itself had drawbacks: one had to tolerate the unreasonable demands of landladies.

Mrs. Grogan lived in a three-storey terraced house, in one of the inner streets of Carlisle. Her home, which she had purchased for Four-hundred and Fifty pounds some years previously, was comfortable. The lady herself was now elderly and, occasionally, somewhat irritable. Whilst she was prepared to take-in lodgers, to supplement her Age-Pension; she exercised a tyrannical control over household affairs. The living-room was cluttered with the usual bric-a-brac of the Victorian era, which still formed the standard decor in many British homes, at this time. Teresa and I had one bedroom on the first floor and slept in a large double-bed, furnished with a very comfortable feather-mattress.

After several months here and following upon a disagreement between my landlady and me, we moved to a room in an old terraced cottage on the Brough road. The house was a tiny two-bedroom, but comfortable place, owned by a middle-aged couple, Tom and Thelma Redgewell. They had managed to produce a small child, Tony, then aged five years. The husband worked at the Camp Orderly-Room as a Civilian Clerk. “Reg” was a man of short stature, robust build and medium complexion. In temperament he was stable and reliable, although in no way could he be regarded as being of an adventurous disposition. His wife, on the other hand, was a skinny, distinctly flat-chested woman, of a frugal and somewhat hysterical temperament.

From time to time, I had occasion to visit the Orderly-Room and speak to Reg in connection with my duties. One afternoon I went to the Orderly-Room to collect some papers, which Reg handed to me. During our conversation, I told Reg that we were not particularly happy in our present lodgings. “Well, if you find yourselves in difficulties, I suppose Thelma and I could put you-up for a few weeks, until you find something more suitable.” I responded: “Well, talk it over with your wife and see what she says.”

It was not long after this that I had “words” with my landlady and told her that Teresa and I would be finding other lodgings. I, therefore, made arrangements with Reg for us to move into the Redgewell home on the week-end. The arrangement was that Thelma would do the cooking for us, as the house was too small for us to live together on any other basis. For a few weeks, things went tolerably well.

Thelma was extremely neurotic as a mother. Meal times were a literal scream, so far as I was concerned. Little Tony was a fussy eater, which is not surprising, in view of his mother’s limited ability, in the culinary department. He manipulated his mother with consummate skill, on these occasions. The child knew that he could get all his own way, by simply refusing to eat anything that did not appeal to him. His mother, instead of leaving him to eat, or not to eat, insisted on feeding him herself: spooning up his food and offering it to him with motherly entreaties. “Come, Tony darling, eat your mashed potato, there’s a dear!” The child’s father sat impotently by, whilst we ate our meal, in amused anticipation. Tony sat silently with folded arms. His delicate pale face immobile. “Come darling Tony-Wonsy, please, please eat your potato! Just for mammy!” implored the anxious parent. No response from the child. The hitherto well-behaved mother now “blew her top!”. Her face reddened and she, suddenly, came to life: leaping from her chair; “You horrid little monster!” she screamed, “eat your dinner at once! How dare you treat your mother in this way!” She banged the spoon down on the table in front of the child and burst into tears.” “Oh! Whatever am I going to do with this horrible child!?” She now sat down, exhausted and wept. Tom now patted her arm saying, “There, there, Thelma, don’t take on so: leave him alone and he will eat what he wants.” After another minute, Thelma recovered herself and, now feeling guilty over her recent outburst, placed her arm around Tony’s back and kissed him on the cheek, saying, “Mother is sorry for shouting at her darling baby. We will find something nice for Tony to have instead of Potato.” She now took the plate away and returned with a piece of apple-pie, which the child consumed, with alacrity.

This delicate little boy was worshipped by his mother, but she was wholly incapable of rational behaviour, so far as he was concerned. Her ideas as to what constituted a “square meal” were limited, as the family seemed to subsist, largely, upon a diet of baked-beans-on-toast. This did not impress me greatly, as I had always enjoyed good and varied food.

Reg was the proud possessor of an “Allotment”, which, to the uninitiated, is a small area of land, set aside by the Local Authority, usually on the outskirts of a town or on wasteland and divided into lots. These are let out to “gardeners”, who wish to get away from their wives and families for a hour or so, now and again. Small sheds or greenhouses are erected on the allotments, ostensibly to store gardening tools or to grow tomatoes but, essentially, to provide a refuge or hide-away in cold or inclement weather, in which the allotment-holders can spend their time, when not digging or weeding. This was a great thing for Reg, as it enabled him to escape his wife’s constant nagging, without invoking the suspicion that he found her companionship to be intolerable.

Teresa was successful in obtaining casual work at the Carlisle Electricity Authority, although this was only relief work, whilst one of the female employees was away on leave. She later obtained full-time work as a Secretary for the Manager of the Deaf and Dumb Society. He was a man of about forty years of age and married. This did not prevent him from making tender approaches to Teresa, which she tactfully rebuffed. Perhaps the fact that she was obviously pregnant aroused his latent sexuality.

Teresa enjoyed working at the Deaf Society and her experiences there, taught her something of the problems of handicapped people. She remained in this job until advancing pregnancy compelled her to leave

During the course of my duties, I became acquainted with one or two of the Cavalry Officers stationed at the Camp. They were principally from the Royal Horse Guards: “The Elite!”. My own Company Commander was, at one stage, Major D.J. St. M. Taber, a very grand fellow, judging by his title and most considerate to me. He was an excellent officer. Another Officer, with whom I established a cordial relationship, was Lieutenant Borwick, the Assistant Adjutant. This Officer suggested to me that I should re-enlist for a further term and that he would pull the necessary strings, to enable me to be transferred to the Royal Horse Guards. This would probably have involved a move to London. However, I hated Army Life and, in any event, I was apprehensive that I might re-enlist and still not be certain of such a posting. I, therefore, refused to consider the offer, which was, in its way, quite a compliment to me. I reflected that I might have been the shortest “Guardsman” ever, had this move eventuated. I was precisely 5 feet 5 inches in height in my stockinged-feet.

It became clear to me, whilst stationed here, that these really well-bred people were not generally so conceited as those Officers who came from lower down the Social Scale: who were obliged to make themselves obnoxious, in order to prove their superiority.

The petty irritations of the military life were demonstrated to me one day, when I discovered that a colleague, a Corporal Black, who was a very decent young man, had been charged with a breach of General Regulations, in that he had disobeyed a Regimental Order, requiring all personnel who resided outside Camp in Married Quarters, to attend the Camp by 8 o’clock each morning. The RSM had evidently observed that I, whom he mistook for Cpl. Black, was regularly in breach of this requirement: as I was usually half an hour or so late each day. The RSM had mistakenly charged the wrong man. I was well aware of this mistake but it did not directly affect me and I assumed that I would probably be charged with the misdemeanour, when the RSM discovered his error. However, the charge against Cpl. Black was duly dismissed and I, myself, heard no more of the matter.

Whilst I was stationed at Carlisle, I had an opportunity to try my hand at Rock-climbing. Several members of the Carlisle Rock-Climbing Club arranged to take a group of soldiers to Great Gable, to introduce us to the Sport. I joined the party and spent several Saturdays engaged in this activity. A special bus was laid-on, to take us to the head of Borrowdale. We then took a footpath to climb the fells to Great Gable. Once at the Slabs, we were initiated into rudimentary safety and other procedures, before being taken aloft, under the supervision of Alec Wilson, the leader of the group. I took to this Sport with a natural flair. When we were climbing the slabs, Alec said to me, “You are doing quite well: have you done any climbing before?” “No, this is my first attempt at Rock Climbing.”

Over the next few weeks, we attempted the more difficult climbs and, eventually, progressed to Nape’s Needle, a narrow pinnacle of rock: seating ourselves together on the square yard or so of level stone at the point of the needle.

Quite apart from the actual climbing, the ascent to the mountain was enjoyable, although strenuous. The mountain scenery was inspiring. Once upon the highlands, one enjoyed a prospect of natural beauty, unsurpassed in any part of the British Isles. Great Gable stands at the head of Wastdale, with Scafell Pike, the highest “mountain” in England across the valley. These hills, although not so magnificent as those of the Alps or some other mountain ranges throughout the world, have a charm and grandeur of their own, which has established the English Lake District as one of the world’s great beauty spots.

One of the other NCO’s, a Cpl. Martin, possessed a wreck of a motor-bike and side-car which he wanted to be rid of. He suggested to me that I could have it for Ten Pounds, as it only needed a little work on the motor and a side-car body. I knew nothing, whatsoever, of internal-combustion engines and thought that this was a good proposition. Full of optimism, I paid over the Ten Pounds and arranged for the Camp Carpenter to knock-up a rudimentary side-car body. The bike would not work but, nothing deterred, and trusting the word of my colleague, I pushed the bike the two miles to Carlisle, to the workshop of an elderly man named, Tom Kerr, who was a motor-mechanic. Tom inspected the wreck: discovered that there were no valves in the engine and declared that it was irreparable. However, he had a 1930 model BSA 350cc Sloper, which he had been working-on and I could have that for Thirty Pounds. This was at a time when this sum would have formed a deposit on a house for myself and Teresa. However, at this stage in our marriage, Teresa had not yet learned to put her foot down. I, thereupon, committed myself to the purchase of the bike from Tom Kerr and duly paid the money over, receiving, in return, a motor-cycle which was worth, perhaps, Ten Pounds, at the upper limit of its real value. I was delighted at the prospect of a greater degree of mobility than that afforded by the bicycle.  Teresa was well-advanced in pregnancy and I was about to leave the Army, for good.

Whilst undergoing my medical examination, prior to discharge, the Doctor said to me, “You won’t get Seven Pounds Ten shillings a week in Civilian life, you know.” I realized this was true, when I tried to get work in the Carlisle district.

### Chapter 80

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### Career Opportunities

Although there was work available in Carlisle, it was usually of a menial nature and was not generally sought-after by the indigenous population. I was worried at the prospect of being unemployed and was prepared to accept any type of work, until I could obtain suitable employment.

I worked for one day in the Carlisle Dairy. This work entailed the handling and emptying of milk churns; an art in itself; followed by the dismantling and sterilization of the plant and equipment used for Pasteurising the milk. As the pipes, which I was required to dismantle and later re-assemble, were about seven feet from the floor, I spent a considerable amount of time on my toes. At the end of the day, I was determined not to return to this work.

My next job was as a labourer for three weeks at the Annan ICI Factory. I commenced work daily at 7.30am, riding the twenty or so miles from Carlisle by motor- bike. Strong winds, gusting up the Solway Firth, made riding hazardous. On windy days, I found myself being blown to the incorrect side of the highway, which was a narrow, two-way tarmacadam road. On arriving at Annan, I joined my gang and worked until 5pm, with an hour for lunch, usually emptying railway wagons of bags of lime or cement. The work was heavy and continuous. I also spent several days, in company with one or two colleagues, using a Jack-Hammer to demolish brickwork, inside acid-kilns. As overtime was available, I worked steadily for three solid weeks at this job, earning about nine or ten pounds a week.

One of my workmates was a German, named Walter, who had been a Prisoner-of-War and had, somehow, managed to stay in Scotland, on the termination of hostilities. He spoke English with a Scottish accent, which sounded rather strange to me. One or two of my mates were in a similar position to myself, in that they were clerical workers or shop-assistants, who had never been accustomed to work of this nature. There were several Scottish fellows in our gang, local Dumfrieshire men. They resented the presence of the Sassenach foreigners, whom they considered to be: “stealing the bread out of the mouths of Scots’ bairns!” They were ignorant, circumspect and bigoted to a degree: reflecting the parochialism of the Lowland Scot.

One day I noticed an advertisement in the local paper for a Window-Cleaner with the Carlisle Mental Hospital. I did not particularly relish the prospect of doing this type of work, but thought that this might be an opening to better things and applied for the job. Although the personnel officer thought that I was too “well-qualified” to carry out such menial work, I got the job. It was evident when I arrived at the hospital that the previous window-cleaner had either been too lazy or too frightened to do his job properly, as there were many very dirty windows in the establishment. This was not surprising in some ways, as the buildings were generally of three storeys. As each level had a ceiling height of about fifteen-feet, the third-storey was a considerable height above the ground. This did not disturb me, unduly, as my recent Rock-climbing experiences had accustomed me to heights. The ladder used for cleaning these high windows was of the wheelbarrow type, with two large wheels to aid the movement of the ladder. There was nothing in the nature of a safety harness to secure the window-cleaner, at great heights. However, I did my best to clean the windows thoroughly, commencing, of course with the Administration Office windows. I was left largely to my own devices, it being apparent that I was not “loafing”, on the job, although it must be admitted that I frequently repaired to the laundry, where I was able to regale myself with mugs of tea and slices of bread and jam, to my heart’s content. Here I found a number of kindly-disposed laundry-maids, who made me welcome, there being no other relatively comfortable place, in which I could take my refreshment.

I was interested in the behaviour of the patients at the hospital. They suffered varying degrees of mental illness, from the severe manic-depressive to the mildly schizoid or alcoholic patients. The former would sit silently in one place for hours on end; showing no inclination to communicate with anyone. In common with Mental Hospitals, universally, at this time, many patients had spent years in the place, when they, perhaps, would have been better-off leading a normal life in the community. One middle-aged lady had a small area of pavement, as her own personal preserve, which she kept spotless by continuous sweeping; chattering to her imaginary companions, as she busied herself with her broom. Her spot was only a short distance from the laundry entrance. I watched her as I sat enjoying my meal-break and thought to myself that she appeared to be perfectly content with herself, in her busy, imaginary world. Sometimes, as I cleaned a window on the upper floors, I would engage in conversation with one of the patients who occupied the Wards. It became apparent to me that many were quite rational. One day I caught a glimpse of a young girl, about fifteen years of age. She lay on her bed, wailing continuously and would not be comforted. One of the male Wardsmen informed me that she was incurably “Manic Depressive”.

After some weeks on this job, there came a time when I decided that I had done enough Window-cleaning to last me a lifetime. There was little clerical work available in Carlisle and wages were very poor. Had I been able to get work in the town, I would have been paid about Five-pounds ten-shillings per week. However, work was available as a Bus-Conductor with the Ribble Bus Co. I applied-for and obtained this job, which involved long hours, but in which the work was congenial and the time passed remarkably well. The pay was good, as penalty rates and overtime brought the wages to a reasonable level.

Most of the bus-runs were confined to the city districts but there were quite a few country trips to outlying towns and villages, which passed through some very pretty countryside. These took much longer to complete than the town runs and demanded less effort than the busier City trips, most of which kept the Conductor busy, taking fares and supervising passengers entering and leaving the vehicle. I remained in this job until my wife and I decided to return to Salford.

After residing with Reg and Thelma for some three months, during which time relations with Thelma inevitably became strained, we moved to other lodgings: situated in a Council-Housing estate, at the home of a Mrs. Reid. We were allotted the main bedroom; which we converted to a bed-sitter. Our landlady was a widow, who had a nine year old son, Peter. He was a good-natured lad and he and I got on very well together. This was his mother’s first venture into taking-in Lodgers. Mrs. Reid was about the middle-age, of medium build and height, with greying hair. She had given birth to Peter rather late in life, her husband having died during the War.

### Chapter 81

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### Motherhood

Teresa, at this time, was well-advanced in pregnancy, although this did not prevent her from wall-papering our room and making it very comfortable. Our landlady was not impressed with me; considering me to be overbearing and selfish, which, indeed, was the case. I was also financially irresponsible. In my favour, it must be affirmed that I had largely discontinued my drinking habits and spent most of my spare time with Teresa.

One evening, Teresa came into labour and was admitted to the Carlisle General Hospital. After about thirty-six hours in labour, she gave birth to a boy; a tiny baby, weighing only four pounds, fourteen ounces. However, he was complete in all respects and quite robust, for such a small child; although regarded by the Medical Staff as a premature baby. Teresa and I affirmed that he had been carried for the full period of nine months. Teresa had been a girl of very slight build and it was, probably, best for her and the child that he was only small. As it was, she required stitches, following the birth. I stopped my bus in the Town Centre, on the afternoon of 29th October l952, and telephoned the hospital: to be told the news that I was a father. I was, of course, very proud of myself and Teresa.

Whilst Teresa was in hospital, relations between our landlady and me soured so much, that I determined to find other lodgings. I could not pin-point the precise reason for Mrs. Reid’s aversion from myself, but it became obvious that I, at least, was not welcome there. One of my workmates, a driver named Andy Burns, had just been allocated a new Council House on the Southern outskirts of Carlisle. Andy suggested that my family and I could have their spare room. This seemed to ”fit the bill” and, in due course, Teresa, I and little John, (named after his father), moved-in with Andy and his rather “sluggish” wife, Ethel. These people had three small children of their own. Andy was an easy-going and rather weak character, who left the management of the household affairs completely to his wife. She was an indifferent mother and an incompetent housewife; bent more upon the pleasures, than the responsibilities of life. At this period she was carrying-on a largely illusory, but highly romantic, relationship with a Polish gentleman, who lived in a Council house immediately to the rear of her own home. It amused me to see her preening herself and posing for her enamorato, before the large window, which opened on to the rear garden: through which he could gaze upon her “loveliness” from afar, if so inclined. Andy, perhaps, was aware of this romantic bent in his wife, but could not do much about it, as she was much bigger than him.

The room to which I had brought my wife and child was very damp. The house had been recently built and the walls ran with moisture. There was no fireplace in the room, so I invested in an Aladdin Oil-Heater, which proved to be adequate. Baby had to be well-wrapped and I seemed to have some instinctive ideas about this; enfolding the tiny child snugly in his blankets. Teresa said that I had more idea of this, than she, herself.

The Winter of l952 was severe, with deep snow-drifts blocking roads on many days. I found it to be hazardous when riding my motor-bike to work, at four o’clock in the morning, to commence early shift. Several times I skidded and lost control of the bike but, fortunately, came to no harm. I also had to work outside, in the bitter cold, whenever I needed to repair my motor-bike, which was frequently the case. Still, I was a hardy soul and the discomfort did not cause me undue concern. One afternoon, when I had been working on the motor-cycle, I went to the ground-floor toilet; still holding a spanner, which I dropped, breaking the toilet bowl. As there was another toilet upstairs, this did not matter immediately, but the expense of several pounds in repairs was a severe blow to myself and Teresa, quite apart from the modicum of abuse, forthcoming from Ethel who, herself, conscious of her own domestic shortcomings, was anxious to justify herself, at the expense of her lodgers.

Teresa was an excellent mother to her baby; keeping him spotless and tending to his every need. She took him along regularly to the Baby Health Centre, for his weekly examinations, and saw to it that he was provided with all the necessary dietary supplements. I assisted my wife in the day-to-day care of the child and showed myself a loving and concerned parent. I was not afraid to change nappies or to assist in the feeding and bathing of the baby. I also helped my wife with the laundry, washing and ironing nappies, as required.

### Chapter 82

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### Religion

There were two Spiritualist Churches in Carlisle, in those days; the National Union Church and the Christian-Spiritualist Church. Both were located in the central part of the town, the latter occupying a large upper-room in the West-Walls. We, periodically, went along to each of these establishments. The National Union Church rented one or two smallish rooms on the third floor of one of the old buildings, close to the Town Centre. Services were held there on Sundays and once or twice during the week. There was no emphasis on any particular form of doctrine. The Christian-Spiritualist Church, on the other-hand, was conducted on the basis that Jesus of Nazareth was quite distinctly, the Son of God and entitled to acknowledgement, as such. The hymns that were sung at these meetings were the traditional Non-conformist hymns from Sankey’s Songs and Solo’s; many of which, although doctrinaire, are lively and inspiring. On Saturday nights, an Open-Circle was held at this Church. As I was interested in the development of Spiritual-gifts, I took Teresa along to these meetings, at which those present formed a large circle. The meeting commenced with an hymn, sung in a lively manner by the congregation. There was a devout opening prayer, followed by a further hymn and a Bible-reading: usually selected wisely from the more Spiritual passages of the New Testament. After an address, which often flowed “inspirationally” from one of the Speakers, the meeting was thrown open for those present who wished to participate. Thereupon, anyone, who may have felt that he or she had a contribution to make to the Service, was free to speak of his or her experiences, or to express personal feelings. Thus, the meeting passed usually in an atmosphere of devotion and edification. I myself had no experiences at these meetings that I could have regarded as being of a “psychic” nature, except on one occasion, when I felt a sudden rush of “Power” and shook violently. This was the first experience I had of the “power” of the Spirit, since returning from Overseas. Apart from this manifestation, I had no other perceptions that evening of an unusual nature. Nor, indeed, did I have further experiences during our stay in Carlisle.

During one Sunday service at this Church, we witnessed an inspired address, given by one of the principle lady members, on the subject of the text, “I, if I be lifted up from the Earth, will draw all men unto me”. This passage is to be found in the New Testament, John Chapter 12, Verse 32. The substance of the address was in denial of the doctrines of The Fall and The Vicarious Atonement and an affirmation of the Speaker’s belief that the Crucifixion of Jesus was necessary to draw the attention of the world to the validity of his teachings and as a demonstration of his confidence in the love and power of God. The address was delivered with a loftiness of concept and nobility of delivery, which enthralled her auditors. Its source was, unquestionably inspirational: suggesting an intelligence, at once, wise, beautiful and refined. The Speaker emphasized the concept of Jesus as an Exemplar, not as a Saviour, in contrast to the generally accepted and traditional belief.

The Pelagian Doctrine is generally accepted as valid amongst thinking Spiritualists, although within the Movement, there are no fixed doctrines. It is basic to the teachings of Spiritualism that within the Movement there can be no rigid teachings, which, in itself, an enlightened attitude, leads to confusion, in practice. There is no limit to the inventive capacity of individuals, when the subject turns to religious belief. This is particularly true in the case of the “Occult” practices.

The National Spiritualist Church, at Carlisle was dominated, at this time, by a well-to-do lady, named Mrs. Davenport. She had been appointed to the position of Secretary of the Church Committee, which gave her a degree of control over the activities of the Church. She took no part in the conduct of the Services, except to introduce visiting speakers. It was common practice, in those days, for popular, and often very competent “Mediums”, (persons who are gifted with psychic perception) to tour the Country, making a circuit of the major towns throughout the year. This gave them a steady and perhaps, tax-free, income, as well as providing them with an acceptable life-style. They were paid for their work with a “fee” for the evening Service. In addition, the visitors often gave private “readings” for a further fee, usually about ten-shillings: resulting in a substantial Annual Income for these people. It was, of course, blatant fortune-telling for gain. The practice was justified on the basis that “The labourer is worthy of his hire!”

I was then of the opinion, which I have not seen fit to modify, in the light of life’s experience, that there was some very easy money to be made, by people who might have considered the practice of spiritual gifts to be contaminated by the acquisition of lucre, in this fashion. In effect, it meant that these small Churches were able to employ the services of some very gifted people, amongst whom I remember, Magdalene Kelly and Jack McKay: who would have now passed-on to a higher understanding. In addition to the Sunday Service, Circles were held on certain weekdays, to enable the members to develop their own Spiritual-gifts. Spiritual-healing services were also held periodically. Spiritual healing has always had an important place in the work of the Movement and has received publicity in the Press over the years; both favourable and adverse.

The hymns sung at the “National” Church were from the Spiritualist Hymn-book and eminently suited to the doctrines of that body. Many of these hymns were originally written during the late l9th Century, for the Lyceum Movement, the Spiritualists’ Sunday School, which has been defunct for many years. The Lyceum Manual contained many fine Spiritual Songs which, unfortunately, have been largely forgotten. I, later, learned some of these Lyceum Hymns from a lady, who had herself attended a Lyceum as a child and remembered them. The tunes were lively and melodious; in contrast to some of the “Modern” songs, of a fundamentalist flavour, which have become popular in recent years, as a result of the spread of “T.V. Religion” from the U.S.A. This type of “Hot-Gospelling” has influenced folk in English-speaking countries elsewhere.

The degree of satisfaction, derived by me from the Services at this Church, varied in accordance with the capacity of the Speakers: which is true of any assembly. Often I returned home convinced that my attendance had been worthwhile. At other times, I was outraged by what I had heard.

Mrs. Davenport had been to London, where she had imbibed the philosophy of the “White-Eagle Lodge”: a fashionable Occult Society. Theosophical doctrines formed the basis of this group, including the idea of Reincarnation. To me this doctrine involved a negation of the idea of the continuity of the personality after death: embracing, as it does, the idea of loss of individual identity. In the Hindu tradition, this idea is carried to ridiculous extremes in the doctrine of the Transmigration of Souls. Controversy surrounding the doctrine has existed in the Spiritualist Movement for practically the whole of its existence, i.e. for over a hundred and fifty years, yet it is only in the last forty years that it has achieved the status of almost an “article of faith”. Such a belief is, fundamentally, materialist in nature, as it acknowledges that only the physical world has enduring reality for us. Hence, the appeal of the idea of a physical re-birth. In addition, there is a further attraction, in the thought that one might be permitted a “second bite at the cherry!”: for instance, one’s personal life might not have been so satisfying: the next time around, it could be much better. Perhaps also, one might enjoy a higher standard of living in the next incarnation, or a more exalted social status.

Mrs. Davenport was convinced that she had been a “Princess” in her previous incarnation. She was so Avant-Garde, that she permitted herself to be taken-in by a fraudulent device: several of which at this time were promoted by, “The Two Worlds”, published in Keighley and circulated mainly in the North of England. The paper had originally been founded by Emma H. Britten: one of the English pioneers of the Spiritualist movement. This paper carried articles and advertisements, supporting claims by persons, who were allegedly engaged in “Advanced Psychic Research!”. They produced, inter-alia, a type of hand-warmer, similar-to and probably adapted-from a simple one-bar radiator which, it was maintained, would assist in the development of Psychic-Gifts. I have no idea how many of these gadgets had been sold, but certainly observed one hopeful individual, who was sitting patiently, in the National Spiritualist Church in Carlisle, warming his hands, in anticipation of great openings. There were one or two other scams of this nature promulgated by this Newspaper at about that time. The “Two- Worlds” was then edited by a person named Thompson, whose office was in Manchester. I was satisfied that, at that time, there were opportunists prepared to capitalise on the gullibility of the general public. Spiritualist literature was produced with a view to the making of money, rather than for the dissemination of spiritual truths. I found it difficult to stomach most of this occult material; together with the glaringly entrepreneurial nature of many of the advertisements, which appeared in the Spiritualist periodicals of the day. I formed the opinion, which over fifty years, I have seen no reason to modify, that much of this publishing capacity was controlled by persons who were only interested in the profits to be made from the distribution of “psychic” papers. During this period, the situation has deteriorated to the stage where “spirituality” has become farcical. All pretence at disinterested altruism has disappeared: if there’s a “Buck” to be made: go for it!

### Chapter 83

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### Back to Salford

My work as a Bus Conductor was interesting in some respects. It entailed shift work, from as early as 5.00am to as late as 11.30pm in the evenings. On occasions, I was called-upon to perform double-shifts, which were not onerous, although time-consuming.  I enjoyed meeting people and the journeys through the surrounding Countryside were often very pleasant indeed. In addition, my wages were adequate and enabled me to support myself and my small family, quite well. However, there was the problem of accommodation and I had not yet realized that, with some small economy, I would have been able to purchase my own home, by saving the necessary deposit. I decided, with Teresa’s agreement, to leave Carlisle and return to Manchester. In some respects, we were both sad to leave this place, situated as it was, close to some of the loveliest countryside in Britain. Teresa, particularly, had made friends with one or two of the local girls. I, as always, had no close male friends, so that there was no heartbreak for me, in returning to Salford.

I applied for a transfer to the Ribble Depot in Manchester and was successful in obtaining a position as a Conductor at that Depot. Thus we returned to Salford; Teresa travelling with Baby John by train, whilst the devoted husband and father loaded all our personal effects on to the motor-cycle and set-off for home. It should be stated that I had swapped my bike for an old motor-cycle and sidecar, a BSA “V” Twin, which was a 1929,1000cc model and quite an antique. The bike had a square petrol-tank, with an adjoining oil-tank and a hand-operated pump, to boost the oil-supply to the engine, when ascending hills. It also had a side-car brake, which made the normally hazardous negotiation of left-hand bends, much easier. It still had some life left in it and was able, with a little coaxing, to get over Shap Fell, South of Carlisle; the major obstacle in the journey of about a hundred and twenty miles to Manchester.

My father and sister were not pleased at the thought of sharing the house with me and my family, but they made no formal objection. There was also no possibility of me obtaining a house for my family, at this time, as housing was extremely difficult to obtain in all the cities of England. George jnr. and Mona had now moved to their own terraced house in Wythenshawe; leaving room for us. The house was large enough for us all and we settled-in without difficulty.

I now worked on the long-distance buses from Manchester to Penrith or to Leeds, in Yorkshire. I enjoyed this work, as there was little to be done, apart from the initial checking or issuing of tickets. At this time, it was still a legal requirement that buses should carry Conductors, for reasons of Public Safety. I might have continued in this position for the rest of my working-life, but I felt that there was little personal satisfaction in being a Ribble Bus-Conductor. I, therefore, sought other employment, as soon as I had adjusted to life in Salford, once more.

Two photo’s of my father, looking up Duncan Terrace and of his small front garden.

All the houses in this picture are now demolished.



### Chapter 34

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### J.& N. Phillip’s

After several months, I applied for and obtained a position as a Warehouseman, at the firm of J.& N. Phillips. This was one of the originally large Manchester firms, which, in better days, had been engaged in a huge Colonial Trade, in what are known overseas as “Manchester” Goods. The firm now was only a “shadow of its former self”. The vast Warehouse was, for the most part, empty, with only a tiny portion of its storage space occupied by the stock-in-trade of Blankets, bedding, etc., which was mainly sold to local Retailers.

My duties were in the “Blanket” section, in the basement of the warehouse. My Departmental Head was an Ex-Lieutenant in the Army, whose name I no-longer remember: about 35 years old; not particularly brilliant but a decent chap. He gave me an outline of the job and introduced me to the two other Staff members.

One was an elderly man who had been with the firm for many years and maintained the Departmental records. The other was a young man about my own age; who had served his two-years National Service with the British Army in Malaya.

There was not a large range of goods here and I had no difficulty in learning my job. The work was hardly laborious and I rather enjoyed my six-months here. There was no prospect of promotion or progression, in this obviously dying trade. I had no difficulty in relating to visiting shop-keepers, most of whom only purchased very small quantities of supplies. Much of the time was spent in moving or storing merchandise, as there were both quiet and busy times. Once goods were selected by a purchaser, they had to be parcelled and dispatched.

### Chapter 85

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### Collyhurst

It soon became apparent to me, that this was a rather sleepy hollow, in which nothing was doing and with no prospect of advancement, in any shape or form. I, therefore, sought other work and obtained a job with a firm called, “John Walton of Collyhurst”; a firm of Dyers and Bleachers. The Dyeworks was situated in the Irk Valley at Collyhurst, a spot which, at some point in the distant past, must have been delightfully beautiful, but in the early l950’s was anything but picturesque. The steep hills on each side of the rivulet were covered in a tattered garment of old and dirty terraced-houses, with not a blade of grass to be seen. The Works occupied about two acres of land on the river itself, a situation originally rendered necessary by the need for huge quantities of water, in the bleaching and dying processes. The supply from the river, which was now a filthy and disgusting sewer, was supplanted by bore-water, pumped-up from deep below the Earth. Indeed, the river itself was so blackened and foul, from the immense quantities of refuse which were daily discharged therein, that the use of such liquid for bleaching or dying would have been unthinkable. The Dyeworks had evidently been here for generations, as much of the equipment, still in use, had been manufactured in the early days of the Industrial Revolution, or so it seemed to me; as I observed the old vats and antiquated bleaching equipment.

On my first morning, at about 8am, I caught the No. 3 bus to the Salford Bus Depot, situated on the Salford side of the River Irwell, which constitutes the boundary between Manchester and Salford. In those far-off days, Salford had its own fleet of green-painted buses; clean and well-maintained and not plastered all over with advertisements, as were the Manchester Buses. In the intervening years, the Salford Corporation foolishly allowed itself to be convinced that its independent Bus Service should be merged with the Manchester Service, thereby depriving its citizens of their own neat and clean vehicles and efficient organization. In addition, its wonderful fleet of electrically powered trams was, at some stage, dispersed and the tram lines ripped out, in the belief that the trams were old-fashioned.

From the Bus Depot, I walked the mile or so to Collyhurst: my route taking me along the bottom of the Irk Valley. There was nothing of a scenic nature remaining here: just a monotonous succession of drab and dirty buildings. At one point on the River Bank stood a forbidding block of tenement-dwellings, erected in the late l9th Century and now a huge filthy hovel, in which resided the poorer section of the local community. On this bitter January morning, I observed a naked child, perhaps 3 years of age, playing on the balcony of its home. A hardy child, indeed! It appeared to be quite oblivious of the fact that the temperature was just above the freezing mark. I wondered what its parents were doing, to permit the little one to wander about in the cold air, in such a condition.

On arrival at the Dyeworks, I reported to the Secretary’s office and spoke to John Walton, the General Manager. John took me to my place of work and introduced me to the Foreman Dyer.

My job was to prepare typewritten instructions for the Dyers and Bleachers, on a daily basis. These were initially prepared in longhand by the Foreman Dyer, Mr. Herbert Clarkson, who was a sweet-natured, elderly man, close to retirement. There was another old Yorkshireman, named Albert Saxon; a quiet, heavily-built man, who was in charge of the Bleaching Department.

Also working, or rather occupied here, was a gentleman named Mr. Bird, whose functions appeared to me to be largely in the nature of a “sinecure”, as he did not seem to be doing anything very much, at any time. His duties were those of a Pusher or Chaser of Orders. Mr. Bird was an unimaginative man, who had evidently spent many years, slowly vegetating, in this relic of the l8th Century. He did not communicate greatly with me, who was content to keep my counsel. Bird was pale-faced, about the middle height, and rather thin on top. Also working nearby, was the Chemist, Brian Robinson, whose principle task was to check the water quality, from time to time, to ensure that it was suitable for the purposes of the Works. Brian was a slim, fresh-complexioned, intelligent young man, with whom I established a cordial relationship. He had a well-equipped laboratory, stocked with all manner of chemicals, for use in his trade.

My typewriter was an old Underwood: quite a good machine in its day, but which nowadays would be regarded as a genuine antique. Herbert usually had the orders written out by the time I arrived at 9am and I would type them out, as quickly as possible, and distribute copies to the various Dying and Bleaching sections. This took me most of the morning, although I usually had an extended morning tea.

One day I decided to try my hand at manufacturing Gun-Cotton. I took a piece of bleached cotton, about two inches square and soaked this is the requisite mixture of concentrated Sulphuric and Nitric Acid. The next morning I washed the cotton thoroughly and placed it on top of the radiator to dry.

“Birdy” was in the room with me, unaware of the presence of the highly inflammable material nearby, when it suddenly erupted in flame. It did not exactly explode but caused Mr. Bird to jump to his feet in alarm. I had completely forgotten about it. Bird was momentarily shocked and cried out, “What on earth was that! What have you been up to?” I replied, “Oh! that’s nothing to worry about: its only some gun-cotton that I made. I put it on the radiator to dry-out, but forgot all about it. I had no idea it would go up like that. It must have worked pretty well!” Mr Bird murmured, “I would think you should have better things to do with your time, than fooling about with dangerous things like that!” I did not respond.

My job was uninspiring and I soon realized that there was no future here. The Owner-Manager, John Walton, (of a long line, doubtless, of individuals, bearing the same designation), informed me that in the years to come, I might, possibly, aspire to the dizzy heights of Warehouse Manager. John was Public-School educated and, whilst, obviously, considering himself to be of superior stuff to the Working-Class people around-about him, was always courteous in his dealings towards me. As a result, I rather liked my employer. The Company Secretary, named Smith, was a person to whom I took an instant revulsion, owing to his pompous and arrogant manner.

During meal-breaks, Herbert and Albert would generally bring their lunches upstairs; when I had an opportunity of engaging them in conversation. Albert had worked in the trade all his life and spoke about the hard times he had as a youth. He told me, “Before the first War, we started work at 6am and finished at 6pm, working a 6-day week”. Herbert had served in the Great-War as an Ambulanceman and spoke of the suffering of the wounded and dying men. He was aware of my interest in Spiritualism. On one occasion whilst they were chatting together, he said, “Whilst I am not a believer in your Doctrines myself, there must be something in these ideas of a future life. I remember during the War, when I was attending to the Wounded: a dying Welshman lay nearby. He sang Hymns with such a radiance upon his features; such a wonderful expression of Joy, that I became convinced that he knew that he was going to somewhere beautiful.” Herbert also informed me that his son was a Minister of the New (Jerusalem) Church: The Swedenborgian.

I also discussed religious matters with Brian, the Chemist, who was a Methodist by persuasion. He thought that I was rather a strange character; particularly when I showed him a refutation of some fundamentalist literature, which I myself had composed. Brian said to me, “Did you really write that?” “Yes”, said I. I, subsequently, threw the paper away, as I had never made any attempt to publish it.

I remained in this job for over a year, following which I was awarded a rise of a Pound a week: bringing my Wages to about Six-Pounds Ten-shillings per week. Soon after being awarded this princely sum, I was informed by the Company Secretary that I would be transferred to the Stock-Warehouse, still doing the same work, but would be expected to start at 8am instead of, as formerly, 9am. I suggested that this would warrant an increase in Salary, but was told that this would not be forthcoming, as I had already been given a pay rise. I “smelt a rat” and, thereupon, gave my two-week’s notice on the spot. This placed me in a precarious financial position, as I had a wife and two children to support. Teresa had presented me with a second Son, Owen, on 4th February l954.

I learned through my father that the Refuge Insurance people were seeking a local Salesman and was fortunate to be given an appointment for interview. After being interviewed by the local Manager, I was told that I had been accepted for this post, subject to confirmation of my employment record. All appeared to be in order, except for a document which was sent to John Walton’s, for completion and return. This was never received by the Insurance Company. When I approached the Dyeworks Secretary, to enquire after the document, Smith informed me, with every appearance of satisfaction, that he had no intention of returning the document to the Insurance Co. Presumably, as a result of this deliberate omission, I didn’t get the job and was disappointed, at the time, as Insurance work offered security and a reasonable income. With hindsight, he may have done me a favour.

### Chapter 86

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### The Tiger Garage

My next job was as Book-keeper, Secretary to a Cotton-Waste Agent, Mr. Harold Haynes. This gentleman was a large, self-made man who, as well as conducting an Agency for the supply of Indian Cotton Waste, was the proprietor of a Petrol-Station, which was known as “The Tiger Garage”, Harpurhey. This was situate not far distant from my last place of work. My duties were varied and interesting; including keeping the books of the Garage; making-up the Wages of the Staff and shorthand-typing for Mr. Haynes. I also helped out in the Garage now and again, serving petrol.

I never was able to balance the books of the Garage, largely because either one of the other employees or Mr. Haynes himself was dipping his hand into the till. After some weeks of vainly trying to balance the Cashbook, I gave up in disgust. This did not seem to bother my employer. Cash was not kept in the safe, as one would expect, but in a cash-box in a steel- locker, to enable Mr. Haynes to have ready access to the cash. The steel locker was of a type easily opened by a simple key.

Each morning, Harold gave me dictation, which I had then to type on Air-mail letters for transmission to India. These were long, rambling letters and I usually had no trouble typing them, although from time to time, during the day, I would often doze-off for a few minutes. As I was working alone, I was rarely disturbed, during these intermissions. Mr. Haynes spent a lot of time at the Cotton Exchange and was, consequently, absent from the office for much of the day.

This was now the year l954 and, as previously indicated, I was the father of another baby boy, Owen, who was the product of my too-pressing attentions upon my wife, at a time when she had not fully recovered from the birth of her first child. Thus, there was only fifteen months between the two children: placing an additional burden upon the mother. As Teresa was of a delicate constitution, I myself was called-upon to assist in the household chores: with particular regard to the washing and ironing. The laundry was done in the cellar and required, first, the hosing of dirty nappies to remove faeces; followed by a soaking in hot, soapy-water, when the nappies would be “possered” with the aid of a copper “posser”. This was a round, helmet-shaped instrument with a wooden handle. It was worked vigorously up and down in a tub and was effective in removing dirt. Following this treatment, the items were scrubbed, individually, on a broad table, after which they were then transferred to the copper-boiler. When full, this was raised to the boil. After some minutes of boiling, the clothing was rinsed and mangled by hand; before being hung upon the Clothes-rack to dry. This was arduous “women’s” work, at the best. Happy, the modern mother, who can afford disposable nappies. I made the best of this job: my fertile imagination sailing to wondrous heights, as I went about my task. I was also an habitual bathroom yodeller, which I extended into the night hours, spent in the cellar. My often noisy activities incurred the wrath of the next-door neighbour, an elderly lady, who complained to Teresa that the noise I made, kept her awake.

The “rack” was a device suspended from the kitchen ceiling, by means of pulleys, enabling a large amount of clothing to be dried by the heat rising from the hearth. In dry weather, clothing could be hung out to dry in the open air, although there was always the problem of soot being deposited thereon, from the Wash-house chimney nearby.

I felt that this was some contribution towards my responsibilities as a father. As I had always been taught to do my share of the household chores, no great adjustment was needed, before I was able to play my part as a father, in the rearing of my children. Thus, I changed nappies, fed and bathed the children and took a personal interest in them. John, the elder child, was a happy and well-adjusted little boy, with close-curled fair hair. Owen, on the other hand, was dark-haired, with a large head and enormous dark-eyes. He was an insecure child, constantly demanding the attention of his parents and refusing to sleep at night, unless his hand was securely held by his father. I would spend many hours with my hand out of bed, in the cold night air, holding on to Owen’s hand, until the child eventually fell to sleep. It is, therefore, not surprising to find me dozing at my desk, during the day. These occasional naps did not unduly interfere with my work, which was usually completed in time for my employer’s return from business, during the afternoon.

There were three employees working in the Garage, two Mechanics and one Lady Petrol-Attendant. Thelma, was then aged about forty-five years; of fair complexion and above the middle height. She was good-natured and appreciated my occasional assistance at the petrol bowsers. I also chatted, from time to time, with the two mechanics, Bob and James. Like many mechanics, Bob was not happy in his work; considering it to be far too dirty an occupation. He was a tall, intelligent and sensible man, about forty years of age, for whom I had a great respect. James, on the other hand, was an itinerant soul, rather a “dark horse”, who kept himself largely to himself. He was short and stockily built, with dark hair and a swarthy complexion. He was a good mechanic. He did not stay long at the Garage. After he left, I was able to balance the books for the first time. This did not necessarily mean that Jim had been helping himself to the Cash Box, as my Boss himself was rather casual with the funds. However, there were times when I was not in the office and, on those occasions, the other staff did have access to the upstairs rooms.

Once, and apparently in order to test me, Harold walked through my office and pulled his handkerchief out of his rear pocket; at the same time dropping a wad of notes to the floor. He then walked off, evidently, without noticing the mishap. I observed this behaviour and assumed that I was being tested. I picked up the cash and, although half-tempted to keep it, thought it advisable to take it to my employer. I went into Mr. Haynes room and placed the money on his desk, saying, as I did so, “You dropped this cash as you walked through my office”. Harold said, “Thanks” and glanced at me rather sheepishly, whereupon, I turned about and left the office. I regret that I was not always totally honest with Mr. Haynes.

### Chapter 87

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### An Incident at Morecambe

During the Summer of l954, we rented a Caravan at Kendal for a week. The van was located on a farm, several miles from the town and in the vicinity of the village of Crook. We travelled by Ribble bus to Kendal and thence by a local bus to the farm.

The caravan was adequate and we made ourselves at home. Conditions were otherwise primitive. There was a hand-operated water pump in the van but no bathing facilities. The privy consisted of a box, sitting on top of an enormous dung-heap, containing the excrement of numerous farm animals in addition to human waste. In spite of these limitations on our comfort, we enjoyed our stay. The surrounding countryside was beautiful: the enjoyment of which was sufficient reward for our effort. We walked each day through the vales. At times, I carried both children: one on each shoulder.

Owen was now 18 months old. When I was standing outside the van one morning, little Owen came toddling to the door. I moved to intercept him, but was too late: he fell and split his lip on the ground outside the van. Apart from this minor accident, there were no other incidents during our stay.

On the return trip, we diverted to Morecambe, to enjoy a day at the seaside. When we arrived at the seafront, the tide was out and the sea was nowhere to be seen. The weather was cloudy-bright: one of those indeterminate English Summer days. The children played in the sand whilst Teresa and I sat against the sea-wall and relaxed. After some time, I decided to stretch my legs and took John, now aged 3 years, by the hand. Together we set out in the direction of the sea. After proceeding two or three hundred yards, we came to the water’s edge. I was not, particularly, observant and it was not until I heard a juvenile voice calling to me, “Hey mister, can you help that boy - he can’t swim?” I now saw a child struggling in the water, about 60 feet away. I immediately said to little John, “Stand there and don’t move!” I plunged into the water and, being a strong swimmer, quickly reached the boy: whom I brought to shore. I said to the lad, “Are you alright?” The child nodded and appeared to be none the worse for his soaking. “Mister, there’s another lad in the water, can you get him out?” I looked again: saw a bobbing head and repeated the exercise. I returned to shore with this smaller child, who had evidently swallowed a lot of water. Another boy called out: “Help me mister!” An older lad of about twelve years was on the edge of the water: panicking. I went over and, taking his arm, pulled him out.

All the children said that they were “alright” and I now picked up my son and turned to return to the promenade. As I did so, some people, who had witnessed the incident from a jetty, came running-up. They were evidently from the tour-party, to which the children belonged.

When Teresa saw me in a cold and wet state, she was not pleased. However, I explained the situation to her and took off my wet shirt and singlet and hung them over the rail to dry. The children had, evidently, been caught by the tide, as it returned. The sands here are treacherous and can quickly turn to quick-sand, which has taken the lives of many people, over the years.

Fortunately, I had decided to take my walk, just at the crucial moment and was the only adult person near, when the children found themselves in difficulties. This incident coincided with a strange premonition which I had experienced, in preceding weeks, which took the form of a “fear” of water: an apprehension of danger from water. Subsequent to this time, my “anxiety” passed. Perhaps I had been “led” to the position in which I found myself, that day.

The members of the Picnic Party were naturally grateful to me for my speedy action and sought me out. When requested, I gave my personal particulars to the local press. Subsequently, Teresa and I received an invitation from the Club, to which the trippers belonged. We travelled to Dewsbury and met the parents of the children and spoke to the lads themselves. At the local Workers’ Club, I said that I was only too thankful that I had been able to be of assistance, in averting what would have been a disaster for the families concerned.

Photo’s of David Ainsworth and his little brother:



### Chapter 88

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### Strangeways

After I had been working for Harold Haynes for about twelve months, I saw an advertisement for a Local Government position in the Strangeways Courthouse. Believing that a Government post might offer secure employment, with good prospects, I applied for the job. I was called for interview and, evidently, made a positive impression on the man who was to be my immediate superior, John Noden. It seems that it was this gentleman’s influence upon the Solicitor-in-Charge, Mr. Green, who was known by the title of “Clerk to the Justices”, which secured the job for me. Noden was impressed by the fact that I could write Shorthand. Something else about my personal qualifications, may also have impressed him, which I would not have taken as complimentary.

This job was “the answer to a maiden’s prayer”, so far as I was concerned. I subsequently discovered that there was one draw-back to the job and this was the fact that my superior was a man of distinctly homosexual tendencies. These never went beyond the stage of a friendly “hug” in the office. I did not particularly like being hugged by Mr.Noden, even if it was in apparent jest. The latter was then about forty years of age, middle-height, balding and of medium build. He was highly intelligent, played the organ at his local Anglican Church and thought very highly, indeed, of himself. Noden was extremely critical of people, in general, and often made remarks to me, regarding the character of other people, which I thought were offensive. His sense of humour was keenest, when directed at the misapprehensions and errors of those around about him.

The year was now l956. Each morning I rode my cycle along Cross Lane, down towards the Crescent and past the Technical College and Peel Park. At the Adelphi RC Girls school, I turned left and rode downhill and through the streets to my place of work. I was employed in the “Maintenance” Section: taking in payments from men, who were obliged to support their wives and children by means of Court Orders. The amounts were entered into a Kalamazoo machine and also into a ledger. At the end of the day, when payments had been sent-out or paid over the counter to the persons entitled, the books were balanced. This was basically very straightforward, single-entry book-keeping. Fridays were always busy, of course, being pay-day, when men generally came to the office to make their payments. The rest of the week went smoothly, without rush.

There was another gentleman in the Section, Mr. Faulkner, who was within a year or so of Retirement. John Noden made no secret to me, of his intolerance of this gentleman, of whom he spoke in contemptuous terms. In fact his animosity towards Mr. Faulkner, who was his senior officer, was plain for all to see, except those superiors who dwelt in realms above: meaning the three Solicitors, who occupied rather palatial offices, situated on the next floor. Much of Mr. Noden’s energy was directed to toadying to these gentlemen and to Mr. Green, in particular.

There was a total staff of about six in the main Office, which was divided into the Criminal and the Maintenance Sections. Mr.Monk was in overall charge of the Criminal Section and, perhaps even of the whole office, although Noden made it clear that no “interference” with his section would be tolerated. Mr. Monk was a tall, dark, elderly man, with whom I had little contact, apart from the usual polite formalities at the beginning and end of each day. He was well regarded by his Staff and appeared to me to be a decent fellow.

I carried out my duties conscientiously, here in the Courthouse, and it seemed that I was finally destined to settle down to the business of making a career for myself. Once or twice, legal papers passed through my hands and I began to imagine, to myself, that I might have made a good lawyer, had life taken a different turn for me. However, such an ambition was now out of the question. There were certain examinations for Local Government Staff, which could be taken within the Service. Had I stayed in this job, it might have given me a fruitful field of endeavour. However, life was now about to take another turn.

### Chapter 89

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### Australia Bound

A year or so previous to this time, I had answered an advertisement, in a local newspaper; recruiting people who were interested in migrating to Tasmania, to work with the Tasmanian Railways. I had received a reply to the effect that that organization had a sufficient number of Clerks of its own. I had subsequently dismissed the subject of migration from my mind entirely. It was, therefore, a surprise when I received a letter from “Australia House”, in early l956, asking if I was still interested in migrating to Australia. I discussed the situation with Bridget. She had no particular desire to leave England. At that time she was contemplating the possibility of returning to the workforce, at least on a part-time basis, now that the children were able to attend a Pre school Centre. This would have meant a great improvement in our living-conditions, with the possibility, perhaps, of obtaining a house of our own. However, we were still living in Salford, in rather poor conditions and with little immediate prospect of being able to purchase a house. It had not yet dawned on me that we might, at an early date, be able to afford a deposit on a house of our own.

Whilst I enjoyed my work, I was not happy regarding the tense situation, then prevailing between Mr. Noden and Mr. Faulkner. The latter was now about sixty-four years old. He was short and stocky in build and retiring in his disposition. I considered him to be a very decent old chap. However, I was, myself, placed in a difficult situation by my immediate superior, who fiercely criticised what he considered to be the “senile incompetence” of the older man. In addition, I foresaw that Mr. Noden’s effeminate spitefulness was always liable, sooner or later, to be directed against myself.

This peevishness had already manifested itself in one particular direction. Wedding-bells had rung nearby, with the marriage of one of the Junior Solicitors. The marriage was to be a small affair, which meant that only the “Clerk to the Justices”, Mr. Green, was officially invited. Noden was incensed by the failure to invite him to the Wedding and took it as a personal affront from the Bridegroom. He declined to contribute towards a present for the newly-weds from the General-Office Staff and even asserted himself, to such an extent, that no collection was made in the Office to obtain a present on behalf of the Staff. I, personally, thought highly of the young man in question, and quietly purchased a pair of drinking-mugs and sent them off, with an anonymous note. It was this incident which, more than any other, disclosed to me the true nature of the man, with whom I was working. I did not wish to spend the next twenty years in such an environment, no-matter how great the material rewards. I could contemplate the possibility of a situation arising, in the future, when I myself might fall foul of the wrath of the volatile John Noden. I, therefore, decided to accept the offer of a “Ten-Pound Trip” to Australia.

Teresa agreed to accompany me to Australia, even though this meant taking the children away from their home and family ties. Both of us took the view that, at that time, neither of us had anything to lose, so that there was no great hazard in taking such a step. Had we possessed our own house, it is doubtful if we would have given the question a second thought.

With the passage of time, the migration formalities were completed and I gave notice at work. I had been paid on a monthly basis, which created difficulties initially, but meant that I had a little more cash-in-hand, on leaving my employment. I also received a small sum in refund of Superannuation contributions, which provided the family with funds for our expenses, during the voyage.

Strangely, it transpired that my replacement, at work, was a young man, Robert, who had just returned from Australia. When I was showing him the job routine, Robert spoke about life in Sydney. He said, “You’ll like Australia: the Aussies are great people. They are so British in their ways and very democratic. There’s no doffing of the cap to the boss out there. You call the boss, ‘Tom, Dick or Harry’. There none of this Mr. this or that. Everyone drinks out there: you will have to drink in Australia: you won’t be able to say, ‘No!”

At this stage in my life, I had just about taken the pledge. This was unwelcome news. I did start drinking again in Australia, but always remained a purely social and occasional drinker. Perhaps I was beginning to mature?

I had kept my old motor-cycle and side-car for a year or so, after returning from Carlisle to Manchester. Not wishing to leave it in the narrow street fronting the house; for fear of causing an accident, I had been in the habit of parking it in the nearby Tatton’s yard, where it was off the street, but not protected from the juvenile vandals in the neighbourhood. One day, I found the windscreen had been smashed and other damage occasioned to the motor-bike, evidently by children. I was destitute of funds for repair and the bike needed a complete overhaul, which I could not afford. One day, a young fellow asked me what I intended to do with the bike and I told him that he could have it. I did not discover what subsequently happened to the bike, which had served me well during my motor-cycling days.

Photo of John and Owen, 5yrs and 3yrs: Teresa and Owen at Chatsworth, Derbyshire. 1956

### Owen John

### Chapter 90

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### Prognostications

Following our return to Manchester, I had continued to interest myself in Spiritualism, attending several of the local Churches, including the Lord Duncan Street, Salford, Church. This had been a Welsh Chapel, when originally built but, with the passage of time, had been taken over by a Spiritualist group. It still retained many relics of its former glory, in the shape of a fine Organ, now never used, and huge Mahogany pews, which required several people to move them, whenever it became necessary to do so. This building had considerable character but, alas, along with most other things pertaining to the Salford of Yesterday, has gone forever.

On Saturday evenings, an “Open Circle” was held at this church, which was attended by fifteen or twenty people, usually women, but occasionally the odd man. I enjoyed these circles and attended regularly. There was one man, named “Albert”, who sometimes came along to this Church and gave strange messages to those seated in the Congregation. He was about forty years of age, of medium height, slim build and with a fair complexion. Albert was semi-literate and, quite literally, an “ignorant” man, yet his perception of Spiritual things was remarkable. In a confidential moment Albert said to me, “If you had told me, five years ago, that I would be speaking in Spiritualist Churches, I would have said you were daft”. As it was, his messages, whilst quaint and original, were often rejected by his auditors. At one meeting he spoke to a lady seated nearby: “With you I see a ‘Midden Tin’; full of rubbish and I’m busy tipping-out this muck and scrubbing-out this bin until it is shining-bright.” Now, such a spiritual analogy should have been clear to even the most simple-minded person, yet this poor soul refused to accept even the remotest possibility that she might have one or more closet skeletons sitting there. “Oh! I won’t accept that, indeed!” said this lady, “I don’t see that that has anything to do with me!” She did not wish to be associated, in any way, with unpleasant-sounding associations. Yet I found Albert’s words to be full of Wisdom.

From time to time, I attended Services in the Raby Street Church, Moss Side, Manchester. About two years before I left England with my Wife and children, I went to see a much applauded Speaker, a currently highly-popular chap from London, who was scheduled to take the Sunday-afternoon Service. I have forgotten his name. When speaking, he would reveal some traces of a Scottish accent, indicating the identity of the Spirit-Guide who was with him; but he was not entranced or under the control of the Spirit. He was a tall, pleasant looking man of about forty-years of age at that time; fair-haired and of a fair complexion. He wore a light suit with a Bow-tie and might, perhaps, be considered to be “flashy” in appearance.

The Raby Street Church was packed to capacity, as he was a very popular speaker. I sat in the aisle, not unduly concerned whether he spoke to me or not. As I so often found, when I myself was not anxious to have a “Message”, I heard myself being addressed by the speaker. The man gave me words of encouragement and said to him. “You have a small child?” I replied, “Yes”. The man then said, “There will be others”, making several motions of his hand with the palm down; indicating “Steps and Stairs”. He then said to me, much to my surprise, “I see you going to Australia. You have a Guide who was an Australian Digger. He will keep an eye on you in Australia.” I said, “Thank-you”. At that time, I had no thought of going anywhere, so that I kept an open mind on this point. After more words of encouragement, the speaker then moved to another person. I enjoyed this Service, not only because I had been spoken to by the Speaker but by the demonstration given of the ease with which communication between Physical and Spiritual-worlds can be attained. This man even gave names and addresses, to link-up his visitors from Spirit with those attending the Meeting. This was an unusual gift of Clairaudience (the hearing of Spirit-Voices) and may have explained the speaker’s popularity.

In addition to these meetings, and for a period of about 18 months, during l955 and l956, my brother George and I attended a private Circle in Blackley, Manchester, which was the home of Jack and Doris Slinger. This lady had been brought up as a Spiritualist and had a great understanding of the work of the Movement. It was she, whose knowledge of the old Spiritualist Songs was passed to me through my attendance at her Circle. Her husband was a “Physical Medium”, who was sitting for the development of this particular form of spiritual-gift. The group sat in the living-room, with the fireplace closed-off, as far as possible, with a sheet of tin. The meeting was held in total darkness, as it was considered necessary for this particular phenomenon, to sit in this way. As one became accustomed to the dark, there was a residual amount of light visible from the fireplace surround. Paper Trumpets, banded at each end with luminous tape, were used during the course of the Meeting, in conjunction with a small table. After an opening prayer, Jack Siinger duly went into deep trance, whilst the sitters sang the lively Lyceum Songs, led by his wife. Jack had a Chinese Guide, who acted as a “Door-keeper”. Many people from the Spirit-side of life came through in this way and spoke to the group. In addition, there was physical elevation of the table. The paper-trumpets floated around the room and could be seen in outline. There was no fraud here as, indeed, nobody was making anything out of the proceedings. The trumpets were used to facilitate the development of Direct-Voice mediumship. I observed this phenomena over a period of over 12 months, although I felt that there was not a great deal of instructional value in such phenomena, for its own sake. As Jack Slinger was actually aiming for “Materialization”, this was a necessary part of his development. From time to time, as the “Ectoplasmic rod” holding the trumpets moved close to one’s head, the heat flowing therefrom, was clearly felt. This sounds crazy but is recorded as a recollection of fact, not fancy, from long ago.

Towards the end of my period of attendance at this Circle, I, myself, experienced (what I would describe as) a tremendous surge of “power” and on several occasions had clear and strong impressions of an Ancient Egyptian person with me. I actually “saw” what are termed “thought forms” of the Sphinx and Pyramids. On these occasions, I stood-up, in order to distribute this flow of power to the other sitters. I did not feel that this unduly interfered with Jack’s development: indeed, I felt that it may have been intended as a form of assistance. However, Mrs. Slinger, although not speaking directly to me, was annoyed at this. From her point of view, it was an unwelcome intrusion into the normal work of the Circle.

I was, perhaps, too naive to appreciate that I had become a disruptive influence in the Group but, in any event, it soon after disbanded, when the Slingers moved away from Manchester, to Blackpool. At no time did I myself actually hear any direct-voice phenomena from the trumpets, which was the Slingers’ objective. There was no doubt in my mind as to the validity of the other phenomena, which I, personally, observed. George, however, affirmed that he had heard something issuing from the trumpet.

The Secretary of the Salford Spiritualist Church, at this time, was Mrs. Oliver, a kindly disposed lady who took an interest in my Spiritual search. There were very few young men, active in the Movement, at this period, in which Occult subjects were taboo in “respectable” society. During Saturday night and Sunday afternoon Circles, I began to give an occasional address, usually, I believed, with the help and assistance of my friends from Spirit. I felt the power strongly on these occasions, although, I myself, did not enter into a trance-state. In fact, although I felt the physical characteristics of the guides who came to me, as a rule I had a clear, concious visual perception. I never saw Spirit-people until much later in life and then, usually, when dozing or in the form of “waking visions”. Sometimes, when about to receive an impression from Spirit, I saw what Spiritualists term, “Thought-forms”, in which I perceived impressions of things associated with the spirit, who was about to manifest. These might take the form of, e.g, a sphinx or a pyramid, or perhaps an American Indian’s head-dress. Such impressions, I felt, were sent to indicate the identity of the spirit-friend, who was about to enter my consciousness.

I enjoyed the genuinely devotional atmosphere in this little Church and felt that I was receiving help in regard to my own development; as I still had many personal problems to resolve. Before leaving Salford, Mrs. Oliver presented me with her own copy of the Lyceum Manual, the original Spiritualist Sunday-School Book, which I still retain. This was a tender gesture, as it would have been reasonably certain that she did not have another copy of her own.

I, occasionally, attended a Sunday-afternoon Circle at the Britten Memorial Fellowship, which was situated at 2a Tib Lane, Manchester. This place was named in memory of one, Emma Hardinge Britten, a Spiritualist Pioneer, who settled in Manchester with her Doctor husband, later in her life. She was the authoress of considerable Spiritualist literature, including a document entitled “The Seven Principles of Spiritualism.” Mrs. Britten had intended these principles as a guide to Spiritualists, not as a Creed. Emma was also active in the United States from the 1850’s to the 1890’s and travelled extensively there, during these years. In recent years there has been a tendency in Spiritualist Circles to elevate the Seven Principles to the status of a Creed. Emma Britten’s autobiography has recently (1996) been republished in facsimile form. It is interesting, although composed in a childish, rather “forced” style: revealing a self-orientated and, it seemed to me, a somewhat superficial character.

One Sunday afternoon, whilst attending an Open-Circle at the Fellowship, I dozed-off; which I had a habit of doing at services. I dreamed that I heard the sound of gunfire, a rumbling, thunderous noise, followed by a thud in the head, which seemed to penetrate my brain from right to left. I awoke, following this sensation, feeling that I had perhaps been visited by a soldier who had been killed during the War. A few minutes later, one of the ladies present, rose and spoke on the horrors of War: it being the l lth November. I had forgotten that it was Armistice Day.

There was a Spiritualist Church in Pendleton, which I also visited, occasionally. During a circle here, one evening, I was spoken to by a lady, who said that “Lawrence of Arabia” was present and wanted me to read his book, as there was something contained therein, which was of importance. When, subsequently, reading the book, “The Seven Pillars of Wisdom” by Lawrence, I came across a passage in which he describes meeting a wandering hermit at Wadi Rhumm in the Arabian Desert. The hermit, who was evidently deranged, repeated the words, “The Love is from God and of God and towards God!” Lawrence was surprised by this reference to “Love” as an attribute of the Godhead. He had never heard a Muslim mention “Divine Love” before. I felt that it was this particular passage, that would prove to be of significance for me.

It is this idea of the omnipresent “Love of God”, which I, later, understood to be the very first principle, in considering Man’s relationship with his Creator. God is, in fact, Infinite and All-pervading Love: this Love-power permeates and superintends every aspect of human affairs. Whilst mankind is permitted the essential gift of Free-will, in spite of the enormity of human wickedness, above all stands this indomitable and compassionate “Power of Divine Love”: a Love which it is certainly within the capacity of the individual to comprehend and to experience. I, subsequently, had many dream experiences, in which I was made aware of the presence of this Divine Love, which I comprehended as a benign and caring influence, accompanied by brilliant light. This love came to me in the form of a wondrous compassion: all-forgiving and elevating. In my dreams, I sometimes felt very tiny, as if I were, once more, a little child. I began to understand the meaning of the text, “Except ye be converted and come as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven!” (Math Ch 18 v 3). I felt that it is possible for a mature person to partake of the innocence of childhood: a spiritual innocence, in spite of a lifetime of worldly activity.

On another occasion at the Pendleton circle, I was spoken to by a lady, who informed me that “Conan Doyle” was present and wished me to know that he would assist me with my writing. It is well-known that the author of the Sherlock Holmes stories was a Spiritualist. I made a mental note of this message but did not assume, therefrom, that I would be a writer myself. At the time of writing, none of my work has been published for sale. I was also told about this time, that I would become a prominent Spiritualist. The speaker emphasized, “Christian-Spiritualist”. I was advised that there was a “lady” in Spirit, who wished me to read the Bible. This was something that I considered to be of no great relevance at that time. The suggestion that I would be a Christian-Spiritualist puzzled me. I have never been a “Chapter and Verse” person, believing that the Bible is merely a collection of very human experiences. However, I later did compose a “Commentary” on the Bible, which I placed on my website, (John Roberts’ Alcove) mainly in order to give substance to my ideas on the relevance of the teachings of the Nazarene, to the principles of Spiritualism. Jesus of Nazareth was, indeed, a Spiritualist and the greatest exponent of the Spiritual princlples, which govern our lives, whether we are aware of it or not.

### Chapter 81

### BASIL COPSON

During the year or so subsequent to my return home from overseas, my sister Margery, had commenced keeping company with a chap named Basil Copson. He was short in stature, stocky, with strong, almost Semite, features and an olive complexion. Basil was a few years older than Margery, and was now employed as a Surveyor by the Salford Council. He was an extremely sweet-natured person, whose family were members of the Society of Friends. (The Quakers). Subsequently, Margery and Basil were married in the Quaker Meeting House at Eccles, which they attended regularly each Sunday morning. Occasionally, Teresa and I, together with our little ones, attended the Meeting; finding the atmosphere to be sincerely Christian. The silent meetings contrasted with the lively musical meetings of the Spiritualists, with which they had much in common: the Quaker Movement having originated with an outpouring of the Spirit, in 17th-Century England.

The Quakers, although preserving the principles of the teachings of George Fox, in ensuing centuries, had, or so it appeared to me, largely lost the sense of the “Power of the Spirit”. The Quakers, as with all charismatic people, found that there are mixed blessings to be experienced with the outpouring of the Spirit; there being a need for discipline and control in the use and understanding of the Power of Spirit. In the early days of the Quaker movement there was, understandably, an incomplete understanding of the working of the power of Spirit. This led to schism and persecution of the Quakers by both Parliamentary and Monarchist political powers.

Whilst attracted by the sincerity and intellectualism of the Quakers, I realized that it was not a Movement for the Working-Classes: rather, one for an elitist and privileged section of the Community, which, essentially, it remains today.

During l955, Margery and Basil were able to place a deposit upon a house of their own; this being in Grange Road, Eccles: now obliterated by the Motorway. The house was a large, three-storey terraced cottage, in sound condition. Margery and Basil worked hard to make it into a comfortable home for themselves. They were unfortunate not to have children but, not wishing to be by themselves in the house, took in University Students, as lodgers. Thus, there was always plenty of life in the Copson household. They remained here for almost twenty years, when the necessity for change forced them to sell the house to the Salford Council. They then moved away from Manchester, to Langho, a country district, near Whalley, some 30 miles to the North. However, they still continued to drive to Salford to work, until ill-health forced Basil to retire, when he was still in his early Fifties. After they moved from Eccles and for the next five years, their old house was leased to a Counsellor at a subsidised rental, before finally being demolished to make way for the Motorway.

Photos hereunder: Margery (my twin sister) at 18 yrs, Marge’s Wedding in l953, Marge and Bas, and an earlier group taken about l950, showing my father; George and his wife, Mona; her father and sister, Beattie. Margery and Basil. The children are David and Barbara, George and Mona’s children.



### Chapter 82

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### All Aboard

Teresa and I packed our few belongings into tea chests and a large steel-bound cabin trunk. The latter article I purchased from an elderly lady, who had returned to Salford from Sydney, Australia. When I visited her, in response to her advertisement, I found a lonely and embittered old woman. She bewailed her misfortune at finding herself in a room, in Salford, after having a nice little place of her own in Australia. She affirmed that it had been unwise of her to return home, during a fit of homesickness, as she had been much happier “down under”. She had no relations in Salford and was most unhappy.

In due course, all was ready and we said “good-bye!” to our relatives and friends; some of whom, we would never see again in this life. Aunty Margery and her husband Basil, were distressed at separation from the children, as they had taken a loving interest in the little ones. Uncle “Bas”, particularly for a man, had taken to the babies as if they were his own flesh and blood. He had not been afraid to take the children to Buille Hill Park, for an outing, pushing the pram up the hill in Langworthy Road, whilst Teresa was able to get on with her work. He was always full of fun. He told many a harmless and inoffensive joke and was liked by everyone who knew him. Bas had been “blown out of an aeroplane”, in an explosion on the Cocos-Keeling Islands, during the War and, as a result, suffered from Menier’s disease; which affected his balance and caused nausea. This was to distress him to his death at the age of sixty-four years: but that was to be many years later.

Teresa and I were keenly aware of the wrench, which both we and the children must suffer, in leaving behind “Old England”. We faced an unknown future, in a strange land, but were both young and capable of supporting ourselves. Teresa herself was a competent Clerk and Stenographer and hoped to be able to work in her new Country. Of course, we had very little by way of “funds” and were reliant upon the Australian authorities to provide us with accommodation in our new surroundings. In spite of our penurious state, we were determined to see as much as possible of the World, through which we would be passing.

On the 6th January l957, we duly took train to Tilbury, where we boarded an elderly Steamer, the S.S. Orontes, built in 1929 and then on its penultimate voyage, before being scrapped. We were fortunate in being allocated a cabin of our own, although it was on “J” Deck, in the bowels of the ship. We did, however, possess a porthole, which was permanently closed, but provided some daylight. There was a ventilator, which blew fresh air into this, otherwise, stuffy environment. It was, perhaps, appropriate that we should have a cabin to ourselves, as the children, who were both of a delicate constitution, suffered seriously from Bronchitis and Sea-Sickness, during the voyage, causing Teresa and I great anxiety.

There were the usual ship-board activities, including card-playing and drinking, but we found no time to engage in such pastimes, as we were fully engaged in caring for the children. At our first Port-of-Call, which was Las Palmas in the Canary Islands, we took a tour of the Island: which included a visit to Teror, a shrine famous from the days of the Spanish Empire. We tourists waited for our bus in the square, close by the Cathedral of Las Palmas, an ancient Gothic structure. I peered into the depths of the building, but only went a short distance within the porch. It was dark inside the Church but I could make out the form of an image of one of the Saints. A small boy was standing nearby and, perceiving my interest in the statue, said to me “Patroni, Patroni!”.

The bus journey took us over winding mountain roads, with spectacular views of the splendid countryside. The island is intensively cultivated and terraced, with Banana plantations situated on the steepest and, one would imagine, most inaccessible slopes. In due course, the bus entered a sleepy Spanish village, with unpainted adobe walls. It stopped outside an unpretentious Church. At the rear of the Chapel, which is dedicated to “Our Lady of the Pine Tree”, was a treasure-house guarded, in those days, by a sleepy little Priest. He sat quietly in the corner, as the Tourists gazed upon the vast array of obviously unclassified riches, which lay before them; being merely retained behind glass cases. Gold, silver and jewelled artefacts lay, heaped, one upon another, with no attempt at orderly display. These were the votive-offerings deposited in the Sanctuary by Sailors over many generations, in gratitude for safe-keeping: following hazardous sea-voyages to and from the Spanish Main. It was all here in irregular piles, including some of the silver plate from St. Paul’s Cathedral, which had been sold by the Parliamentarians after the Civil War. We returned to the ship, well pleased with our first venture offshore.

Following the tour of Gran Canaria, the voyage continued. There was, for many, the initial day or so of Sea-sickness, which ensured that the sufferer lost all interest in external things, until he began to adjust to the routine of life at Sea. My family all suffered from this malady but, at least, we were together, in our distress, and were not required to share our agony with strangers: as was the case with those families who had been allocated cabins on a sexually segregated basis: several men or several women, sharing a cabin.

After a day or so; when life had resumed its normal course, the passengers could begin to take pleasure in their surroundings. They then occupied themselves, between meals, by pacing the deck or lounging in deck-chairs; reading or chatting. Many formed regular groups for Card-playing or for Deck games. Teresa and I were fully occupied in caring for our two boys, who continued to exhibit symptoms of Bronchitis, throughout the voyage, and which caused us serious concern.

We made friends with several of the other passengers, amongst whom was a Scots family comprising middle-aged parents and several grown-up sons and daughters. Altogether there would have been about twelve members of the family. They were named Smith. The Smiths were a closely-knit group and, evidently, had decided to remain together, by moving to Australia as a body. Mrs. Smith was a sweet-natured little lady, very much in charge, as such women usually have to be. Her husband was a quiet, tall and thin man: content to leave the management of things in his wife’s capable hands.

There was a family from Somerset, named Carter. The father had been a farm-worker, with his own house, which he had surrendered, to take this risky venture to a new land.  His wife was a pretty woman, intelligent and the mother of two lovely twin boys, aged about four years. Our children enjoyed playing together with their two little boys. I remarked to Teresa, “If I had been in his position, I would never have left Somerset, to go to Australia”.

There was a Geordie on board, Russell Hill, who had an Italian Wife, Clelia. They had married during the War, when Rus was with the British Army in Italy. She had lived in England so long that she had forgotten her native tongue, to a large extent. On hearing some Italians speaking to one another on board ship, she said to them. “I am Italian. I can understand what you are saying but I have forgotten how to speak Italian.” Her auditors were sceptical about her claims. The Hills had two small children, a boy and a girl, aged about six and eight years. They were simple, decent and unpretentious people. We often chatted to this couple, during our six weeks’ voyage. Sadly, as so often happens, friendships formed in this way are such transitory things. Whilst contact was maintained with both families during our stay at the Migrant Hostel, inevitably we separated and eventually lost touch with our ship-board friends.

On arrival at Cape Town, we took a Tour of the City and Cape Peninsula. We admired the gardens of the City itself and, even more, the glorious scenery and sweeping coastal views of the Peninsula. It was clear that there were glaring inequalities between the Whites and Blacks, which was altogether alien to my nature. I could not avoid the obvious facts of Apartheid, when every Public facility was segregated. We remarked on the size of many of the houses, owned obviously by Whites and surrounded by large and well-tended gardens. There was a marked contrast between these beautiful homes and the squalid shanty-towns, through which our Tourist Bus was obliged to pass and in which were housed large numbers of Africans.

We also toured the district of Durban on arrival at that Port. This tour included a visit to the Zulu Reserve, some distance from the City and situated in a green and pleasant, although hilly landscape. This was obviously a showplace, as the Kraal was well laid out and clean. There were numbers of Zulu people living here, all magnificent examples of the Human Race. The men tall and powerfully built; the women handsome and robust. The girls were “Topless”, which lent a touch of spice to the outing: I not having previously experienced the situation of being in the presence of uninhibited African females. However, this episode passed and I only have a tiny and rather faded black-and-white photograph of myself and several other English people, dancing a “Ring-o-Roses!” with several Zulu maidens, to remind me of our visit to the Zulu Reserve.

In due course, the s.s. Orontes sailed for Fremantle, which was to be the first Port of Call in Australia. Some of the passengers were disembarking here, whereas we were continuing-on to Sydney. We took a trip to the Perth Zoo; travelling in the quaint, almost antique Railway carriages to the City, a distance of about ten miles. Perth was a beautiful place, with large gardens stretching down to the Swan River. There was a similarity in some respects with the South-African Cities, yet here, there were no signs telling people which Public Toilet we could lawfully use. There were no ‘buses exclusively for the use of White people. Not that there was any need for such segregation, as at this point in the history of Australia the only Blacks here were the Aboriginal inhabitants and they were far from numerous, in the towns.

Our little family enjoyed the trip to the Zoo, observing, for the first time, many of the Marsupial animals, for which Australia is famous. The weather was hot, it being February, and we made the most of our outing.

After a day in Fremantle, we sailed-on to Melbourne, but did not disembark at this Port; as the vessel was not intending to remain there for longer than was necessary to disembark passengers and their effects. On the morning of the 14th February l957, the Good-Ship Orontes sailed into Sydney Harbour, setting-down the passengers for the start of a new life.

Life on Board ship. East Hills Hostel Cape peninsula South Africa /

### Ss Orontes 650cc Panther John and Owen with the twins.

### Chapter 83.

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### Sydney

It had taken us six weeks to reach Australia, in contrast to the six months or more, which the First Fleet took, to sail there in l788. In the intervening period, since l957, technological changes in Air travel have made it possible to complete the trip in 24 hours from the United Kingdom. It is a truly shrinking world.

We new arrivals were processed, without undue formality by the Customs Staff at the Terminal; following which we were shepherded into buses for the trip to our respective Migrant Hostels. Everyone, of course, was thrilled to be in Australia: the view of the harbour, with its magnificent steel bridge, provided a perfect setting for the City itself; with extensive gardens fringing the harbour-side.

The bus wound its way laboriously through the heart of Sydney City and out into the suburbs, which extended for fifteen miles to the South. After an hour or so bumping and jostling, we arrived at the Cabramatta Migrant Hostel, situated half a mile from the Railway Station of that name and adjacent to extensive residential areas. I was not impressed by this Hostel: crammed, as it appeared to be, into a tiny space. After depositing a number of passengers, the bus continued-on. We passed the red- tiled roofs of fibro-houses, which had been erected in their thousands, in the years subsequent to the War, with inadequate planning or control. The bus now entered more open country and, eventually, after passing through the town of Liverpool, which at that time was still a “Sleepy Hollow”; crossed a rickety wooden bridge over the Georges River and finally arrived at the East Hills Migrant Hostel. This establishment appeared to be in the middle of nowhere; situated in scrubland on the banks of Williams’ Creek: a narrow watercourse which found its confluence with the George’s River, a short distance from the Hostel.

The new arrivals were allotted two rooms in a Nissen hut on the Hostel grounds, which had been converted into four flats. For the first time in our married lives, we had a place of our own, albeit, not entirely self-contained, as meals were taken in a Communal Dining Hall. It was considered by the Commonwealth Authorities that Migrants were incapable of feeding or cleaning themselves. The adaptation of the US-constructed, wartime camps for use by migrants was a sensible decision. Some of these buildings are still in use, fifty years after they were erected as temporary accommodation.

The accommodation provided by Commonwealth Hostels Ltd., the managing body, was limited but adequate. At least, it provided the necessary temporary housing for Migrants. There was a large bedroom, containing four single beds and bedding, with rudimentary wardrobes for clothing, etc.. The small living-room contained two easy chairs and a table. There were communal washing and bathing facilities but these were well maintained and clean: with plenty of hot-water. There were no cooking facilities in the huts, although many of the long-term residents of the Hostel had provided themselves with their own Cookers and refrigerators. These people were generally those who were employed in the kitchens or other Camp Services. Many had lived on the Hostel for over ten years and had no incentive to move.

Teresa and I came to Australia with no pre-conceived ideas. We did not expect to be met with a “Red Carpet”: as was the case with many English Migrants. As it was, we accepted circumstances as we found them and set about obtaining work.

A Nursery was conducted by the Hostel Management for younger children. This meant that mothers could go out to work, leaving their little ones in the capable hands of the Kindergarten Staff. We arrived with about Ten Pounds left from our funds, plus a further Fifteen Pounds, which had been deposited with the Commonwealth Immigration Authority and was returned to us, on arrival.

On collecting our baggage from the Hostel Store, the day after our arrival, we were distressed to find that certain items of new Children’s wear, purchased from that Grand Emporium, “Marks and Spencers”, prior to departure, had been stolen. The lock on the trunk had been forced. I suspected that this may have happened, whilst in the store overnight but, of course, had no proof of this. I thought that it was a pretty “sick” thing, to rob penniless migrants of their few possessions, especially Children’s clothing. On complaining to the Hostel Management, I received no response, whatever. It became apparent, on speaking to other arrivals from time to time, that pilfering of baggage was Big Business, either whilst in the hold of the vessel en-route or whilst being transported to the Migrant Hostel itself. Only the thieves themselves knew the true situation.

Quite apart from Larceny, there was considerable damage occasioned to property in transit. Some weeks after our arrival, a married-couple came from London, who had brought with them a large quantity of delicate Bone China: much of it collected by an ancient relative, on the Chinese Mainland, during the Colonial era, and of considerable value. It had been “professionally” packed in England, before consignment. However, this did not prevent the destruction of the whole of this lovely porcelain, which on arrival at the Hostel was found to have been totally shattered: not one piece survived. Ruefully, the owner threw the fragments of egg-shell china on to a pile as she, piece by piece, removed the wreckage from the tea-chest in which it had been transported. Teresa and I were appalled to see such avoidable damage. The chest had been clearly marked, “Fragile - with Care”, a fact which, no doubt, singled it out for special treatment.

As our family arrived on a Saturday, it was Monday before we received an official welcome from the Hostel Manager. It was made clear to us, that if we wanted work, it was up to us to go out and get a job. I, therefore, decided to seek work the following day. Armed with the Sydney Morning Herald, I walked the mile or so, in torrential rain, to the East-Hills Railway Station: crossing the Foot-bridge, which enabled those living on the other side of the George’s River to get to the Station. The river at this point is about a hundred yards or more in width and is a not unimpressive stretch of water. There were some very comfortable Naval Married Quarters, built on the Hostel side of the River, a short distance from the Footbridge.

I took a train to Sydney and, in due course, presented myself, looking as if I had been swimming in my clothes, to one or two prospective employers. I was finally accepted as a Cost-Clerk by the Colgate-Palmolive Company of Balmain, at the princely salary of Fifteen Pounds Ten-shillings per week. This was a start. Teresa also obtained work with Otis Elevator Co. of Bankstown, which was about a ten-mile round trip by car. She was able to arrange transport with a man who also lived on the Migrant Hostel and worked at Otis. I had to leave home at 7.00am to get the train to Sydney. From here I caught the Ferry to Mort’s Dock, which was close to my place of work.

The Ferry trip across the harbour to Mort’s Dock was most enjoyable, in the morning light. I left the hustle and bustle of the city behind, as soon as I reached the harbour. The Ferry boat took me across to Balmain, where it deposited the bulk of the passengers and then proceeded to Mort’s Dock. From here there was a grand view of the harbour and the bridge. I lingered here, for a short while and then made my way to the Colgate factory, which was about a hundred and fifty yards from the quayside.

I reported to the personnel office and was conducted to the Cost Office. Here I said “Hello!” to my boss, a rather stout but very good natured man, named, “Ray”. He shook hands with me and said, “Welcome to Colgate-Palmolive!”. “We do the costing for the Company. Have you done any work of this nature before?” “No”, said I. “You’ll soon settle-in. Come with me.” He escorted me to a desk, one of many in this large room. Ray introduced me to the occupant of the adjoining desk, named “Fred”, and pulled-up a chair and sat down next to me. “Your job will be entering stock details on a card system: at least for the time-being”. There was no trace of the stuffiness which exists in England between boss and newcomer and it quickly became evident to me that one used “first-name” terms, in speaking to one’s senior staff. Ray showed me what I was required to do and left me to work.

There were perhaps twenty or so people of both sexes working here, most of them young people My duties, initially, were tedious to a degree, but not arduous. Later I progressed to using a calculator, rather like a large typewriter, to work-out the monthly value of the buildings and stock, for Insurance Purposes. I rather enjoyed playing with figures in this way, which surprised me, as I had not realized that I had this kind of ability.

One worked by the bell at Colgate, starting at 9am and working to 5pm, with an hour for lunch. There was also a morning and an afternoon tea-break, during which one could run downstairs to the Canteen for an excellent cup of tea. I was usually the first off the mark when the tea-bell rang and, invariably, took a prominent early place in the tea-queue, thus ensuring that I would not spend the greater part of the tea-break, standing in line.

It was here, of course, that I met my first Australians. They were, surprisingly, just like English people, in their tastes, although louder and more outspoken in their address. I appreciated the democratic atmosphere here too: calling your boss, “Tom” or “Dick” or whatever; never Mr. So-and-So. I found the women to be loud and coarse in some respects. One neat and pretty girl who worked nearby, suddenly exclaimed, “O Shit!”, when something went wrong. I found this a little hard to take. At this time, many Aussie girls wore a multiple series of underskirts, (or petticoats) with a short outer skirt, producing an effect rather like a ballerina’s dress. It was strangely different from anything I had previously seen and I deduced that it may have been a carry-over from earlier styles, that had been entirely lost in the American-influenced world of European fashion. It was significant that with the advent of Television, this trend disappeared totally. Another Australian “anachronism” was the habit of describing an “attaché-case” or small suitcase as a “Port”, (being short for “Portmanteau”). “Don’t forget your port!” was a familiar cry. One does not hear this so much nowadays, (year 2005).

The women all appeared to be addicted to “BEX” or “Vincent’s” Powders, which were ostensibly recommended for the relief of pain. At any given moment, they would spontaneously cease work and hand around powders, wrapped in a folded paper, which would be carefully opened and, without the assistance of a glass of water, be promptly popped into the awaiting “gob”; where it would be savoured with relish by the recipient. This ritual occurred several times during each morning and afternoon, so that the overall intake of drugs must have been considerable. The habit fell out of fashion years later, when it was discovered that many women were dying of kidney failure; induced by excessive intake of Phenacetin, one of the principle ingredients of these powders.

I found the men to be very like Englishmen in every way. In fact, Australians of British extraction generally fail to fully appreciate the fact that the Australian Culture, and this was particularly true of the Fifties, is essentially British. Even today, that which we recognize in the Australian way of life as desirable; the social standards which are set and generally maintained by everyone, with Ethnic exceptions, are essential values that were developed over centuries by the British People. This is why Aussies feel so much at home when they go to England. It is not merely the language, which they have in common, but the basic attitudes to life: the sense of fair-play and honest dealing that forms the basis of the Cultural life of a Nation.

I had no doubt at this time that, whilst other Nations had a contribution to make to the evolution of Mankind, the British Race could lay claim to having made the best effort so far. Sadly the intervening period, of almost fifty years, has resulted in devastating changes in both British and Australian standards of morality. This is due, in my view, to the gradual decline in moral standards, evidently running parallel to the continuous failure of religious influence in the lives of the people. The absence of a critical press has also resulted in political control over the intellectual lives of the people, to an unprecedented level.

There also exists an anglo-phobic element in the Australian community, which has, as its source, the Catholic-Irish tensions of preceding years. This tendency is evident more in political life than in the ordinary daily intercourse of the people. It does not impinge upon inter-personal relationships to any noticeable degree. Indeed, there are no visible sectarian divisions here, at least among the traditional religious denominations.

I would have to admit that, with the influx of people of other Races into Britain, enormous changes have taken place there, in the last forty-odd years. Changes that have drastically altered Social and Cultural values: changes, which have not been of benefit to that Nation, have loosed the bonds of cultural discipline. The same could perhaps be said of Australia, to an even greater degree, although the Aussies have never been subjected to the social pressures of the British.

The failure to control and limit the intake of Ethnic Races into Australia or to foresee the serious impact upon the Australian way of life, which such a free-for-all would create, will result in serious social disruption for future generations and may bring about the eventual partition of the Continent. In particular, the influx of people of Negro Race will have some impact upon the Aboriginal people, who have not been consulted, regarding problems that might arise in identifying or classifying racial types in the future. People of Aboriginal origin enjoy specific privileges, not available to persons of other races. The preservation of Aboriginal Culture, alone, demands some control of these migrant influences. Whilst it is now too late to remedy the situation, there is no doubt that the influx of people of non-English-speaking background into Australia was due, in part, to the Anglo-phobic attitudes of some Australian politicians, which amounted to a form of paranoia, in addition to the need for cheap labour in the Post-War Economy. We are now witnessing the logical consequences of this policy, in the piecemeal destruction of the living standards of the Australian people.

Of particular concern, is the march of Islam in Australia, with the trend towards Fundamentalism, which is developing so rapidly, overseas, amongst people of that Faith. Modern Islam is not renowned for its tolerance, in any event, whatever the historical position might have been. The prospect remains, of an ever-increasing measure of conflict between people of Islamic and other religious beliefs and even amongst the adherents of Islam itself. One has only to observe recent developments in the Middle-East, to be made aware of the very real dangers to ensue from uncontrolled migration of persons of Islamic origin, into a land which has, hitherto, been free from serious sectarian strife.

This is not to deny the fact that the Prophet Mohammed did experience a rather wonderful revelation of the unity of the Creation: nor can it be denied that the Muslims at both Damascus and Cordova, with the co-operation of the Jews, preserved and developed the ancient learning over a period of almost eight-hundred years. It, merely, appears to me that, somewhere, Islam has gone off the rails. It would not be the first time that this has happened in religious history, nor the last. Islam made its mark on the history of mankind a thousand years ago, and has been in the doldrums, ever since the expulsion of the Moors from Spain, in the 15th Century.

At the beginning of the Twenty-First Century, we have a situation in Australia, in which the increasing belligerency of the ruling elite has resulted in the rapid growth of Nationalist Militarism, bordering upon a form of neo-Fascism. Our involvement in United States expansionist Wars has alienated many people of Muslim background and bodes not well for future Muslim-Western relationships. The two bombings in Bali, aimed at Westerners and, particularly, Australians and Americans, should serve to warn our leaders of the dangers into which their arrogant and morally degenerate behaviour is, increasingly, leading this Nation.

However, in l957, very few Australians had ever heard of Islam, nor were they interested in Theology. The average “Aussie” was content to go to work; have a few beers, either during meal breaks or after work, and then go home to his wife and family, if possessed thereof. This was not yet the hey-day of the “Registered Club”, with its luxurious interior, to which later generations tended to gravitate, rather than to the often drab and dingy environment of their own homes. Television was about to “Take off”, but had not yet revolutionized the traditional way of life of the people.

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My new work-mate, Fred, was occupied in rather more important duties than I and was about forty years of age, at this time. He was about 5 feet 10 inches in height, of medium build and fair complexion. He was married and had two children. He lived with his family in Five Dock; a pleasant, Harbour-side suburb, several miles from Balmain, in which the soap-factory was situated. Fred was a quiet, introspective type of man. One day, he and I were seated together in the Canteen, enjoying a respite from the tedious daily routine. The subject turned upon the prospects for advancement with Colgate. Fred said to me, “Well, I have been with this firm for twenty-years and I am not even earning Twenty Pounds a week!” I said, “The prospects do not look too good for me, in that case.” As it happened, I was merely filling-in time here, whilst adjusting to life in Sydney and did not intend to remain at Colgate’s. My Departmental Boss, Ray, was very fair towards his Staff and, upon the whole, apart from the fact that the work was tedious, I was happy working here.

Several other young men commenced work with Colgate, during the time I was employed as a Cost Clerk. One of these was a Tasmanian, Peter Prees, whom I found to be rather a strange individual. He appeared to me, to be always looking over his shoulder. Peter was short, dark-haired and of a pale complexion. His manner was, initially, cool and distant, as if he distrusted people. Perhaps it was the strangeness of his new life-style that placed him on the defensive. He had recently arrived in Sydney and this was his first Job here. He struck me as a crafty, calculating chap, who was anxious to get-on, as quickly as possible. He left Colgate, for other work, before me but I had contact with him again at a later stage. There was another young man who came to work at Colgate whilst I was there. He was a tall and well-built lad about 19 years, named Michael. After we were introduced by Ray, Michael sat in the desk to my right. During the morning we had a chat: I said, “Are you from Sydney, Michael? “No”, he replied, I am from a place near Wagga Wagga called “The Rock”. It is about three hundred miles from here. It is a very quiet place and there is no work for people like me. I have come to Sydney to try to make something of my life.” “That is what we are all trying to do.” said I. I have only been here for three months and find it very strange. It is a different world altogether from England”.

Michael later told me that he was Jewish, although, apart from a rather dark complexion, there was nothing in his appearance to indicate that he was of Semite extraction. This young man also left after about a month and I heard no more of him.

As I walked to the Railway Station, each morning, I got to know another young fellow who was living on the Hostel. His name was Peter and he was a Glazier by trade. He was an easy-going and affable man, several years older than me and had been in Sydney for about two years. Being in the building trade, he was familiar with the cost of land. He told me, that land in the Eastern Suburbs could cost up to Ten Thousand Pounds for a small block. I thought this was a tremendous sum. At the time, a block of Land in East Hills, which was a quiet urban district on the George’s River, ten or so miles from the City Centre, could be purchased for about Seven Hundred Pounds. Of course, Teresa and I had no concept, whatever, as to what was involved in the purchase of land and the building of houses. This to us, was another sphere. At this period, we were adjusting to the change in life-style and were by no means certain that we would be staying in Australia. I then intended that, at the end of the two year period, which we were required to stay in Australia under the terms of our agreement with the Commonwealth Government, we would, probably, go to New Zealand.

### Chapter 84

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### East Hills Hostel

Meals were taken in the large Dining-Hall at the Migrant Hostel. The food was adequate but uninspiring. Occasionally, meals were tasty but, as they were purchased by Caterers on a strictly limited per-capita allowance and prepared by Cooks who had previously been bricklayers, metalworkers or general-labourers, it was not to be expected that the place would come up to the standard of the Hotel-de-Luxe. However, as one of the Hostel Dwellers remarked, “They could not burn the Corn Flakes!”, which was true. During our time at the Hostel, we became friendly with some decent people and maintained contact with them for several years, after we had left the Hostel. Times change, of course, and people move from place to place, invariably losing contact with each other.

Also residing on the Hostel were Alan and Carol Morrison. They were from Newcastle and full of the easy-going affability of the Geordies. Carol got to know me, when she was doing her washing in the Hostel laundry; one Saturday afternoon. I was scrubbing the clothing, with vigour, and doing everything in a workmanlike manner. Carol was amazed to see a man scrubbing clothes and said to me, “Eeee!, you wash better than a wooman!”. I was rather flattered by this compliment. As both my wife and I were in full-time employment, I had to do my bit, in this manner.

Later Carol introduced us to her husband, Alan. He was a tall, dark-haired and well-built man of about 40 years, at that time. They had two children: a boy and a girl, some years older than our own children. They later bought a house near Liverpool and for a number of years there was regular contact between our two families. When we moved to the South Coast, as was invariably the case, we lost touch with our “Geordie” friends. We had heard that they had returned to Newcastle.

Prior to leaving England, our family had spent a week in the early Summer, in a cabin at Malham Cove, in the Yorkshire Dales. This cabin was just South of the Cove itself, in a delightful situation. However, there was an abundance of blossom in the hedgerows and fields around about. It was on this holiday that our younger Son, Owen, then aged two years, suffered his first attack of Asthma, which was to plague him and torment the family for many years. Teresa and I had no idea what was happening to our little boy, who had great difficulty in breathing. The weather did not improve things, as it rained heavily throughout our week’s holiday. We took Owen to a local Doctor, who asked us, “How long has he had Asthma?” This was a shock to me, who had heard of the complaint, but had no personal experience of this devastating malady. I said, “He has never had it before”. Naturally, this incident blighted our holiday. Owen was, generally well, whilst in Manchester, but on moving to Sydney, his Asthma developed into a major problem. Whether it was exacerbated by his mother’s absence, at work, one can never know, but the fact was, that there was a performance every morning, when she left him at the Nursery.

On those days when the child was sick, his mother could not go to work. When she felt that she could have no more time off, it fell to me to take a day off, which was also alien to my character. However, there was no other way out of the dilemma. One or other of the parents had to be with him, on those days when he was ill. It did not really matter a great deal which of us took a day off work but neither of us liked the idea. This attitude remained with us for the rest of our working lives. The other female employees were rather bitchy with Teresa, whenever she had been absent from work. However, her supervisor, Bert Smith, supported her and told her not to worry, as she always did “twice as much” as the other girls, on the days on which she was there.

### Chapter 85

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### Bentley Chemical Co.

After six months working for Colgate, i obtained work as a Book-keeper-clerk with the Bentley Chemical Co. This was a one-man concern, conducted by an Austrian Jew, Mr. Bentley. (An anglicisation of Bettelheim). He was short and stout, about the late fifties at this time. Mr. Bentley had escaped the slaughter, by the skin of his teeth; arriving in Australia shortly before the War. However, his other relatives and those of his wife were not so fortunate. As a result and, understandably, both he and his wife were highly neurotic.

I was required to work from 9am to 6pm and earned Twenty Pounds per week, which was an improvement on my last job. Mr. Bentley was a fairly good employer, although he was liable to turn on a tantrum over some minor point. I worked conscientiously: did the Books, the Wages and the correspondence, being a versatile young chap. However, I was never happy in this job. My “office” was a tiny box, bereft of daylight and lit by a single electric light globe. The firm manufactured cheap chemicals and perfumes for Woolworths and G.J. Coles, and had its premises at the bottom-end of Pitt Street in an old building, which is still standing and now forms part of an extended Chinatown.

The firm employed about six girls, as sweated labour, although Mr. Bentley paid them the basic wage, of course, as required by Australian Law. If I had a quiet moment, I was also expected to lend a hand on the shop-floor, assisting in the filling of bottles. Whilst I did not mind this, I considered that I should not have been called-upon to do work of this nature. Several times during the twelve months I worked here, I gave notice, following which Mr. Bentley would be on his “best behaviour”, for a week or so.

I observed the strictest honesty, when working for this firm. Bentley appreciated my trustworthiness; not that there was much here to tempt anyone to dishonesty.

The firm had a traveller, Joe Schneider who like Bentley, was a Jewish refugee. Joe was a sweet-natured, gentle soul, to whom I responded warmly. Joe was fairly tall, thin and rather shabbily attired. He was a Polish Jew and had somehow survived the Holocaust. Whilst I often spoke to Joe, our conversation usually turned upon mundane subjects and I learned nothing of his history. Joe did tell me, once, that he had gone into a Chinese Shop, in some far-flung Oriental place, and had been surprised to see a copy of the Jewish Gazette (or some such Hebrew publication), lying on the Counter. He asked the proprietor, who was a Chinaman, why he had this paper on his Counter. The Chinaman replied to the effect that he was a Jew and liked to know what was happening in the world of Jewry. Joe was understandably reticent about speaking of his Wartime experiences, which might have been worth recording. I know that he was a “Camp” survivor.

Whilst working for Bentley Chemicals, I also took a Saturday morning job for a few weeks, doing typing for another Jewish trader. This man dealt in toys, dolls, etc., and had premises near the Sydney Market. This job occupied me from 9am to lpm each Saturday, but paid very little. I was required to type long stock-lists. These premises reminded me of something out of a “Dickens” Novel, being on the first floor of an old Warehouse: dark, dismal and cluttered with rubbish. After working here for several Saturday mornings, I was told that I was no longer needed.

As my train usually arrived in Sydney thirty minutes or so before I was due to commence my daily duties, I would usually spend a few minutes in the Park at Central Station; “psyching myself-up” for the day’s labour. It was pleasant to spend even a few minutes, in a relative oasis, distant from, yet so close to the turmoil of city life. Here and there, lying on benches, were the “derelicts”, who habitually frequented the Park. They were the very dregs of Society: addicted to alcohol, filthy, foul-mouthed and ill-clad. Sometimes they would sit together, two or three on a bench, passing-around a cheap bottle of wine. They have been a constant feature of the Sydney scene and this park, in particular, for generations. At lunchtime, I usually took my sandwiches to the park and sitting or lying under the tall, graceful palm-trees, would reflect on life, whilst observing the rhythmic sway of the treetops, in the breeze.

Sometimes I would wander through the nearby streets, window-shopping. Once, I passed a wine-bar in Pitt Street, outside which was an irate lady, who had evidently been refused further credit. She stood shaking her fist in the direction of the proprietor of the establishment and calling out lustily, “I’ll fuck you!, I’ll fuck you!”, repeatedly. I was both shocked and amused by this. Another time, whilst stretching my legs in Liverpool Street, I passed a man and woman, presumably husband and wife, walking in the opposite direction. The lady was large and fat; her spouse small and thin. Both were perhaps in their late fifties. She was belabouring him over some unknown problem, stating, both audibly and eloquently, “You are the most cantankerous old bastard I have ever met!” There was no audible response from the gentleman.

During one lunch-hour, I was accosted by a Prostitute, as I walked in the Haymarket. This should not have surprised me, as it was an acknowledged “Red-light” district. However, I was surprised and embarrassed: blushing violently, as I declined the young lady’s services. “Sorry dear, I am on my lunch-hour”. Had I been inclined to indulge myself, I would have had to refuse.

Whilst walking in Pitt Street, one day, I met a young man, whom I had known at Colgate Palmolive, one Peter Prees. Peter looked very lively and satisfied with himself. We shook hands and I said, “How are you getting-on?” He replied, “I am working for the NSW State Government now. That is the thing to be in. Working conditions are good and there is plenty of scope for promotion. Also, there are so many Departments, that you can transfer to and from. The best thing of all is that you’ve got a job for life and Superannuation at the end of it. It’s better than working for a boss, who can sack you at a moment’s notice!” I said, “That sounds like the ticket. I didn’t know there was a NSW Public Service.” We now parted and I gave no further thought to the matter.

I had previously enquired at the Commonwealth Public Service Board and had been informed that there was no work available. A short time later, I saw an advertisement in the Sydney Morning Herald, calling for applications from persons wishing to undertake the Clerical Entrance Examination for the NSW Public Service. I applied to sit for the Examination, which was in the form of a dictation and intelligence test. When I went to the hall at NSW University, where the examination was to be held, I was astonished to find probably two-hundred people seated in a large room. I did not think much of my chances of obtaining a place. A week or so later, I received a letter telling me that I had come “top of the class” and asking me to attend for an interview. I was offered employment with the Tourist Bureau as a Filing Clerk. When I visited the Bureau, in Martin Place, I thought it a dump: the Records Department was a dismal, dusty place and I was not impressed. Although I accepted the position, I did not turn up for the job, as arranged.

### Chapter 86

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### Admiral Television Co.

At about the same time, I was offered a job as Private Secretary to the Company Secretary of Admiral Television Co., which, at that time was manufacturing this desirable article, in a factory at Gow Street, Bankstown. The latter job appeared to offer good prospects for the future, with a wage in excess of Twenty Pounds per week. I took the job with Admiral and did not report for work at the Tourist Bureau. This was a mistake, as I had not been in my new job for two weeks before I was relegated to the Service Department as a Service Clerk. Mr O’Neill, the Secretary, who was very decent with me, told me that he had decided to employ a “male” secretary, as he was “sick” of unreliable females. However, the Managing-Director disapproved of this decision and I had to go. Mr. O’Neill gave me a reference, which stated that, “whilst his work has been satisfactory during the short period of his employment, a change in Company policy had demanded that he be replaced.” Unbeknown to me, Admiral Television in Australia was “On the rocks”: the Managing-Director having recently returned from the United States with instructions to cut costs. Heads began to roll, particularly in the Sales Department. The problem with Admiral was that, whilst initially, it had imported serviceable sets from the USA: latterly the Company had been manufacturing them in Bankstown; using parts made in Australia. Many of these parts were manufactured by a firm named “Ducon Condenser” , of Riverwood, which rushed them out, without adequate quality control.

My duties in the Service Department required me to accept calls for TV Service and arrange for a Serviceman to visit. Quality-control was also non-existent at the Admiral Factory, although each set delivered had attached, thereto, a fancy label indicating it had been subject to rigid testing. The inevitable result was that unserviceable Television Sets were being released on to the market. Customers frequently complained that, after the set had been running for an hour or so, the screen would suddenly go blank. When this happened on Saturday mornings, they would justifiably become extremely agitated, as no service was available until the following Monday. Having paid Five-hundred pounds for a TV set, customers were entitled to expect that it would work. In those days, this was a large sum of money. One of these irate customers was a well-known tennis player, a Mr. Lew Hoad, but this fact was unknown to me, who took no interest whatever in illustrious sporting identities. Mr. Hoad was loud in his complaint, when informed that he would need to restrain his impatience, until Monday morning. I was always polite to these customers and felt genuinely sorry that they had bought a “bomb”. There was nothing I could do but advise them that a serviceman would call early in the following week.

Apart from the fact that I regretted not accepting the Public Service Job, I would have been quite content. However, I knew that there was no prospect of a permanent position here, as the Company was on the verge of collapse. I got along very well with the Service Manager, one Harry Widdows and the other Staff. There was a quiet, but kindly-natured man nominally in charge of the other Clerks, named John Steel. John had been with the Company since its Australian debut. He was extremely considerate with his two colleagues. In appearance he was about thirty years of age, fairly tall, dark haired but balding and with a sallow, rather Jesuitical complexion. He did not appear to be of a particularly robust physique.

My immediate colleague, during my time at the Service department, was a young Australian named John Dundas, who was a tall, good-looking and well-built chap, of about the same age as myself. He was married and lived in Greenacre, a mile or so from the Factory. He had two small children. John seemed to be a very sensible young man, who knew where he was going in life. Like me, he was still “battling” to establish himself, but unlike me, he was self-assured. During our frequently quiet moments, we discussed various aspects of life and I grew to have a great respect for him. John embodied so many of the desirable qualities of stability, self-confidence and manliness, which I considered to be essential in a man.

There were several other characters with whom I made acquaintance here. One of them was the elderly gate-keeper, Pat Ryan, an old man in his late Seventies, who had been able to get a part-time job at the gate office. Pat was slim and frail, although still very lively in his mental faculties. I spoke to him from time to time, as I was entering or leaving the factory. Pat told me that he had lived in Bankstown all his life and that during the greater part of that time it had largely consisted of paddocks. Now all that was changed. The town was rapidly developing as a satellite of Sydney. Pat lived in a cottage not far from the town centre, with his daughters. They were very concerned that he should still be working, but he enjoyed his job, which filled in the daytime hours very well for him. He was a very sweet-natured old gentleman. Forty years on, he would have not recognized his home-town, in the glass and concrete monstrosities which now constitute the greater part of this once quiet suburban town.

Also working in the Service Department workshop were two very friendly French Polishers, Albert and Michael. It was their job to rectify complaints as to the finish on the cabinets. They would spend hours; working the shellac to and fro, as they brought it to a fine polish. All that skill is now gone, with the advent of Plastic finishes. Albert was in his late fifties and looking forward to his eventual retirement. He was a large, fresh-faced and pleasant-natured man. I would stop to chat with Albert when visiting the workshop, to check on the progress of some repair job. I would also watch the servicemen, as they laboriously checked printed circuits for faults.

A Jewish man named Cohen occasionally came to the Service Department: being employed by one of the large Retailing Chains (Eric Anderson’s). This man only spoke to me once or twice, as he waited to collect goods. He displayed an astonishing sweetness of temperament. I received such an impression of genuine spirituality about this man, that I never forgot him. There was nothing physically prepossessing about him. He was short in stature, olive-complexioned and dark-haired. Indeed, he bore all the classical identifying features of the Orthodox Jewish male. My contact with Mr. Cohen demonstrated, once more, to me, the fact that the recognition of a virtuous character is often instantaneous and transcends normal physical relationships between individuals. Nor is it confined within a particular class or group of people.

There were other interesting people employed here, one of whom was a Dutchman, named Gerard Gheering, a charming, cultivated man of about fifty-five years, whose son also worked in the Service Department. He lived only a short distance from the Factory, in George’s Hall and had called his home, “Great Mokum”. This was the name the Jews had given to Amsterdam; in gratitude for the privilege, which they there enjoyed, of freedom to live their lives without fear of molestation. When speaking to Gerry one day, I made some remark about the lust for wealth and the dangers inherent in greed. Gerry replied, “That is true, but you have to remember that wealth brings power with it; power to do good as well as harm!”

For a short time, there worked at Admiral an husband and wife, named Jorgen and Ingrid Hansen. I think that the husband was a technician of some kind, as he and his wife came into the Service Department on several occasions. They were Danish and might easily have played the part of Pope Gregory the Great’s “Angels”, in a play or film, as they were both “as fair as the day”. In fact, one might easily have mistaken them for twins. Even now, I am not sure whether they were not, in fact, brother and sister, rather than husband and wife. Neither was tall, being about the middle height, but both could have equally been described as “beautiful”. The girl was absolutely ravishing, with flaxen hair, fair complexion and perfect features. Likewise, whilst not attracting me in a sexual way, Jorgen impressed as being a perfect specimen of the human male. Of course, when they were present, my eyes were always on the girl: whose like I have not seen to this day, almost fifty years down the track.

There was a short but well-built chap, about thirty-odd years of age, who worked in the factory floor. He was named Egon Huch, probably a German, although I never questioned him about his origins. He was a man of a warm, kindly and introspective nature. After I left the firm, I corresponded with Egon, once or twice, but gradually lost contact with him.

### Chapter 87

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### Spiritualism Down Under

About six months after our arrival, I purchased a motorcycle and sidecar for Fifty Pounds. It was a l95l model, Panther 600cc, single cylinder bike. I had the engine bored and a new piston fitted, by a motor-cycle dealer, who kept a shop at Hammondville. The bike was reliable, although slow, and particularly so during hot weather, when there was a tendency for the fuel to vaporize. However, it provided my family with essential transport, which was necessary in Australia, even more so than in the United Kingdom. This vehicle enabled us to visit the South Coast beaches during the hot Summer weather, when the temperature away from the coast can often reach over l00 degrees Fahrenheit, or 35 to 40+ degrees Celsius.

I drove my bike to Sydney from time to time, to attend Services at the Enmore Spiritualist Church; which was one of two churches functioning in Sydney at that time. The other place was a one-woman affair: services being held in a private house in Coronation Boulevard, Enfield. This place was nicely maintained. The meetings were held in a large room, which had been suitably furnished. The lady who conducted these Meetings had no “organization”; nor did she have regular Services, so that this establishment was practically non-functional.

I attended the Enfield meetings, several times, as I was not happy with the Services at Enmore. On one occasion, I had observed a man reading a newspaper at the rear of the meeting. One problem, from my point of view, was that much of the Service was devoted to Flower-Readings; a form of Psychometry, much in vogue in Australia, and generally useless as a means of proving survival, which is the primary purpose of such readings. The person giving the “Reading” will hold the flower (or personal object) tendered by the hopeful recipient, thereby “linking-up” with his or her Spirit influences. Usually, the net result of this activity is a form of character-analysis of the individual. Sometimes, if the “Medium” is gifted with “vision”, a message is given, which identifies someone who has passed-over, or perhaps a spiritual exhortation may be given, which is of benefit to the recipient. Psychometry is unsatisfactory, as it relies on a physical link.

Many of the persons taking the platform at meetings and giving such messages are obviously lacking in the requisite perception: the net result being very much a waste of time. In fact I, increasingly, formed the opinion that there is, in Australia, and perhaps to some extent in England also, a profound and almost universal ignorance of the principles and practice of Spiritualism, as traditionally taught. Throughout the 20th Century, it could be suggested that the situation in the world of the “Occult” has been chaotic, with an infinitely variable range of ideas being promulgated on the subject of “spirituality”.

There were several sincere people who attended services at Enmore, amongst them the President, an old gentleman, Mr. Bennett, who was then in his Nineties. I also got to know Miss Scott, an aged Spinster and Frank Macken, both of whom have now moved-on to more active duties elsewhere. Frank was a man, then in his middle-age, who although not highly-educated, was well-read and had a great deal of understanding of Spiritual things. Although I did not agree with many things that Frank taught, principally on the subject of “Re-incarnation”, I always entertained a great respect for his sincerity. For a number of years, Frank conducted a Friday-night Circle at the Enmore Church, which I attended on a number of occasions, in my early years in Sydney.

One evening, as I was returning home along the Hume Highway on my motor-bike and travelling between thirty and forty miles per hour, I lost control of the vehicle, for some reason; most probably a “pothole”, and ended-up in the gravel on the incorrect side of the Highway. I was alarmed at finding the outfit suddenly pulling to the right, in spite of my attempts to keep to the left. Fortunately for me, there was no other vehicle coming in the opposite direction. I was thankful for this, as I had simply run straight across the highway and would have been, possibly, killed or injured, had there been a collision with an oncoming vehicle. I would also have been held to blame for any injury or damage caused to persons or property. In those days, the Hume Highway was a single-lane each-way affair, not the broad motorway it is today. After recovering from the shock of my experience and checking the outfit as well as I could, in the dark, I continued my journey home, without further incident.

In subsequent years, I became involved in the administration of the “Wollongong Christian-Spiritualist Church”. For some time, in the latter part of the 20th Century, I was the “President” of this Association, which I arranged to become incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act, when that legislation was enacted by the State Government of New South Wales. By then I was a Solicitor, working for the Australian Legal Aid Office and made myself familiar with the legislation. I was also involved in developing the constitution of the Church, over number of years, before it was finally settled under the terms of the Act. Prior to this Act, there was no provision for a Friendly Society to attain legal status, except by an Act of Parliament. I understand that the name of the Society as a “Christian-Spiritualist” body was determined by the members, some years before my appearance on the scene, in order to placate the Society’s Bankers when seeking a loan with which to purchase the property, currently in the possession of the Church. ( It seems that the inclusion of the word, “Christian” gave an ora of “respectability” to a body that, otherwise, might have been tainted with the stigma of “Necromancy” and “Witchcraft”. ) Such was the public conception of the Spiritualist Movement in our Society, prior to the advent of the Whitlam Government of the early 70’s, which provided for the formal recognition of minority religious groups. During my term of some years, this Church was never a “Christian-Spiritualist” body, in the properly accepted sense, but was simply a Spiritualist Church, which did not particularly emphasize the importance of the Christian message. I resigned as President, one Sunday afternoon, after becoming disillusioned with my inability to make any impression on other Committee members, on such points as the importance of the principle of “worship” rather than “fund-raising”: of “spirituality” as a basic principle of the work of the Movement. There was also, in my opinion, among other matters, a lack of proper control of the finances of the Association. As it is a number of years since I have been back to the Church, I cannot comment on the present state of affairs at the church.

It was about the early sixties that I began experience vivid dreams, and after being roundly lectured by a gentleman, whom I perceived to be a former Buddhist Monk, I promised him that I would keep a record of my experiences. Since that time I have maintained a record, as accurately as possible, of some of my more impressive experiences whilst in the dream state.

### Chapter 88

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### Ingleburn

It was during my period at Admiral Television Co, that Teresa and I moved to our first real home at Lots 21-22 Ingleburn Road, Ingleburn. Teresa had saved a deposit of Six-hundred pounds and we decided to purchase this small, two-bedroomed house, which had been built as a speculative venture by a local builder. It was only about 8 Squares in size, (800 square feet), but was well-built and brand new, with a small garden front and rear. The price of the house was Two-thousand four hundred and fifty pounds, for the balance of which we took a Mortgage through Custom-Credit Corporation, one of the major money-lending organizations, of those years. We were still totally ignorant of many aspects of life in Australia but, at least, this was a step in the right direction for us.

To assist in moving our few effects, I borrowed the Service vehicle, which was a two-ton Commer Van. On the way to Ingleburn from the Hostel, the van ran out of petrol, owing to a faulty fuel indicator; leaving me stranded, several miles from the nearest Service Station. A passing motorist kindly came to my aid, with a Jerry-can of Petrol.

When we moved into the house, we had very little by way of furniture: using Boxes covered with upholstery material for seating. We went into debt to obtain beds and kitchen furniture, but this was really unavoidable. As it was, things were rather hard for us, in the first year or so. Nevertheless, this was our first real home and we were very proud of it. It was situated almost at the end of Ingleburn Road, about three-quarters of a mile from the Railway Station. It was a typical small, fibro-tile cottage with two bedrooms, a small living-room and a correspondingly small kitchen-dining-room. There was a bathroom with shower and bath. There was no sewerage installed in those days, in outlying parts of Sydney, and the toilet consisted of a petit-maison in the back-yard, with a pan that was emptied once a week by the local “Bin-men”, employed by the Campbelltown Council.

Sometimes the pan became over-full and I would then dig a pit in the back-yard to bury the excrement. In rainy weather, as the house was situated at the bottom of a long hill, water tended to accumulate in the drains at the front of the house, becoming stagnant and odorous. However, these primitive aspects of life in Australia were overshadowed by the freedom and privilege of ownership of a place of one’s own: a small cottage on a block of land, forty feet by one hundred and twenty, in which one could feel secure and content.

I planted poplar trees and roses in the front garden. Behind the house I planted Citrus. In the Summer months I grew tomatoes and other vegetables, as the heavy clay soil was highly fertile: having been previously used for raising hens.

Teresa made the home as comfortable as possible within her limited means. Whilst working for Bentley Chemical Co, I had purchased, for a hundred pounds, again on the “never-never”, an Elna Sewing Machine, which was the very latest Swiss model. Teresa put this machine to very good use, around the house and it is still working almost fifty-years later, although somewhat noisier than when new. Gradually the house was equipped with simple but serviceable furniture; providing us with a measure of comfort.

Teresa continued to work at Otis, travelling to work in the sidecar of my motor-bike, for a distance of about ten miles. During the Winter months, I found exposure to the chill morning air to be decidedly unpleasant. I often arrived at work, with fingers suffering from the effects of mild frostbite. However, at this time there was no prospect of me obtaining more comfortable transport.

Whilst we were at work, the two boys attended the local Kindergarten, at Ingleburn, conducted by a Mrs. Vereker, This lady was a considerate person, who did not object to the children remaining with her until almost 6 O’clock on week-days, at which time they would be collected by Teresa and I

Later on, when little John commenced school, arrangements were made for him to go to the Kindergarten after school finished. This arrangement worked very well.  Likewise, when Owen too enrolled in the Ingleburn Infants’ School, both children were cared for by Mrs. Vereker, until they were old enough to return home by themselves.

The motor-bike provided the family with the means of transport and we were able to keep in touch with those friends who remained on the Hostel or had gone to live in other suburbs. In addition to the beaches, we often drove for a picnic to one of the extensive and well-equipped picnic areas, provided by the Sydney Water Board at its Dams. These were situated, for the most part, in the Catchment areas to the South of the City. Here there were barbeque facilities, boiling-water laid-on, together with outdoor furniture and extensive grassed picnic areas, enabling a family to have a really enjoyable day. One could take a walk along the sealed roads to the Dam Wall, usually some distance from the Picnic area. The environs were landscaped, with well-maintained gardens and clean toilet facilities; providing an ideal place for a family or even a large group of people to spend an enjoyable day together. Sad to say, in recent years the standard of maintenance care has deteriorated greatly, with gardens being allowed to go to wrack and toilet facilities not properly cleaned. In spite of this, the Dams are still popular with families and groups, seeking an inexpensive picnic outing.

The following pictures show Teresa at her desk at Otis, Bankstown, our little house at Ingleburn, Teresa, then pregnant with Edward (Ted) in 1962 and Teresa with George and Mona in 1959, prior to returning to England:



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### Chapter 89

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### The South Coast

The Beaches of New South Wales are places of resort for thousands of Sydneysiders, during the hotter months and even during the Winter, on the often warm and pleasant days. I would usually drive my family the thirty or so miles to the South Coast, on either the Saturday or the Sunday and sometimes on both days, to escape the intolerable heat of the hot Westerly winds. The road from Ingleburn to the Coast was single-lane traffic each way, as indeed were most highways in Australia, at this time. My motor-bike made hard work of the hills between Appin and Bulli, a distance of fifteen miles; with the result that a long queue of cars would build-up behind the motorcycle Combination, as it chugged laboriously up the hills, in the heat of the day. The petrol must have vaporized in the carburettor, as in the cool of the evening the motor ran with much more power. In spite of this drawback, the motorcycle provided the necessary transport for the family, notwithstanding the abuse and insults offered to me by those irate motorists, following in the rear, as I coaxed the bike slowly up the hills.

We early decided that Coaldale Beach was to be the regular place of Seaside resort for us; this being not so well frequented as Austinmer, a mile to the South, and with equally good facilities. The only drawback there, was that the surfing-beach was rather steep, which meant that, when a heavy swell was running, the surf could be dangerous. On several occasions, I found myself in difficulties, when attempting to surface for air, after diving beneath a breaking wave. As I grew older, I decided that I no longer had the stamina to brave the waves, as the native Australians could do. The children, of course, loved the seaside; the water was warm and clean here, with no evidence of the pollution, which later became a problem in the more fashionable Sydney Beaches of Bondi and Maroubra. Here, on the South Coast, some 40 miles from Sydney, there was not the same problem with sewage pollution, as at that time Sewage was not being pumped into the sea on the massive scale of later years.

Many a pleasant weekend was spent here by our family, in lazing about, sunbathing and swimming for hours; with little regard for the effects of sunburn. Later, when we moved to the South Coast, we decided that we would like to live at Austinmer: then a sleepy dormitory suburb of the steel town of Wollongong. It was a popular retirement district for elderly people, many of whom were originally English. The charm of Austinmer, lay in the fact that it was completely unspoilt, with little commerce and no industry in the immediate neighbourhood, apart from a small coal-mine burrowing into the escarpment behind the village. The mine closed shortly before we moved to the South Coast. The setting of Austinmer, beneath the escarpment, which here rises twelve hundred feet above the village: and bounded by the Pacific Ocean on the East, is rather picturesque.

### Chapter 90

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### The NSW Public Service.

I had been dissatisfied with myself, ever since I had made the mistake of taking the job with Admiral Television, instead of starting work with the State Public Service. I realized that I had been short-sighted in this decision. One day in l959 I telephoned the Personnel Branch of the NSW Public Service Board and asked the lady, who answered the telephone, if there was a prospect of obtaining work in the Service. I pointed-out that I had passed the Entrance Examination but had not accepted the job offered to me: explaining my situation. This lady obtained my file and observed that I had not reported for work, after having accepted a position. However, she said that work was available and I was offered a job with the Mines’ Department, as a Clerk, at a Salary of Seventeen-Pounds, Ten-shillings per week. This was Two-pounds Ten shillings less than I was then earning. However, I was beginning to realize that opportunities have to be made and readily accepted the offer. Accordingly, I gave notice at Admiral, after having been in the job for about twelve months. Subsequent to my departure, the Company closed its Australian operations and laid-off the workers.

I now embarked upon a totally new career: which was to involve me in numerous adventures and in which I would become acquainted with many kindly and some rather strange people.

The New South Wales Department of Mines was situated in a building which fronted directly on to Circular Quay, the very spot where it all started in 1788: with the landing of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove. The building itself was old but still serviceable; I being employed as a general clerk in the Accounts’ section. My daily tasks were not arduous and involved the opening of the mail in the morning and entering of particulars in a Mail-Received Register. Following this, I was required to tour the major Banking Houses in Sydney and various Government Departments; delivering and collecting documents.

On occasions, I had to handle fairly large sums of money and, for security purposes, was required to carry a pistol. The Regulations demanded that I attend the Police Pistol Range, situated in a disused Railway Tunnel beneath the City, at Wynyard Station; to be trained in the use of a pistol. After firing several shots, the Police Constable in charge of the Range remarked that I was a good shot and asked me if I had handled a pistol before. I replied that during my Army Service I had been required to have regular pistol-shooting practice.

My Supervisor at the Mines’ Department was a gentleman named Mr. Connor. He was an elderly Australian; close to retirement: a man of gentle nature and extremely genial temperament. When I reported to this office on my first morning, Mr. Connor shook hands with me and introduced himself. “How do you like living in Australia, John?” “Pretty well, thank you, Mr. Connor”. “Call me ‘Jim’”, said my boss. “Where do you come from in the old country?” “From Salford, in Lancashire”, I replied, thinking that Mr. Connor would have no idea of Salford. “Now, that is a coincidence, John. Do you know Salford Royal Hospital?” “Yes, I lived about a mile away from there.” “Well!”, continued my supervisor, “During the First World War I was wounded and sent to Salford Royal Hospital. I was there for a good many months. I have a very high regard for the people of Salford: they looked after me, very well indeed. They were wonderful people!” I was, naturally, pleased to hear this news. Subsequently and, perhaps, as a result of this talk, I got along very well with Mr. Connor, who showed me every consideration. In fact, I only realized after I had completed my three months’ Probationary Service, that Mr. Connor had been of some considerable assistance to me. During this time, as Owen had been very sick, I had, of necessity, been obliged to take a day off work here and there, as my wife had, herself, missed far too much time from her job. It so happened that I had been absent about five days during this period. In reporting on my attitude and application to my work, during my Probationary period, Mr. Connor stated that I had not been absent during this time, which, as he probably well knew, was not the case. Such a report would have affected my appointment on a permanent basis. In due course I was confirmed in my appointment to the Service.

I became good-mates with the other members of the Accounts’ Branch. In fact, it must be admitted that I got along almost too well with them. The boys had a habit of “nipping-out” to the Pub, conveniently situated on the corner of the building, during the afternoon, when they should have been at work. Mr. Connor turned a “blind-eye” to this. The result was that, quite often, we would return to the office shortly before five o’clock, to sign off for the day, affected by alcohol to a greater or lesser extent.  I myself commenced drinking during this period, after four years on the Band-wagon. However, I never became a heavy drinker; there being only one or two occasions in succeeding years, of which it could be averred that I had had too much to drink.  In any event, the family financial resources were still severely restricted and would not have permitted heavy expenditure on alcohol.

My colleagues at the Accounts’ Branch were a mixed bunch. There was one young man who had recently been appointed as a Cadet Legal Officer. His name was John Garrett. John was a tall, agreeable young man, affable and open hearted. There was another young chap named Paul Verner, who carried out menial duties of some kind within the Branch, but who drove a large American Dodge car. Paul was still a single man, about twenty-eight years of age and lived in the Liverpool district; about seven miles from Ingleburn. One afternoon, when we had been drinking rather late at the Corner Pub, Paul gave several other young men and myself, a lift home in his car. Whilst I was pleased to be given a lift to Liverpool, from where I could have caught the train home, Paul insisted on driving me to my front door.

In l959, with a view to improving my Shorthand, I had commenced attending an establishment known as “Hornblower College!” This was a Shorthand-Speed School, conducted in Moore Park, Sydney, by two Edwardian sisters, now in their Seventies. They were intelligent, dignified ladies, dressed in the traditional Turn-of-the-Century style, with full gowns and high collars. One could drop-in at any time, after tea, and commence writing to the dictation of the Proprietresses, who simply read from the Hansard Reports, in a manner calculated to improve the speed of any Shorthand student. This was an excellent method, as a result of which many young men and women subsequently attended and passed the 150 words per minute Shorthand Examination; required to gain entry to the ranks of the Court Reporting Service.

I attended for some months, on two evenings per week, spending about two hours at the College. This, naturally, meant that I would not return home until late at night. Payment of fees was on an hourly basis. Although the fees were moderate, this also was an outlay, which the family could ill afford. Whilst attending the College, I improved my writing speed considerably. I took the Court Reporters’ Examination on one occasion. I passed the English and Typing tests but failed the Shorthand Test. I had already passed the 120 wpm test and was not discouraged. I continued to practice my shorthand regularly.

### Chapter 91

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### “The Welfare!”

After I had been at the Mines Department for about three months, I saw an announcement in the Public Service Board Notices, to the effect that the “Child Welfare Department” was seeking Trainee District Officers. The trainees would be required to undertake a two-year Evening Course. I discussed this opening with Teresa and decided to apply for the position, as it was apparent that the Mines Department job, although not in itself arduous, would not present many opportunities for personal advancement. I, therefore applied for an interview. This took place in the Head Office of the Child Welfare Department, in William Street, Sydney. This building had at one time been a Non-Conformist Chapel and was situated immediately below the Museum of New South Wales. The building is still there. It was in December l959 that I entered these “hallowed” halls for the first time. The interview was conducted by three of the senior staff of the Department, amongst whom was my future Boss, Mr. Roy Sherriff. I must have made a satisfactory impression on the tribunal, as I was subsequently accepted as a Trainee District Officer. I transferred to the Child Welfare Department, prior to Christmas.

I found the atmosphere in this Department to be oppressive to a degree, after the relaxed and carefree environment of the Mines Department. There was much competition and concealed sectarian hostility within the Public Service at this time; none more so than in this Department, although the lessor minions were not directly affected. One had to be at work “on time”, for the Attendance-Book was ruled-off by Ron Jarvis, the Second-in-Charge of the ”Secretariat”, at 9am prompt. This gentleman was about thirty-five years of age, at the time: of medium height and build, with dark, thinning hair and a sallow complexion. He appeared to be somewhat humourless and preoccupied with the need to assert his authority over his inferiors. It was only many years later that I realized that he had been under a great deal of pressure in this job.

As its name implied, the Secretariat was the administrative hub of the Department and my task was to collate requisitions for stores and supplies from various establishments, throughout the State; making bulk purchases from the numerous Government Contractors. The work was interesting but demanding and was no sinecure.

During my time in the Head Office, I attended Evening Classes, conducted at the Sydney Teachers’ College in the University Grounds on two evenings each week. I now discontinued my Shorthand Studies. Classes commenced at 7pm and continued to 9pm, so that it was often past 11pm, by the time I arrived home in Ingleburn. During the Winter months, the nights were often bitterly cold. I usually caught the Electric Train from Sydney Central Station to Liverpool, where I would change and catch the Steamer to Ingleburn. This was a little Heath-Robinson contraption that plied the line between Liverpool and Camden: there being a single track line from Campbelltown to Camden, in those days. The connecting train was often late, for one reason or another; sometimes it was the fact that there was a cow on the line, or some other delaying factor. The icy winds, which swept the station on Winter nights, increased the anxiety of the weary workers, homeward bound, for the warmth and comfort of their own armchairs. It had been the practice at Liverpool Station, for a coal fire to be lit in the Station Waiting-Room on cold Winter nights. However, when this cosy haven began to attract the local derelicts, the very sensible provision of a fire was discontinued.

I persevered with the Evening Course, as I realized that I now had an opportunity to improve my lot. Teresa also gave me every encouragement to apply myself to my studies, which included Psychology, Sociology, Social History, Child Welfare Legislation and a range of associated subjects.

My colleagues at work were friendly, in the main, although I never established a cordial relationship with Ron Jarvis, who remained defensive and distant. He was not popular with the junior Staff. Mr. Sherriff, on the other hand, although maintaining the necessary distance between himself and his juniors, was approachable and generally well disposed. He was about fifty-five years of age, at this time, of medium height and complexion: his once dark-brown hair now greying. He wore spectacles. His office was adjacent to the main office and accessed by a doorway close to Ron Jarvis’s desk. He carried out his work quietly and in a dignified manner, leaving the general oversight of the office to his assistant.

I had a young lady to do the bulk of my typing, named, Ann Mangan. She was a pleasant girl, about twenty-one years of age, auburn-haired, fresh-complexioned and good-looking. Like many young women of her generation, she was terrified of putting on weight: being of that build which inevitably spreads beyond reasonable limits, if not rigidly disciplined and controlled. She would take nothing to eat during the day, not even at lunch-time. I told her that she was being very foolish, in not eating at proper times. However, I could not persuade her to take some food at lunch-time. Ann was quite attractive. Occasionally, during a relaxed moment, I would pass some humorous observation, in a light-hearted manner. Perhaps a suppressed ripple of laughter would contaminate the serene and businesslike atmosphere of the Secretariat: causing Ron Jarvis to frown and make a gesture of reproof.

The Director, at this time, was a man named Thomas. He was a sour-faced fellow, about sixty years of age, dark complexioned, and of medium height. He could barely deign to acknowledge the existence of the minions, toiling below. His office was on the floor above the Admin Office. Occasionally, I would pass him on the stairs. Sometimes, and particularly towards the end of my stay in Sydney, he would grunt, in recognition of a familiar, although much inferior face. I felt much gratified, by this attention from my Boss.

The Deputy Director in charge of the Establishments Branch at this time was Vince Heffernan: a large, jovial Australian of distinctly Irish pedigree, who occasionally gave me direct instructions. This man controlled every residential establishment conducted by the Department and had a heavy responsibility. Now and again, he would ask me to order some particular item of equipment or to expedite delivery of much needed supplies to some particular institution. His manner was businesslike, although relaxed.

Down below, in the cellar was the Stationery Store, conducted by a young man who was, more or less, the office junior. He was John Raggett, a tall and slender 17-year-old youth, dark-haired and with a medium complexion. Johnny was awkward and juvenile in his manner, at this stage in his working career. He retained much of the apparent independence of youth, particularly Australian youth. I was impressed by his relaxed manner. In spite of this apparent indifference to the demands of a stuffy working environment, Johnny was a young fellow of a very pleasant disposition and good company. He subsequently rose to the exalted status of a “District Officer”.

I satisfactorily completed the first year of the course, following which I was surprised and delighted to discover that, along with a number of my fellow Trainees, I was to be appointed an Acting District-Officer; pending the completion of the second year of the Course. In effect, this meant not only that I would leave the, unnecessarily, strained atmosphere of the Secretariat, but that I would be embarking upon a totally new lifestyle; combined with a doubling of my salary from roughly Seventeen Pounds Ten Shillings to Thirty-five pounds per week, which, after tax, meant a substantial net weekly gain. This was wonderful news for both myself and Teresa.

### Chapter 92

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### Newtown

My first posting as an Acting-District Officer was to Newtown District Office. This was in the heart of the, then, depressed area of Inner-Sydney and was still generally regarded as an undesirable residential district, by those who considered themselves to be “superior people”. The Office was situated in King Street, the main thoroughfare, which was a busy traffic artery, even in those distant days. The Child Welfare Office was on the first floor, above the ANZ Bank. The premises are still there, as the topical frenzy for pulling down and destroying everything that can be turned to profit has, for some strange reason, by-passed Newtown. The University and the two large hospitals situated nearby, have encroached considerably on the available open space, in and around Newtown, but have not yet swallowed-up the old shops. It will only be a matter of time before the property fronting King Street will have disappeared for ever: not that it will be such a loss, as the buildings are of no architectural value; consisting of late-Victorian or early Twentieth Century, two-storey buildings, of a distinctly utilitarian character.

The District Office was approached by a flight of steep stairs, leading from the street by way of a door at the side of the Bank. At the top there was a reception-area, attended by one of the female clerks. Leading from this was the General Office and Peter Fallon’s office, he being then the Senior District Officer in Charge. A long corridor, flanked by small interviewing rooms, led from the waiting room to the male and female toilets.

There were two female clerks; an elderly male Social Welfare Officer, a male Junior Clerk and a Shorthand-typist. The latter did most of the work of producing reports by District Officers and practically ran the office. Her name was Pat Swain. Pat was a woman of about forty years of age, at this time: still very handsome, being of Gallic origin, fair-complexioned, with long blond hair. She was a highly competent shorthand-typist; not lacking in intelligence. Having worked at the Office for a number of years, she enjoyed a total command of operations; the Senior District Officer being content to allow her to do the bulk of the administrative work in the office. Pat liked to keep her finger on the pulse of what was going-on in the “Field”, as she derived a vicarious satisfaction from the perusal of the various files: carefully noting the progress of each individual case. I was accustomed to doing my own typing, so that she found it difficult to keep a track of my files. Consequently, she was not able to recall from memory the precise situation, with regard to each particular matter in the office, which hitherto she had managed to record very well. This gap in her knowledge caused Pat some consternation. However, I steadfastly adhered to my practice; as I found it more convenient to type reports myself, than go through the process of dictation, with attendant and inevitable delay.

The Social Welfare Officer, a pleasant elderly man, named “Bill Robinson””, was a Welfare Officer from the former Department of Social Welfare; (now merged with the Child Welfare Department to produce a composite of both Departments.) The Child Welfare Department was staffed by Officers of the Clerical and Administrative Grade, whereas the Social Welfare Officers had been merely General Division Staff: a much inferior status. This fact was made forcefully evident to those unfortunates now working in the reformed Department. There were thus, two distinct grades of Officers working directly with the public, apart from the Clerical Staff proper. The Social Welfare Officer looked after the provision of Surgical Aids and such things as Food Orders, Spectacles for Pensioners, Emergency Cash Grants and the like; whereas the District Officers covered a wide range of functions which, in latter years, have tended to become more specialized, although not necessarily more efficient. It must be stressed that this Department, perhaps more than any other New South Wales Government Department, has been subjected to many changes during the last forty years, many of them motivated from reasons of a political, rather than a Social Welfare nature. In early l961, there was a growing awareness of the responsibilities, thrust upon Governments, for the welfare of the people: an attitude that is sadly lacking today.

Also employed in the office was a young and rather self-satisfied young man, who was the general clerk. His name was George Pashcovich, of White Russian origin. He had been born in Shanghai, whence his forbears had found their way, subsequent to the Revolution and the defeat of the White-Russian Army. George informed me that his grandfather had been a General in the Tsarist Army and he appeared to be inordinately proud of his superior ancestry. In appearance, he was 6 ft, or more, in height, of slim figure and with finely-cut features. He had dark hair and a pale complexion. Always well-dressed, at this yet immature period in his life, he sported a silver-topped swagger-stick, which he carried with aplomb. George had originally commenced Medical School, following the completion of his Secondary Education but, for some reason, had discontinued his studies at the conclusion of his first year at University. He subsequently joined the Department.

George’s personal life was devoted to the indulgence of his worldly appetites. This is not to suggest that he was promiscuous: indeed, the reverse was the case. However, George was completely satisfied with himself, in every way, and considered that, if providence bestowed upon him any little comforts and luxuries, this was no more than his due, as one of life’s “gentlemen born”. This philosophy he bore stoically throughout his life: despite many minor inconveniences. Nothing was to disturb the comfort or tranquillity of George Pashkovich, scion of the Old-Russian Nobility.

George ultimately graduated to the status of a District Officer, which position he retained for many years to come. He assiduously cultivated his image, as a person of intelligence and sensitivity. So far as his relationships with his colleagues were concerned, he was a model friend and companion. Indeed, it could rarely be suggested that the Aussie spirit of “mateship” was lacking within the Department, as the new generation of District Officer was generally a person of high standards.

Naturally, I was keen to do my best, within my limited ability and having regard to my total lack of self-confidence; which was still a major handicap for me. At least, I was enthused with a sense of responsibility towards those with whom I was required to work and had a natural warmth and genuine compassion for the problems of my fellows. Their difficulties were similar to those which I myself had experienced, to some extent. In this respect I was well equipped to advise and assist those who were in need.

The District Officer’s duties could be described as varied and responsible. My own District, which I was required to traverse on foot, using Public Transport, covered an area of several square miles and included a part of Camperdown, Leichhardt and Petersham, with an overlap here and there into the surrounding suburbs; all of which were situated within two or three miles from the City centre.

I was required to inspect School Registers and act as a Truant Officer. I had to supervise State Wards; prepare Adoption reports; visit recipients of State Cash Assistance (which was then two-shillings and sixpence per week, for each dependent child); act as a Juvenile Probation Officer; make After-Care visits to the homes of young people recently discharged from Correctional Institutions; make home visits to elderly applicants for surgical aids; enquire and take Court Proceedings in Child Neglect cases; interview the putative fathers of illegitimate children, with a view to obtaining evidence to be used in Court proceedings; make enquiries under the Immigration Act and carry out a number of other miscellaneous functions.

I still had to attend my Evening Course on two nights per week, during the first year of my appointment, which imposed a great strain upon Teresa, the children and myself. However, I did my work conscientiously and got along well with my colleagues and the majority of my clients.

Teresa, like all loving and considerate wives, accepted my absence from home, on those evenings when I was attending lectures, as she appreciated that the future material well-being of the family depended, to a great extent, upon my completion of my studies. To my credit, it may be stated that there were few occasions, during this period of my life when I extended my absences from home, for the purpose of personal indulgence. As a migrant, I realized that the preservation of my family ties was the most important feature of my life.

I carried out my Truant Officer duties with dedication, as I well understood that much delinquency commences with “Wagging” School. I regularly inspected the School Rolls at Ibrox Park High School, Leichhardt and the other Schools within my District, usually in the presence of the Deputy Headmaster: noting absences which were either unexplained or excessively frequent. I would then visit the homes of absentee children, to speak to the parents, who were often wholly unaware of the fact that their dear little boy, or occasionally their little girl, had been wagging school on numerous occasions. At other times, the absences were wholly the result of parental neglect or indifference. Serious cases of School Refusal would result in a Complaint being laid in the Yasmar Children’s Court, to the effect that the child was, “Neglected, in that he did not attend school regularly!” The incurable truant would be sent off to Anglewood, at Bowral, a charming Neo-Tudor establishment, set in delightful grounds: Anglewood, having originally been built as a Private Boys’ School. Of course, the little miscreants generally failed to appreciate the charm of their new environment and could not wait to return home to Sydney. As most truants were in the 12 to 14 years age group, they often remained at Anglewood until they were 15 years, the school-leaving age. If younger than this, they might perhaps stay at the school for 18 months, before returning home.

The nature of my work gave me a great measure of freedom as to starting and finishing times. Indeed, many of my Clients were working in Sydney during the day and did not return home until after normal working hours. It was not unusual, therefore, for me to start work at mid-day and remain in my District until 8 or 9pm.

It was here that I first came face-to-face with serious child neglect. Visiting Leichhardt Public School, one day, I was requested by the Headmaster to investigate the circumstances of a family named “Cotton” which lived a short distance away from the school. It appeared that there were three children, the two eldest of whom were of school-age and were frequently absent, without explanation.

One afternoon I strolled along to the home, which was a typical Sydney-side Fibro-tile cottage, situated in a pleasant residential street, with a small, but poorly maintained yard at the front and rear. The house was one of the single-storey cottages, which were then so much a part of the Sydney scene. After knocking for some minutes, the door was finally opened, to reveal a tall thin man of about forty-five years of age, accompanied by a very small lady, of about five feet in height. The man was of fair complexion; ginger-haired, with flushed cheeks and a heavy growth of beard. He was clad in a long and grubby woollen under-shirt, which effected a measure of decency, by covering his private-parts. The lady presented as a malnourished woman, of pale complexion, about the same age as her husband, with long, mousey hair, which fell away to her waist. She was wearing a nightdress and it was evident that she suffered from a spinal deformity. Both were well-affected by alcohol: judging from their bloated physiognomy and bloodshot eyes. Issuing from the couple was a pervading odour of sweat and booze, of some description. They stood together in the doorway, presenting a pathetic spectacle. Both were dirty, confused and did not appear to be disconcerted by the fact that they were hardly dressed for receiving visitors.

I spoke first, saying “G’Day, My name is Roberts, from the Child Welfare Department. I understand that you are Mr and Mrs. Cotton”. The man answered, “Yep!” I continued, “The children have not been to school for some time. What is the problem?” Mr. Cotton, who was an excitable fellow, now cried out, in a feeble attempt to intimidate me, “We are fed-up to the teeth with you people pestering us about our kids. They are all right and are well-looked-after. You’ve got no right to be hounding us like this!” Mrs. Cotton weakly echoed her husband’s complaint: “Yes, we are fed-up with it”. “I’ve got my job to do, Mr.Cotton. I would like to see the children, if you don’t mind. Can I come in?” Somewhat reluctantly, the parents now stood back to allow me to enter the house.

I saw that it contained two-bedrooms and a living-room, with an adjoining kitchen. It was poorly but adequately furnished. There were three children living in the home, all of whom were present at the time. The two older children were charming and intelligent. Tony, aged 12 years was a sensible lad, who had evidently tried to look after his parents and siblings, which was an impossible responsibility for a boy of his age. Angela, 10 years old, was a pretty and appealing child. The little boy, Peter aged 6 years, was not quite so attractive a child as his other siblings, as he appeared to be retarded. It became quickly evident to me, that the parents had reached a stage of addiction to Alcohol that prevented them exercising their normal parental responsibilities. This was a typical example of “Role-reversal”: a situation in which children were caring for parents.

The house was extremely dirty and untidy: it being evident that no housework had been done for some time. Bedding was filthy; the bed occupied by the smallest child was urine soaked and stank offensively. There was little food in the kitchen. There was a refrigerator, which, when opened by me, stank of stale food. The walls were stained with the deposit of years of food residues, which had accumulated. In the fridge was a milk bottle containing sour milk and there were also several other containers that had once held foodstuffs. These were covered in mould.

On the kitchen table was a Gallon flagon of cheap wine and two ten-ounce beer glasses, containing a quantity of this liquid. The table was covered in a slimy substance, which had evidently been wiped at some stage, as the fibre marks from the cloth were clearly visible in the greasy deposit thereon. There was also a half-consumed loaf of white bread and a packet of margarine. There was nothing else on the table, apart from some soiled crockery and cutlery. The living-room and kitchen, generally, were in a dirty and malodorous state.

From the presence of the wine and beer glasses, I deduced that the parents were what is colloquially known as, “Wino’s!”

At the rear of the house was a covered veranda, which served as a laundry, although it appeared that no work in the nature of washing had been done for some time, as the laundry tub contained a dark and liquid mass, from which arose a pungent and intolerable odour of fermenting, dirty-washing. This was, clearly, a case of “Child Neglect!”.

The policy of the Department, at that time, was the rehabilitation of the family. Perhaps, to some extent owing to my lack of experience, I did not take immediate action to bring the children before the Court. Instead, I advised the parents that they had better clean the place-up and see that the children were properly cared-for, in addition to regular attendance at school; otherwise they would be taken from the home. Assurances were given by the parents and a subsequent visit indicated that there had been an improvement in the situation.

However, as was to be expected, conditions soon deteriorated once more. Several weeks later, I visited the house but was unable to contact the occupants. As the children were not at school, I made enquiries of the neighbours and was told that the children and the parents were still at home. I, accordingly, arranged for a Search Warrant to be issued, for execution by the Police, to enable me to gain entry to the house, with the object of securing the children. I attended with the local Police Sergeant and several Constables. The occupants refused to admit the Police, who thereupon forced open the door. They were met by a drunken Mr.Cotton, armed with a large Shifting-spanner, with which he attempted to repel the invaders. However, his efforts were ineffectual. He was quickly subdued and arrested for assaulting Police. The home was in a filthy condition and there was the now familiar evidence of heavy drinking and neglect of the children.

I was accompanied by my Senior District Officer on this occasion, Peter Fallon, who was not renowned for his “bravery under fire!” Peter declined to enter the premises, until he was assured that all risk of injury to himself had been eliminated. This was understandable, as he was very short in stature. Indeed, so was I, for that matter. I gathered the children together and they were placed in Peter’s car, which was a l948 FJ Holden sedan. Their mother, who was clad in her night-dress, as usual, protested to me, “You can’t leave me behind!” Thereupon, I picked her up, as though she had been a little child, and placed her in the rear of the vehicle.  Indeed, she weighed no more than a ten-year-old girl.

On arrival at the Metropolitan Children’s Court in Albion Street, I carried the mother up the stairs and placed her before the presiding Magistrate, who was a crabbed and humourless old man, named McCreadie. Mrs. Cotton was placed in a chair, opposite to the Magistrate, whereupon she commenced to comb her long and abundant hair, like a Lorelei. Mr. McCreadie became incensed at the sight of this undressed and somewhat irrational female, saying, “What is this woman doing in my Court, in this condition?” Peter Fallon replied, “She wanted to come, so she was brought”

This was my first “neglect” case and I was particularly anxious for a satisfactory result. As it was, I need not have been concerned, for the facts revealed a serious case of Child Neglect and the children were remanded in the care of the Department. Subsequently, the parents made a further attempt at rehabilitation and the children were returned to their care at the end of a period of two months.

I later lost contact with this family, as they moved to the Liverpool area. About a year later, when I was working at the Liverpool District Office, I saw the parents walking past the Office, one morning. Subsequently, a file arrived but I was not personally involved with them. They were then residing on a property some miles away and not within my own District.

Another DO, Tom Ryan, had the task of supervision of the family in his District. Several weeks later, the eldest Cotton child walked a distance of eight miles to the home of an Aunt: to whom he complained that he had not seen his mother for some weeks. The police were called and upon questioning the husband and his “alcoholic” Mate, with whom he shared this rural allotment, no information was forthcoming, as to the whereabouts of the little woman. However, there was a freshly laid slab of cement behind the house, for which no rational explanation was given by Mr Cotton. This, upon excavation, revealed the body of his wife. It transpired that the lodger had thrown a brick at the lady, during a drunken bout, resulting in her immediate demise. The two men thereupon decided to dispense with the usual funeral formalities and bury her themselves. Subsequently, the lodger was charged with “Manslaughter” and served a term of Imprisonment, whilst the father was released on a Bond in respect of his part in the affair. The children were now happily placed with relatives.

It was a sad end to a generally unhappy tale. Mrs. Cotton herself had been an intelligent and sensitive woman. Her husband was not a wicked or aggressive person. Both were brought low by their indulgence in liquor, to the extent that they were incapable of caring properly for themselves, or their little ones.

### Chapter 93

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### Boys and Girls

I derived much satisfaction from my work which was, at times, stressful and demanding: not the least factor being the demands made upon myself and my colleagues, by the archaic attitudes of my superiors. Peter Fallon, although not an ill-disposed fellow, was a person of limited ability. He was now about fifty-five years of age. Peter had been given the job of SDO after an appeal had been lodged by him, against the appointment of some other person to the position. As a result, he was on the defensive; being virtually “on Probation” himself. He had to ensure that everything ran smoothly at the Newtown Office and was a stickler for the “Rules”. Indeed, he was incapable of any other approach to his duties. I judiciously avoided conflict with my Senior District Officer.

One of the other Trainee District Officers, was a young man named Robert Brooks, who was about the same age as I, with fair hair and complexion, being about the middle height. He had an easy-going, extroverted nature and was a charming companion. However, he must have found the work too demanding, for he left the Department before completing his first year at Newtown Office: taking a position with “Qantas”, the Australian Airline.

Another colleague of mine was a strange and anxious chap, named Tony Burns, who was about five feet ten inches in height, of sallow complexion and dark-haired. He was chatty and conversational with me. He also left the Department after a year or so, to take up a trade in wool marketing. He was a married man with a wife and two children. Some months after Tony left the Department, I was on duty at the Showground during the 1962 Easter Show: accosting truants. On leaving the showground, at the end of the day, I saw Tony, in company with a gaudily dressed young lady. I called out to him, “Hello, Tony! How are you?” in a friendly manner: anticipating a similar response. I was, undoubtedly, recognized by him, but he made a very peculiar face and vigorously waived me away. Perhaps he was embarrassed at being seen in the company of this girl. I thought that, perhaps, it was just as well that Tony did not have to introduce the young lady to me. I thought that she would probably not have been a family member.

There was a lady District Officer appointed to the Camperdown Office soon after me. She was Joan Kelly, a tall young woman, about thirty years of age, well-built, auburn-haired and with a pleasant, open face. She was intelligent and well educated. Joan found it very hard to tolerate the oppressive atmosphere within the District Office. She was a sweet-natured girl and I was impressed by her. She complained to me about the bureaucratic demands being made upon the DO’s, by their superior. Joan had never been faced with this type of restrictive bureaucratic attitude before. She resented being told when to attend the office or how long she could stay for a cup of coffee. Joan was a Divorcee and shortly after commencing work at Newtown, she married a Barrister, Cliff Pappayanni, who had also been a former District Officer with the Child Welfare Department. Cliff had completed his Bar Examinations in the record time of two years; by dividing his working day between study and his duties as a District Officer. Subsequently, the Bar Admission Rules were changed to prevent such rapid progression through, what should normally have been, an arduous and difficult series of Examinations, extending over a number of years. It hardly needs to be added, that Cliff was a particularly clever fellow. He was tall, dark, sallow-complexioned, with sharp, penetrating eyes.

There were two other female District Officers working at Newtown, in those days. One was Wendy Newton and the other named Lois Judd. Both were quite dissimilar characters, although Spinsters. Wendy was about forty years of age, a plain, rather quiet, shy woman, who had evidently been brought up in a very formal household. She dressed conservatively, in tailored suits. Although of a retiring disposition she was a sweet-natured lady and well regarded by everyone within the office. Some time during l961 or early l962, Wendy bought a little terraced house in Erskineville, which she re-decorated and furnished tastefully; inviting the members of the office to a house-warming party. This was a surprise to me, as the idea of “Yuppies” buying older property within inner-Sydney suburbs had only just caught-on. However, the party was a great success and Wendy was voted a “good sport”. Lois on the other hand, was a much more lively girl. She was extremely emaciated, perhaps anorexic, in appearance: of medium height with long, scraggy, rather mousy hair. Whilst unprepossessing, at first sight, upon a closer familiarity, Lois turned out to be an intelligent and well-disposed young lady, with an excellent sense of humour and with plenty of life about her. I enjoyed her company, on those occasions when we were together in the District Office.

Occasionally, on Friday nights, the District Officers would wander across the street to one of the numerous Newtown Pubs, for a glass or two of beer. This was never done to excess, as most of the DO’s were anxious to get home. However, these short convivial gatherings did much to alleviate tensions that might, otherwise, have developed between the members of the Staff. It also served a useful de-fusing function, so far as our relations with the SDO were concerned, as Peter himself usually came along on these occasions.

### Chapter 94

### PHIL STEVENS

One day, soon after my arrival in the Office, I had occasion to visit a Foster-home in Annandale Street, Annandale. The houses, here, were large terraced dwellings, similar to the traditional English terraces; having been constructed along similar lines. At the rear was a broad lane, dividing the houses in Annandale Street from those in the adjoining street, Young Street. I entered the house through the rear door and was greeted by a youngish woman of about thirty-five years of age, who was hanging washing on the line. She was still dressed in a dressing-gown and slippers; although it was fairly late in the morning. The lady, who thus met me, was of medium height and build, with a nice figure. She had brown eyes and dark brown hair, bound with a scarf. Her face was oval, of medium complexion and, as girl, she would have been lovely. At this date she had lost the initial bloom of youth but was still a handsome woman.

I said, “Mrs. Stevens?” “Yes, what can I do for you?” I am John Roberts, DO”. She looked carefully at me and smiled, “You had better come inside, where we can talk”. She led the way through the flagged yard and into the kitchen. This was a fairly large room, with a long table, on which were various kitchen utensils. Two small children now ran from the living-room, when their Foster-mother and I entered.

I was immediately impressed by something about this woman. She displayed an unusual degree of nervous energy. Without consulting me, Mrs. Stevens filled the kettle and placed it on the stove. She then made a couple of hefty ham-sandwiches. When the kettle boiled, she made a pot of tea and deposited the sandwiches and a cup of tea before me, saying, “Eat up!” Never loath to partake of refreshment, I did as I was bidden.

“You’re English are you John?” “Yes”. “I am Australian from way back” said the lady. “How do you like your job?” “It’s very interesting, although demanding at times”, I replied. “I like meeting people and some aspects of the job are better than others.” “I have known a lot of District Officers, in my time as a Foster-Mother. I have six State Wards living here at present?” These two little ones are ‘Tommy’ and ‘Jenny’. Tom is three years and Jenny is two years. The other children are at school. Then there is Billy, my own son. He is fourteen years old. He is the only child of my own. I couldn’t have more children and, so you see, I have taken in State-Wards for the last ten years. All the people at Head Office know me.”

I had come to see her about one particular child and was surprised to discover that this lady had so many State Wards living with her. I, subsequently, became aware that she was one of the few remaining “Old-fashioned Foster-Mothers!”, still caring for State Wards on the grand scale.

Mr. Wally Stevens, who worked in some obscure employment in the City, was several years older than his wife. He was a docile and, physically, rather strange type of man, who gave an initial impression of being mentally retarded. His eyes were large and prominent; his face pale, emaciated and rather featureless: his hair almost non-existent. What hair he had, grew at the side and back of his head to considerable length, for the fashion of the time. Physically he was not tall or particularly robust but, like his wife, he seemed possessed of boundless energy. Conversationally, he was very quiet, although Phil Stevens made up by her loquacity for her husband’s reticence.

Throughout the years that I had contact with Mr. and Mrs. Stevens, it appeared to me that Wally was continually painting or wall-papering his home. He was incapable of sitting down and relaxing for more than a few minutes at a time. Mrs. Stevens complemented her husband by her constant activity, in the process of caring for her numerous foster-progeny. She had herself been an “Only-child”, and had led a sheltered life as a girl. For many years, she raised a succession of State Wards, some of whom had been rejected for Adoption as “medically unsuitable”. One day, during my time at Newtown, she felt the “mothering urge” coming upon herself and visited the Child Welfare Babies’ Home, “Myee”, the Establishment at which babies were cared for, until placement. Upon her arrival, she was accompanied by Matron to inspect the Babies-in-residence. Matron pointed out to her a particular child, whose pathetic and grotesque physiognomy was calculated to repel even the most ardent maternal approach. It lay quietly in its cot, nameless; red-faced; malnourished, uncouth in visage; pop-eyed; its little face grossly distorted and repellent, even for a tiny baby. Mrs. S. pounced upon this helpless infant. “I’ll have him!”, she cried, in her loud Sydney accent, “Get on to Ken Jarvis”. This gentleman, brother of Ron Jarvis, was a friendly, amenable chap, then in charge of Ward Placements in Head-Office. Matron thereupon telephoned Ken: the outcome of the conversation being that Mrs. S. proudly marched forth from Myee, bearing in her arms the tiny, uncouth infant. Within a few weeks the transformation in this child was astounding. It was smiling and responding to the warmth of its foster-mother’s attention, with every prospect of developing into something approaching a normal human-being. It must be conceded that Mrs. Stevens’ overpowering maternal instinct, was probably derived from a deeply neurotic emotional urge, yet the result was that more than one child received that necessary maternal love and protection, which every child needs but of which so many are seriously deprived. Throughout her career as a Foster-mother, this lady nurtured many children, with an impartial and selfless devotion. It was natural that I would respond warmly to her, upon observing the depth of her concern for the children committed to her charge.

Wally Stevens and Billy were quite accustomed to the presence of a brood of children in the house and accepted them, without question. Indeed, there is no doubt that Billy, himself, benefited from his contact with these children; many of whom had suffered material and emotional deprivation, of one form or another.

My task was to ensure that the children who were placed-out with Foster-parents were well-cared-for and that the Foster-mother was given every assistance, to enable her to cope with the children. School-clothing and necessaries had to be purchased; medical bills paid, drugs provided and arrangements made for the appropriate weekly allowance to be paid to the Foster-parents. Problems regarding school were resolved in consultation with the teachers and the progress of the children monitored. Occasionally, the question of restoration to the natural parents had to be considered and a recommendation made on this difficult and emotive question. These considerations, all created problems for the District Officer; not the least being the distress of foster-parents, whenever a child was restored to its natural parents after a period of some years. This was a shattering experience for Foster-mothers, particularly in the case of tiny children, for whom the Foster-mother formed a genuine maternal affection. In the case of Mrs. Stevens, whilst there were one or two children removed from her home over the years; as a general rule, once children were placed with her, she kept them until they matured and left home in the normal course of events. In any case, there were so many children in her care at any one time, she was too busy to spend time bewailing the loss of a single child. Such at least, was the impression she made upon me.

Mrs. Stevens was, what has been described as, a “Carpet-Slipper Aussie!” She was intelligent but not particularly erudite; being preoccupied with her maternal responsibilities, which absorbed the whole of her energies. She had little patience with red- tape and no tolerance for anyone who adopted an officious demeanour towards herself. Being an Australian, she was fiercely democratic. There was no doubt that she ran the household: Wally merely providing her with the necessary means. She revealed an indifference towards money, as such, and was not covetous of worldly possessions. Such religious views as she held, she generally kept to herself.

I always felt comfortable in the presence of this lady and often spent more time than usual when visiting her. There was always a cup of tea and a bite to eat, for which I, usually, had a healthy appetite; as my job involved me in walking long distances, from street to street. I used the bus or train services, where these were available.

In inclement or cold weather, I wore a raincoat and a trilby, the latter being necessary even in the Summer months, to shade my eyes from the fierce heat of the Sun. One evening, I walked through the bar of a Leichhardt hotel, in order to use the toilet; there being a notorious absence of Public Toilet facilities in Sydney and environs. My appearance must have impressed one of the local drinkers, who called out loudly, “Look-out, here comes Isaac!” I pretended not to notice this remark but thought to myself that the gentleman must have thought that I looked Jewish. I was amused at the idea, which my appearance had given to my anonymous observer.

I usually travelled to work by train, catching the Steamer from Ingleburn, soon after 7am. This got me to Central Station shortly before 9am. The commuters who were able to catch this particular train were fortunate, in that they were usually able to find a vacant seat. On most days I shared the same compartment as other Ingleburn passengers, two of whom lived quite close to Teresa and me. They were men, named Noel and Cecil. Noel was about forty years of age, whereas his friend was, perhaps, in the region of 30 years. Noel worked in some obscure Sydney office and Cec’s occupation was unknown to me. They shared a house together and were, undoubtedly, homosexuals. This aspect of their relationship did not impinge itself at all forcibly upon me, who found them to be intelligent and agreeable people. Noel, particularly, was an artistic and articulate person. His friend, who was a Eurasian, was of a much quieter disposition. On several occasions, I visited the couple at their home, but never really gave any consideration to the question of the impropriety of their relationship. Noel had a number of Poodle dogs, which impressed me by their intelligence, as they spent a great deal of their time walking about the house on two legs, emulating the behaviour of their masters.

Certainly, neither Noel or Cec gave any indication in public, or even in private, that they were what is now colloquially termed “Gay”. That being the case, I did not feel obliged to consider the question at all. Had I done so, it is quite likely that I would have dismissed it, as irrelevant. It did not occur to me, at any stage, that I may have been compromising myself, by being companionable with such people. After a year or so, our friends moved away from Ingleburn and we heard no more of them.

From Central Station, I would catch an electric train to Petersham Station. I usually attended the office on two half-days of each week; the remainder of the time being spent, “in the field”. In really inclement weather, many of the DO’s went to the office but this was frowned upon by the SDO, who usually ordered them out, revealing a somewhat pedantic attitude. Nobody enjoyed traipsing around in the rain, particularly in the type of weather experienced in Australia. However, I equipped myself with rubber overshoes, in addition to a heavy waterproof Macintosh and umbrella. I was well protected from the worst effects of rainy weather and found that, on rainy days, people tended to stay at home, so that I was more likely to find my clients at home, when I knocked upon their front doors. There was always much time wasted in travelling the district, without being able to contact people. This was not such a problem, once I had been allotted a car district, as I then had greater mobility.

Whilst standing at the bus-stop at Petersham, one morning, I observed a little mongrel dog nearby. This was a time in which there were many Volkswagon cars on the roads, with their distinctive “putt-putt” engines. This dog specialized in attacking such cars; remaining motionless on the edge of the kerb: ignoring the stream of vehicles, until a VW beetle passed-by. He would then rush, in a suicidal frenzy, into the road; snapping furiously at the rear nearside wheel of the car, for a distance of ten or twelve yards, before returning to his post, to await the next Volkswagon. On succeeding weeks I often saw the same dog, performing his daily routine. After entertaining himself for some months, he must have been skittled by a car, as I saw him no more. All Australian mongrels were infected with this car-chasing mania. It must be related to their sheep and cattle-herding ancestry. They simply adore motor-bikes. I often found myself surrounded by half-a-dozen curs, all barking madly at my front wheel. Fortunately, they never attempted to bite my leg, which was always possible, as dogs sometimes confuse flesh and blood and cold steel, being unable to distinguish between them, when chasing a motorcycle.

It was whilst I was patrolling the streets of Camperdown and Leichhardt that I bought my first car. It was a tiny Fiat 500cc, two-seater, with a small seat in the rear, which the two children could use. It had no starter-motor and I had to start the engine with a cranking handle. As the four-cylinder motor was in quite good order, I had no trouble with this, although the driver’s door tended to fly open at unexpected times, which could have been dangerous, particularly as there were no seat-belts fitted to those old vehicles. The little car ran very well; the only problem being that, in hot weather, once the engine had been stopped, it was very difficult to start again. However, it provided transport and we found it to be a great improvement on the motor-bike, which I sold to the chap next door for Twenty-five pounds. Occasionally, I used my car to drive around my District, although this was officially frowned-upon by the Department, as there was no insurance indemnity, in respect of Departmental liability. Many of the Foot-Officers used their own cars; finding it much more convenient that plodding around on foot all day.

One day, I received a telephone call from Ron Jarvis, asking me if I had a car. As by this time, I was the possessor of an old Diesel Mercedes-Benz 170D, having traded-in my FIAT, I replied that I had. Jarvis thereupon offered me a Car-District at Liverpool. I omitted to inform Ron that my car was an old “Bomb”. As it was, the car had been used for carting fish around Sydney, and was rusted out in the rear seat. I had fixed this up; upholstering the seat to make it comfortable for the children. It had previously been in a bad smash and had been very poorly repaired; the left-front mudguard being crumpled and without a supporting bracket. One could not put a heavy person in the front passenger seat, as the weight caused the mudguard to rub on the front wheel. In fact, I did use this car for a few weeks, before I decided to pull it apart. During this time, I had to take a trainee Lady-DO with me, on my rounds. As she was a large, very overweight young-woman, she had to sit in the rear, right-hand passenger seat, before the car could move off. There was also a problem in driving in reverse gear. As the accident had damaged the chassis alignment, the car shuddered violently in reverse and was just impossible to move. I had to ensure that I parked at the end of a row of cars, to avoid being blocked-in, as there was no possibility of my being able to reverse out of a tight parking space. Apart from these minor problems, the car drove very well and would cruise at 60 miles an hour, all day, on the open highway.

One morning, I could not get the car to start, as the battery was flat, perhaps owing to lack of use. However, I decided that the car needed repairs to the engine, which was definitely not the case. This was a typically fatuous idea of mine, who was devoid of both the tools and the skill to work on any engine, not to mention a diesel motor. Hence, it was not surprising that the vehicle would not run, when, some weeks’ later, I had put it together again. After getting a tow-start, I found that, when the engine finally fired, diesel fuel was spraying all over the place, from the numerous leaks in the injection system. This was the last of my Mercedes diesel car, which, thereafter, stood in the back-yard, rusting, until Teresa, who was exasperated at having it on the premises, arranged to have it towed away to the wrecking yard. I just did not have the resources to repair it.

When I applied for a loan to purchase a new car, Ron Jarvis abused me roundly, inferring that I had lied about my possession of a car. As it was, there was no alternative: I had to have a car for a Car-District and the result was that, one morning, soon thereafter, I found myself driving away from Dwyer’s Car yard at Liverpool; the proud owner of a brand-new, pale blue, Holden EJ sedan, purchased at a cost of eleven hundred Pounds. The dealer had, sensitively, placed paper mats on the floor, upon which were printed the words, “We wanted to keep it clean!” This was unbounded luxury; beyond my wildest dreams.

Two pictures showing Teresa outside our house at Austinmer, October l966. Our EJ Holden car is in the background.



### Chapter 95

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### Liverpool

The Liverpool District Office was situated in those days in the “School of Arts”. This was a two-storey building, in the main street, occupied on the right hand side by a Real Estate Agency and on the left, by the Child Welfare Department. Forty years later, this building is still extant.

The Senior District Officer, at this time was an ignorant and aggressive man, of Scots lineage, named Alan Murdoch. He was short in stature but strongly built and made up in belligerence what he lacked in height. It was rumoured that he had been a Boxer in his youth. He had obtained his appointment as a Child Welfare Officer, through the medium of the “Returned Armed-Services” preferential scheme, whereby returned soldiers were given priority in employment, over the less heroic members of the community. Murdoch had risen dramatically through the ranks, by the simple expedient of obtaining an appointment in the “Establishments’ Branch”. These posts were not sought-after, as they involved moving to the Country, in many instances and were demanding, in the sense that the Officers who were appointed to the positions of Superintendent or Deputy- Superintendent of an Institution, were required to be “on call” on a 24 hours-a-day basis. However, the positions were well-graded and permitted rapid movement through the Seniority ranks. As a result, Murdoch found himself, on returning to Field Division after several years in the Establishments Branch, in a position senior to many men who had spent much more time in the Service. It was rumoured that he had severely beaten one of the delinquents at Mt. Penang Training School, Gosford. Instead of being dismissed the Service, he was quietly transferred to Liverpool Office, as SDO. In those days Seniority was sacrosanct, whereas, at the present time, promotion is dependent upon “qualifications and ability”, which are supposed to be the determining factors in the promotions race. Unfortunately, this system has its weaknesses; with the result that one sees females appointed to positions, merely because they happen to be of that particular Sex, or “Ethnics” appointed to important posts, (which they are often incapable of performing competently), owing to the present insistence on policies of Non-Discrimination and the eagerness of politicians to be seen to be doing something positive in this regard. It has also been found politically expedient to make such appointments, to placate vigorously vocal, Ethnic Pressure Groups. This results in discrimination against those who do not come within those categories and who have often spent a lifetime in the Service: being passed-over because they do not happen to speak with a foreign accent, wear skirts or be a member of the indigenous race. The strongest criticism, however, which can be made of the “Merit” system, is that it provides “Jobs for the Boys (or Girls)!” No-matter how this tendency is concealed by the device of the “Interview-Panel”, there is no doubt that the “Old-School-Tie” principle comes into its own, when this system of appointments is introduced. The seniority system may also have its weaknesses, but, in the main, is far more equitable than the former and certainly avoids the taint of corruption. I do not, necessarily, advocate a pro-male or pro-British-Australian stance: it is a question of individual merit: not political convenience.

Alan Murdoch was highly efficient, when it came to standing over neglectful parents. He would bang the table and shout; threatening all sorts of dire consequences; but here his talents ended. In cases requiring the delicate touch, he was entirely out of his depth. He, on his part, considered that I was too weak in my approach to the job; a criticism that may well have had some validity.

For the first few months at Liverpool Office, I worked the Cabramatta and Fairfield Districts, which were dormitory suburbs of Sydney, now growing at a rapid rate. Both suburbs were served by the Railway line to Liverpool. Housing estates, mainly constructed by the New South Wales Housing Commission, were spreading several miles from the Railway, running in a Westerly direction and creating more suburbs, with names such as Fairfield West and Cabramatta Heights. It was at one of these new suburbs, Canley Heights, adjacent to Canley Vale, that I renewed acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs.Stevens, who now had a four-bedroom, fibro cottage on Canley Heights Road. Mrs. Stevens had a complement of about eight children, at this time, plus her own child, William. I often called to see her on business or, when passing, as I was always sure of a welcome and a cup of tea. There was also certain to be something needing my attention, regarding her numerous brood of State Wards.

None of these new areas, at this period, were sewered. Many people were beginning to install Septic Tanks, which gave some semblance of hygiene, but Toilet Bins still remained to serve the bulk of the population. There were also problems regarding the proper drainage of rainwater and domestic waste water, with the result that, in low-lying districts, the smell from drains in wet weather was often intolerable. There must also have been a serious “Public Health” problem at this time. However, it was to be a good many years before sewerage was installed in such areas. Mrs. Stevens’ residence was no exception. Her toilet pan had to be emptied daily and still became unpleasantly full, at times. Edging the road in front of the house there was a drainage ditch about a yard wide and of the same depth, which often held stagnant and stinking water for weeks on end. The Local Authorities took the rather strange view that it was the householder’s responsibility to clear drains, although it was clearly impossible for the individual to do anything about such problems. After a year or so at this house, the Stevens’ family wisely moved to an older, more established Sydney suburb, which was sewered.

There were several high-schools and a number of Public (Primary) Schools in my District. I was kept very busy, travelling abroad each day, sometimes in very hot weather, which resulted in serious dehydration. I found that the best refreshment in such dry conditions was tea, which both quenched thirst and reduced body heat, by inducing perspiration. Alcohol, under such conditions, only increases body heat, by causing excessive dehydration.

The Liverpool District Office, in l962, had a staff of about 6 District Officers, including two female DO’s. One of the lady DO’s was Margaret Coleman, She was a single woman, of a very “masculine” appearance, who often had difficulty, during telephone conversations, in convincing the other party that she was not “Mr. Coleman” but “Miss,(emphasis) Miss, Colman!” Margaret was active in Women’s matters, including Girl Guides, in which she had a responsible position. Having no domestic ties, she was free to undertake these demanding activities, which she carried out with enthusiasm. None of the male District Officers was particularly close to Margaret, although there was no conflict of any kind between us.

There was another lady District Officer working at Liverpool, during my time, named Annette Carter. Miss Carter was a charming and single young lady, whose engaging nature stirred the hearts of all the boys, married or single, whenever she was present in the Office. She was, naturally, a very sweet girl; about 5ft 7” in height; well built, without being too heavy; auburn-haired with fresh complexion and an attractive round face. She was ingenuous and totally lacking in guile. Whilst I never permitted myself undue familiarity with Annette, there is no doubt that I was conscious of her charms and delighted to find myself in her company. Like all the DO’s, she eventually moved away and I heard that she had married some lucky fellow in the Medical profession.

Tom Ryan also spent some time in Liverpool Office, before transferring to Queanbeyan District Office. He was a former Army Provost Sergeant, who had served in Japan, after the war. There he had met and married a Korean lady, whom he subsequently brought to Australia. Tom was a very sound character, with his feet firmly placed upon the ground. I admired Tom greatly for his modest self-assurance, which so much contrasted my own weakness and self-consciousness. There was no affectation in Tom’s manner. He was about 5ft 10” or so in height, well-built and very smart in his appearance. In some respects he was a pragmatic character, who talked about his Army duties in a rather cold and detached manner. He had had a job to carry out and had evidently taken pleasure in the games of “Cat and Mouse”, which his duties had entailed. Tom owned a VW beetle, which he drove to Sydney to attend the Evening Classes. He regularly gave a lift in his car to several of the other students who resided in the Western Suburbs and eventually made way for me, so that I too was able to travel at least part of the way home by car to Granville. Tom dropped me off at the Railway Station at about 9.30pm, whence I then caught the train home to Ingleburn. This saved an hour in travelling time.

One day, I received a call to investigate a family living under conditions of alleged “neglect” in the Hoxton Park area. As Mr. Murdoch was in the office, it was decided that he would accompany me on the visit. There was also another DO, who came along on this occasion, Malcolm Smith, who described himself as an “Instant DO”, as he had been appointed from another Department to fill a vacancy, without undergoing a course of training. I drove my car on this occasion and, as I had only just purchased this new Holden sedan, I was keen to show-off to my colleagues. As I drove along Hoxton Park Road, a long, straight, but fairly narrow road, in those days, I overtook a large, rambling American sedan, which was cruising along in front. Two rather burly characters were seated in this vehicle, which I assumed was on commercial business of some description. I continued driving, in excess of the speed limit, which was 30 miles per hour in those far-off days, until one of passengers exclaimed, “Isn’t that a Police Siren which I can hear?” “No, it’s probably the siren from the “Chuck” Farm just over the hill.” I replied. The sound persisted and I could see, in my rear-vision mirror, the lumbering car behind me. However, it did not register with me, that it could possibly be a Police Vehicle, as I had convinced myself that the car contained a couple of Insurance Representatives. It was not until the car suddenly overtook me, that I realized that it had been, in fact, a Highway Patrol Car. The vehicle pulled to a halt in front of me and forced me to stop.

I nearly collapsed with shock and alarm, when approached by a large and burly Policeman in Mufti. The Constable spoke formally to me: “Sgt. ……….. of the Highway Patrol. May I see your driving licence, Sir?” I produced this document. “Didn’t you hear the siren?” “Yes, but I thought it was the chuck farm over the hill.” “You are aware of the fact this is a 30mph zone?” I nodded “Y-y- yes.” I stuttered. “You overtook us travelling at about 45 mph, is that right?” “That may be correct, Officer”. “You were doing over 40 through the village. Why were you travelling so fast?” I did not reply that I was merely trying to impress my colleagues with my new car but murmured, “We are from the Child Welfare Department and are attending a complaint of neglect.” “I cannot see that that would be all that urgent.” quoth the Policeman. Mr. Murdoch now left the car and came to my assistance: “Sergeant, my name is Murdoch and I am the Officer in Charge of the Liverpool District Office. We have been called out to investigate a complaint of child neglect and Mr. Roberts may have been anxious to get there as soon as possible. He does not normally drive so fast. The complaint is one requiring urgent attention. The Sergeant now conferred with his colleague and, returning to the Welfare Vehicle, said, “In the circumstances I won’t book you, but I am giving you a formal caution. You will have to be more careful in future”. “I will, thank you Sergeant.” said I, submissively.

I, thereby, escaped prosecution by the skin of my teeth, as I might well have been charged with Dangerous Driving, not merely with exceeding the Speed Limit. Even though this was a country road and a 30mph speed limit was, in my view, ridiculous, I had deliberately exceeded the limit. I had also committed the, usually, unforgivable crime of overtaking a Police vehicle.

In spite of this warning, I continued, at times, to drive too fast, although I was fortunate enough not to be booked either speeding or crossing over double-yellow lines. Nor, indeed, did I have an accident, which I ascribed, in retrospect, to the assistance of some very attentive “Guardian Angels”, who must have been keeping a pretty close eye upon me and my family. Had I then realized the penalties for reckless or dangerous driving, I might have been a little less adventurous behind the wheel of a car. Quite apart from financial penalties and licence disqualification, there was always the risk of a serious accident and of death or injury to others. Nor do persons who drive dangerously always appreciate that, in doing so, they prejudice their chances of recovering the cost of repairs from their Insurance Company, as the latter are always on the lookout for an opportunity of avoiding their obligations under a Policy of Insurance. The financial penalties in such a case can be quite crippling: involving vehicle damage and also damage to other private property.

There were occasional hazards facing the District Officer, apart from the common everyday vicissitudes of life. Following an inspection of the Fairfield Heights Public-School Roll, I had occasion to visit the home of a young lady, named Miss Barbara M……. she having missed a considerable amount of schooling. When I first called, during the day, the father was not at home but I was able to speak to Barbara, a twelve-year old, dark-haired child, who had evidently been permitted to absent herself from school to assist with the domestic chores. I indicated that I would return, during the evening, to speak to her father.

Upon arriving at the house, sometime after 6pm, I announced my appearance to Barbara, who came to the front door. Upon seeing me, she retired to another room. The father now appeared before me, carrying a large and dangerous-looking kitchen-knife, which he pointed in an aggressive manner in my direction. The father, was a small, dark-man, who evidently felt that in situations of this nature he needed weaponry to defend himself. He ran at me, calling out something, which sounded to me like, “I’ll fix this Welfare Bloke!” but stopped short of the doorway. I put on a “bold front” and stood my ground, saying in a firm voice, “Are you threatening me with that knife?” Mr. M…….. immediately replied, “No!” and, turning, threw the knife to the floor. Thereafter, he appeared to lose some of his belligerence and I was able to engage him in conversation, on the question of his daughter’s absences from school. Upon the father giving assurances as to his daughter’s future attendance at school, I left and had no further occasion to visit the home.

For the last year or so of my stay at Liverpool Office, I was responsible for working the Western Districts from that town to Warragamba and Silverdale, on the foothills of the Great Dividing Range. I also drove South to Appin and Narellan, a distance of about twenty miles from Liverpool but much less from my home. These districts were largely undeveloped in those days. Bringelly and Rossmore, some ten to fifteen miles from Liverpool, were distinctly rural areas, originally consisting of extensive holdings, of thousands of acres. Many had been sub-divided into lots of a hundred or more acres. These smaller blocks were now beginning to be sub-divided again, into five-acre blocks; upon which the purchasers, who were often poor Migrants, would erect a temporary-dwelling. This was usually a garage, in which the occupants lived, pending the completion of a more substantial house. It was pioneering in the real sense, as it placed families well away from major Public Transport facilities. Children had to travel long distances to attend a High School. There were a number of small Public Schools scattered here and there, throughout the District.

Once each month, I drove to Warragamba, which had been the construction village for the huge hydro-electric Dam, erected nearby. When the Dam was finished, during l962, many of the workmen moved away, as there was no-longer employment for them in the neighbourhood. As a consequence, some of the houses became vacant and these were filled with people from Sydney, who were desperately in need of accommodation and were prepared to move to Warragamba. Some of these people were deserted wives with small children, who were content to live on the Pension and did not depend on employment. However, there were still some of the original construction workers, who had retired and preferred to remain in the village. The situation of the town was pleasant: being on a high rocky plateau, overlooking the Sydney plain. I enjoyed my trips to the Dam, even though this often required me to travel after normal hours, to visit Probationers who did not arrive home until late. During the day I would eat my lunch at the Picnic Ground near to the Dam itself. I also visited Silverdale, which was then a very sleepy place, with a little one-teacher school.

There was one curious family residing here, in a large but primitive dwelling, with galvanized roof and Hessian walls. The floor was of beaten-earth. There was a man, his wife and six children living in this “humpy”. The mother kept the place spotlessly clean and there was no suggestion of material neglect. However, the children had missed a lot of schooling and a file had been opened by the previous incumbent of my position. I went to the school and spoke to the Headmaster, who told me that the children were always well-turned-out. The humpy, in which the family lived, stood in several acres of land and about sixty yards from the road.

As I walked down the path to the house, several noisy and aggressive dogs came to meet me. This was not uncommon and I was usually able to manage all but the more ferocious members of the canine species, by talking to them in a friendly and confidential manner.

As I drew near to the front door of the humpy, I was met by a short, irate man, who called out, “Yes, what do you want?” I responded, “My name is Roberts of the Child Welfare Department. Are you Mr. R……..?” “What the devil are you doing here?” “I have just been up to the school and notice that your children have missed a lot of school”. “Well, they have had the gastric. What do you people mean by dragging my kids out of class?” “I am just doing my job, Mr. R……... So long as the children are looked-after properly and go to school regularly, you need not be afraid that I will be always knocking on your door.” These remarks seemed to placate the father somewhat and I now said, “Do you mind if I come inside and look around.” As I stepped inside, the father said, “My kids might live in a canvas house but they are well-cared-for.”

Mrs. R……. was in the house. She was a small, dumpy woman; slightly taller than her husband but good-natured. There were three small children at home at the time. I looked through the place and observed that all was neat and clean. The children’s beds were satisfactory and it was evident that Mrs. R……. was a good mother. The children were also neatly dressed and well-nourished.

I said, “I can see that you keep your home clean and tidy, Mrs. R……...” The mother seemed relieved and pleased with this observation, after which I added, “Thanks for your co-operation. I don’t think you will be seeing a lot of me, in the future, but I’ll probably call in a few weeks time to see how you are getting-on. Cheerio!” With this remark I left the home.

Whilst the weather at the time was warm, I had some misgivings as to the comfort and security of the children during prolonged periods of inclement or cold, windy weather.

In the early Sixties, there were still many people in the outlying districts of Sydney, and no doubt, other Australian cities, who were living in sub-standard conditions. There was a serious housing-shortage and building materials were only just beginning to be readily available for the home-builder, after being in short-supply since the War. As cheap land was available in outlying, semi-Rural suburbs, many people purchased land, preferring to erect a temporary-dwelling, until they could afford to build a house. This was permitted by many Local Government Councils, with a view to encouraging people to settle within their respective boundaries.

Many people were living along the banks of the Georges River from Glenfield, to Campbelltown, which was then a compact little town, but is now a sprawling residential district, with suburbs extending some miles to the South and West. A number of my “Neglect Families” and Social Welfare Clients resided in “Humpies”, as sub-standard dwellings were termed, within this strip of land. Generally, it was considered sufficient for the District Officer to keep an eye on the situation, in an endeavour to preserve the family unit, but in cases of serious neglect, there was no alternative to Court proceedings. In those days it was considered sound practice to counsel the family within the home, in an attempt to bring living standards up to a tolerable level, rather than to rush off to Court at the first contact with a family, unless the children were seriously at risk. Nowadays, the situation is reversed, although made easier for the District Officer by the documentary procedure which has been adopted in recent years. Then, the DO had to give verbatim evidence in the Witness Box, as to his observations in every case; in the process being subject to Cross-Examination. Now, much of the work is done by presenting paperwork to the Court. Court action, where necessary, is taken soon after the initial contact with the family; as it is considered desirable for the Officer concerned to have the support of an Order of the Court, before carrying-out supervision of the family situation. Whilst this course is advantageous for the Department, it often results in unnecessary Court appearances and trauma for the children and parents involved. There are, therefore, arguments both in favour-of and against the principle of early Court proceedings in Child Neglect or Care Proceedings.

### Chapter 96

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### The Simpsons’

Whilst I was occupied in my Child Welfare role, Teresa, on the other-hand, was herself working at the Otis Plant at Bankstown for much of this time. However, when I had to work in Sydney, Teresa found it increasingly inconvenient to travel to Bankstown by Public Transport. She, therefore, left Otis and, after working for a short time in the office of Ediswan-Echo, an Electrical Company in Auburn, she obtained work as a Clerical Assistant at the Liverpool Girls’ High School. Also employed in the office there was a young English woman, Brenda Simpson. Mrs. Simpson was married with two little girls, and, like Teresa, had left Lancashire some years previously, to embark upon a new adventure in Australia. Brenda, a rather prim and proper lady, was anxious to improve herself socially, whilst her husband, Geoffrey (Bill), was a genial and friendly fellow: well-content with his particular station in life, which happened to be at the bottom of the social scale. He was of typical Anglo-Saxon appearance; of fair complexion, stocky build and of medium height, with an open friendly countenance. He worked on Inghams’s Poultry farm, in the Liverpool District and the family lived in a rented cottage on the property. Bill longed to purchase a few acres of his own, but Brenda’s ambitions were for a substantial and well-furnished cottage on a small garden-sized block of land. She did not wish to be known as a Farm-labourer’s or even a Farmer’s wife. Brenda, herself, was then in her early thirties, of fresh complexion with light brown hair. In appearance, whilst neither beautiful nor glamorous, she was homely, neat and presentable. She kept spotless her two little girls, aged at this time about 9yrs and 7yrs. They were, undoubtedly, the pride of her maternal bosom.

Teresa and I saw quite a lot of the Simpson’s family whilst we lived at Ingleburn; often enjoying reciprocal visits. As Teresa worked at the School for a year or so, she and Brenda saw a great deal of each other. Teresa was polite to Belinda, but privately became irritated by the latter’s tendency to criticise the imagined shortcomings or failings of others, without being conscious that she herself possessed anything but ladylike attributes. Teresa also resented the superior airs adopted by Brenda, who appeared, to the former, to entertain grandiose ambitions, which she would never realistically be able to attain. I, myself, was quite at home with the Simpson’s, particularly with Bill, with whom I enjoyed the common affinity of Lancashire Lads. Like most of my friendships, this was of a relatively brief tenure. On those occasions on which we visited the Simpsons’ at their home, I would sometimes accompany Bill, whilst he went about his duties. He had to keep a constant check on the condition of the thousands of chickens, then being raised on the property: using modern intensive methods.

Bill informed me that the tons of droppings, produced monthly by this poultry farm, were mixed with molasses and fed to cattle. I was revolted by this thought. Many years later when there was much discussion of “Mad Cow” disease, I thought about the possible effects of this revolting practice.

With our move to the Coast, we gradually lost contact with Bill and Brenda. The severance was accelerated by Teresa’s inability to tolerate Brenda’s working-class “snobbery”. There was no actual “falling-out” between our families. We just failed to maintain contact with the Simpson’s, which was unfortunate, in the sense that we really needed as much contact as possible with our English friends. I, personally, regretted the breach between us. There may have been an element of jealousy of Brenda, on the part of my wife. I had never given any indication of a more than “friendly” interest in her and her husband. It is a pity that we lost contact with these decent Lancashire folk.

After working at the High School for a year or so, during which she had an opportunity to observe the poor standard of many of the staff, in such basic skills as syntax, spelling and grammar, Teresa obtained a transfer to Ingleburn High School. She made herself useful to the Headmaster, Mr. Myall, who became dependent upon her organizing skills. However, she was not to remain working here for long, as she fell pregnant once more and subsequently gave birth to her third son, named Edward (Ted). He was born at Liverpool Hospital on 17th September l962, some 18 months before our move to Austinmer. Teresa now devoted herself to the care of her child. Being skilled in the domestic arts, she was able to make much of his clothing herself. Whilst I often complained of boredom, Teresa, on the other hand, never lacked for some useful and constructive activity. Whilst knitting, she would usually read a book; passing in this way many useful hours.

### Chapter 97

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### Blue Seas

It became our custom to visit the Seaside as often as possible in the Summer season, when hot Westerly Winds would sweep across the valley, to bake the suffering inhabitants of South-Western Sydney. On Saturdays during the Summer, I would propose that we should drive to Coledale; a suggestion that was enthusiastically endorsed by the other members of the family. We would leave quite early, to avoid travelling in the heat of the day: preparing a picnic lunch before heading off to the Coast. The trip usually took about an hour and, in hot weather, was a slow and unpleasant crawl in the traffic stream. As we drove down from the hills to the coast, we felt the cooling effect of the sea-breeze, which increased in strength, as the inland became hotter. This gave welcome relief and the anticipation of “cooling waters”.

On arrival at Coledale, the day was delightfully spent in the environment of Sun and Surf: with rolling breakers, clear blue skies and a cooling sea-breeze. We had purchased a large beach umbrella, under which we could all shelter from the direct rays of the sun. Day-trippers would usually remain here until evening, when the approaching sunset, saw a reduction in the insufferable temperatures, away from the Coast. Occasionally, a Southerly change would arrive during the afternoon, bringing with it stormy skies and a rapid fall in temperature, with heavy rain; prompting a sudden exodus of holidaymakers.

Coledale was a small and uncrowded beach, with a number of permanent caravans parked on the grass strip, adjoining the sandy beach. Behind and about fifty yards from the beach, ran the main road, called “Laurence Hargrave Drive”, after the pioneer aviator; leading North to Stanwell Park and South to Austinmer and the “Illawarra” District. West of the main road were several streets of fibro cottages, reaching up towards the Railway cutting. Beyond that, the escarpment of sandstone cliffs rose twelve hundred feet above the village. Here the terrain comprised largely undeveloped Public Reserve: clad in a rich garment of trees and shrubs of many varieties. Before the arrival of the white-man in this Country, the land below the escarpment here was luxurious rain-forest, with majestic timbers rising three-hundred feet, or more, beneath which flourished a host of flora and fauna, now largely lost to the world. The stately red-cedar trees formed a rich prize for the timber gatherers. The Cedar-getters arrived in the mid-l9th Century, destroying everything, in their lust for gain. Little remains to remind us of the original beauties of the place, as gum-trees replaced the rain-forest timbers. However, at Mt. Keira, just East of Wollongong, there is a tiny patch of Rain-Forest preserved for posterity. Here the canopy rises high above the ground, beneath which, in the gloomy and moist conditions below, thrive shade-loving ferns and plants, providing a cool and attractive place for the visitor, in which to reflect upon the destruction which the rapacity of man has caused in this place.

It is sad to reflect that this disregard for the natural beauties and fauna of Australia is still evident in the callous indifference of Timber Interests, to the destruction of the last remaining rain-forests of the East Coast. Governments pay lip-service to the need to conserve the forest but are more responsive to the demands of commerce, which cares not a fig for the loveliness; nor the environment, seeing only the financial returns to be derived from the rape of the tall and stately trees; nor cares one whit whether the native species, flora or fauna, survive the destruction of their habitat. Those involved in logging industries should be informed, once and for all, that Society will not tolerate such destruction, in the future. If jobs are lost and small communities dispersed, so be it. That is the price that will need to be paid to save the land and the birds and mammals dependent upon its preservation for their continuing survival. Unfortunately, when the last of the old-growth forest has been plundered, in the South Coast of New South Wales and Tasmania, it will be too late to reclaim the lost loveliness and the extinct fauna. They will, like the forests and wildlife of New Zealand, have gone forever.

### Chapter 98

### AUSTINMER

It was accepted, within the Department, that Wollongong was not a popular place with Sydneysiders, who, in common with city-dwellers generally, do not relish the prospect of being moved from the Metropolis to Country Districts. However, I myself had no particular aversion to a move to the coast. One day, in Departmental Notices, I saw that that there was a vacancy at the Wollongong Office. After discussing the matter with Teresa, I applied for and was granted a transfer to that District. It was thus that we arrived in this rapidly-growing, industrial town.

We moved to Austinmer just prior to the lst April l964, on which date I commenced work at Wollongong Child Welfare Office. It was the end of the Summer Season and we were able to obtain the tenancy of a holiday flat, on the understanding that we would vacate the premises before Christmas. The flat was situated in The Grove, a winding, shady avenue, which courses from the beach to the Railway Station, some two or three hundred yards in all. The property, Nos 15-17, The Grove, was then owned by a gardener and Camellia fancier: Hamie Frew. There were two houses, surrounded by gardens, containing many shrubs of this genus, which in the Winter season, gave a both beautiful and colourful display. There were several buildings here, that had been converted to holiday flats. Our flat was in No. 15 and was very adequate for our purposes. Our lounge-room was large and commodious, with a kitchenette and three small bedrooms at the rear. We established a cordial, although not familiar relationship, with our landlord and his wife. It was also here that we met the Whitneys, Trevor and Marge: a couple with whom we were to have contact for many years. Trevor was a Railway Engineman by occupation. He was a tall, well-built, olive-complexioned, dark-haired but prematurely bald young man; good-looking and of an even temperament. He lived with his wife and three small children in a self-contained flat, at the rear of the premises. Marge was a well disposed but “neurotic” woman, who made life intolerable, at times, for her long-suffering husband and also for the children. She was a scrawny female, with mousy hair and a pale, rather rough, complexion. Marge was impulsive and intolerant of her husband, who was normally docile and easily manipulated by his wife. However, there were times when he became exasperated by Marge’s hysterical behaviour and took himself off to the Pub. His subsequent return, in an inebriated condition, only inflamed the situation still further, resulting in a flow of hysterics and tears on the part of the deeply offended lady.

Marge found the problems of household management and the care of her three small children to be an insuperable burden. This is not to imply that she was an incompetent housewife: quite the contrary was the case, as she maintained her home in spotless condition. However, the emotional stresses generated by her responsibilities took a heavy toll of her. Thus, for many years, the pressures of domestic life ebbed and flowed in harmony with Marge’s moods: sometimes leading to periods of marital separation but never enough for a final rupture. As the children grew older and financial and other pressures eased, as so often happens, her once insurmountable cares faded away.

The two older Roberts’ boys enrolled at the Austinmer Public School, which is delightfully situated, on prime real-estate, overlooking the beach. Both children did well at school, particularly as they were encouraged to read, as much as possible. At this time, the family did not possess a TV Set, nor was I in a hurry to obtain one. However, Owen continued to suffer from Asthma, which was a source of anxiety and stress for all the family.

The youngest family member at this time was Ted, who was about l8 months old when we moved to the Coast. He was a happy child, rather spoilt by his mother, who was able to devote the whole of her time to his care. She made all his clothing and was constantly knitting for the child, as well as for herself and other family members. Teresa later maintained, that Ted and her daughter, Margaret, were both raised in conditions of relative affluence; without the constant care over financial obligations, which haunts low-income families. To that extent, the two later children had a much more secure and stable background than their older siblings.

When the time came for the family to find alternative accommodation, our new house was not quite ready for occupation. Our landlord told us that we could move into one of the small flats at the rear of the building, which only had two small bedrooms. He suggested that we could stay there, as long as we wished. As we had stored our furniture under the building, there was little to be moved into the smaller flat and we were very glad to be permitted to stay in “The Grove”, for the time-being.

On first moving to the Coast, we had made enquiries at the Austinmer Real Estate Agency, as to the purchase of a house or land in the locality. We were shown one or two houses in the village itself and also several blocks of land. One old house, in Boyce Avenue, was priced at three-thousand five hundred pounds and needed extensive work internally. We were impressed by a block of land fronting the main road, which overlooked the ocean, but this block was priced at Twelve-hundred and fifty pounds, which was well above our budget. We had about a thousand pounds available, from the sale of our house at Ingleburn, upon which we had agreed to carry the initial deposit of Five-hundred Pounds, by way of a Second-Mortgage. This had resulted in the quick sale of the premises. We were also shown a block of land on the hill, overlooking the village, and rejected it, initially, because it would have meant building, with no town water. However, the block was quite large, consisting of an area of just under an acre. There were large Blackbutt trees growing on the property and the setting was very pretty: looking-out between the trees over the sea, with the escarpment rising behind. We were very taken with the location and, after giving some consideration to the question, decided to buy the land. It cost us a Thousand Pounds.

Being wholly ignorant of building procedures, we contracted with one of the large development Companies, named Lend Lease Corporation, for the construction of a house. This was a three-way agreement, in which a builder, named Sharman, was to actually erect the dwelling: the development Company providing the plans and lending its name to the project. The builder then sub-contracted the work to the lowest tenderers. However, we were fortunate, in that our Building Society Inspector was a local identity, now deceased, named Tom Ward. This gentleman kept the builder on his toes and insisted on shoddy work being rectified; resulting in the installation of additional timber supporting beams. Mr. Ward also demanded that the roof-tiles be removed by the builder and replaced, to provide the requisite amount of overlap. Naturally, Mr Sharman was not pleased, but Teresa and I felt that our interests were being protected by Mr. Ward. Some years subsequently, Sharman closed his business and left the district.

Shortly before Christmas l964, we moved into our new house. It was a brick-veneer cottage, about ten and a half squares (1,050 square feet) in size; small by contemporary Australian standards. These invariably dictate the requirement that, in order to establish the status of its new owner, every house now constructed should be at least twice the size requisite for the reasonable comfort of the occupants. Fifteen squares is the order of the day and, preferably, twenty or twenty-five squares. Such is the need for each individual to establish his or her worth in the community, by a display of ostentation. The net result, for many people, has been that, with escalating financial pressures, they find that they can not afford to service their mortgage and are forced to sell. In some instances mortgagees have walked out of their houses, leaving the Bank to salvage what it can from the sale of the property. That institution will not suffer unduly, as it is certain to recover its principle and interest from the sale.

The main source of such troubles, in the past, has been the failure of successive Governments to properly regulate the interest payable on housing loans, or indeed, on loans in general; permitting Money-Lenders to impose intolerable burdens upon the working classes. No consideration is shown for the damage, which they are inflicting, not only on the individual, but on Society as a whole. Such impositions, combined with the equally culpable failure to regulate land values, has resulted in a situation, in which the average working-class person can no longer consider the question of home ownership. Wealthy foreigners: Japanese, principally, together with Hong Kong and Singaporean Chinese, are invited to buy land in Australia: thereby forcing the price of property to outrageous levels. This is great news for Real Estate interests and land speculators in general, but is a disaster for the younger generation of Australians, which hopes to be able to buy its own home at some time in the future. No, No! There is no room for Governmental control of land values, as this would mean a restriction on the freedom of the individual to enrich himself, at the expense of the Community. It also smacks of Socialist interference.

The artificial inflation of land values plays upon the greed of the individual vendor of land, who is persuaded that he is on to a good thing in selling his house at an increased value. Unless purchasing another property in the country, the city dweller has to pay a similarly inflated price for his new house. The only people who win in this situation are the Real Estate agents, and Governments, which profit from increased stamp duties and taxes. These people have collectively used every device imaginable, to inflate land values continuously over many years. Governments, which once made cheap housing available for rent or purchase by the poor, now engage in precisely similar activities as Real Estate interests, in forcing-up values, to obtain maximum returns on the sale of Crown land. Tough-luck for the newly-weds of Australian society. Unless born with the proverbial “silver-spoon”, they have “Buckley’s” chance of home ownership.

Another singular factor in the house-land equation, is the fact that the cost of erecting a house seems, increasingly, to keep pace with the price of a block of land on a roughly 50/50 basis. It does not appear to be related to the actual cost of labour and materials. Overall, land values have got to be the greatest factor in the annual inflation spiral, yet this element receives little or no mention in the Press, as a cause of concern. Whereas, wage rises, which for the ordinary worker in recent years have been infinitesimal, receive much publicity from the Capitalist Press. Of continuous concern to me, has been the obvious inability of those responsible for the calculation of the Annual Cost of Living Increases in Australia (the Commonwealth Bureau of Statistics), to properly consider questions of the inflationary effects of land and property values or the real cost of food and consumer goods spirals, when making their annual adjustments of the Cost of Living. We have seen figures given of a very low percentage points (One or One and a half per centum) for years, when it is obvious to anyone who does the family shopping, that the price of food, clothing and services is rocketing, year by year.

However, when we arrived in Austinmer, the purchase of a block of land for building a home was still a comparatively easy matter. We obtained a loan from the Public Service Building Society, in the vast sum of four-thousand, six-hundred Pounds, ($9,200.00) which was all that was needed to build our modest cottage. It was a sensible design, being roughly in the shape of a letter “T”, with the kitchen and living room to the fore and bedrooms at the rear. In order to make the most of the pleasant view to the East, we had the house erected sideways-on. As it was only a single-storey cottage, we did not interfere with the view of the neighbours next door, who had built their own home as a two storey cottage, to take full advantage of the view. As the land sloped steeply to the East, the buildings to the West were erected on a slightly higher level than those on the seaward side.

When we moved into our new house, we were, of course, very pleased with ourselves. The situation of the home, in bushland, with few houses nearby, was peaceful. This was in marked contrast to the situation of our first house at Ingleburn, which was close to the Railway line and past which trains, plying between Sydney and Melbourne, would race with a tremendous roar. Often, during the night, a coal-train would move slowly-by, pulled by two huge diesel engines, with almost a mile of wagons trailing behind. The drivers of these trains displayed no consideration for nearby inhabitants, who were endeavouring to sleep; as they often operated the air-horns for several seconds, without intermission.

On one occasion, I had experienced a frightening nightmare, in which I dreamed that the house was in the middle of the line, about to be crushed by the advancing monster. I got up from the bed, in my confusion and alarm, and, going to the window, waited for the “end” to come. My heart was pounding and as the train passed-on without, apparently, demolishing the house, I gradually awoke to my situation. Even whilst living in the flat in The Grove, the sound of the surf had disturbed me, so much so, that on one occasion I had ordered Teresa out of bed, as I had then believed that the house was about to be overwhelmed by the waves. There were to be no more noise-generated nightmares for me, in our new home. The only sound which disturbed our slumber here, was the occasional morning cackle of Kookaburras or the melodious warbling of Currawongs: a type of large Magpie, common to Eastern Australia.

As one entered the main-entrance of the new house, the lounge-room lay immediately to the left. A door led from the end of this room directly out to the front yard. To the right was a small dining area, at the end of which another door led to the tiny kitchen: just adequate for food preparation for a small family. A door opened from the kitchen to the back yard. A sliding-door from the lounge-room led to a narrow hall, providing access to the three bedrooms, laundry and bathroom. The toilet was a tiny room adjacent to the laundry, itself approached by a door on the right of the hall. Like many small project cottages, the design was calculated to make the maximum use of the interior space. Whilst the house was utilitarian in design and construction, upon the whole Teresa and I were very pleased with our new home and its location. I had had to agree with the building foreman who had said, “It is not a bad little cottage”. Forty-one years later, we still reside here.

As there was still no piped-water available, the house had two large aluminium water-tanks, connected to a pressure system, which provided water to the taps situated here and there within the house. There was only one problem: at the time: the South Coast was experiencing a drought and, in fact, had received little rain for a period or about a year and a half. During this initial period, in common with my neighbours, I borrowed the Bush-Fire Brigade tanker-trailer to supply the house with water. The tank held a hundred gallons. I filled this tank at a tap, located in Clewe’s park, down below, in the village. This needed to be done once or twice weekly and meant that I was kept busy supplying my family with water. We were fortunate to have access to this supply. The toilet was serviced by a Septic-Tank, which was effective, although the overflow tended to smell, to some extent. There was also a problem with mosquitoes, which thrived in the damp conditions from the rubble drains on unsewered properties. All windows and doors had to be fitted with mosquito netting.

It was many years before sewerage was installed in these suburbs, but we were fortunate in that, about six months after we moved into the house, a new sub-division for domestic housing was approved nearby. The approval for the development was made conditionally, on the developer paying the costs incurred in the reticulation of water to the land. As the water-main, thus installed, passed close to our house, it was not long before we were able to turn on the tap, without giving thought to the amount of water being used.

There was a great deal of debris left over from the building of the cottage, which had not been removed by the builder, probably because we had moved-in before the house was officially handed over. There was still a dispute between the Building Society and the Builder, although this did not affect us to any great extent. I set about making a garden. I bought several Camellia plants from our former landlord and planted these near the front of the house. In the ensuing months I split a great deal of stone, of which there was an abundance on the property itself: constructing retaining walls and paths of rough stone. In fact, the financial position of the family was as precarious as ever. At this period of our lives we lived from hand to mouth. We had no surplus funds to permit me to spend a great deal on the garden. I had to do what I could with minimal resources. However, I was active and enthusiastic and, within a few months, had done quite a lot towards making the surroundings presentable. I visited many gardens during the course of my work and was often given cuttings and plants by people I met.

The yard itself had great potential from a landscaping aspect, as it was large, by urban standards. The block fanned-out from the narrow frontage of fifty-feet, for a distance of a hundred yards to the rear, where the width was two-hundred feet. The ground also fell away steeply for a hundred feet or so. At the bottom of the block there was a level area, which I planted with Citrus and Plum trees. Scattered throughout the yard were a number of Casuarina and Gum trees, in addition to native shrubs, of an indeterminate nature. There were many tree-stumps to be dug out and burnt: a task that kept me busy, during ensuing weeks.

### Chapter 99

### WOLLONGONG

The Wollongong District Office was then situated in Market Street, immediately adjacent to the Courthouse. The Police-Station was to the rear. The building in which the Child Welfare Department was housed, had been the original Police Station, when it was merely a Country town. The ground floor was then occupied by the Police Prosecuting Branch. The Senior District Officer was a friendly, light-hearted man, of English parentage although himself Australian born. His name was George Hayton. Also working here were two older District Officers, Ernie Etherton and Dave Checkley. Both were in their early forties: tall and heavily built. Here their similarities ceased. Dave was a deeply religious but not overtly pious man: mild-mannered, with a compassionate and understanding nature. He was married with two daughters; now just about grown up. Dave was dark-haired and pale-complexioned. Ernie, who was fresh-faced and balding; whilst a very practical type of man, was no softy and could, at times, be rather belligerent: not that there was any suggestion of trouble within the office. Ernie just would not tolerate any nonsense: he called a spade a spade. He also was a married-man, with several children.

My first District here comprised the areas of West Wollongong, including the two residential suburbs of Berkeley and Lake Heights. These two suburbs were populated, mainly, by Migrant families; consisting of both British and Southern European stock. My district included the Berkeley Migrant Hostel, which was then situated on the hill overlooking Lake Illawarra; a large tidal lake which lies about 4 miles to the South of Wollongong. The bulk of my work consisted of School Attendance and Probation duties, although there was a sprinkling of State Wards and many Deserted Wives residing in the area. A large number of Housing Commission dwellings had been constructed in the vicinity of the Migrant Hostel and many of these had been allotted to migrants.

Deserted Wives received an allowance from the Department of two-shillings and sixpence a week for each child, in addition to their Pension. Every three months or so, a home visit was made by the DO, to check that the recipient’s circumstances had not changed. I usually had no difficulty with these women, as I was always considerate in my approach to them. Some, of course, were unmarried mothers; many of whom experienced real hardship in trying to make ends meet, on a strictly limited income. Whilst they did not actually starve, if paying a high rent, these mothers often found themselves short of money for the purchase of food and other necessaries. I met several young women, throughout my years as a DO, who had deprived themselves of food, to ensure that they fed their children. Such problems usually arose prior to the allocation of Housing-Commission accommodation, the rent of which was subsidised by the State Government.

The District North of Wollongong was served, at that time, by Dave Checkley, who then lived with his wife and family at Bulli. However, after I had been in the office for several months, Dave, who was a fairly senior officer, was transferred to Sydney and the District from Fairy Meadow to Helensburg was given to me, as I now lived at Austinmer.

The Social Welfare Officer, at that time, was a ruddy-faced, rather quiet man, named Albert Thompson. “Bert” was a family man, who had lived in the town for a number of years, with his wife and three little girls. He suffered from high blood-pressure, although I felt that he was such a docile character, it was most unlikely that he would suffer from such a thing as stress. His duties were not arduous and should not have been conducive to anxiety, of any kind. Still, Bert, like many of the Social Welfare Staff, felt that he was in an inferior position, compared to the District Officers, who were paid a much higher salary than him. In the ensuing months, I became friendly with Bert. Occasionally, the two of us would go off on fishing expeditions, in and around Lake Illawarra. A favourite spot was the warm outlet to the Power Station on Lake Illawarra, which attracted large numbers of young bream. Here we would spend much of the night fishing. We usually caught a good many fish, most of which were bream about six to nine inches in length. Later, these waters were closed to fishermen, as a move to protect the small bream from being fished out.

There was a lady DO working at Wollongong, named Mavis Beer, a tall, slender woman of about thirty-five years of age: very quiet and agreeable in her disposition. She was then a single woman and was still caring for her aged mother, with whom she resided in the Western suburbs of the town. Mavis was a member of a Non-Conformist Church and was rather old-fashioned in her ways. I felt that she was a pretty decent sort of woman. As I grew to know her better, my respect for her increased. Her conversation was sensible and interesting and she and I got along very well together. About a year later, another female District Officer arrived on the scene; Beatrice Grayling. This lady was a divorced woman: disillusioned at the failure of her marriage. We boys found her to be sociable enough, as Beatrice obviously enjoyed the company of men. She was large in build and of fair complexion. One day, soon after her arrival in Wollongong, I was disturbed to hear Beatrice expressing her views on the competence and suitability of Mavis for her job. She was sitting near my desk, at the time, and said to me, quite gratuitously, “What do you think of Mavis, isn’t she hopeless? I wonder what she is doing in this job. She is quite unsuited to the work!” I was so shocked by this unexpected statement, that I could not think of an appropriate reply and murmured, “Oh! I think she is alright: she is very quiet you know”.

As the male DO’s had a high opinion of Mavis’s capacity as a District Officer, I was surprised at the vehemence of Beatrice’s criticism: which was entirely baseless. I concluded that it was a case of one female being “bitchy” towards another. Throughout ensuing years, it became apparent to me that this desire to undermine the position of competing females, was a weakness of Beatrice’s; which really did not endear the affected ladies to her. The habit directed itself, particularly, in the direction of the wives of the male DO’s: it becoming evident to me, that she somehow obtained a vicarious satisfaction from the distress occasioned to those ladies, if their respective husbands happened to stray out of the matrimonial line. This is not to suggest that Beatrice, herself, was personally involved in any form of enticement. That did not happen. It was merely that, if there happened to be an intra-office romance developing between male and female officers, she was sure to give her encouragement to the participants; secure in the knowledge that somebody was going to be very upset. Whether she was consciously aware of the fact that she was participating in a form of procurement, I never knew: nor did I disturb the superficial tranquillity of Staff-relationships, by pointing this out to her.

There was another DO, a young man, named Keith Honeyman, who was working in the office when I arrived there. He was about thirty years of age: tall, thin, pale and undernourished, in his appearance, but evidently sound in wind and limb. He had a pronounced Hapsburg chin. Keith was an optimistic chap; chatty and communicable. At the same time, he was a sensitive fellow, who found the sometimes conflicting situations created by his work to be very intimidating as, indeed, did I, also. One morning, as Keith and I were chatting during morning tea, I said to him, “Do you have a girl-friend, Keith?” “No”, replied my friend, with a whimsical expression on his long, pale face. “None of the women who I fancied would look at me and I never fancied any of those who were interested in me. That is still the situation.” I said, “I suppose that adds-up!”

George Hayton, the SDO, was an easy-going fellow. He was an active member of “The Lions Club”, which, to the uninitiated, is what is known as a “Service Club”. Ostensibly established to perform Community Service work, in common with many similar organizations, it functions rather like a Masonic Society, although lacking the secretive and ritualistic practices of the latter. In essence, it is a “Back-Scratching” Association; membership of which ensures that a discount can be obtained, in the purchase of practically anything in the business field; as the members are usually businessmen of one kind or another. They are prepared to give and take discounts, as available. That this type of organization originated in the “Land of the Free!” should come as no surprise: it being well known that the capacity for “Bull-Shit” is the most prolific attribute of the North-American. Proof of this was given to me in the form of the Magazine produced by this organization, entitled, “The Lion”, copies of which were left in the office, from time to time, by George or Ernie, who both happened to be members of the Club. These documents, upon perusal, proved to be a dozen or so pages of the most unutterable gibberish. The literature was mainly devoted to listing the virtues of Lions “X, Y & Z”, who had done such wonderful work in the cause of Back-Scratching in diverse spheres. There was, it must be affirmed, one distinct advantage to be derived from my colleagues’ attendance at the gatherings of the Club. There were always a few new jokes to go the rounds of the office on Monday mornings: the recitation of such entertaining anecdotes, enlivening the depressing moments at the start of a new week. It appeared to me that this was the principle activity conducted at Lions’ meetings, apart from, of course, the usual “arm-bending” exercises. One has to concede, in the case of this organization, that many minor public facilities are provided by the members, as part of their group activities. One is usually left in no doubt as to the nature of the work carried out, by the erection of a suitable sign, stating the fact.

In l965 the Wollongong District Office of the Department of Child Welfare and Social Welfare, as it was then known, was situated next door to the newly opened office of the Public Solicitor. The incumbent at this time was a Frank Hore, who appeared to me to be a somewhat smug and self-satisfied individual, with whom I had occasional dealings of a semi-official nature. I assumed that Fred was well-to-do, as he was a “lawyer”. On Christmas Eve, 1965, Frank opened his office for a small celebration. The Social Welfare Officer, Bert and I, went along for a few drinks. Bert only stayed for one or two cans, which was conventional behaviour, but I, for some inexplicable reason, took it into my head that the booze had been donated to Frank, from some mysterious source, and determined to stay for a few more cans. The result was that I imbibed rather more than I should and, certainly, overstayed my welcome. As it was, I don’t think I drank more than about five or six cans, which would have been my absolute limit. My usual custom, following a drinking session, was to drink large quantities of water, an absolute necessity for me. However, I did not take any liquid that night, with the result that the next morning, when I was due to convey my wife and family to the Simpsons’ home, for Christmas Dinner, I was still sick. I managed to drive to Liverpool, but was too ill to enjoy the festivities; spending much of the time dry-retching in my car. My wife was unsympathetic, with just cause, and I had occasion to regret my indulgence of the day before. In fact, for the next few days I was not well: suffering the effects of dehydration and alcohol-poisoning. I had learnt another lesson. This was my last bout of drinking to excess: thereafter, I generally had the sense to carefully watch my intake of liquor. Frank Hore was, justifiably, unhappy at the way in which I drank more than my share of his beer.

### Chapter 100

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### The Funnel-Web Spider

That Christmas Eve, I took presents home for family members: amongst them a cheap plastic “Soldier’s” helmet for little Ted, and a plastic sword, which had been amongst several items left in the office by charity workers. Several weeks’ later, I was working at the front of the house, when the child, now aged 3 years, came running to the front door. He called out, “Daddy: there’s a Funnel Web in my toy box!” I thought to myself, “It is probably just a Huntsman spider”. This is a large, graceful and harmless spider, which makes itself at home indoors, feeding on mosquitoes and other insects that find their way inside the house. I now went to look at the spider. Sure enough, there was a large male Funnel-Web spider, sitting in the upturned helmet in the tea-chest, containing Ted’s toys. This I promptly killed: it being too dangerous to try to get it outside alive. Ted had seen these spiders before, as I had often disturbed their nests in the yard, when moving rocks.  A toy tin-train had been left in the yard for a week or so, before being brought inside. Unbeknown to the person who picked it up, (probably Teresa) the spider must have been inside the toy-train, when placed in the tea-chest. Had the child or his mother been bitten by this spider, it would, probably, have proved fatal as, at that time, there was no antidote for its toxin.

Normally, in spite of the reputation of the Funnel-web spider as a “killer”; it is, in reality, a timid and retiring creature. It is slow-moving, compared to other large spiders, and presents no direct threat to humans. Indeed, it must remain in its web in a damp place, in order to survive, and only emerges at night, in the warmer months, to hunt or to mate. Sometimes, on Summer nights the males are seen roving around, looking for lady-friends. The danger to people from the Funnel-web spider comes when damp washing is left out overnight, or when people are camping-out. Each morning the foraging spiders seek a dark and damp environment and sometimes find their way into laundry baskets. There have been several fatal bites in New South Wales, during the last thirty or so years. With the development of a vaccine, some years ago, the risk of suffering a fatal bite has been virtually eliminated.

### Chapter 101

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### Convivial Company

Before the advent of “Breathalyser” legislation, some of the Child Welfare people, myself included, would gravitate each Thursday evening to the local Master Builders’ Club. This establishment was only a hundred yards or so from the District Office. There, we would partake of a few beers and enjoy a meal in the Buffet lounge. This was a pleasant social evening, in which some of the female Police Officers, of whom there were one or two then stationed at Wollongong, would join. We limited our drinking to about four or five beers, which was more than enough, in any event, as the alcohol content of Aussie beer was no less than 5%. Nowadays, such an intake would put one over the 0.05% alcohol limit, but was not then considered sufficient to create problems with regard to the driving of motor-cars. The Alcohol limit, at that period, was O.08%. On these nights, I would not arrive home until after 10pm. Teresa tolerated this, as she realized that this was customary behaviour which, not taken to extremes, was unobjectionable.

When I finally left the Department in l973, I still continued to drink socially, to some extent. When later working as a Government Lawyer, on Friday nights I would spend an hour after work, enjoying a convivial beer and a chat with my colleagues. However, even this practice became too hazardous in later years, with the prospect of being “Put on the bag!”

I enjoyed my work in the Northern Suburbs. I found the character of the people to be wholly different from the type of person, with whom I had dealt, in Sydney. The district had originally been settled by Welsh Miners, who had been brought to NSW for the express purpose of opening-up the Coal Mines of the South Coast. Thus the settlers, hereabouts, were not of Convict stock. The local people impressed me as being more civilized than their Sydney counterparts. Such a distinction might be regarded by Sociologists, after so many generations, as too fine but I felt, instinctively, that this was the case. It may have been also due to the fact that there was not a great deal of poverty within the area. Over the years, I saw several cases of long-term child neglect, none of which was attributable to poverty, per se.

Coal was first discovered about 1840, when the 8ft thick seams were found at Coalcliff by shipwrecked mariners. It is here that the seams are visible from the sea.

I was very conscientious in the matter of School attendance and regularly visited the numerous Public and Catholic Schools in my district; to check on truancy or other problems that might need my attention. I found the local Headmasters and Headmistresses to be co-operative and helpful. I was generally made welcome and, in some cases, almost “feted” by the teachers, who were generally pleased to see me. At least one of the local Headmasters reported that my work with truants was highly effective. The Northern suburbs of the “Illawarra” were particularly well-blessed with intelligent and understanding Head-teachers, which made my task much more pleasant than it otherwise might have been.

One day I had occasion to visit a Foster-Home in Stanwell Park. The family consisted of an aged lady, Mrs. Harvey and several of her daughters. Mrs. Harvey was caring for two of her grand-children, whose mother was now deceased. She herself was now, perhaps, 70 or more years of age but still displayed the hallmarks of great strength of character. She informed me that she had lived for many years in a large house on the top of Bald Hill. However, after the veranda blew away in a gale, she was unable to afford the cost of repairs and was obliged to sell the property and seek other, more affordable accommodation. She was a lady of high intelligence and I was deeply impressed by her. She also told me a rather sad story of how she had lost one of her daughters in a boating accident on the Shoalhaven River some years before. Another daughter had been killed on Tom Ugly’s Bridge, Sydney, in a head-on collision. In spite of these calamities, she still had a number of surviving daughters around about her. I saw Mrs. Harvey on several occasions, during my years as a DO, both at Stanwell Park and, later, when the family moved to Helensburgh. The latter place is a sprawling mining town on the Southern outskirts of Sydney, surrounded on its Northern and Eastern sides by an extensive National Park. In recent years it has grown considerably but, at the time of which we speak, it was still a relatively quiet backwater, largely unaffected by the spread of the Sydney suburbs. There was a Public School and a Catholic School here, at both of which I was assured of a cordial welcome.

I had occasion to remember another charming lady of the district. One day I went to Coalcliff to visit a Foster-home. The house was situated on the main road, below the Colliery. A driveway, that served several houses, led from the road to a point below the house, from which a steep flight of stairs led to the front-door. Mrs. Schmidt, was a lady of Colonial-Dutch origin; having settled in Australia with her husband and family, on the collapse of the Dutch Colonial Empire. She had the care of a young man aged about ten years, who was a Ward. Mrs Schmidt immediately impressed me by the warmth of her concern for her children and by the high personal standards she maintained. I felt that I was in the presence of a very sweet lady. This impression was not diminished in subsequent visits to the house. I was not then aware of the fact that she was suffering from terminal cancer and, in fact, moved-on to the “higher life”, a year or so later. I felt a genuine sympathy with those whom she had left behind and for the enormity of their loss. Such a mother must surely be irreplaceable.

Once a month, it was my duty to visit those “incorrigibles” who had been sent to either the Anglewood Special School (for Truants) at Bowral or the Mittagong Training School for Boys. The latter being an establishment for delinquent juveniles. The Headmaster of Anglewood, Jim Glasson, was a dedicated and charming man, who lived and worked at the School for many years, until his retirement and subsequent early death in the l970’s. On arriving at Anglewood, we DOs were shown into Jim’s office, where, under the gentle influence of tea and biscuits, we would discuss our clients. Subsequently, each District Officer interviewed his own boys, to ascertain whether there were any problems needing attention and what degree of contact there had been with relatives. In this way, the DO kept in touch with his truants and maintained a continuity of contact with the lads: for the time when they were due to return home. Anglewood itself, as previously recorded, was a lovely place, set in large grounds; in which were to be found many stately trees and flower gardens. Sadly, in recent years the property has fallen into disrepair: deliberately closed down and allowed to deteriorate. The young people who would have been incarcerated there, are now permitted to roam the streets: exposed to all the vices of an indifferent and uncaring world. It costs money and effort to run such establishments and Governments, of whatever political flavour, find it is easier to dismantle services and ignore the problems.

The Mittagong Training School consisted of a number of large “Cottages” which housed lads of about the early teen-age years. It was a place for degenerate youth; not a place of harsh confinement but with a rather free and, certainly, an open-air environment. The School covered perhaps a thousand acres of land, each cottage being surrounded by extensive paddocks. There was a dairy, supplying milk, not only to the school, but for the Sydney Market and many of the cottages had a farming staff, independent of the Administration.

Each cottage provided lunch on a rostered basis for the visiting DOs, who took the occasion to enjoy their meal, with light-hearted conversation. As there were usually about half a dozen DO’s together, at one time, each from a different district, it was the occasion for catching-up on Departmental Gossip and general chit-chat. The fellows looked forward to their trip to Anglewood and Mittagong as a pleasant outing, and not merely as a break from the, sometimes demanding, routine of Field-duties.

Sadly, the Training School is no more: one or two of the cottages may remain as homes for State Wards, but the bulk of the property has been sold-off by successive New South Wales Governments.

### Chapter 102

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### Pat Hanrahan

It was at Mittagong that I met my friend, Pat Hanrahan, DO. I was to maintain contact with Pat for a good many years. At this time, Pat was a sweet-natured fellow of about 30 years; somewhat above the average height. He was dark-haired, of medium build and wore thick-rimmed spectacles, which gave him an academic look. His temperament was congenial to a degree. On first meeting Pat, I felt, instinctively, that here was a gentle, responsive soul.

We discussed the general topics of the day and, as Pat was a practising Catholic, from time to time the topic of religion would arise. In addition to Catholic questions, Pat and his fellow DO’s discussed current political questions and events.

I told Pat that I was a “Spiritualist” but never revealed my erstwhile “flirtation” with Catholicism. Pat, who had himself spent a number of years preparing for the Priesthood, which he only managed to avoid by the “skin of his teeth”, was well-versed in his own religious doctrines. He did not fully comprehend the nature of my own beliefs and these were never discussed, in detail, by us. No doubt, he would have known that the “Church” proscribed anything to do with “Spiritualism”, as “diabolically wicked”. Many years after our first meeting, I gave Pat an early copy of my “Bible Commentary”, which was my attempt to set-out my own religious ideas.

Pat’s isolation from ordinary life, for so long, had produced an extraordinary naive and simple-natured character. He never lost this attribute. Whilst possessing an Irishman’s sense of humour, he was always astonished at the behaviour of those with whom he dealt. Even whilst in the Seminary (he confided to me) one of his priestly tutors had taken him aside and promised to “show him the way to God through love!” Such a proposition, of course, could be regarded as ambiguous and would be perfectly acceptable, if based upon purely spiritual principles.

One of my Anglewood/Mittagong DO friends was named Ken Armstrong. This chap was a short, stocky fellow, with an apparent reputation, within the Department, as a “boor”. Very few of the DO’s who knew Ken were attracted to him. He was self-opinionated and arrogant, according to report. I got to know Ken during the Anglewood trips and found him to be excellent company. He was a pleasant, somewhat witty conversationalist. He had a habit of putting direct, very personal questions, rather like a TV interviewer, which were apt to find one off-guard. Such questions tend to embarrass people and might have accounted for his unpopularity.

When a conference was to be held in Sydney, which involved an overnight stay, Ken very kindly invited me to stay at his North Shore home, which I gladly accepted. Ken lived in a two-storey cottage in Allambie Heights, a quiet residential district of North Sydney. Ken’s wife, Doreen, made me very comfortable. Subsequently, I lost contact with these interesting people. Thirty years later, when visiting my daughter, who then resided at Allambie Heights, I again visited Ken. He did not remember me and it took a few minutes conversation before he recollected who I was. We met again, in company with Pat Hanrahan, on one further occasion, when we had lunch in Sydney, one day. Ken moved-on to the “higher life” in 2003.

### Chapter 103

### CLARE

When I had been working at Wollongong for a year or so, another young District Officer was transferred to the office. He was Michael O’Blarney, an Australian of distinctly Irish origin. Of short, stocky build, with Ginger hair and fresh complexion, he was bright and extroverted. Mick had married young. His wife, Mary, was an Englishwoman, by whom he had produced three children. The eldest child was a girl, now about 13 years of age. There were two younger boys, who were still in primary school.

Mick was a friendly, “hail-fellow-well-met!” type: self-orientated, as is common with many men. He, evidently, felt that he had been ”trapped” into matrimony, as Mary had fallen pregnant with the eldest child, prior to their marriage. In those far-off days, it was still considered essential for a man to do the “right thing”, if his girl-friend became pregnant. Whilst Mick appeared to be indifferent towards his wife, his marriage had subsisted until the arrival of another young-lady stenographer at the Office.

This girl was named Clare. She was a country-girl, about twenty-five years of age at this time: 5’ 6” tall, bright, full-breasted and shapely. Her features were pleasant, she was fair-haired and complexioned, although her skin lacked the smooth, delicate texture of the Northern beauty. Clare was husband-hunting and was not particular, whether he was to be new or “second-hand”.

In fact, I myself found Clare to be something of a ”temptress”: as once or twice, I fancied that she had set her cap at me. At least this is what I thought, although I may well have been flattering myself, unduly. One afternoon, whilst looking for files in the front-office filing-cabinet, I felt the soft roundness of Carol’s bosom which, quite accidentally, it appeared, happened to be gently pressing into my back. Whilst, I have to confess that it was a not-unpleasant experience, I was not sufficiently attracted to the young lady to wish to destroy my marriage, by becoming involved with her. I enjoyed Clare’s company and raised no objection, whenever she wandered through the tea-room in her bikini: which, during the Summer months, she would often do. The ladies toilet was adjacent to the tea-room, downstairs. It was here that I was accustomed to taking my lunch, when in the office. During the lunch-hour, Clare would go off to the beach for a quick swim. Sometimes, when taking dictation, she would confide in me. One afternoon she was sitting in my office and said to me, “I was downstairs in the Prosecutor’s office at lunch-time, talking to “Ossie” O’Grady. Do you know, he ran his hand completely up my leg? I was so shocked!” I responded, “You have to be so careful of these people, Clare. They certainly cannot be trusted!” It might be noted that, at this time, she was wearing the shortest of all possible mini-skirts and would have been seated next to O’Grady, showing a vast expanse of thigh.

Clare eventually latched-on to Mick, although he refused to leave his wife for her. As it was, the affair, although brief, disrupted his family life, causing his wife great distress, as she loved her husband dearly. He would often stay away until late at night or even into the small hours, although this habit was not new to him. He had previously become friendly with one or two of the local Police and it was not uncommon for him to stay out late, playing cards with his Police mates, in one of the Station Cells.

Mick’s eldest daughter, whose name I no longer recall, suffered greatly as a result of her father’s emotional neglect of her. She would refuse to go to sleep, lying awake: waiting for him to return home. Perhaps she was apprehensive that the time would come when he would not return home at all.

When Clare realized that she could not induce Mick to leave his wife and family, the affair gradually cooled. She subsequently married a quiet, intelligent and contemplative young man. He was, evidently, unable to gratify his wife’s insatiable need for male companionship. Soon after her marriage, she was flirting with the other District Officers, including the then incumbent of the Social Welfare job, Gordon Hollis: then a single man. He took Clare home from a Club one night, perhaps not realizing that her husband was, “On the Warpath!”: the latter suspecting that his wife was deceiving him. The incensed husband had, apparently, been waiting-up for his wife: the hour being close to midnight, as Gordon drove-up, with Clare in the front passenger seat of his car. Hearing the vehicle approach and, suspecting the worst, he walked out of the front door just as Gordon was opening the car door, for Clare to alight from the vehicle. Her husband now rushed down the path. Gordon, realizing his danger, took to his heels, followed by the irate husband. Whereupon, Clare got out of the car and went home to bed. Gordon was able to avoid the injured husband and realized the folly of his actions: he being essentially a very stable person. Some time later, Gordon plucked-up sufficient courage to return to his car and drive home. As I only heard this story at second-hand, I cannot vouch for its entire veracity.

### Chapter 104

### MAGGIE.

What finally demolished Mick’s marriage, was the arrival in the Office of another female DO, “Maggie”. This lady was a widow, at the time she came to the Wollongong office. Maggie was lonely, childless and, perhaps, desperate for a new husband. She was a slim, waspish female, slight in the bosom but with, otherwise, a charming figure, which the extremely short-skirts of the day permitted her to display to her best advantage. She was not pretty; her face was dry and thin, but she displayed her long black hair and body to good advantage, by revealing an excellent dress sense. Soon after her arrival, she “set her cap” at Mick: determined to adopt him as her own. In this she was encouraged by the vicariously excited Beatrice, who, to say the least, did nothing to discourage the development of the affair, and even went so far as to make her flat available for those intimate occasions, when alternate facilities became necessary. Thereafter, it was not long before it was generally known that Mick had left his wife and children.

As Teresa and I had been friendly with Mary, we were distressed by this development. However, I did not choose to interfere in Mick’s affairs. Mary and the children returned to live with her parents in Campbelltown and we heard no more of her. Of course, Maggie took Mick “in hand” and disciplined him very well, during the ensuing years. She gave him no opportunity to play-up with other women: taking care that all their future activities were joint enterprises.

### Chapter 105

### Social life

During l966, a tall, handsome and good-natured chap commenced working as a DO at the Wollongong office. His name was “Alan Evans”. He had been brought up in the country and had imbibed the egalitarian ideas of the Australia Bush. Alan was about forty years of age at this time, married with two children, a boy, Andrew 12 years and a little girl of 7 years. His wife, Margaret, was two or three years the junior of her husband. She was a fairly tall, handsome, well-educated woman, who had devoted herself in recent years to the raising of her children. Alan was an easy-going fellow, who proved to be an agreeable companion to the other DO’s. The newcomers readily joined in the convivial social activities of the office. From time to time, Picnics were organized at one of the numerous South Coast beaches, where one could swim, fish or just lie about in the sun, as inclination dictated. As these activities were for married officers, their wives and children, they included all family members. Such gatherings help to cement relationships between the families, thus represented, and certainly helped to relieve the stresses generated by the very nature of their duties. Also included in the group was a young DO named John Van der Doorn, a large and jolly man, of Dutch origin, who came to Australia as a teenager. John was married to a charming girl named, Anne, and was the father of three children.

It was apparent to me that my married colleagues were, in the main, a sensible and stable set of fellows, with sound family backgrounds.

### Chapter 106

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### A Bush Visit

Alan said to me, one lunchtime. “I am visiting my parents at Parkes, this week-end. Perhaps you might care to come with me. It will give you some idea of what life is like, in the Bush”. I was pleased and flattered by my friend’s suggestion and replied, “I will have a word with Teresa and see what she says.” When I arrived home that evening, I mentioned the invitation, saying, “Alan Evans has invited me to go with him to his parent’s place at Parkes, next weekend. How do you feel about me going away for Saturday and Sunday?” Teresa, who was always practical about such matters, replied, “I have no objection to you going: I will be perfectly all right here with the children.” Plans were therefore made for Alan to collect me at 7am the following Saturday morning.

I was already waiting, when Alan arrived, almost on the hour. I threw my bag into the 1970 model Chrysler Wagon and we were off. Our route lay over the Blue Mountains to Lithgow: through Bathurst and Orange and on to the Western Plains, a distance of about 220 miles. Alan pushed his car at an average speed of almost sixty miles per hour, as he was anxious to be in Parkes, soon after mid-day. It was now high Summer and we did not want to be in the car during the heat of the afternoon.

We took the Bell route, via Richmond: a longer but more picturesque and quieter road, which by-passed the busy residential areas along the Blue-Mountains Highway. The road was a narrow, winding but well-engineered route and, as Alan put his foot firmly down, we drove swiftly up and over the range and down the steep drop into the mining town of Lithgow. The town sits in a hollow on the Western side of the Mountains. From Lithgow we continued-on to Bathurst, winding over the Western foothills of the Blue Mountains before we reached the more level and easier country, before that town. Not stopping here, we sped-on through pretty, undulating country, for the next 50 miles to Orange: a busy rural centre. Here again, I only had a swift glimpse of the town before we were again speeding the last 50 miles stage to Parkes.

The Evans’ property was several miles from the town. We arrived at the home of Mr. and Mrs Evans, at about one o’clock, to find the old folk waiting at the door. They occupied a typical Australian country cottage, on six hundred acres of land, which, although by Australian standards only a small-holding, was capable of producing a living for a man and wife. The Evans’ were now in their early “seventies” and still very active in and about the property. The old man was tall and strongly built and with a few more active years ahead of him. Mrs. Evans was petite and sensible. Alan kissed his mother and said, “This is John Roberts, Mum. He is a New Chum and anxious to see a bit of Aus.” She greeted me warmly: “Come inside, out of the heat and make yourself at home, John!” “Thank you, Mrs. Evans!” “Your lunch is ready for you, as soon as you like.” said Alan’s mother.

As we were sitting down to eat, Mrs. Evans said to me, “How do you like Australia, John?” “It is a different world altogether Mrs. Evans. One would not know where to begin in describing the change in life-style, on leaving the Old Country. Australia is so vast: the people so free, in a more complete sense than are the British: who pride themselves on their civil liberties. They don’t know the meaning of freedom.” I now waxed eloquent: “There is something really democratic about life here: that is the most striking thing. Otherwise the Aussies are just like people at home. It is great to be able to come out here, where there is so much space: so much more room to move. Australia is a great place to live.” Mr. Evans now spoke, “We live a very quiet life here in the country, but we have known no other life and would not change it for anything in the world.” The conversation now lapsed and we continued our meal in silence.

The house was set about a hundred yards from the dirt road, fronting the property. It was a small cottage by country standards yet substantial in its own way. There were five bedrooms, in addition to a spacious kitchen and living area. The roof was of corrugated iron: the standard roofing material in the Australian Bush. The house was surrounded by a broad veranda, which served to protect the occupants from the intolerable Summer heat. In addition, there were the usual sheds and out-houses, essential in a country property. A short distance from the house was a modest Shearing-Shed, used by contract shearers once or twice a year, when they came to shear the Evans’ sheep.

The country hereabouts was generally flat, being part of the Western Plains of New South Wales, with a few low hills scattered over the plain. Much of the country had been cleared for agriculture, with here and there the odd gum tree or currawong tree: the latter useful for feeding stock in times of drought. The land now was dry and barren: what grass there was, shrivelled and dead. It did not seem to me that very much could survive the heat and dryness of Summer on these Western Plains.

After our meal and a short rest, we three men drove into town, where the elder Evans had some business with a local Stock and Station Agent. Parkes is a typical country town, with essentially one main street, surrounded by light-industrial and residential areas. One important feature on the outlying plains, is the huge “radio telescope”, which can be seen for many miles around. On Saturday afternoons in those days, the only activity to be observed was in and around local Hotels or the Showground. We younger men remained in the car, whilst Mr. Evans spoke to the Agent, following which we repaired to an hotel for a couple of cold beers. We remained in the Pub for about half an hour, chatting to other local identities, before returning to the house.

Alan took me to look at the shearing shed and out-buildings. He also showed me an interesting little beetle which inhabited the bark of the Kurrajong tree. It was too hot to remain outside for long and after a half hour or so, we returned to the relatively cool shade of the homestead. An International Cricket Match was being shown on the Television, which I could watch, at my ease. I had little knowledge of the technicalities of Cricket and could not appreciate the “finer points” of the game, in which the two Evans men took a keen interest.

I felt at a disadvantage amongst these country folk, being, myself, both a “Pommie” and a Townsman. I was self-conscious and awkward in conversation, as I had no knowledge of those topics that were of interest to the Bushman: sheep, wheat, politics and Cricket.

I slept that night in a comfortable bed, at the rear of the house. In the morning I was awake soon after dawn. After an excellent breakfast of bacon and eggs, Alan and I said “goodbye” to Mr. and Mrs. Evans. I said, “I really appreciate your kindness in putting me up Mrs.Evans. It has been a great experience!” Turning to the older man, I said, “You too Mr. Evans, thanks for everything!” “That is alright lad. We have been only too glad to have you.” We then retraced our steps Eastwards and arrived at Austinmer, in the early afternoon.

Some time later, I was in the local High School to check the School Rolls, when I observed a tall, smart young woman who was signing-on for the day. I did not see her face, as she had her back towards me. She was dressed in a tailored skirt and blouse: her fair hair neatly combed. I said to myself, “That is very nice!” The next moment, she turned to reveal her handsome, almost classical features. She was fair-skinned, with clear grey eyes. The lady was Margaret Evans, who had recently entered the ranks of the Teaching profession. Having obtained a Science Degree before her marriage, she had decided to become a teacher and had lately obtained her Diploma of Education. I greeted Margaret pleasantly, thinking to myself that Alan was a lucky man, to have such a beautiful and intelligent wife.

### Chapter 107

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### Continuing Pursuits

Whilst I was busy in my Child Welfare duties, Teresa herself cared for the three boys. As Ted grew older and commenced attending school in Austinmer Kindergarten, Teresa found that she had more free time. She, therefore, undertook studies, at the Wollongong Technical College, first in Dress-making, which she pursued for three years, eventually covering the whole range of ladies’ tailoring. She produced meticulously exact work: indeed, the standard required of students was high. Later, she took Art classes. Not only was the work interesting and creative but Teresa enjoyed the social contacts that she made at the College. She continued her Art classes for a number of years. In addition to these activities, she played Tennis with a group of women on Wednesdays and was also active, for many years, with the local VIEW Club, a women’s social club. She revealed at aptitude for debating, which she performed so well, as to reach the finals of the debating competition, on at least one occasion.

As for me, I had no regular leisure activities. Though retaining an interest in Spiritualism, my experiences in Australia had convinced me that there was a great deal of ignorance within the Movement. Occasionally I attended meetings, here and there, but felt that I derived very little satisfaction from the Services. I was saddened to find that the standard of “mediumship” was poor, with the emphasis at services being upon the use of physical links to establish contact with the “Spirit-world”. I found that many speakers appeared to be confused in regard to the teachings and philosophy of Spiritualism: nor were many of those attending the Services interested in questions of a doctrinal nature. The majority of people went to meetings for a “reading” and were interested in nothing else.

I had stopped attending meetings in Sydney, years before. However, during the late 60’s a group was formed in the Wollongong district, by persons who, although enthusiastic, were largely ignorant of the principles and practice of Spiritualism and without the necessary spiritual perception themselves. There was one gifted lady, a Mrs. Jean Caddick, who attended these services and was, perhaps, the only person capable of demonstrating “survival” in the district, at that time. After getting off to a great start, with meetings being held at the Wollongong “Eastern Star Hall”, which showed some promise; inevitable jealousies surfaced, resulting in a schism which lasted twenty-five years, with one half-hearted attempt at re-unification in the 70’s.

I was present on one occasion, during an Open Circle, when one speaker refused to sit down, when requested to do so by Mrs. Caddick, who was conducting the meeting. This type of circle demands a measure of discipline and control. There was much bickering after this incident. On another occasion, a “propaganda meeting” was held at the same hall, by an entirely unrelated group of persons. One of the speakers, who claimed to be a “Healer”; spoke at great length and with lurid detail, about the horrors of vivisection. The other, a young and effeminate “psychic”, spoke much about what “he” was going to do for the “…cause of Spiritualism in the Illawarra region”. This meeting was attended by a good many people. I doubt that many intelligent people would have been impressed by this presentation of “Spiritualism”.

During the Summer of l969/70, a large meeting was held at the Workers’ Education Centre in Corrimal Street, Wollongong, which was attended by, perhaps, 200 persons. A succession of so-called “mediums” purported to read flowers for about three hours, in stifling conditions. I found the heat in the packed room to be intolerable, but the torment continued during this time. I could not get myself out of the place quickly enough. I was convinced that these two meetings, which revealed no understanding, on the part of any of the speakers, of the teachings of Spiritualism, had struck a blow against the attraction of reasonably intelligent people to the work of the Movement in the town.

There was one brief ray of light cast on this dreary scene. I discovered in the early 70’s that an Open-Circle was conducted on Saturday afternoons at a hall in Campsie, in Sydney, by a Mr. and Mrs. Morris. I went along and was pleased to observe that the meeting was conducted in a truly elevated manner: with many of the traditional Spiritualist hymns being sung during the meeting. The Bible was read and both husband and wife were evidently endowed with a certain spiritual perception. I myself was able to speak at these meetings, being invited by the leader of the meeting to address the group. I felt the presence of the Spirit and was able to speak on the subject of Divine Guidance and individual responsibility. Being an “Open” meeting, any person was free to speak to the assembly. Unfortunately, ill health caused the break-up of this group, which I felt could have been the nucleus of a progresssive traditional Meeting.

In subsequent years I was involved, from time to time, in the work of the Movement in the Wollongong district.

I do not recall when I first came into contact with Beryl Starr, a Lancashire woman who has been in Australia for many years. She is exceptionally gifted Spiritually and has, perhaps, the “finest vision” of any person in Australia: certainly in the Sydney region. For some years she conducted a group at Corrimal Park and later at the Swimming Complex building. I attended quite regularly for some time and always found her perception of “Spirit” to be first-class. I often spoke at these meetings and also enjoyed a gift of prayer. Soon after my Son, Owen, died at age 32 years, in March l986, she spoke to me, describing a vision she had of …”an altar with a single rose thereon” and my Son’s presence. The altar was significant in that both my father and myself had frequently sung an old song “Take thou this rose…” in which these images are mentioned. When Owen was a boy he would have recalled my love of this old melody.

For some years I was active with the “Wollongong Christian Spiritualist Church” and for a time was “President” of the Church. However, I often felt frustrated by, what I perceived to be) the failure of other members to comprehend the absolute need for the avoidance of all forms of money-gathering. During the mid-90’s I resigned from this position and have since had little contact with any Spiritualist Church. This is mainly due, I feel, to my responsibility to care for my wife, who is mildly handicapped, following minor strokes in 2000.

I might add that my legal knowledge enabled me to be of assistance to the Church in the Incorporation of the group under amendments made to the law about the mid-90’s, and also in the creation of a sensible Constitution for the Church. I do not know if this has been varied at all since that time.

During the mid-60’s I first began to have indications of “psychic” activity around about me. This took the form of an awareness of the “presence” of spirit people with me, as I lay in bed at night. I would feel the build up of the “power” of spirit and felt a “massaging” of my solar plexus. (This is one of the regions of the body, know as “shakras” of which there are a number.) When this process was taking place, I knew nothing about these “psychic centres” and would have been sceptical about statements of this nature. However, as a result of these experiences, I realized that I was being assisted in some way in my own “psychic” development. This massaging would continue for some time and occurred so frequently that I became quite accustomed to the sensation. I also felt the power strongly over my head and back. I was intrigued and interested in what was happening to me. About this time, also I began to experience very vivid dreams and decided to record the most interesting of these happenings. I have kept a record of these dreams for many years. I believe that they convey some insight into the nature of the Spirit World itself.

Subsequent to this period, I often had brilliant visions during meetings, usually when dozing, which I frequently do whilst “demonstrations of psychic ability” are being given. Also at times, when in bed at night, I would “see” spirit-people of diverse kinds and, occasionally, hear voices. These experiences lasted for many years but nowadays my vision is limited and I only catch glimpses of people from time to time: usually prior to falling asleep or waking in the morning.

### Chapter 108

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### The Goring’s

Situated above the residential district of Austinmer, there were a number of sub-standard dwellings, erected on Crown land, during the depression years of the 30’s. I had occasion to visit several of these humpies, for a variety of reasons, ranging from the payment of allowances or the supply of medical services to Pensioners. There was, however, one family, which had moved here some time previously, having been ejected from a Housing Commission cottage for non-payment of rent and dirty conditions. Whilst living at Woonona, they had reached the stage at which the power had been disconnected and the family was reduced to cooking its meals in the back-yard, on an open fire. This was in spite of the fact that the father was employed in a well-paid Government job.

The Goring family now lived in a corrugated-iron shack, set in a forested and secluded part of the escarpment, designated as Public Reserve. The house was relatively large, containing a kitchen, living-room and three bedrooms. However, it was unlined; had no ceiling and was erected directly upon the ground, without flooring or foundations of any kind. Nor was it equipped with those essential items, doors and windows. In the place where the windows should have been there was merely an open rectangular space. It was as though the builder had run out of funds and done nothing further to the shack. It must have been bitterly cold during the Winter months, when fierce winds lash this part of the coast from June to September. The shack had evidently been here many years and had probably been erected by a local miner, as were many sub-standard houses, during the “depression” years.

Water was supplied to the house from a nearby creek, by means of a siphoning hose. This continued to run, even during drought conditions, as the water passed eight hundred feet through the sandstone escarpment, before reaching impermeable clays, from whence it made its way down to the sea.

The house was approached by a bush track, passable in dry weather but a quagmire in wet. As visited for the first time, I walked up the path to the house and was met by the Goring’s dog, “Towser”: a small but extremely disagreeable cur, which understood its duty to deter visitors of any and every description. He rushed at me, barking savagely and showing his teeth, with grim determination. I was good with dogs and it did not take me long to pacify Towser, and show him. that I was there for a permissible reason. I now drew near to the building. On the left, about twenty feet from the house, was the toilet: consisting of a little house (or “Dunny”), with no door. Henceforth, I exercised discretion, when approaching the residence, to enable persons who may have been occupying the “Loo” to vacate, before I arrived. I would call out loudly, “Hello! Is anyone at home!”, to announce my presence.

This is, in fact, what I cried out, now, and was answered by the appearance at the door of the shack of a short, stout, middle-aged lady, who had, evidently, not bathed or washed for some time and who was clad in a filthy dress. Meanwhile, Towser was making his presence felt by the occasional menacing growl. “Good morning”, said I. “I am from the Welfare Department. Are you Mrs. Goring?” “That’s right. What do you want?” “I’m here to see how you are getting along. Do you mind if I come in?” The fact that there was no door made entrance to the premises relatively easy. Mrs. Goring stepped back to permit me to enter.

I walked into what would have been the kitchen in a normal house. To the left was a wood-fired stove on which all cooking was carried out. It was over-flowing with ashes, which were also scattered over the dirt floor. In the middle of the room was an extremely dirty table, with nothing on it. There were a couple of old chairs in the room but little else. To the right was a concrete sink, with the hose leading from the creek: the clear, pure water gushing forth. The husband was at work on this first visit. However, the daughter, Elizabeth, 16 yrs was at home. She was a fair-haired, slim and very pretty girl, or would have been, had it not been for the accumulated grime, which smeared her face and locks. Her dress also was filthy. One of the boys, Jimmy aged 12 yrs, was also present . He was a rather dull but not ill-disposed lad, who should have been at school. Jimmy also was very dirty but clothed. Their mother introduced the children to me and I said, “Hello! You’re not at school today, Jim?” “He has not been well for a few days”, responded his mother.

I inspected the rest of the house, which did not take long. There was a double bed in the parents’ “room” and camp beds for the children. There were no sheets on the beds and what bedding was visible was of a dark grey shade. “The place is a bit of a mess, Mrs. Goring”. “Well, it is very hard living here and with my Asthma, I find it difficult to do things.” “You are going to have to try harder or we will have to take the children into care. This is not suitable for them, particularly in the Winter-time.” “When will your husband be home?” “Oh, he is often here during the day. You can catch him any time”. “Very well, I’ll come again and speak to him.”

A few days’ later, I called again. On this occasion the dog was more friendly, barking at me but wagging his tail, in recognition of a familiar face. Mr. Goring was at home. He was a large, grubby and unfriendly man. I approached Goring and said “Good-day, Mr. Goring?” He said, “Yep. What do you want.” “I saw your wife the other day and had a look around. This place is not suitable for children and you will have to either improve the dwelling or find alternative accommodation, Mr. Goring. I see that you have running water: there is no excuse for filth.” “I do the best I can here”. I continued: “The children are missing a lot of school. Unless they are genuinely sick they must attend school regularly. I do not want to take Court action, but if things do not improve I will do so.” Goring responded with, “My wife tells them to go to school. She can’t do more than that.” As there was little more that I could do, for the moment, I left, saying, “Well, I will come back again in a few week’s time and see how things are. Cheerio for now!”

As Goring was in regular and well-paid employment, there did not seem to be a reasonable explanation, as to why he should allow conditions to deteriorate to this level. Mrs. Goring had affirmed that her husband was not a drinker. I could only deduce that he must have been a gambler, to be so short of funds that he could not make even this place tolerably comfortable for his family. I had felt obliged to lay down the law to some extent, as it was clear to me that Court action was not far off. As the family was only squatting here, it was unlikely that the father would spend any money on improving the shack and, in fact, he did nothing, whatever, in this regard.

My initial visit resulted in a short-term improvement in the children’s school attendance and in the level of personal cleanliness, but it was not long before I had to bring them before the Court. The Complaint under the old Child Welfare Act of 1939, was that they were “Neglected: in that they are under Incompetent Guardianship!” The children were placed in temporary foster-care, whilst the parents found more suitable accommodation. The father eventually obtained a large hut to rent, in a nearby suburb, which, being adequately furnished, was considered to be suitable. At least it had windows and doors and was weatherproof. It constituted an enormous improvement on the old shack.

I recommended to the Court that the children be returned to their parents. Mrs. Goring must have been very thankful to me for my consideration, as she afterwards always spoke to me courteously. She must also have appreciated the improvement in her own physical conditions, now that she had something approaching a decent house. In the new house, the children slept in double-decker beds and the bedding, at least initially, was clean.

I maintained contact with the Goring’s in ensuing months, and whilst there was always a poor standard of hygiene here, no action was taken to interfere with the children, as the family was a closely knit unit. In any event, as they grew older, the children no longer needed the supervising influence of the Welfare Department.

Elizabeth married at 18yrs and had two or three children. She moved out of the family home soon after her marriage and I had no further direct contact with her. In subsequent years I sometimes saw Elizabeth, when shopping in the district. It always appeared to me that she was in need of a good bath.

### Chapter 109

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### The McGill’s

Visiting Waniora Primary School, one day during l967, the Headmaster, Mr Fairlie, asked me to investigate the living conditions of a family, living a short distance from the school. I, accordingly, went along to the home, which was a nice little cottage in a respectable and quiet residential street close to the Beach. It was occupied by a lady, Mrs. McGill and her three children, Michael 14yrs, red-haired and a good-looking youth, Ann 12 yrs, a pretty girl and Billy 6 yrs. When I knocked on the door, it was opened by the mother herself. She was a woman of about 45 years of age and of neat and clean appearance. I was immediately overpowered by a potent smell of methylated-spirit, which exuded from the lady herself. “Good-day!”, said I, “Are you Mrs. McGill?”, whereupon the lady nodded. “My name is Roberts from the Welfare Department. The children appear to be missing a lot of school, Mrs. McGill. Do you mind if I come in?” With that I stepped inside the cottage.

The three children were present; were adequately dressed and well-nourished. The house was a three-bedroom, fibro-tiled cottage, in good condition. Inside the house, the rooms were modestly furnished, reasonably clean and comfortable. Whilst untidy, there was no evidence of outright neglect.

Mrs. McGill was obviously affected by liquor and I moved into the kitchen area, to observe that, on the table, was a half-empty bottle of Methylated Spirit and a beer glass, containing some of this liquid. There was no food in the kitchen, which was otherwise clean and tidy. On inspecting the kitchen-cupboards, I discovered about 25 empty methylated-spirit bottles. The refrigerator, although clean, was empty. Underneath the building was a box, containing a large number of bottles of a similar description to those already found by me. It was now clear, what was the nature of the problem in this house.

The mother was severely under the influence of alcohol and I could get no sense out of her. I therefore, questioned Michael: “Where is your father, Michael”’ “He is in the Army in Vietnam: he is a Sergeant.” “Does he know that your mother has this drinking problem?” “Yes, I think so.” “What on earth is he doing in Vietnam, when his family is in such dire straights?” I thought to myself. I said, “Have you any relatives or friends, who could look after you, until your mother is better?” “No, we don’t know anyone here. We are originally from Victoria.” said Michael. “I am going to have to find someone to look after you and your brother and sister until we can get your father back from overseas.” I cannot leave you here under the present conditions.” Michael, who was a fine type of young man, had taken upon himself the role of care-giver to the other family members, including his mother, but was quite unable to check her addiction to alcohol.

I took the children into care and later contacted the Department of the Army, explaining the mother’s circumstances. The Military authorities arranged for Sgt. McGill to be brought home from Vietnam.

One might have expected him to show some gratitude for the concern that I had revealed for the welfare of his family, but the reverse was the case. He was, in fact, furious at being repatriated to look after his wife and children. He much preferred the adventurous life of a NCO in Vietnam, to the onerous prospect of taking on some responsibility for his family, in Australia.

I also fell foul of a local Social Worker, a Mr. Swan, who had been “counselling” Mrs. McGill for her alcohol dependence, apparently without success. He was distressed to find that his therapy had been disrupted by my peremptory removal of the children: as the stress of this action affected his Client’s emotional state. The fact that the children were starving, did not seem to concern him: they were not part of his case.

Subsequently the children were returned to the parents and I lost contact with them. Remarkably enough, many years later, the mother was still alive and sober. I saw her, one day, in the Wollongong Courthouse. I said, “Hello, Mrs. McGill, how are you.” “I am very well, thank you Mr. Roberts”. “How are the children keeping?” “They are all well: Michael is in Western Australia and is really doing well. He is married and has two children.” I replied, “I am very pleased to hear that. He is a fine young man: you are lucky to have such good children.” “I know that.” said the mother. Although her parched skin still testified to the devastating effects of her earlier alcoholism, she told me that she was in good health and quite happy. I did not ask her about her husband. It seems that my action, in removing the children, had been the catalyst that had enabled her to overcome her addiction and, undoubtedly, saved her from an early demise.

### Chapter 110

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### A Bush-Fire

Teresa was now 39 years of age and had considered herself to be past the age of child-bearing. However, she found herself to be pregnant again and, subsequently, gave birth to a daughter, Margaret, at Bulli Hospital on the 18th October l968. When the child arrived and was pronounced to be a girl, the mother was incredulous and said to the Doctor, “Are you sure?” There was, however, no doubt that the child was a girl and, even at birth, equipped with long eyelashes.

We were both very pleased at the belated arrival of a daughter: which was a new experience for us. The weather at that time was unseasonably hot. Soon after mother and daughter came home from the hospital, Bushfires were reported all along the escarpment and in many other parts of NSW. I was on leave, having arranged to have time off work, to enable me to assist my wife in the management of the new baby. I was a member of the local “Bush Fire Brigade” and spent some time, in the days preceding the big fire, in helping to control several small fires that had broken out in nearby bushland.

On the Friday of that week, a fire had been burning all day in scrub at Coledale. My companions and I had been keeping an eye on it, as it crept slowly against the wind towards Austinmer. During the afternoon we were called to a fire, burning in the residential area of Austinmer, in Asquith Street. This is a steeply winding roadway, with houses situated on either side and with surrounding bush. There being no water pressure in the mains, at this point, owing to heavy demand, the fire-fighters were using wet sacks to beat out small outbreaks of fire around the houses. When I had spent some time engaged in this activity, a neighbour, Jan Wilton, passed-by and called-out, “You had better get back home, John: the fire has jumped the railway line and is heading for the Circle.” Thereupon, I wearily trudged up the hill towards our house, which was about four hundred yards from where I had been working. I reached the house ten minutes later. I said to Teresa, “The fire is on its way here and with this wind it will be dangerous.” I will take you and the baby down to Coledale beach, where you will be safe”.

Teresa had spent much of the day in dipping her new baby into water, to keep her cool. When news of the threatening fire reached them, a neighbouring housewife, Elaine Wilton, climbed a ladder on to the roof of our house and placed a hose sprinkler there, to dampen the roof. In Bushfires, there is always a danger of dry leaves igniting and setting fire to the house timbers. When I arrived home, I was annoyed to find that the hose was not available; being on the roof. A sprinkler placed in any position there would only have covered a small area, leaving much of the roof, gutters and any other leaves, thereon, in a highly inflammable state. I hurriedly climbed a ladder and removed the sprinkler, replacing it with a jet nozzle.

My wife collected a few baby things and I drove them to the beach, returning about five minutes later. I commenced to hose down the roof and area surrounding the house to reduce the risk of fire igniting leaves and roof litter. I now observed a wall of flame, thirty feet or more in height and about a hundred yards away from where I stood, in front of the dwelling. It was fortunate that nearby homes were the first houses on the water main from the Coledale reservoir. There was still some pressure in the hose and I was able to soak the area surrounding the house.

As the fire approached, on a broad front, it rose high above the roofs of the houses, on the opposite side of the Circle, which itself was a large open space of about an acre in size, affording a break from the bushland, surrounding the houses on all sides. The fire moved quickly, fanned by a strong Southerly wind. It reached a number of Casuarina trees, below a nearby house, which exploded with a roar, as the resins in their leaves ignited. The fire-front raced past, like an express train. As it did so, dry leaves and grass, nearby, appeared to ignite spontaneously, as if eager to burn. I quickly put these spot fires out with my hose. The fire at this stage was a “Crown-fire”, burning in the tree-tops. Fortunately, it jumped the Circle and the tall Blackbutt trees immediately to the North of the house were not ignited. Lower down, on the hillside, the Bush was totally blackened. The fire moved swiftly through the undergrowth on the vacant block next door and completely burnt out the surrounding bushland. Fortunately, the new purchaser of that block had cleared a considerable number of Casuarina (or She-oak) trees, only a few weeks prior to the fire. Two or three cottages were destroyed, close to the Railway line; some three hundred yards away to the North East. The fire then threatened a large number of sub standard dwellings situated in scrubland in the Coledale district. When things began to look very black, indeed, for the people of Coledale, a sudden change of wind from a Southerly to a Northerly direction, eliminated the danger. As it was, a number of houses were destroyed that day in Bulli and Thirroul, to the South.

There was not a blade of grass remaining in the bushland surrounding the Circle and a number of Blackbutt trees at the bottom of the bank, below the house, eventually died: the heat generated by the fire proving to be too severe for them to survive. Normally, gum trees have a remarkable resilience and resistance to fire. The heat generated by this fire was so intense, that even the stumps of dead trees, that penetrated several feet into the earth, were completely burnt out: leaving a deep hole where the timber had previously been. For a week or more, subsequent to the passage of the fire, there was the occasional crash, as dead trees on the escarpment, gradually burnt out and fell. At night, the glow from numerous trees and stumps, still burning, was visible right along the escarpment. The coal seam, which reaches the surface, nearby, burnt for weeks and required bulldozing, before the fire could be extinguished.

Many small native animals sought refuge in the green oasis of the Circle, which had escaped the flames. Some of these, Pigmy Possums, were killed by the cats owned by local residents. I found several small marsupials that had been killed by cats, some still with a cluster of tiny babies adhering to them. There was also a dead glider-possum, that had evidently fallen prey to the fangs of the family cat. These avoidable deaths emphasized the danger to native animals, from domestic cats and feral animals generally. I ultimately came to the conclusion that there can be no place in Australia for European cats. If small native animals are to survive in Australia, cats, particularly, will have to be eliminated and that, of course, includes pet cats.

Somewhat miraculously, the fire had jumped the Circle completely: the only damage being to a “T” Tree fence, dividing two adjoining properties, which had caught the blast of the fire. One house about a hundred yards away to the North, owned by Paul Skinner and his wife, had caught fire but this had been extinguished by the owner, with only slight damage to the laundry.

The damage to the fence was the occasion of a quarrel between the owners, as the fence had been erected by Jan Wilton, at some expense and with much attention to detail: he being a perfectionist in such matters. The other neighbour, however, named, Alan Myler, a reporter on the local paper, “The Illawarra Mercury”, was anything but a gardener. Jan alleged that Alan had allowed combustible material to accumulate against the fence, which, according to Jan, contributed to the burning of the fence palings. This was disputed by Alan, perhaps with some justification, as it was apparent, at the time, that houses, quite apart from fences, were in grave danger of going up in flames.

### Chapter 111

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### The Walkeley’s

One family, which had lost everything in the blaze, was known personally to me: I having had occasion to visit the home regarding allegations of neglect. The Walkeley’s had resided in a small cottage at the top of High Street, in Thirroul. When I first arrived at the house, I found that the parents and four or five small children were residing in a tiny place that would have been barely adequate for two people. Mr. Walkeley was a “chicken-fancier” and saw nothing unusual in keeping day-old chicks in the kitchen oven and, later, allowing them to wander throughout the house, as if they were, in the fullest sense, members of the family. The parents were quiet, rather slow but even-tempered people, who appeared to be wholly incapable of caring properly for their numerous brood of infant children. The mother had no concept, whatever, of basic house-keeping: the place being quite filthy, when I visited for the first time. Bedding was dirty and stinking with urine: the floor coated with all manner of filth, including human excrement. However, I did not wish to disturb the family, if this could be avoided. I therefore gave the mother some advice. At that time, there were no residential facilities available for the instruction of mothers in the basic principles of household management.

I made a second visit, a short time before the bushfire effectively destroyed the premises. The chickens were now about six weeks old and still had the run of the place. One of the chickens was foraging on the kitchen table, when I arrived. Mrs. and Mrs. Walkeley were again advised, regarding minimum standards of housekeeping. However, the fire effectively removed the immediate family problems and compelled the Walkeley’s to seek accommodation elsewhere. They were given priority for Housing Commission accommodation, in common with other bushfire victims. They also received $500.00, in cash, from the Mayor’s Disaster Fund and a fully-furnished house, situated in the suburb of Berkeley. Furniture was supplied by the Smith Family (A charitable organisation) and included a fridge and a washing machine. After residing in the new home for six weeks, conditions had deteriorated so much, that the family was evicted by the Housing Authority. This in itself was a rare occurrence.

I had occasion to visit the house, in company with the supervising DO, Mr.Jereley. Actually, our George of Newtown days, who was now working at the Wollongong office. (For personal reasons, he had changed his name to Jereley). The fly-screen doors, fitted to the house, had been demolished and the lounge-room lamp, which hung from the centre of the ceiling, was surrounded by a myriad flies. Food-scraps and rubbish littered the house throughout. In one of the bedrooms, occupied by the children, the baby’s cot mattress had collapsed: revealing a large hole in the centre. A goodly number of maggots were regaling themselves on the contents. The washing had not been done for some time: evident from the putrefying mass of dirty clothing in the laundry sink. By the side of the parents’ bed, was a perfectly conical pyramid of cigarette-ends and matchsticks, about a foot high, which had evidently been accumulating since the family had moved into the house. Outside, the drains were overflowing and it appeared that there was a danger of the house sinking into the morass.

George brought the children before the Court under a Complaint of “Neglect” and they were remanded, temporarily, in the care of the Department. Whilst in the witness box, the DO was questioned by the Magistrate as to how many maggots were feeding on the mattress. George had to confess that he had not counted them. Subsequently, the children were returned to the care of the parents and moved back into my district.

The residence now occupied by the Walkeley family was an old, two storey timber building, which has subsequently been demolished. It contained three upstairs bedrooms, a lounge room, kitchen-dining room and necessary offices. Normally, it would have been quite satisfactory, as a home. However, I became concerned on my first visit to the new premises, upon observing that there were open fireplaces, in both the kitchen and living-room, wholly unprotected by screens or fenders. In fact, the kitchen fireplace was of the type, common in early Australian houses, in which the grate protruded into the room space in rather a hazardous manner. As it was now the Winter season, a goodly fire was burning in each grate. The father was a Miner, who received a liberal allowance of coal. Playing-in and around the rooms were three of Mrs Walkeley’s five small children. The eldest was now at school and the baby was still not at the walking stage. I expressed my concern to the mother, as to the need for protection from the open fires, but it is doubtful if these suggestions registered with her, as no attempt was made, subsequently, to screen the fires from the children.

I kept an eye on the family to ensure that conditions did not deteriorate unduly. However, the father gave his wife no support, other than to provide necessary funds, from his earnings as a Miner. It just did not register with him that she needed every assistance, if the children were to be properly cared for.

One day I went to the home, to find it in a putrid condition. The floors were covered with dirt of every description: the Fridge was filthy and coated with a covering of dark slime. The laundry tub was overflowing, with the now familiar stench. The effluvium from this was so potent as to cause a violent reaction, upon reaching the olfactory senses: as if one’s lungs were being assailed by strong and rancid gases. As I ascended the steep staircase, avoiding faecal deposits thereon. I noted many brown stains upon the walls and ceilings. I said to the mother, “What are all those brown marks, Mrs. Walkeley?” “That is little Charlie: he throws his shit all over the place.” This child, it must be explained, was about four years of age and intellectually handicapped. The bedrooms were, once more, in a deplorable state, with the children’s bedding foul and urine soaked. Once more it was: “Back to Court!”

This time the children were made Wards of the State and eventually placed out with Foster-parents. The mother was again pregnant and gave birth, in due course, to another little boy. Her Doctor wisely arranged for her to have her “tubes” tied, ensuring that there would be no more little ones coming along. Mrs. Walkeley was able to cope well with the sole remaining child. For a number of years, thereafter, I occasionally observed this mother, looking quite neat herself, taking her well-cared-for little boy to school each morning.

### Chapter 112

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### The Beveridge Family

Last, but not least of our problem families, was the Beveridge family of Woonona. They were a numerous family, Mrs. Beveridge having produced a baker’s dozen of children, in as many years. She was the dominant party in the marriage: her husband, who was a short, rather docile character, left the management of the home in her incapable hands. Not that this lady was in any degree incapable of caring for her children properly. She was an intelligent woman, but preferred to let them get on with the job themselves.

Mr. Beveridge worked as a Technician, employed by the electricity authority, so that there was no financial hardship. Indeed, the children were kept clothed, by the simple expedient of obtaining more clothing, on the never-never, whenever the things which they were then wearing fell to pieces or reached the stage when they could no longer be worn. It appeared to me, on first visiting the house, that if an item of clothing fell to the floor, it remained there until it merged with other putrefying elements concealing the original linoleum: with the passage of time becoming indistinguishable from the other debris.

Mrs. B. had no time for housework or washing, or any of those homely pursuits. She endeavoured to escape from her responsibilities by simply closing her eyes to their existence: instead preferring to spend her time at the local “Workers” Club. Frequent complaints were made by the Headmaster of the local Public School, as to the stinking, louse-bound condition of the children. The other children in the school could not sit next to them, in Class, owing to the potent bodily odour that exuded from them. As it was, the Beveridge children suffered no problems of rejection from this: they simply played, quite happily, together. It must be emphasized that these children were all beautiful, sweet-natured children: well-adjusted and happy.

It was realized by the Department that this family should be kept as an united whole and, with this in mind, the parents were counselled for a good many years, before Court action became drastically necessary. There were several local ladies, belong to a Non-Conformist Church organization, who maintained contact with the children. They took them into their own homes, at week-ends, to give them a taste of decent living. The parents raised no objection to this. The mother, herself, felt greatly relieved at not having to put herself out, when the children were away from home, as this permitted her to spend more time, engaged as she preferred.

On my first visit to the house, I had difficulty in gaining admission to the premises. I had come straight from the school and knew that two or more of the children were at home, when they should normally have been at school. I, therefore, persisted in knocking and calling-out, “Is anyone home?” both at the front and rear doors of the small fibro cottage, then occupied by the family. Finally, the door was opened by a tired-looking lady, whom I knew as Mrs. Beveridge. “Oh!”, said I, “You are home then, Mrs. Beveridge. You know who I am! Do you mind if I come inside?” “You can if you like”, said Mrs. B. I now entered the house. The usual signs of pressing neglect were evident: filth everywhere: rubbish strewn floors: filthy kitchen table and fridge. I inspected the children’s bedrooms and discovered that what had once been mattresses had collapsed through the bedwires: having rotted to the stage where the coverings no longer retained the mattress filling. The children had been lying in a decomposing mass of flock and bedwire.

I rang the “Smith Family”, Charitable Organization, which supplied new beds and bedding for the children. I counselled the mother, regarding cleanliness of the children at school. For a short time at least, the children were able to sleep in relative comfort.

The family, at this time, was residing in a rented house owned by an “Ethnic gentleman”. This public-spirited person determined that he wished to redevelop the property and that, therefore, the Beveridge family had to go. However, eviction was easier said than done. Forcing the family out, by the process of issuing an Ejectment Summons did not appeal to him, as this was a slow and, possibly, expensive procedure. Indeed, the premises were old and may well have still been “protected” premises under Wartime legislation, which was still current in respect of buildings erected before1954. He therefore decided to use his own initiative in the matter. One night, when the family was asleep, he took his ladder and a hammer: effectively removing a number of sheets of roofing-iron. The father was away on night-shift at the time and Mrs. B was probably still at the local Club. As the weather happened to be wet, the children were thus exposed to the elements. Not that this, per se, would have amounted to much greater discomfort than they were accustomed to tolerating, as their bedding was well and truly putrid once more. However, this action on the part of their landlord made the place uninhabitable and I was called out, urgently, to place the children in a Shelter: as there was nowhere else for them to go. They were subsequently made Wards and fostered-out in their home district, in order to preserve, as far as possible the family ties.

### Chapter 113

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### A Legal Man!

The stress engendered by the nature of my duties, combined with administrative pressures within the office, resulted in my seeking an alternative career for myself. When working at the Courthouse in Manchester, I had thought to myself that I might have been a Lawyer, had I applied myself to my studies, as a youth. However, I had never at, any stage, entertained the remotest idea that I might, at some time in the future, be able to obtain a legal qualification.

There were several other DO’s, who had undertaken the Barristers’ Admission Board courses, whilst working for the Welfare Department. In l967, I decided to apply for admission as a Student-at-Law. I had little in the way of formal educational qualifications, apart from a GCE in English and Geography, a German language Certificate and my Typing and shorthand Certificates, together with my Departmental Child Welfare qualification. After reading the Admission Rules, I applied for Provisional Admission as a Student-at-Law, sending with my application my various bits and pieces. I was able to obtain personal references from two local Solicitors, with whom I had had contact, over a number of years. They kindly certified that I was “a fit and proper person to become a Student-at-Law.”

In due course and much to my delight, I was advised that I had been provisionally admitted as a Law Student. My admission was subject to satisfactory completion of the Preliminary Examination. The course involved private study, together with periodic weekend lectures, organized by the Sydney Law-Extension Committee. I was now, at the age of 37 years, embarking upon studies that were, eventually, to lead to my admission to the New South Wales Bar.

For the next six years I applied myself to my studies, with variable results. There were times when I doubted my ability to complete the course. I was encouraged, when I obtained a “Very Satisfactory” pass in the Intermediate Examination, which was devoted, principally, to an introductory study of Land Law. Thereafter, I commenced to study individual legal subjects.

One problem in my own case, was that I had no legal background: I had never worked in a law office, nor was I familiar with the documents and forms used therein. I had also to obtain access to law books.

One of the principal barriers, facing the law student, is the subject of “Real Property”. This deals with the history of land law and requires the student to master, inter-alia, certain generally incomprehensible principles, known as “Limitations”, which have no application whatever to 20th Century Law. However, they serve, conveniently, to weed out, at an early stage, those students who are inevitably doomed to failure. This subject was then taken concurrently with Contract Law: not a difficult, but an extensive subject. I concentrated my efforts on Land Law and, after much heart-rending effort, managed to catch a “glimpse” of the subject, just prior to the Exam. I was therefore pleased when I learned that I had passed Land Law, although I failed Contract Law. The subsequent section embraced three legal subjects and at the examination, 6 months later, I passed two subjects, but again failed Contract Law. I decided to concentrate on this subject and was, eventually, rewarded with a pass. I continued in this vein: failing some subjects, but always succeeding in at least one examination. This gave me the necessary encouragement to persevere. I had a generally good run of luck for the next few years. I had two attempts at Tax Law and Company Law before getting past those hurdles.

During these six arduous years, I continued to carry out my duties as a District Officer. Much of my study was done in the Courthouse Library, which in those days, was in a small storeroom. I sat on a low set of wooden steps, as there was no other seating in the room. Here, I spent hours reading case law, in an endeavour to master relevant legal principles. There were no photocopy machines, in those archaic days, and I took copious notes to assist me. These studies took place during working hours: some of which was allotted “study leave”. As my duties involved late evening work, I usually made up this time, by working at my Welfare job outside normal hours: which I had to do, in any event.

Most DO’s adopted their own flexible system of work at that time, as there was no question of overtime for officers, who were required to visit Probationers during the evenings. Prior to each six-monthly exam, I spent a month in intensive study: taking leave to enable me to “cram”, as much as possible. I suffered Migraine headaches increasingly, as Examination time drew near. On at least one occasion I had an attack on the morning of the examination. I could well have done without such a problem, as any Migraine sufferer knows just what an attack of Migraine does for the memory. One even forgets one’s own name, on such occasions.

Teresa was considerate and long-suffering with me: making it as easy as possible for me to study. If the examination was to be held in the afternoon, I would attend the Sydney Law-school library, during the morning, in order to do some last minute cramming. I found that this practice was of great assistance to me, as I had access to a wide range of Law Reports. Usually, the Examinations were held at Unisearch House at the University of NSW, Kensington.

After much hard work I eventually passed my last examination and, in July l973, was admitted to the NSW Bar. I requested a former Child Welfare Colleague, Cliff Papayanni, who was now a well-established Barrister, to assist me, by proposing my admission. This gentleman kindly consented to do so. I was duly enrobed in the Barrister’s wig and gown, borrowed from a friend of Cliff, for the occasion. This was the only time on which I was ever attired in this manner. I have a record of this momentous event, in the form of two photo![Two people posing for a photo

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taken outside the Supreme Court in Sydney, showing Two people posing for a photo

Description generated with very high confidencemyself standing, uncomfortably in borrowed regalia, accompanied by Teresa, Ted and Margaret. (We are, evidently, in deliberate breach of the law!)

Following the ceremony in the Banco Court, Cliff and Joan and Teresa and I had lunch at the Mandarin Restaurant, George Street: then, undoubtedly, the finest Chinese Restaurant in Sydney.

Two people posing for a photo

Description generated with very high confidenceA group of people posing for a photo

Description generated with very high confidenceA group of people posing for a photo

Description generated with very high confidenceTwo people posing for a photo

Description generated with very high confidenceA group of people posing for a photo

Description generated with very high confidence

### Chapter 114

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### Clerk of the Peace

I was now 43 years of age. In retrospect, I might have been advised to remain within the ranks of the Child Welfare Department. However, I had served 13 years with the Department and felt that I ought to try my hand at a legal career. I did not realize that I would find myself in a job, which, perhaps more than any other profession, apart from Medicine, drives people crazy.

Was I not too old to embark upon the Law as a profession? I was a slow-thinker: lacking the quick-witted response; demanded of a competent courtroom lawyer. I also lacked the aggressive disposition, which is essential for an advocate. Above, all, my lack of self-confidence was to prove to be a continuing handicap, in my new career. However, I was only to discover these shortcomings, at a later date. On the positive side, I had a wealth of experience in human affairs: quite apart from my own perception of questions of good and evil. These would assist me to understand the problems of my fellows. I was, generally, able to confine my legal activities within a range which was not too demanding of my abilities.

Lawyers were then in short supply within the ranks of the Public Service of NSW. I applied for a job as an Instructing Officer with the Clerk of the Peace, who was the forerunner of the Director of Public Prosecutions. The office was situated in Darlinghurst, a stone’s throw from the Court complex at Taylor Square. The Clerk of the Peace was a Mr McKay: a pleasant and agreeable man, who had little direct contact with his lessor minions: leaving the bulk of the administrative work to his Deputy. This chap was a somewhat circumspect gentleman named Tyson. Both had worked in the Office for many years. Mr. Tyson was not impressed by either myself or his other new recruit, Ken B………., who commenced working in the office on the same day as I. Ken, like myself, was a middle-aged man, who had spent the last few years studying for the Bar Examinations. On our first morning in the office, Tyson said to us: “You have got to stop thinking like Clerks and start thinking like Lawyers!”

The work demanded of me, here, was the preparation of cases for Trial before Judge and Jury. I had to summarise and prepare cases, for presentation by the Crown Prosecutor and arrange for the exhibits and witnesses to be present. The work was demanding but interesting and once I had settled-in, I had little difficulty in coping with my tasks. When instructing at Trials, at Darlinghurst, there was very little for me to do, except to look as if I was doing something important. It was difficult, at times, for me to stay awake. I often fell into a doze.

After six months, I was transferred to a Country position, which required me to carry out the preparation of Trial Cases, in respect of two Country Circuits, when one would have been a more than adequate burden. However, at this time, shortage of staff made it impossible for one Instructing Officer to be allocated to each Circuit. The net result, was that I found myself hopelessly burdened with work. It was customary for me to spend three days or more away from the office, attending Country Trials. On Friday I would return to the office, to prepare cases for Trial at another venue for the following week. In addition, I often had a great many documents to sign and despatch: all in haste and without a proper check.

When working in the country, I sometimes had to leave home on Sunday night. For example: when attending Trials at Albury, on the Victorian Border, I caught the midnight train from Sydney, arriving at Albury at 6am in the morning. This meant that I had to leave home by 9pm on the Sunday evening. The train was a “sleeper” and I was able to sleep in moderate comfort. I did not object to this procedure. When instructing at Trials in the Far-West, I took an early morning flight from Sydney Airport. To reach Wentworth, which is about 1200 kilometres from Sydney, I caught a plane to Melbourne and another to Mildura in North Western Victoria. This town is about 30 kilometres from Wentworth. The Judge and Crown Officers were collected by Police car, at the Airport and driven to the Wentworth Courthouse. On these trips I could be away from home for a week, although, as a rule, the sittings was shortened, as a result of the inevitable “Plea- bargaining”, which usually occurred before cases went to trial. This bargaining was a regular, though unofficial, aspect of Trial procedure, at that time.

Teresa tolerated my absences from home, as she understood that they were a necessary concomitant of my employment.

One of my circuits was the Wollongong Quarter Sessions. The sittings might last up to three weeks and this was convenient for me, although it meant that my Sydney work was piling-up, in my absence. Other members of the Staff would be assigned to assist me, from time to time. Sometimes the Crown Prosecutor for Wollongong, an elderly man, named Max Warburton, would excuse me, to enable me to return to Sydney, to try to straighten out my country matters. These measures alleviated but did not solve the problem of work volume.

To assist me in Sydney and carry out all my typing, I had the services of a Secretary who, throughout my stay with the Clerk of the Peace was a young English girl, Philomena, “Phil” Barrett. Phil was a fresh-complexioned and pleasant young lady, who had been in Australia since the age of 9 years. I found her to be hard-working and competent. I was, therefore, able to leave much of the routine work to her.

Max Warburton was now in his late 60’s. He had little in his nature that appealed to me and was an unimaginative, somewhat isolated character. He was not a brilliant lawyer and appeared content to do his work with minimum fuss: not being particularly affected, one way or another, whether he won or lost a case. In addition to an excellent salary, the Crown Prosecutors received a fee in respect of every Appeal heard by the Quarter Sessions Judge. In those days there was a local Magistrate, Jim Towns, who was a terror to evil-doers, particularly drink-drivers and people driving “with bald tyres”. His penalties were harsh: hence there was always a considerable number of Appeals. Max did very well out of his Appeal Fees.

The Crown Prosecutor on the South Western Circuit, was another elderly Barrister, Keith Cowie. This gentleman was now aged 73 years. He was tall and dignified and in delicate health. As a result of cataract surgery he wore thick-lensed spectacles and no longer drove a car: although he told me that, in previous years, he had driven a “Jaguar”. Mr. Cowie was an old-fashioned gentleman: well known throughout the Country towns of the Western District of New South Wales. He was very well regarded, by all who knew him.

Keith told me that he had been pressured to retire but had insisted that he would go when it suited him and not before. As a Crown Prosecutor, he was independently appointed and could not be forced to retire by the arbitrary decision of some obscure Public Servant. Whilst I was somewhat overawed by Keith, I had a great respect for him. For his part, except for the occasional petulant outburst in Court, Keith treated me very well indeed. I appreciated his consideration and kindness. Mr. Cowie, like many old people, was out of place in the late 20th Century. He bewailed the falling standards at the Bar and claimed that the “old courtesies” were no longer observed: there was no longer any “respect for the Bench!” Mr. Cowie affirmed that the very first principle of Court work, was the observance of the “utmost respect for the Bench!”

On one circuit visit to Deniliquin, in the far West of New South Wales, the cases set down for Trial did not proceed, owing to a change of Plea. I found myself with a free day, as I was not due to return to Sydney until the following day. One of the local Detectives suggested I might care to go for a drive, as he had to visit Swan Hill, in Victoria, in connection with a severe assault and battery case that was pending. I was pleased with this chance to see some of the surrounding areas and, in due course, I set of with Det. Sgt John Hitchcock and his colleague Det. Sgt. Sam White, for the drive of some 150 kilometres to Swan Hill. The terrain was flat and the car sped along the graded dirt road at 70 or more miles an hour, with no other traffic in either direction. The countryside hereabouts was little more than semi-desert: consisting mainly of scrub country, with here and there a small tree, struggling to survive. Along the billabongs and creeks there were more shrubs and trees, with an abundance of birdlife but, on the open plains there was little to be seen but the vast extent of a flat treeless landscape. This was the real “Outback!”.

At one point we turned from the direct route and made a detour to Barham. Here we stopped at a fruit-packing plant and, after speaking to the Manager, opened the boot and filled it with Citrus. I assumed that they had some arrangement for the purchase of this produce. After leaving Barham, we returned to the Swan Hill road. After crossing the broad expanse of the Murray River and entering the town, we came to a Fruit-Fly inspection point. As we approached the Inspection Depot, John said, “Oh! shit”, which I took to be a reference to the fact that they had a boot full of fruit, which could not legally be taken into Victoria. “Just drive past and wave to the blokes”, said his mate. They continued-on and did as Sam suggested. Their salutations were returned by the Fruit-Fly Officers, who, evidently, recognized the lawful arm of the NSW Police Force.

We stopped at the Police Station in the town for a half-hour or so and, on completing enquiries, returned to the vehicle. From here we drove to the Murray Downs Hotel: a refreshment house on the NSW side of the River. It might be convenient to note, here, that whilst there is a fairly large town in Victoria at this point on the River Murray, on the NSW side there are only thousands of broad acres; with the exception of this hostelry.

Here the Police Officers and I partook of a substantial lunch, in the company of the Landlord himself: during which we consumed several “schooners” (15oz glasses) of beer. The Police had enquiries to make at this establishment, in respect of the brutal bashing of a young lady, which took place on the premises, some weeks previously. John took a number of photographs of the cabin, at the rear, in which the assault had occurred. He told me, “This was a brutal bashing: he nearly killed the girl.” This work completed, we said “Goodbye” to Mine Host and departed for Deniliquin. We had enjoyed a pleasant and fruitful day.

On another occasion, when I was working in Sydney, received a telephone call from a Det. Sgt. stationed at Griffith, another of the towns for which I was responsible. “This is Det. Sgt. McVickers here from Griffith.” “John Roberts, Instructing Officer speaking, what can I do for you?” “I am ringing about these two Italian chaps, Corrileone and Possitti. I understand that they are now intending to ‘Plead Guilty’ to the charges.” “That’s good”, said I. “Well, they are really not bad fellows at all, these two. From my enquiries, I am satisfied that they have been used by somebody higher up the scale. They really didn’t know what they were getting into. I don’t want them to be hit too hard in this case.” “I won’t be going to the sittings myself, there will be another Instructing Officer in attendance. I will let the Crown Prosecutor know!” I responded.

Subsequently, I learned that the two “gullible individuals”, who had been growing Marijuana on a grand scale, had received only nominal sentences. Many years later, I also discovered that certain Police officers had only recently been charged with “conspiring to pervert the course of justice”, over this particular case. I was never called to give evidence in the matter, as, in any event, my recollection of what had actually been discussed was, by this time, uncertain.

### Chapter 115

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### The Commonwealth

I enjoyed working for the Prosecutor’s Office, but the demanding nature of the work and the extraordinary workload, were proving too much for me. After almost a year of working for the Clerk of the Peace, I noticed an advertisement in the newspapers, calling for applications from lawyers for work in the “Australian Legal Aid Office.” Offices were to be established, throughout Australia, to bring Legal Aid to those least able to afford a lawyer. This seemed to be something more in keeping with my ideas about “Service to the Community!” I, therefore, applied for a position. After an interview, I was offered work as a Legal Officer at the Wollongong Office.

This change in my employment meant that I would have to resign from the NSW Public Service. As it transpired, I was able to transfer my leave entitlements but not my Superannuation. I received the, then, princely sum of $6,000.00, which, after consultation with Teresa, was paid to the Building Society, by way of Mortgage reduction. The balance, which was a relatively small sum, was to be paid-off within two years.

On the last day of my attendance at the Office of the Clerk of the Peace, I took my Secretary, Phil, to lunch at a nearby Cafe’. She was upset to see me leave, as I had been very supportive of her, whilst in the office. From what I was able to ascertain, she was not a very happy young lady: being in her early twenties and much in need of companionship. Phil had come to Australia from England, as a child, and had completed her Secondary Schooling here. However, she was insecure and unhappy at home. It seemed that her relationship with her parents was lacking in warmth and that tender, reciprocal affection, which is so necessary: particularly for the fair sex. One of the other Instructing Officers, Graham Chegwidden, subsequently informed me, that Phil had been distressed at my departure, although he did not elaborate on the circumstances, nor, indeed, did I interrogate him on the subject of the young lady. I merely assumed that, perhaps, Phil had become emotionally dependent upon me, to a degree that I had never suspected.

I also had lunch with a friend, Warren Cook, another Instructing Officer, with whom I had established warm and friendly relations. Warren was a young man of an extremely stable temperament, with whom I felt completely at ease. He was, perhaps, ten years younger than me and had been raised in a secure family environment. I envied Warren his capacity to take the world in his stride, without anxieties or evident personal problems, of any nature. I said “goodbye” to my friends at the Office of the Clerk of the Peace and turned my back on that world, for ever.

After 14 years with the NSW Public Service, I faced a new and uncertain future. The role of Instructing Officer had not rested lightly upon my shoulders. I felt that my new job would provide me with an opportunity to apply the principle of “Service to the Community”, which had occupied so much of my thoughts, in addition to providing me with the means to support my family. Whether I was to achieve a measure of personal satisfaction in my new “role”: only the future would tell.

In spite of my belief in the validity of prophecy, I knew that my future, in that regard, would remain sealed, nor did I wish to pry into the future: realizing that it is better for mankind not to be able to perceive what lies ahead: for better or for worse.

Looking back, I felt that, perhaps I might leave some small mark upon my tiny spot upon Mother Earth. Certainly, in my life I had committed many errors, most of which were, perhaps, of a relatively minor nature. These I regretted. On the positive side, there were also some constructive events, during my lifetime, that might, in the aggregate, balance out the competing claims of good and evil. I do not believe in “Divine Judgement”, in the sense that the Deity actively participates in the individual assessment of souls. I certainly accepted the principle that, as Paul the Apostle, affirmed, “God is not mocked: that which a man soweth, that shall he surely reap!” I therefore, know that whatever form my conduct may take, I alone bear the responsibility for that. Man is the product of his own activity! I now looked forward to another twenty or so years of active working life. It was not all “beer and skittles” and there were many “ups and downs” to be faced in the future. Perhaps I might be able to pen my further recollections, at a later stage in my life’s history.

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