A SHERBORNE CHILDHOOD

by

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V1 FORM WITH MISS BILLINGER
NORA, PHIL ALGOOD,
EILEEN STRADLING, BETTY

Arthur from Mother

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A copy of Mr. Oliver Holt's talk, 'On First Coming to Sherborne', given to the Sherborne Historical Society in 1983 and later reproduced in print, has just arrived by post from Miss Dew. Outside, in this corner of S. Wales, the ground is covered with frozen rutted snow and the sky is overcast and threatening, but I have been back in memory to a wood near Sherborne, where Mr. Littleton Powys, accompanied by a vague boy figure called Oliver Holt, had taken some of us on a Nature ramble. There we heard the high-pitched call of the wood-wren and I was able to show Mr. Powys Herb Paris and a Bird's Nest Orchid in flower. "Well done!" he said. That was a moment of triumph I have never forgotten. As I read Mr. Holt's paper, I could smell the wild violets he mentions. How many have I not gathered in my childhood along the south side of Leweston Road, white, blue and pink, which I tied carefully with wool, adding long strands of a fernlike moss to be put with them in a shallow bowl. Along that same road I had a secret source of bee orchids, the finest I have ever seen - not like the ones growing on chalk hillsides, but nine or ten inches tall and with four or five open bees on them. Conservation was not so urgent then, and I happily gathered a dozen or more to take home.

Unlike Oliver Holt who was eight before he first knew Sherborne, I have it in my blood. My ancestors' names appear for 400 years back in the Church register. I spent many an Easter holiday looking them up by courtesy of Mr. Burt, the Abbey Custodian and Librarian. In return I was able to help him by sketching the West Window while it was being restored and by cleaning and fitting together pieces of the tiles upearthed during the restoration of the Lady Chapel. He encouraged us too to make a note of masons' marks and to study the bosses on the Abbey roof. In these various ways Mr. Burt enriched our minds from his store of knowledge of the Abbey, for which I was immensely grateful later on in my teacher training course.

I was born in the Woolmington Hotel on the Thursday preceding Pack Monday Fair. My grandfather, Edmund King, was

the licensee and one of the strictest teetotallers and anti-smokers of all time. He was six feet tall, stout, with a tonsure-type of jet-black hair, over which he wore a cap. He was constantly searching for his spectacles which were almost always pushed up over his head. Grandmother was barely five feet. She always wore taffeta, purple, black or grey, and rustled as she walked. She usually carried a carved round-headed parasol which added to her immense dignity and which she tapped on the ground to emphasize her authority. Her snow-white hair was piled high over side-pads and dressed every morning by my aunt or my mother, whilst I sat in enforced and reluctant silence on a footstool.

Her father had been head-keeper in Honeycombe and she and her sisters walked daily to Lord Digby's School, then in Westbury, through the Mill fields or along Thornford road. My own father had been in camp with the Territorials on Salisbury Plain, when war broke out in 1914, and was drafted straight out to France whence he was lucky to return alive, having been through most of the major fighting. So my mother stayed with her parents and that is why I was born in Sherborne - with the aid, so they used to tell me, of the gypsies. I can well believe it, for I love the real Romanies and gitanos to this day, and indeed much of the genuine unadulterated happiness of my life has been spent in wood field and hedgerow.

My grandfather, whom I loved dearly, was one of the numerous King family, six brothers and four sisters, of whom he was the fourth son. Of them all I remember best great-uncle Henry and Aunt Louisa who lived at the blacksmith's shop in Yeovil Road and ran the business which has always been of great interest to me. I loved to see the name of my great-grandfather, William, on the gates of the Castle, of the Church and the Pageant Garden and on other decorative ironwork removed during the war. Great-uncle Henry resembled Edward VII and Aunt Louisa, though taller and thinner, had something of Queen Alexandra about her. They had an ancient grey parrot. Their sons Pen and Lionel, lived in Marston Road. There was also an elderly cousin, known as Mr. Charlie, a person of some importance and

a great stamp-collector, who expected to be consulted or informed, when any big family event occurred. I remember having to take Ray to tea with him, when we became engaged, and fortunately he approved my choice - not that it would have made any difference, had he not.

While we lived in the Woolmington, I loved going down into the Malt House underneath and ran the risk of being buried in the barley. Another memory of those days is of the teams of Castle horses with their marvellous brasses, head bells and red-ribbon-braided tails and manes, grey shires in one team and roans in the other, pulling the great lengths of timber. The carters were two brothers, Sid, stout and rubicund, with a heavy moustache, the model to me in later years of Samkin Aylward of 'The White Company', and his younger brother, tall, slimmer and quieter. They and the old maltster himself, whom I remember as stout and fair haired, with a cone-shaped straw hat on his head and in his hand a staff or shovel for turning the malt, used to heave me up on to the backs of the great horses to my huge delight. Another agreeable couple I remember from those days was the old carter and his wife who lived in a cottage, one of two, in Bradford's Coalyard. They were a Mr. and Mrs. Norris who had been together as housekeeper and butler in a big house. At that time he worked for Bradford's and she helped my grandmother or took care of me. They had a delightful small garden planted with mignonette and some of the real moss roses which are so prized today. They also owned a beautifully bound illustrated volume of the great house in which they had served and often showed me pictures in it.

Before the end of the war my grandfather retired from business and we went to live in 1 Raleigh Place. Only once did my father see me before the Armistice and that was when he was sent home to recover from a shrapnel wound in his hand and my mother and I joined him at Whitstable. For holidays my mother and aunt had bicycles and I used to travel in a basket seat at the back of one. I remember being taken to Tiverton in this manner and how frightened I was at the sight of German prisoners of war marching through the streets of Taunton. We used to start very early on these long bicycle

trips and I have one very vivid memory of the sun rising over the hills at Coombe as we set off for Bath.

My great-aunt at Tiverton was a fairly wealthy old lady and lived in some style. She had owned a milliner's business and on her death her sewing-machine came to my mother. I still have and use it, together with the original bill for it (£4) and the instruction book. When she visited her sister, my grandmother, she wore an enormous hat with many silk bows and a braided green jacket with stiffened border standing out below the waist. Most interesting to me of all her vast amount of luggage, for which a horse and trap had to be hired at the station, was a basket like a school wastepaper basket, fitted to the bottom of which was a very large green velvet pin-cushion. In this were stuck at least a hundred hatpins of every shape and hue, undoubtedly part of her impedimenta as a high-class milliner. One had a deer's foot, another a Scotch thistle, a third a beetle and, whenever she put on one of her glamorous hats or bonnets, she would carefully choose two or three of these hatpins to skewer the hat to her elaborate coiffure. The effect was dangerous to a degree, for the hatpins were invariably longer than the hat and stood out alarmingly all round. I remember too how she jingled as she walked, the result of her many chains and bracelets rattling together.

There were many interesting characters to see in Westbury in the 'twenties. In the morning came Mr. Hunt, the milkman. His milk-float with its two brass-tipped churns was drawn by a Welsh cob, and a dipper hung alongside the churns for measuring and serving the milk. In the days before refrigeration, one used to stand the milk-jug in a bowl of salted water to keep it cool and covered it with muslin against the flies. The day was enlivened by a variety of other traders, according to the season. Fishermen from Weymouth would give their strange hoarse cry of 'Mackerelivo!' and occasionally a loud bellringing heralded the approach of the muffin-man. Ours was tall, thin and dark; he wore a white overall, with an immaculate stiff white apron over it, and on his head a square white box-shaped hat on top of which he carried a green baize-covered tray of muffins. Muffins and mackerel alike cost a halfpenny each (old money) and were a

great treat. The mackerel were fresh caught and often still kicking when they arrived. Then there was the annual visit of the scissors-grinder. We actually had a visit from one ourselves last year and I was delighted and taken back in memory over sixty years. Another occasional caller was the onion-man from Brittany. I used to love listening to my father bargaining with him over a string of onions, he arguing back in his broken English, and then watching his face light up when he was given a tip on top of the agreed price.

When we first moved to Westbury, our next door neighbours were Mr. and Mrs. Beaton. Mr. Beaton worked on the railway and kept two goats on the embankment. He would give my mother some of their milk for me as a child and I loved it, comparing myself to Heidi of whom Miss Sparke read to us at school. After the Beatons came the Webbs - an event of considerable significance in my life, for Violet Webb who took charge of me going to school most happily shared my love of natural history. It was not considered wrong in those days to collect birds' eggs, and I might have tried to rival Violet's collection, had not the first egg I ever found been addled. This completely put me off egg-collecting. Instead I took to first-finds and pressed flowers. By this time Molly Gay and Phyllis Edwards were living close at hand, which led to a long and close friendship between the three of us, especially after we had all started at L.D.S., when Molly and I always went to school together and often did our homework together too.

Before that, however, was my first interview with Miss Sparke, Head of the Preparatory Department of L.D.S., in her sitting-room on the right-hand side of the front door of Ransom House. I loved her from that momert. My first teachers were Miss Agnes Austin of Truro, Miss Wakefield, and, I think, Peggy Hazzard; fellow classmates were Joan Rickard, Leslie Page, Lilla Squires, Mollie Brice and Molly Perham. Ransom House was a wonderful place. It had a huge water-tank at the bottom of some steps in a yard where we were not supposed to go. There was a dolls' house in the big room and the percussion instruments were kept in a cupboard. The big doll remained in Miss Sparke's sitting room.

On Pack Monday horses were tied along the railings of Ransom House so we always had a holiday - most necessary, for the best teacher in the world could not have held our attention then. How I used to long to go and see Teddy Rowe's band, but, as it did not start until midnight had struck on the Abbey clock, of course I never did, until I became acquainted with Ray, my future husband, and could look out ofhis big windows on to Cheap Street. I loved the cheapjacks on the Parade and the two tall musicians with grey toppers and violins who arrived with the Fair. I was never allowed to go to the Fair until the Tuesday, when my grandfather or father would buy me a large bag of the toffee made in a van at the corner of Bristol Road or a bag of fruit costing half-a-crown (12½p today), consisting of 13 oranges, a bunch each of black and white grapes and a cluster of bananas.

But memories of Pack Monday Fair have led me astray. We were in Westbury and now I am dragging my aunt along in order to get the aisle corner seat in the Abbey at Matins. Often ahead of us would be the tall figure of Mrs. B. who had worn nothing but black since the death of her husband in the early days of the First World War. If she were in sight, our progress must have resembled a gallop, for she liked that front seat too and neither she nor I would budge, whoever was successful. I always liked to watch the old people coming in from the Almshouse, the women in their red cloaks and bonnets with white frills round their faces and the men with tricorne hats and brass buttons on their coats, a colourful and picturesque sight. From there too one could watch the Vicar and the choir process in to the service. I can still hear his deep resonant voice, so well suited to the Abbey acoustics, and can see him appear through the curtains over the arch by the organ to announce the hymn. The choir would parade up the north aisle and down the centre, carrying banners and prayer-books and singing their hearts out - Mr. Courage in his deep voice, Joan Trevett's brother, Athelstan, with his alto, and led at one time by Margaret Ford's twin brothers. They really represented the Angel Host to me as a child, and no Church has ever been more truly the House of God.

Other Westbury characters were Miss Wright, a lost visionary old lady, later found drowned in the river in Mill Lane,

and Sally Ridout, a remarkable woman, most in evidence at Carnival time, when she went round the town with a long linen bag, collecting for the Yeatman Hospital. She must have raised hundreds of pounds, for nobody could have refused her. Carnival time was indeed a highlight, with its torches and outriders, Mr. Dicker from the Silk factory, dressed as a cowboy, and behind him a Red Indian chief or could it be the Police Superintendent? Then the fire-engines, shining in brass and floats that looked far more miraculous to me as a child than ever the great Floral Carnival I saw later in Florence. Mr. Douglas Stewart always headed the Boys' Brigade. It was held in November and so was more spectacular because of the dark and the torches.

Another Westbury dweller who became a great friend and influenced some of my major decisions later on was Ena Otton. Violet Webb and I would pick her up in Westbury and then the three of us would walk through the churchyard, up past the Hospital, across Greenhill and so to School. After Violet's marriage and emigration to Australia, we continued to correspond for several years and I still have two little books she gave me once when I was ill. Ena it was who persuaded me in my last year at School to apply to Avery Hill Training College and I never regretted it. Again it was under Ena's supervision and thanks to her influence with Miss Piggott that I did my final School Practice at the Abbey School and gained her formal gratitude for 'much help at a busy time'. I stayed at Ena's home on several occasions and was a guest at her wedding. Her early death was a great grief to me and I am glad to pay this tribute to her memory.

To my grandfather I owe more than I can ever say. It was he who taught me at an early age to read, to draw and to arrange flowers. It was no effort to me to learn the names of flowers, for he called them by their proper names, as we picked them. Indeed he was a stickler for correct language and never tolerated baby talk or swearing. He gave me a patch of garden and showed me how to plant seeds, take cuttings and graft. No wonder I have loved growing things all my life. He knew the Bible stories better than anyone else I have ever known. My father was far from well when he came home from the war, having fought in France, Belgium, Mesopotamia, Egypt and India and

survived a gas attack; jobs were scarce and money was short, so grandfather was able to retain his guardianship of me. This continued until I was ten years old, when grandfather had a stroke and died soon after. His stroke is still one of the most vivid memories of my life, for he tripped on the bend of the stairs and there remained, supported only by my frail little aunt, while grandmother shouted for help from the bedroom window, until her neighbour, Mr. Clark, came to help. For 3 days the house remained in a state of quiet expectancy and I was sent off to stay with Mrs. Norris. After grandfather's death my grandmother was much less well off, for he had lost a lot of money in the Horatio Bottomley swindle and had very unwisely lent money to so-called friends without security and she was unable to recover it. The last house left to them, the one at the bottom left-hand side of Marston Road, had then to be sold.

Soon after this sad change in our lives came scholarship time for me. There were two Governors' Scholarships from the Prep., one to Foster's and the other to L.D.S. Joan Rickard was awarded the Governors' Scholarship and I gained a County Scholarship, to Miss Sparke's delight. She seldom showed emotion, but on this occasion she sent for my mother and, telling us both of my success, put her arms round me and said: "I <u>am</u> so pleased for you, dear, so pleased!"

I already knew Big School, as we called it, from the regular Friday morning prayers to which we marched down in crocodile from Ramson House, presumably to accustom us to the change we should have to face later on. We were always inspected very critically before setting off and I used to look nervously at the Big Girls as they filed into Prayers. The tallest and most important were called Prefects. Would one ever reach such heights oneself? I remember many of their names to this day: Louie Barnes, Freda Salmon, Una Dodge, the Cowling sisters, Eva Weiste, Mary Penny and many more.

The old building that housed Big School has long since been razed to the ground. But there it still stands four-square in my memory, on the south side of Newland and about a hundred

yards along from Cheap Street. I could walk about it blindfold. There was an old yew tree in the fore-court. On the left a long one-storey outbuilding held racks of coats, hats, shoebags, gym. kit and hockey sticks. Further down the passage were the kitchen, stockroom and a small music room, all rather dimly lit. In the main house Miss Billinger's room was on the left of the front door and the Staff room on the right. The left hand room was the Holy of Holies and you trembled if you were invited to enter it. The Staff room, on the other hand, was a cheerful friendly room, full usually of laughter and chatter. At the far end of the entrance hall a doorway led into a glass-covered verandah which joined the cloakroom corridor. The staircase led up to the library and two form-rooms, one of which opened into the Art Room, Miss Wickham's sanctum, and was, therefore, a kind of passage-room, not very convenient, I imagine, to the teacher. The Art room had a great charm and character, all its own and Miss Wickham's. There were always pieces of handwork lying about and some of the better drawings and paintings on the walls, showing less artistic pupils what could be achieved. It was always a high honour to have your work on the wall and a still higher to have it selected for exhibition on Speech Day. Alas, that this incentive had no effect on me where needlework was concerned! I should have had an easier time when I reached College, where as a would-be Junior School teacher I had to take either music or needlework and craft. At music I am hopeless, much as I love it, so it had to be needlework and, sewing hard in every spare moment, I regretted time wasted in the past. Fortunately for my grandchildren I have grown to like plain sewing and enjoy the fun of making them a new costume every Christmas - Red Indian's, pirate's, witch's, clown's, I've made them all.

To return to the old L.D.S. building, - at the back of the entrance hall, there was a flight of stone steps leading down into the playground; this was bordered on the south and west by old stone walls, whilst on the east was an extension to the house with access from the verandah. This contained the main hall, with a stage at one end and a piano. Here Miss Billinger stood to take Prayers each morning. After morning

assembly a heavy glass screen moving on rollers was pushed across the middle of the hall, dividing it into two classrooms The windowsills were wide enough to hold tanks of newts, jars of tadpoles, vases of wild flowers and the like. I remember one particularly blowy morning when a gust of wind blew over a jar of frog-spawn and in the middle of prayers I had to creep out and, gathering the slimy mass up in my hands, slip it back into its bowl.

The gymnasium was a separate building to the rear of the main one - small but not badly equipped for those days, with wall bars, climbing ropes and a horse. By climbing the bars one had a wonderful view over the marketplace to Foster's playground! Above the hall were two more formrooms, one of which was Miss Clough's domain, the Science lab. Under her I was completely and utterly happy. We understood each other and were interested in the same things. When we were in her form, there were 21 of us. I know that for certain, for she called us her 21 elephants, because we made such a noise clattering up and down the wooden staircase. On one occasion we irritated Miss Billinger so much that we had a prolonged session of walking up and down those stairs till we could do it quietly. I can remember almost the entire class register of those 21, in alphabetical order too: Phyllis Allgood, with whom I remained into the Upper Sixth, Phyllis Edwards and Molly Gay, friends from Westbury days, Sybil Haynes, perhaps the cleverest of us all, Ida Mitchell, another good friend of mine, Peggy New who died prematurely as the result of a motor-bicycle accident, dear Joan Parsons, the friend of everyone, dead from cancer some years ago, Betty Patch, who skipped a form and got into the Sixth a year ahead of me, Joy Sharp, Joan Trevett and Dorothy Wise, whose father was headmaster of the Abbey School and who later ran a very successful Preparatory School of her own. One of my most vivid memories of that era is the French Oral examination when Miss Dew was very worried at the lack of small talk of the girl alphabetically ahead of me and exhorted me to talk my head off which I did to such an extent that the examiner could hardly get a word in edgeways.

Geography was my bete noire, especially the physical part, dealing with pressure lines and contours and latitudes and longitudes. I was terrified too of Miss Rendle, though my husband who was taught mathematics by her at Foster's maintains she was a splendid teacher. Fortunately for me, Miss Clough took Junior Maths. at L.D.S.: otherwise I might not have been any good at that either. Miss Rendle's tragically early death brought Miss Cox as a temporary substitute. This lady excited great interest among us, as she was a survivor of the Titanic disaster. Many were the tales she told us of her travels; unfortunately she had no idea of maintaining discipline and we learnt little geography in her lessons.

Miss Rendle's death was soon followed by Miss Clough's departure to be married and in their places came Miss Williams and Miss Steeds. The sting at once left geography and I began at last to understand the influence of climatic conditions on natural regions and the reasons for the growth of particular cities and ports. Travel with my husband in later life has taught me still more and I have often said to him: "If only I could have followed a river-course or looked down over a valley as we are doing now, I'd have enjoyed geography." Miss Palmer and Miss Wickham too are vivid in memory. Whenever as a teacher I found my descriptive powers failing, I would resort to the Blackboard and to what are now called visual aids. I have always been convinced too that I passed my final Biology exam. on the drawings rather than on the written words. Thanks be to Miss Wickham who taught me notonly to draw but also to love pictures. Miss Palmer's foundations have survived even longer, as they are an integral part of daily life. I have just had a lot of fun trying to do the Christmas Quiz in the Observer and continue to find the study of everything connected with cooking of the greatest interest.

Mr. Wearden, Abbey organist and Music Master to our two Grammar Schools, taught us to sing. How he made us sing! He was a stern disciplinarian and never allowed us to take liberties. To him it was quite simply a question of courtesy.

Phyllis Allgood and I were once late for one of his lessons, having been kept by Miss Billinger for extra English. As we entered, his hands crashed on the keys and we were ordered to leave. Later he gave us one of the most severe lectures on good manners I have ever received. Miss Mathison was the first Gym. Mistress I remember clearly - a marvellous hockey player. She played for England in S.Africa after leaving L.D.S. I gave her a fright on one occasion when my arms gave out as Molly Gay and I were swinging along the bar and I fell to the ground, completely winded and considerably scared. Miss Billinger took me home, I remember. Miss Mathison was followed by Miss Lewis, a tiny Welsh redhead of great energy, who took part herself in all the exercises she gave us to do. She taught us Scandinavian Folk Dancing which was great fun and very different from the English Country Dancing we had done until then. It must have been the 'In' think at that time, as I continued with it at College and even taught it later. It was a great blow when Miss Billinger decreed in our School Certificate year (O Level today) that our Form might not take part in a Dancing Competition for which Miss Lewis had been preparing us. The extra rehearsals would interfere, she said, with our exam. work. That is one of the great differences, I notice, in modern education. Today students take both work and play in their stride and a swimmer may be preparing for a race of Olympic standard at the same time as for A Levels. I agree with that. I think the physical and the mental will help each other and children, capable of reaching examination standard, are also capable of deciding for themselves how much of each they can take.

A great feature of school life in those days was the existence of clubs- French, Nature, History and Art Clubs, all run on a voluntary basis by the individual teachers concerned, Miss Dew, Miss Clough and then Miss Williams, Miss Whitworth and Miss Wickham. I belonged to them all and derived much benefit and encouragement from doing so. The History Club once produced a grand exhibition of costumes through the ages by dressing dolls. I dressed mine in panniers and a periwig, the dress being made out of scraps of yellow satin. At French Club meetings we were supposed to talk French the whole time. It was sometimes a queer mixture, but we enjoyed ourselves and Miss

Dew provided wonderful teas. I still remember one particularly delicious chocolate cake and I still possess 'Jeannot Lapin' which I won as a prize in some little French competition. We used to have splendid community singing too, organised by Miss Dew and Miss Whitworth. I believe that all these activities were run out of school hours. Even Staff meetings were held after school. I never remember the Staff's going on strike or complaining of being underpaid. Yet salaries were by no means high in those days. I know, because I was a teacher myself. The result is that they are remembered with love and gratitude for the training they gave and the standards they set.

How much too do I owe to Mr. Littleton Powys, Chairman of the Governors for most of my school life and a great lover of English Literature and of Natural History! To encourage interest in the latter he offered prizes for various competitions that he himself had set. The First Finds competition, in particular, must have meant an immense amount of extra work for Miss Clough and Miss Williams. We had to see how early we could find specimens of wild flowers and bring them live to school, where they were recorded, with name, date and name of the finder, in a special notebook. Just imagine a batch of eager young first-finders arriving at the door of the Science Lab. on a Monday, each clutching a paper bag containing the first primrose, daisy, celandine, chickweek or whatever, all to be checked in the famous notebook! Many started off but fell by the wayside. Marjorie Quinton, Ida Mitchell and I never flagged. Ida and I used to go on long foraging walks together, each keeping a strict eye on the other, lest she steal a special treasure. I never beat Marjorie or Ida. My own achievement lay rather in collecting, pressing, naming and mounting wild flowers and one year I succeeded in collecting over 600 specimens. I owe my grandfather a great debt in that he taught me the names of many wild flowers, as I learned to speak, so that the task was less arduous than it might have been. After I had won Mr. Powys's prize in this section for about four years running, he set a project especially for me, that of recording the date, the location and any interesting information about the flower on its site that I could add. It was a most kind and understanding thought of his and provided me with much interest and enjoyment. Actually, I think he must have kept the record I made, for I never saw it again.

Besides Club meetings after school, there were the fancy dress parties given by Miss Billinger at Christmas. I remember one in particular at which she came as Gainsborough's Duchess of Devonshire and Miss Sparke as a witch, and another when the Staff did backward drill and sang a topical version of 'We've got a little list'. As a child I was always a little scared of fancy dress parties, with all the dressing-up involved, but grew to love play-production and costume-making at College, where the Principal was the aunt of the well-known actor, Charles Hawtrey, and had an obsessive love of amateur dramatics.

The plays we did at school in my time, although I never took a prominent part in them, remain clear in memory. The first was 'Make-Believe', in which I had to be Baby Bear to Dorothy Chaldecott's Goldilocks, just because I happened to be the smallest in Big School! Most belittling, I felt. I was in 'A Kiss for Cinderella' too, in a marvellous dress which had belonged to my great-grandmother. I wish I still had it! I should have liked to be able to recite like Jessie Morrish or Annabel Bird but, although word-perfect, was too scared to let anyone know. It was only later on at College that our Elucution lecturer took me in hand and persuaded me to roll out the description of Hell from 'Paradise Lost' in all its doom-laden splendour. None of the children I taught or my own suffered from lack of dramatic reading after that. We had lectures too by outside lecturers at which we were made to introduce and to thank the speaker. I remember once having to thank M. le Comte de Croze in French and another time having to chair a meeting of the School's Junior Branch of the League of Nations Union. It was all good training, though rather hair-raising at the time.

Speech Day was always a landmark in the school year. Preparations for it seemed to be as intense as for external examinations. We practised choral works under Mr. Wearden as for the Albert Hall. I still have my copy of 'Cherry Bloom' from a Speech Day of nearly sixty years ago. The event was held in the old Methodist Schoolroom in Abbey Road (now belonging to Sherborne School). We wore white dresses and sat in two graded banks facing each other below the platform. The Staff wore academic dress. How I admired them! In those days I used to think the possession of a degree quite equal in value to that of a dukedom, and who would want to be a duke anyway! Shamefully, I cannot remember the names of any of

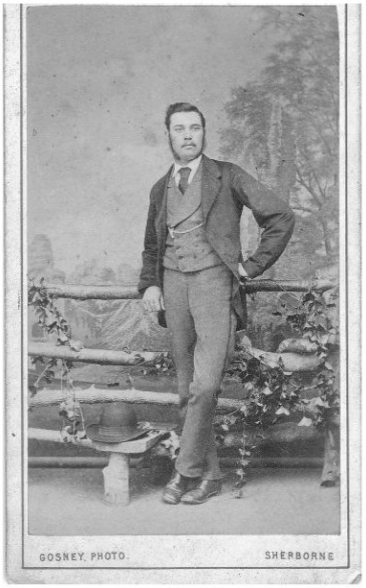
our visiting speakers, but the faces of those I knew and recognised on the platform come back to me clearly, such as,for example, the Vicar, Canon Stephen Wingfield Digby, one or other of the town's doctors, Mr. Hutchings, then Head of Foster's, Miss Mulliner, Headmistress of Sherborne Girls' School, and the Rev. A. Field from Greenhill House. Best of all, of course, I remember the Chairman, Mr. Littleton Powys, with his impressive appearance and delivery. He did not confine his interest in us to public occasions. He sometimes read poetry to us. I still remember his reading of 'Sohrab and Rustum' and how it thrilled me at the age of 13. Another occasion in my school life associated with him is very vivid. I was playing hockey, never a favourite occupation of mine, when he came over the fence of his garden at the half-time whistle and asked permission to show us a rare nest in his hedge. It was that of a shrike and its larder of bees. Another special time I remember is when he and Mrs. Powys showed me the rare plants in their garden. It was during my last College vacation that I encountered him quite by chance at the top of Cheap Street. Encouraged by his brilliant smile, I stopped and tried to thank him for all the help he had given me in earlier years. His joyous acceptance of my thanks, his enthusiasm and further questioning have been a lasting joy to me. I am glad I did not let the opportunity slip.

Almost my final memory of a very happy school life comes from a day near the end of my Lower Sixth year. Phyllis Allgood and I were acting on our own a scene from 'Hamlet' (one of our set texts for H.S.C.) with all the realism at our command immediately over the Staff Room and, just as Hamlet (Phyllis) was about to plunge his dagger (a ruler) through Polonius (me behind the window-curtain), Miss Billinger walked in! We explained that the ndse was of Shakespeare's making, not ours, and she accepted our explanation, though, we felt, with reservations. Then she asked me tocome down to her study. I followed in some trepidation, for even in the Sixth Form one was still in awe of her. But it was a different matter altogether. Sherborne House and its beautiful garden, which had been under negotiation for the past year or two, were at last to be ours, and there and then, to my amazement, she handed me the key of the gate. It was like being given the key to 'The Secret Garden'.
Miss Billinger explained that she was expecting a visit from

some of the Governors and, handing me a pair of clippers and telling me I need not hurry, - could anything have been more understanding? - asked me to gather enough flowers and foliage for her study, the Staff room and the hall and on no account to 'cut them short'. She loved tall expansive flower arrangements with plenty of foliage, as I do to this day. I went quietly over, without a word to anybody, and wandered round, registering every tree and shrub. It was a wonderful morning.

The move followed that autumn and I remember how we carried over all the library books by hand. How proud we were of the hall and staircase with their famous murals, of the library furnished by Miss Billinger as her gift to the School, with a complete set of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, given by the Old Girls' Association. I loved the kitchen, too, which was in the old wing of the house. It was there that Bunty Burns and I had to prepare a luncheon for some distinguished guests, and Miss Palmer, not yet with us full-time, came down from her Domestic Science Centre to show us how to poach salmon and how to make mayonnaise and cheese straws. We even made scones in case they stayed to tea.

These are some of the very personal and individual ways in which we were prepared for life and which seem to me impossible in the much larger schools of today. Writing this account of a Sherborne childhood has not only set me remembering 'many long-forgotten things', but has also made me very conscious of the lasting influence of schooldays spent in this small historic town. One learnt to value teachers, both of family and school, whose main interest and objective was the future wellbeing of those they cared for. Starting to write has shown me the truth of the saying that when one door closes another opens, and I should like to end with a quotation from Wordsworth's 'Lines above Tintern Abbey', quoted in Mr. Powys's autobiography, 'The Joy of It', and which he wrote in a book he gave me: "Fair Nature never doth betray the heart that loves her".



Edmund King

Emily Mary Baker

Lily Matilda