Chapter VIII: Peace! and Christmas; Weymouth again; a cottage in the Toadsmoor Valley; life in Bismore and Eastcombe; father's hospitalization; Stroud High School; back to Cheltenham; Pates; another baby; mixed bathing!

We had the most wonderful Christmas we had ever had. Not only was it *peace* but my parents had more money than they had ever had. The pig was killed and quite half of it sent to Cheltenham. A large piece was given to Uncle and Aunt Maisey, and it arrived on Christmas Eve, just when their meat had been stolen from their outside safe! No one could understand how anyone could have been so mean as to have taken the Christmas dinner from such a generous couple.

We had the front row of the dress circle at the pantomime. We had three wonderful family parties. The Maiseys' house on Christmas Day, ours on Boxing Day, and Auntie Lena's on New Year's Day. There was a historical get-together one night with my father and his two brothers. The three had not been together for years, and I don't think they ever did it again.

Early in January my father decided to take us down to our rented house in Brickyard Terrace before reporting back to Salisbury Plain when his leave would be up. He was hoping to get his discharge in England. There seemed to be some difficulty about us being able to get into our house. The man who had been left in charge had left Weymouth and the present people had not paid any rent for months. It appeared that two women and one little baby were there at the time.

After studying timetables, my father thought he had worked out a way for us to travel down to Weymouth with only one change. Mother was still feeding David and travelling was quite a business with a five-month-old baby. My father put his plan into action, having first sent all but our overnight bags (even David's large pram) well ahead. There were no disposable nappies or plastic bags or any other things to make life easier when travelling. We were to change trains at Swindon. My father said that Mother would have time to go to the cloakroom to feed and change David. My father found a carriage for us in our train, put Geoffrey and the six pieces of hand luggage (one containing all the keys and important matters) into the carriage, then went to find Mother. Suddenly, to our horror, the guard waved the train out of the station! My father came running beside the train and shouted to me 'Chippenham'. I realized he meant the next stop was Chippenham and that he meant us to get out there. The only other person in the carriage was a Tommy just back from France on his way home, so very thrilled that he was not killed or wounded that he couldn't think of anything else. I arranged with Geoffrey that when we got to Chippenham he was to take the bag with the keys, etc, in one hand and his own in the other, and to keep them in his hands. I would get out with two pieces, put them on the platform and quickly nip back for the other two, so we would be safely landed.

This we did at Chippenham, found a seat on the platform and sat down to wait for the next train from Swindon. However, the train did not move off. My father had wired ahead to make sure we got off, so the stationmaster and guard were looking for us in every carriage. At last someone pointed out that perhaps we were the children they were looking for. The train then moved off and the stationmaster, not being very bright, did not leave us on the seat but took us into a terrible little room with windows we could not look out of as they were too high, and told us to wait there for the hour until the next train would arrive. That was the longest hour of our lives. We had nothing to do and nothing to look at, except for the timetables on the walls.

When at last our parents did arrive, they had to get off the train because it did not go to Weymouth and we had to wait four hours for the right one. We went into the refreshment room for a meal and then went to explore the small market town. Having no pram for David, we hired a push chair. Mother wrapped him in her fur coat and we set off. There was no picture palace open, so we went for a walk. Finding a churchyard, we thought we would explore the gravestones, only to find

a sign on the gate which said 'No dogs or prams allowed'...so we went back for another meal.

Really this incident of missing our connection was a blessing, because we would never have got into our house in the daytime. By the time we got to Brickyard Terrace, it was dark and quite late at night, so when my father knocked at the door it was opened at once and he put his foot in it. The discussion was over my head at the time, but we got in and occupied the house except for one bedroom. The next day my father went off to Salisbury Plain, leaving strict instructions that the house must not be left without either Mother or I in it, until we had got the two women out. The older woman had lost all the fingers on one hand, leaving the thumb and stumps. This of course had a weird fascination for Geoffrey and me to see the things she could do with it. She was the official tenant. The younger woman had a baby, a little younger than David. It was always dirty and hungry and would cry a greatdeal.

Mother would allow no visitors to these women. The law was most peculiar just then and no *de facto* wife of a serviceman could be turned out of her rooms, even if she did not pay rent. After a few weeks the 'friend' of the older woman had a long talk with Mother and she managed to persuade him to take them away within 24 hours. He kept his promise and how very glad we were to have the house to ourselves again so that we could clean up all the mess of the years of tenants.

Geoffrey now went with me to Miss Hubert's and we settled down to wait for my father. Things were different from when we had been there before. None of the old army friends were there and Pussy Pacey was now at boarding school but we had some new girls, among them two very countryfied sisters called Lily and Sally. They were the two younger daughters of the chief farmer or bailiff of the Manor of Fleet. He had modern ideas (especially about women) and he wanted his two daughters to have a good education. He had the sense to see that they would suffer greatly if he sent them straight away to boarding school, especially as they even talked in the Dorset dialect, so he sent them to Miss Hubert for a year, to become 'broken in' as it were. They giggled sheepishly and wore pinafores with red flannel petticoats. We teased them – good humouredly, I am glad to say – and called them Silly and Lally. But our teasing had no sting, we were all great friends and this helped them over Miss Hubert's heavy sarcasm, which I hope they did not understand. During our few daily exercises, when we found they wore these red flannel petticoats, we all thought it hilarious. Lily and Sally enjoyed it all as much as we did, although the red perricoats disappeared. Such petticoats were almost as much a uniform among village girls in the country as pinafores.

An annual feast day or children's treat was given by the Lord of Fleet Manor, and was managed by their father from his farm. The year Lily and Sally were at Miss Hubert's school he had the idea that Miss Hubert's school and its mothers should help his daughters entertain the village. This was a great experience for all of us. It was a fine day and the trestle tables, laden with food, were taken over to the farm buildings. It was fun going up those outside stone stairs to two stone storage sheds and the farmhouse, with its bedrooms leading one into another. I should think, except for peace day celebrations, that must have been one of the last of the village treats.

Geoffrey and I resumed our storytelling, although Mother had curtained off part of the large bedroom. After all, I was rising 13 years old now! I also had a screen to dress and undress behind and Geoffrey was told not to look behind it. He never did, either, but we both thought it really rather silly. Behind the screen I hung religious pictures that I had bought in a church we visited. I wanted to be confirmed, but Mother said I was too young and I must wait another year.

My parents wanted to buy a cottage in the country with a little land, preferably in the Cotswolds. Numbers of estates were being broken up and sold at that time. One afternoon when we got home from school we found no Mother. My father had wired her to go and look at some

property and she had left a message that she would not be back until the next day. The neighbour next door would give us our tea. The next afternoon when I got home there was a wire for me, from my father saying that Mother had been held up by the railway strike and that she would not be back until the next day.

Mother always bought a great deal of milk and – although Geoffrey and I were very fond of it and had drunk a great deal – there was still a large amount left over and I did not want it to go bad. So, although I had never been allowed to do any cooking, I made a large rice pudding on the blue flame oil stove. It was a great success. When Mother returned she didn't know whether to be angry or pleased. She was pleased that the milk was not wasted but she said she would have been worried that I might have set the place on fire. Parents never seems to realize their children are growing up. She didn't go away again; the strike had rather worried her. Men had peered into David's pram to see if she had any bombs in it!

Soon after this, my father got his discharge. We packed up and went to Cheltenham, storing the furniture while my parents went to look at an estate near Stroud, called Lypiatt. Most of this was in the Golden Valley [Frances remembered wrongly: she meant Toadsmoor Valley, and from here onwards I have changed the text accordingly. MB]. They bought a stone cottage and about five acres of land. There was a small beech plantation, a small spinney, the cottage garden and a field of about two and a half acres.This was all in a hamlet called Bismore, which belonged to the village of Eastcombe, itself more or less under the larger village of Bisley (*not* the shooting Bisley). It needed just about a week to the Christmas of 1919 when we moved to Bismore. Cousin Charlie was going to be married on Boxing Day and Dorothy and I were going to be two of the three bridesmaids. We were to be dressed in blue with swansdown trimming and white felt hats. Charlie's cousin, May (on his father's side) was to be the chief bridesmaid. She was a flapper! My clothes were left with Auntie Lena and on the day Mother and I would travel to Cheltenham for the wedding.

The day we moved into Bismore, we went by train to Stroud, complete with David in his pushchair and our overnight bags. Then we were to walk the four miles (uphill most of the way) to Bismore. So steep was the Toadsmoor Valley that no horsedrawn cart, or even a car, could go up and down the sides and Bismore could only be reached by going miles to Chalford and then winding through the road along the bottom of the valley. That was the way that the furniture would have to go. When we got to Stroud, we found the removal men refused to go to Bismore that day, as they said they would not be able to get back before dark. They would go first thing the next morning. Geoffrey and I were excited to see our new home, and my parents thought we could manage to sleep one night in an empty house. So we set off.

First we walked about two miles up a long hill past the workhouse on the outskirts of Stroud. When we reached one of the gateways through the high wall surrounding Lypiatt Park, we turned right on, more or less, the top of the hill. The way became a narrow lane with high hedges which met overhead, making it very dark. The lane ended at the top of a wood, with a zigzag track down to the bottom of the valley with a bridge crossing the stream. Opposite were the half a dozen cottages of Bismore and at once I picked out ours as being the one with the attic window looking over the valley.

The cart track at the bottom of the wood continued to the right to Chalford. In about a quarter of a mile we found the woodkeeper's cottage, with the highest box hedge I have ever seen round it. It must have been several hundred years old. On turning left toward Lypiatt House, at about the same distance, was the gamekeeper's cottage, which was equally as old. [These were actually Victorian cottages, and Frances adds a bit here about Henry VIII and Elizabeth I which I simply refuse to perpetuate because it is a fanciful myth. MB] The parlour had a beautiful oak beam [from Bisley church restoration], and there were dog kennels.

On this December day in 1919 we crossed the brook and approached our stone cottage. It was as old as the other cottages [far older MB]. Actually, it had been divided in to two and then turned back to one again so the front and back doors were side by side. There the resemblance to Yew Tree Cottage at Dundry ended. The left-hand side was the front and, to the left of it, a flight of stone steps led down to a cellar with a large, queer oven. I think the 'oven', years before, could have been a sort of blacksmith's cellar to do with the estate. When it was not needed so much it was turned into the bakery for the district [I think not MB]. It had not been used for years.

In the cottage, all the window seats were the width of the wall, which was about two feet thick. The windows were small square panes in lead, which are older than diamond panes. The front door led straight into the sitting room, with an open fire place on one side and in a porch on the opposite side, a door on its left opened straight into a boxed-in flight of stairs. The porch itself ended in a door which had been cut into the wall into the second cottage. This was the ktichen with a coal-fired oven, stone pantry, and door leading in to another boxed-in flight of stairs. Both these staircases led into a bedroom, each with an open flight of stairs into a large attic – only called attics because of their sloping roof. So there were four staircases for a six-roomed cottage! The outside toilet was of stone with a Cotswold stone roof, as were the two really beautiful pigsties next to it. All our water had to be carted from a pump which supplied four cottages. [At the time of typing we have lived in this house for 30 years, and are grateful to Frances for these details, however inaccurate they may be! MB]

Our nearest neighbour, Mrs Nobes, whose husband was partly disabled, was a very kindly, good-hearted soul. She lent us the wherewithal to make some tea, a bucket of coal and a broom. We decided to camp in the sitting room for the night. David was all right in his pushchair. We were to sleep in our clothes, using our night bags as pillows. My father kept a good fire going as it was very cold. The floor was much harder than we had thought it would be, so most of the night we played cards by candlelight.

My father had decided that as soon as it was barely light he would walk in to Stroud to make sure that the furniture started out at daybreak. It was still dark when Mother and I walked up through the wood with him. On the way back a man going to work greeted us. I was a bit shocked until Mother told me that people in the country were always friendly and spoke to each other.

Later, we went to thank Mrs Nobes for her kindness and to return her things and to buy some eggs. We discovered she was a foster mother for Dr Barnado's boys. She would take them when they were a few months old until they left school. There were quite a few such boys in the district. The foster mothers were not paid much, but it helped out with their own families. Only Mrs Nobes didn't have any of her own. She had cards on which she pinned safety pins every spare moment she had. This work brought her twopence or threepence a gross. She was a clean, hardworking woman. I only went into her living room once. Everything was very bare, just wood forms and no cloth on the scrubbed table. I don't think she even had much china. The only luxuries were one or two snapshots which 'old boys' had sent from the other side of the world to the only 'mum' they had ever known.

Our furniture arrived early in the afternoon and then of course it was a big rush to get the beds up and made before dark. Only a week to Christmas, too. Mother, Geoffrey and I were in England for ten Christmases and all but two were spent in Cheltenham: one at Brightlingsea and one in Bismore. On Boxing Day Mother and I had the long journey to Cheltenham for Cousin Charlie's wedding. First we walked the four miles to Stroud. Three times we got wet through with rain and three times the strong winds dried us. Then we took a bus to Cheltenham. Those 12 miles took about two hours. To my sorrow we had to leave before the reception was over or we would not have got home that night.

As soon as the Christmas holidays were over Mother took me up to the village school, and explained to the master, Mr White, that I was not 14 until April and could I go to school for those few months, as I had missed so much schooling over the years. He was a very modern and dedicated schoolmaster and he said 'Certainly, even if it had only been one week'. There had been two tiny schools, one a church school and one a chapel school. When the state took over, they used the chapel building and the church school building was turned into a small church so that people did not have to walk all the way to Bisley to the parish church.

Bismore is a tiny hamlet, whose address and post office is Eastcombe. Eastcombe, at that time, had no inn [how did Frances miss The Lamb? MB], only one all-purpose store, and a post office. It could hardly be called a village, having its parent, Bisley, a mile or so away along the top of the ridge of the hill. Eastcombe had only one house larger that the cottages, and that was a girls' orphanage run by two Kilburn sisters, Sister Frances and Sister Angela. Sister Frances had a birth sister called Jane, and she, with Sister Kate, was in Western Australia running a home they had founded for children in a place called Parkerville in the Darling Range, some 30 miles from Perth. Sister Angela prepared me for confirmation. She was a beautiful woman with a personality to match. I do not remember one word of her talks, but to sit in her sunny, flower-filled room and watch her filled me with such peace and love beyond expression.

When the sisters found we had lived in WA they told us all about Parkerville Home. When we had lived in WA, in 1912, Parkerville was away out in the country and we had never heard of it, much less been there, but we promised that if ever we returned we would visit it. I did more than that, as you will discover! When you begin to look back over your life, you often find it is true that fact can often be stranger than fiction. Such seemingly little things can, in future years, change your whole life or make it fit into a jigsaw of some kind and finally make a pattern. Meeting these two women was one of many in my life.

The village of Bisley was very old. There was an ancient village cross even before the old church was built. Soon after the church was built the people did something which offended the church authorities and, as a punishment, for some 20 years or so (I have forgotten exactly how many) the parishioners were forced to take their dead all the way to Bibury, past Cirencester, to be buried. The rector told my father, Geoffrey and me this the first time we walked along the valley, past Lypiatt House and up through the fields to Bisley church. It was a beautiful walk along the bottom of the valley. Just before we turned up through the fields to the village we saw our first squirrel scuttling away and up a tree. There was a very large number of steps up to the church through the steep churchyard. About halfway up someone had carved these words: 'Seek those things which are above'! In Bisley there were also springs coming out of a wall below the church and on Ascension Day there was always a special blessing of the wells.

Lypiatt House, of which we had a good view from the valley, is a very graceful Tudor building, with long mullioned windows and strong shutters. There is a partly built tower on one side and a chapel on the other. [Actually, the house was much altered in Victorian times – including adding but not finishing the tower – but the chapel dates from the Middle Ages. MB] I understand that some time in the 1930s the centre of the lawn was being dug up for drains or something and the skeleton of a young female of the sixteenth century was found. This revived all the old rumours that Elizabeth had died in her youth and her place had been taken by a young man. It was also remembered that the young princess had owned Lypiatt. Why bury a body there – why not in the private graveyard? Unless the death must be a secret? One of those mysteries we shall never unravel! [This legend belongs to Overcourt in Bisley, not to Lypiatt Park. MB]

In Cromwell's time Lypiatt was attacked. The stream that wanders through the valley must have witnessed so much in the past.

Before Easter a number of things happened. First, my parents had a visit from a couple of forbidding-looking elders from the local chapel. Anyway, that is what they looked like to us and they frightened the life out of me. To put it as briefly as possible, there was a sort of scheme to educate certain children to become teachers in a few years' time. Not exactly ordinary scholarships but free places for picked pupils and they were to become teachers. Every school was allowed at least one pupil. Mr White had chosen me from Eastcombe School and the 'elders' had come to interview us. Would my parents agree to pay fees for me to go to Stroud High School for Girls for half a term? If the school considered me the right sort of child, would they sign to let me continue at school for at least four years to become a teacher? My parents were more than willing, in fact Mother said they would pay for a whole term. I was delighted on two counts – first I loved school and second I liked teaching. It was arranged I should begin after Easter.

I very much enjoyed my stay at the village school. For the only time in my life I was top of the school, for one thing. Mr White was such an inspiring man and teacher. He would let me help with the infants sometimes, too. Again the village children accepted me and taught me a number of their unusual games, which I am afraid have now almost disappeared. Radio, films and TV have given children other games. Two were rather unusual and only played there. The first, I think, was something to do with Spanish wars and the other the French.

'The good ship sails on the alley alley oh in the middle of September!' Those were the words that were sung, and however they had been mis-spoken during the years that it was played I do not know. While it was being sung, a child leaned one arm against the wall and the others gradually ran through and joined on the side of this one, until all had gone through and then the game was finished. It was quite popular, although there didn't seem much sense to it.

The other was a sling off on Britain's usual appeasement business before a war. As the war with Germany was just over, the word 'French' had been changed to 'Germans'. 'Are you ready for a fight for we are the German soldiers?' one side sang, something similar to 'Nuts in May'. 'Would you like a slice of cake for we are the English soldiers?' the other side would answer. 'We don't want your slice of cake for we're the German soldiers!' 'Would you like a glass of wine for we're the English soldiers?' 'We don't want your glass of wine for we're the German soldiers!' 'Are you ready for a fight for we're the English soldiers?' 'Yes! We're ready for a fight for we are the German soldiers!' Then we all got in a circle and shouted 'shoot, bang, fire!' and we all dropped dead!

There was a system among the top class that all boys and girls were paired off at the beginning of the school year. This was stage-managed by the eldest, or at least the biggest boy. I arrived in the middle of a year, but there happened to be a very nice quiet boy called Stanley Marr who, because he was a foster boy and a stranger in the village, had been an odd man out, so of course it was quite natural he should be paired with me. Probably neither of us being country bred, sex did not rear its ugly head. He would walk me home and he gave me sweets from time to time. He would tell me how he hoped to be sent abroad like numbers of foster boys were. He gave me two pieces of butterscotch once, wrapped in paper. I suddenly realized it was Lent and I didn't eat sweets in Lent, so I put it in my pocket until Easter. He was very interested in this, and would ask me nearly every day if I still had the butterscotch in my pocket!

My father had ordered an incubator that would hold about 300 eggs. Pure White Leghorns and White Wyandotts. He had bought books and studied it all up – what to feed them all on, etc. He had also bought all kinds of first-class vegetable seeds and seed potatoes, all of which were to arrive when needed. At the moment we had some old hens in the pigsties to keep us in eggs until the future chickens would lay.

At the end of the garden where the spinney began, he started to build a stone-walled shed, large enough to house a horse and cart he hoped to buy. A bridle path at the side of the garden went between the spinney and the beech plantation and through a gate into our elongated field. The bridle path went through the gate and across the field, the other side of which was a spring which served some half a dozen or so cottages beyond.

In one of the cottages lived an elderly couple called Mr and Mrs Pocketts – a real Gloucestershire name. When Geoffrey's godfather, Mr Daniel, came to stay for a few days, he slept in their cottage. Later in the year Great Uncle and Auntie Maisey came for a few days. It was the first holiday Uncle had had since he was married and then it was unpaid still!

My father became ill, physically and mentally. Mentally because he was depressed and lost. His pension was small because he wanted to stay in England. Mother refused to return to WA while there were what she called 'mines still hanging around'! He felt he had undertaken more than he could manage. He discovered he hadn't the strength he had had before the war and had been pushing himself too hard. After some weeks Mother managed to get a doctor to come out to see him. The doctor came by car to Eastcombe and, leaving his car at the top of the hill, walked down. While the doctor was examining my father, a drama was being enacted out in the garden. Geoffrey, returning from school, ran out to find some worms for the fowls. He had just discovered they liked to eat them. He began to pull a large stone slab that was leaning aginst the pigsty. The next moment it fell towards him; he tried to pull away but it knocked him over and fell on top of him. Mrs Nobes happened to be passing along the lane and, seeing him, asked what the matter was. He told her to call for Mother but to shout loudly as she was upstairs. I came in from school to find Geoffrey lying waiting for the doctor to come and look at him. At first he did not discover that Geoffrey had broken his leg, but when he did he strapped it up with his scarf and two of my father's sticks. They put Geoffrey in David's pushchair; the three of them pushed him up the hill to the car and Geoffrey was taken to Stroud hospital. There he stayed for a month as they didn't plaster legs then. Neither was his leg X-rayed and his ankle was always a little crooked.

I think I only visited him twice – children under 14 were not allowed to visit. The second time I went I met the matron on the stairs – she terrified me! When she shouted at me 'Are you 14', I almost cried as I told her in three weeks' time I would be. (I think she was probaly touched by my honesty, but she didn't let me know.) She shouted at me that, as I was so far in, I might as well stay, but not again!

Within a few days of the doctor's visit my father was sent to a special nursing home called 'St Martin's' in Cheltenham. About that time Mother 'had words' with the pension people. They sent 14 shillings for a fortnight for the four of us. She sent it back saying that she would not feed us on it, so they might as well have it back, or words to that effect. I think we lived on skimmed milk, turnips out of the garden, and any eggs the hens laid.

Then the incubator arrived and Mother and I tried to put it together. Mother never could follow instructions, but with my help we got it working. The eggs arrived, at least as far as Stroud. Mother took David's pushchair to get them as she was afraid they might get broken and she knew what money my father had spent on them. None of the neighbours would help us because they were afraid of things like incubators, and anyway we were foreigners – we came from Cheltenham (12 miles away as the crow flies). We followed all the instructions carefully about heating and placing the eggs and turning them every day., etc. Then two different kinds of brooders arrived for different ages, and food. My father had worked out all their menus for different ages, too. Then came the hatching day, even this we had worked out correctly. Through the glass slide we watched the little chickens break out of their shells and look all wet and funny, not as we had always seen them when they had a mother. They staggered drunkenly to the side and then fell down a sort of

shaft. We looked in the book and found they were meant to do this because there was warm air to dry them and make them all fluffy. All the eggs were hatched out, except eight, and these we found were infertile. We boiled them and cut them up and mixed them with the other food.

We planted the vegetable seeds as and when directed and, when the seed potatoes arrived, Mother planted those as well. The vegetable garden was on a slope and the potatoes sometimes rolled out of their straight rows. When they came up and needed hoeing, Mother asked Mr Pocketts to do them for her. He scratched his head and said he had never seen such rows and was very disgusted. When he dug them later on in the season for her, he was more disgusted than ever because she had the best crop in the district. She, a woman, a foreigner, who couldn't even plant them in straight rows! What they all didn't realize was that my father had bought good seed potatoes in the beginning.

Geoffrey came home just before I was confirmed. He couldn't walk at first because he had been in bed so long, but he was able to take care of David while Mother and I walked along the muddy March fields to Bisley church for me to be confirmed. It was 2 March 1920, one month before I was 14 years old. Mother managed to get me a white frock and Auntie Lena lent me her own confirmation veil; she was my godmother anyway. Afterwards it was a bit of an anticlimax: we were given cocoa made with *water* and a biscuit before we trudged back across the damp fields.

It was good to have Geoffrey home. I would not be so lonely when Mother paid her weekly visit to see my father – which took all day – and David and I were quite alone, often far into the evenings. She walked the four miles into Stroud and then would catch one of the first type of bus to Cheltenham. This would take a couple of hours at least in those days if the bus didn't break down! When she got back to Stroud she would have the long trek uphill all the way home. When she got to the top of the hill in the woods she would 'coo-ee' and I would answer and then dash in and begin beating an egg to give her hot milk and egg as soon as she got in. This took me quite a while with a fork and a saucer, but it was a labour of love to me. One night the bus broke down. (It was before Geoffrey had come home.) I sat nursing David and trying to reassure him that Mother would soon be home. As time went by I was worried that perhaps she had had an accident on the way home from Stroud, but I hoped very much it was only the bus that had broken down. There was no way of finding out – no phone for miles. Every half-hour or so I went outside and shouted 'coo-ee' up into the woods, hopefully, then came in and cuddled David some more and made the fire up. Perhaps she had even missed the last bus. She had no way of letting me know. When I had just about given up I heard her coo-eeing. At long last! She had hurried uphill as much as she could because she knew how worried I would be. It is hard to realize how isolated we were, so few miles out of a town. Buses and radio have certainly brought the world together.

After Easter my life changed again. I went to Stroud High School for Girls. It was a new school not long built, with spacious grounds, some quarter of a mile the other side of Stroud so that I walked for miles each way – downhill most of the way to school and a long trek uphill home. I was away from home nearly 12 hours every day, and then had my homework to do later. I'm not quite sure but I think nearly all the girls were scholarship girls from surrounding country districts, so we all brought our lunch and had a very long lunch time divided into three parts – one for lunch, one for recreation, and the other for prep. We could have our own little patch of garden and grow vegetables: we used dear little gardening tools, easy to handle. If we liked we could use the lunchtime prep in our garden as well as recreation time. On games afternoons I would be very tired when I got home, so after a while I was allowed to do prep in the games period.

We had made friends with the Antill family, a widow and three grown daughters, the eldest of whom ran the post office and, with her mother, did dressmaking. Miss Antill made my school blouses and skirt and I was very proud of them. It was the first time I had had a school uniform.

I enjoyed the classes in school, especially science, algebra and geometry. It was the first time I had done these subjects. Out of school I was *most* lonely; *no one* spoke to me for the whole of the first term. I had gone there after the first term of the year. Cliques had formed and no one cared; there was no one from my district. It was terrible – it was like being sent to Coventry. The second term I arranged to get into a small clique. One of the girls happened to walk a little my way – I think that is how I got in. There were five of us, two were sisters, but if none of these was about I was again on my own.

It was the only time in my life that I was ever hungry and longed for lunchtime. I took an enormous pile of cheese and Marmite sandwiches. I was almost ashamed of them, but I did have my breakfast very early in the morning.

On summer evenings I loved to do my homework sprawled over the brooders to the 'music' of the cheery gossip of the chickens inside as they settled down for the night. As they grew bigger, Mother and I made fowl yards for them and part of the day we let them out to scratch in the spinney among the saplings. I loved going out with a bowl of feed. They would fly all over my head and arms and some of them landed on the bowl itself. They were so tame and beautiful, descending like a white cloud, never hurting me with their claws or beaks. As they grew bigger again, towards dusk when they usually came in to roost, some of the young cockerels would begin to have ideas and pair off with a pullet. They would roost in a sapling and then we would have to throw sticks at them to get them down.

Very occasionally we would all go to Stroud. Geoffrey and I would hitch ourselves to David's pushchair to pull it up the steep hill for Mother. On one such day she sort of collapsed in the hedge and looked very ill. Later she discovered a lump in her groin and she remembered, when Geoffrey was coming out of hospital, she had asked me to help her move the stone slab that had fallen on him. We tied a piece of rope around a third of it which had broken off and it was as much as we could do to drag it away, and yet before she had lifted it *all* off Geoffrey. She had given herself a rupture.

Sometimes I went into the spinney to learn my lessons and one day Mr Pockett found me reciting some of the 'Pilgrim's Progress'. I am sure he thought I was mental! One day he was telling Mother about a skeleton that had been found where he had been working. He suddenly said to her "ave you ever 'eard of a man called Cromwell?' as though he lived in the next street and not hundreds of years ago. Geoffrey and I had trouble not laughing.

Best of all – that year in Bismore – I loved my attic bedroom and its view. I wrote the following for Mother's 'black book'.

> AN EVENING IN JUNE
> It had been a hot day, so hot and dry that everything longed for rain. Now it was cool, the sun was going down slowly and creeping over the sky was the slow, grey-like cloud of night. The sun first began to leave the field in the valley through which the rolling, ever-tumbling stream runs, then little by little it left the beautiful wood on the other side of the valley which stretches far both ways.
>
> The sun began leaving the trees in the lower part of the valley, then taking the higher line of trees it left them also, and so on, taking and leaving line after line, until the wood was left dark and gloomy.
>
> It was then that I saw the dark cloud of night stealing over the sky. On the other side a beautiful picture was being formed, for the sun was setting and was sending out glowing fire-like streaks of light. Every moment the sun sank lower until only the reflection was left.
>
> A little later I was high up in my window watching the cloud of night creep over the

gloomy wood. Nothing was heard save the ever-rushing stream over the waterfall by the little railed bridge in the valley. Now and again a nightingale broke the otherwise silent evening. I may have stood at the window some time watching this beautiful June evening, but the ugly tin-sounding bell struck 10pm. This made me remember I should be in bed.

As I left the window to get into my bed a peacock called its mate. I thought as I went to sleep how days in June change into beautiful evenings, but then I remembered it was not June that made the beautiful evenings but The One who is ever watching over the world.
F.W. Bismore Valley. 4 November 1920.

During one set of holidays in the attic on the other side of the cottage, Geoffrey and I put on our very first concert. Only Mother and Mrs Nobes were our audience. It must have been spring, for we picked branches of leaves for decoration and I can smell them fading as we were lying side by side doing the poem beginning 'Little Brown Brother'. [The sound of this made me nervous, but it turns out to be a conversation between two seeds in the earth, about to grow in the spring – a poem by E Nesbit. MB]

I don't remember us playing any other games or going for walks except to get milk across the fields. There was Geoffrey's broken leg and being interested in the chickens, etc. There were peacocks that had gone wild in the woods; primroses and wood anemones, windflowers which we had never seen before and a pretty white lacy flower which when you picked it, made you smell all oniony – it was a sort of wild garlic, I think.

The fashion of keeping 'bees' and making 'bee wine' came to the Cotswolds. I don't know exactly what these little primitive forms of life they called 'bees' really were. They were rather like a pale, sultana-coloured jellyfish without legs. They spent their time going up and down in sugared water and within two weeks doubled themselves. While so doing they turned the water into a unique wine. As they kept on doubling themselves, people gave a jar to someone else. They then put a couple of tablespoons of sugar in the water and, when the two weeks were up, they poured off the jar of water and put the 'bees' into two jars with water and sugar and began all over again.

The adults became very fond of this but not so the children. From what I remember it tasted most like mead. The Antill family, all four of them, were very fond of it and had bottles and bottles. Then rumour got about that it was *alcoholic.* The Antills were very strict teetotallers and, although they had been drinking it for months, they at once threw away the lot! In time the craze and the bees disappeared as mysteriously as they had arrived. Nowadays I cannot find anyone old enough to remember them.

The chickens had turned out two-thirds female, which was very good in those days of not being able to sex the eggs. By December they would be laying. Mother exchanged two pure-bred cockerels with the Lypiatt home farm, who were also breeding white Leghorns.

As the year wore on my parents realized that my father would not be able to continue with his venture in smallholding, so they decided they would sell the lot: the poultry as a going concern (the pullets were worth a pound a head, quite a bit then), the spinney, the field, the cottage, and the beech timber – the lot.

It was not on the market for long as a number of people were then going in for poultry farming. The widow who finally bought it did so for her son, just discharged from the New Zealand army. She hoped this would keep him in England. Talking with Mother they both discovered that not only did they know Miss Hubert, but she had taught her son when he was a little boy! She bought our property and so, taking one of the two cocks, six laying pullets and four young cockerels for our Christmas dinner, we moved to Cheltenham.

Our new home, which had been named 'Camborne' by some owner, was the centre of three stuck together in Leckhampton Road – a continuation of Bath Road leading up to Leckhampton Hill. A very pleasant, wide, tree-lined road... An iron gate, which so often developed a quaint squeak, led up a narrow path between two elongated flower-bordered lawns and up three steps into a jasmine-covered porch to the front door. There was a narrow window under the step into the house which partly lit the cellar below. Either side of the short hall were the drawing room and dining room, both lit by gas. On the right beyond the dining room was a staircase leading up to the three bedrooms.The smallest, which was mine, looked out over the kitchen roof and the back garden. The hall ended in a green baize door. (Small as the house was, it had had servants before and they lived beyond the baize door.) Down two steps into a kind of 'no man's land', a wide area, bounded on the right by a small room and numerous built-in cupboards and drawers, next to which was the only toilet. Opposite the baize door under a window was a long shallow sink with the only tap in the house. Turning left, a short wooden gate protected the stairs down to the cellar and there was a door into the large kitchen with coal oven, large floor-to-ceiling cupboards and a window and door on the right leading into a covered, half glass-walled verandah running the entire width of the house. There was gas lighting in the kitchen, too, with a pilot light so that you could turn it down in the evening when not using the kitchen.

The back garden was quite large and surrounded by an eight-foot wall, ending in a door at the bottom which led into a back lane. There was a cycle shed at the bottom of the garden, a small fowl pen and a large pear tree with three different kinds of pears on it – two other kinds had been grafted on it. The rest of the back garden, except a border of flowers down one side, was lawn. We would play shuttlecock and sometimes cricket. My father rented an allotment and kept us in vegetables all the year round. In the kitchen between the two built-in floor-to-ceiling cupboards (which were at one end) we could fix a curtain for when we had our tub bath. When we had parties we would use it as our stage.

This was 1920 and Leckhampton was a very superior district, but I doubt if many houses had either a bathroom or electri light. We had gas lighting on the ground floor only and the mantles were very expensive for us when we played ping-pong (table tennis to you) on the dining table – the balls were always hitting one of the mantles and quite a small touch would break them.

As we moved in, again about a week before Christmas 1920, David and I sat in the window, waving goodbye to Mother as she left to go to Stroud Hospital to have an operation for her hernia. It was quite a serious operation in those days and she was in hospital for four weeks. Not only did my father and I settle us in (I think Geoffrey's main job was taking care of David), but my father made and iced *three* Christmas cakes. He was now and out-patient at St Martin's and we were all invited there for Christmas Day – it was quite fun. Of course we were all lost without Mother.

Early in the new year I went for an interview with Miss Miles, the headmistress of Pates Grammar School for Girls. She told me that it was all fixed and that my 'free' place had been transferred from Stroud High School. Miss Antill again made my blouses and a skirt and I planned, and Mother machined, my special gym tunic.

I shall never forget the first day at PGSG ... and it was the last time I would ever be a new girl. I was treated like a VIP! Each form had two form leaders and one of their many jobs was to take care of new girls. Hilda Deacon took me under her wing, showing me not only everything to do with lessons and every part of the building, but at Rec – arm-in-arm – the senior girls walked round and round the grounds, chattering away. That first day someone walked either side of me. It was just heaven and from then on (January 1921 until July 1924 when I left school) I had a wonderful time. In the afternoon Hilda Deacon said she discovered not only did she live quite near us but her mother told her that, when we were babies, we used to visit each other in our prams!

I could have cried with happiness. After 14 different schools – three of them twice – and now my eighteenth change, and nearly 15, I was at last settled in my ideal school for the rest of my schooldays. At last I could really feel I belonged. Apart from the ordinary lessons, there were the annual gym displays and end-of-term concerts, house concerts and end-of-term picnics; the choir to join, Bible study groups, drama groups and the science and photography society when we went on botany walks and fossil hunting. Then there was the boating club and learning to row, the swimming club and debating society, all these to join and delight in. We had long sessions in the art school, doing experiments in the laboratory – life was so full of so much, not to mention moments I could snatch to read. No wonder, when I left at the age of eighteen and a half, sex had not had time to rear its head!

Miss Miles, the headmistress, and a number of the staff were just great. Miss Miles was a great deal more modern than the school board or many of the pupils' parents. In her quiet way she covered the generation gap very well. She just went ahead and saw to it that, when you were a certain age, you knew all the facts of life. It could not have been easy for her. No one ever said anything to their parents; she was never told off by anyone. One time she had a bit of sex trouble with girls getting too friendly with the boys of Pates. She handled that very well, too, and only one girl was expelled. Miss Miles also took the seniors for Scripture. Here again she took a modern, unbiased approach and we just read and studied the Bible with no angles at all.

In the summer of 1921 Mother sent me to stay for two weeks with the Antills. This I thought was just wonderful, to have a holiday on my own. After all, I had had a very eventful year, three schools, moving houses and taking care of David while Mother was in hospital. Also I had been quite ill that winter. I had been confirmed the March before and now in Cheltenham was regularly teaching in Sunday school

In the 1920s people in the country seldom saw very good meat, and what they did was very dear. They had no choice; once or twice a week a travelling butcher came around and they could only buy what he had on his cart. Buses had not begun to open up the countryside. Mother, realizing all this, sent with me a large piece of veal. The Antills were almost embarrassed by this gift. I was not in the kitchen when they unpacked it but one of the sisters, the youngest (who wasn't far off 30 years old), came and asked me if it was veal. When I said it was, she said they had thought it was and that she herself had never seen veal before! I told them Mother had thought it would be a treat for them.

I had a great time with the four women at Eastcombe. Mrs Antill was a small, neat, quiet little woman who sat tatting for hours, the bodkin flying in and out of her fingers so quickly you could hardly follow it with your eyes. She would tell tales of the valley when she was a girl, how all the cottages along the stream in the valley (and there were many more when she was a child) had a water wheel for spinning the wool. All this was before the cloth and carpet factories were around Chalford way. They walked many miles to school when they were quite little. She called me her 'handmaid'.

They killed a fowl and after it had been plucked dry and all the feathers put in a pillowcase, Mrs Antill would take a small handful of feathers in one hand, cut off the stiff quill bits and put the soft feather ends in another pillowcase to save up to make pillows or feather beds! She was a good dressmaker and so was her eldest daughter. Miss Antill, the eldest sister who ran the post office, showed me a good tweed garment and said if I would unpick it under her mother's guidance we would wash it, turn it, and make a dear little coat for David. I was to take his measurements when I got home. This I did and the lessons in unpicking garments have been very useful all my life. She also made me a new wool frock, the first one I had ever had made that was not a school uniform. It was the latest syle, too, for what we would now call teenagers.

I shared Miss Antill's bedroom, another experience. It was in the days of camisoles (the forerunners of bras) – they were usually made of calico. Hers were very neat but on Sundays she wore one that was very elaborately embroidered. This rather amused me because no one saw them anyway, but I suppose it made her feel special on Sunday!

Mrs Antill also taught me how to make very good spills, which I taught a number of people (writing this in 1976 in Western Australia, I can hardly find a person who knows what a spill is. If you can imagine a home-made taper, only of newspaper, that is a spill). There was a number of ways of folding newspaper to make both spills and firelighters. The Antills knew a very good way with spills which made them last much longer than others. Newspaper was in such demand for many things – lining drawers, cupboards and shelves. You could cut the edges fancy too. We also cut the newspapers into squares and, after making a hole through the pile with a skewer, threaded a piece of string and hung it in the toilet!

One day we went over Amberley Common (used as the common in *John Halifax Gentleman*) to a village the other side to visit some of their relations. I had an unusual experience there – I met a man exactly like a curate I had known as a child, that is to say to look at. Even the way the hair lay on his head and his mannerisms. But his hands were hardened as he was a farm labourer and as soon as he spoke it was broad Somersetshire. I couldn't take my eyes off him, I was so amazed.

Soon after my return from my holidays, Mother told me she was expecting another baby. The impression she gave me when telling me altered my entire relations with my father for many years. Looking back I hate to think how hurt he must have been, especially at not knowing the reason. Unconsciously my Mother was rather wicked. It did not seem enough that she now had little love to spare for my father, but to turn his children away from him so that he was lonely was very wrong.

Until we came to Cheltenham, David was the dearest little boy, not only to look at with his wistful expression and crown of golden curls, but he was so used to follwing Geoffrey and me about, we both delighted in his company and probably spoilt him. He was just over two years old when Mother went into hospital for that month. Quite truly he didn't really notice she wasn't there, especially as Father was about too. When Mother came home, she saw this little elfin child in a new light. She was overcome with a new love for him and was sure he would *never* get over the month he had been without her – all his life. From then on she really began to spoil him. It took a year or two before it began to change his nature.

He was never crossed in anything; if possible he was given everything he asked for. My father was not allowed to correct him and it was subconsciously instilled in him that his father was his enemy. Of course, this was all so gradual that Geoffrey and I didn't realize it for years. We only knew that David became a burden and a headache as the years went on. Mother decided David was delicate; where she got it from I do not know – certainly not the doctor. He only had measles when a child, and that only slightly.

Geoffrey went to Naunton Park Boys School. It was becoming obvious he had an academic brain. In fact, he loved all nature, even more than I did, I think. He was not really interested in sport but learnt to swim and took a few boxing lessons because he realized that some bullies only understood fists. He was extremely thoughtful and understanding, never at that silly age boys often have. In a year when there were few scholarships to Pates (only one from his school) he won it and went to Pates.

Margaret was born exactly one week before I was 16 years old. She was 10 months coming, or at least that is what Mother worked out. Mother was very worried about this birth as she was in her 40th year. She had a bed put in the drawing room and turned that into a temporary bedroom, as she was sure she would die. That way her body would be nearer the front door! I was in a terrible state all this time and as I came home from school I would quickly look to see if the blinds were down because she had died! As it was, the Easter holidays came first. Mother had given instructions that if she died I was to get in touch with Auntie Rose to look after us!

Early in the morning of 4 April 1922, my father came into my bedroom and told me that if I heard David wake up to bring him into my room before he could think of looking for Mother, as the baby was coming. This I did and we were lying in bed and I was reading to him – he was then four months off five years old. I was worried stiff! At last I heard a baby crying. David suggested the noise was our new kittens. My father came to tell me I had a baby sister as he knew how much I had always wanted one. All I could think of then was Mother – he assured me she was quite all right.

Later, when we took David to see them both, we wondered how he would take it all. He went to his toy cupboard and got one of his toys and brought it back and gave it to her, which we all thought was very sweet of him. But alas, he was still spoilt and Mother continued to do so always. Less and less was Father allowed to try to discipline him.

Margaret was the most placid, quietly happy baby there ever was. She would what I called 'purr' for hours on end, even when she could talk and walk about. Being the youngest you would think she would talk early, but it was just the opposite. She had one or two basic words for her needs like 'eat' or 'drink' or 'go to the toilet'.

Geoffrey and I both loved doing things together when we could get away without the little ones. Walking or cycling out into the country I would bring back wildflowers for various projects at school and he brought back horse droppings for Mother's garden! Every year we prepared plays or concerts for the two of us at our Christmas parties. We usually had two parties, one for relations and one for our school friends. We charged a penny to our relations to see our concerts. These pennies we kept until Easter, when Mother gave us a little more money which was supposed to be saved from us having no sugar in Lent.Then we would send it to the orphanage in Eastcombe. In the summer holidays we would go on a one-day trip over the Cotswolds on bikes to see the Antills and the Sisters in the orphanage. We took our lunch with us and bought 'pop' at one of the villages.

For the years we lived at Camborne life took on a more or less set pattern. Even though the house was paid for and there was very little upkeep, my father's pension was still very small for six people to live on; he had a light job but that did not bring in much. We were really quite poor for the standard of life we were trying to live, particularly clothing for Geoffrey and me. We had very little pocket money and had to do a great deal with it. Christmas and birthday presents were often things needed for school. But we didn't seem to mind mch.

Our breakfast was porridge and pieces of bread fried in dripping. (Mother would buy several pounds of fat pieces at 9d a pound and cook them crisp to get the fat out.) Father, Geoffrey and I would eat these any old time dipped in salt. Midday meal in winter was Irish stew or rolypoly pudding with treacle. Tea was one piece of the cake Mother had made on Sunday (while it lasted). We had as much bread and marg and jam or syrup or a queer honey-like affair the Maypole sold, which was cheap, as we needed. For supper Geoffrey and I had cocoa made with powdered milk.

On Sundays we had a roast with all the trimmings and a pudding. Mother made and cooked all the cake and pastry she was going to make for the week. Saturday mornings we did most of the shopping and in summer we had chitterlings for lunch for a treat. In the afternoon Father and

Geoffrey nearly always went to the allotment. In the evenings our parents would go to see Auntie and Uncle Maisey and Geoffrey and I would finish our homewwork. I had three hours every night and six at the weekend. On Saturday night I did my darning too – my own school stockings and Father's socks. Part of my pocket money was for this.

Sunday mornings I gave my parents their cup of tea a little earlier in bed before I went to church. When I came back I first changed my clothes (I seemed to spend a great deal of time on Sunday changing clothes to and from church, etc), then helped to get and eat breakfast and then – the job ever with us in those days – beds and slops. Then off I dashed to teach in Sunday school, back again and changing, unless Mother thought it might be a good idea that day to take the two younger ones out – Margaret in her pushchair. In the meantime, Father would have picked and prepared the vegetables and cleaned all the shoes, except Geoffrey's and mine.

Mother decided that Granny Waite, who lived alone with only a neighbour's girl sleeping in the house with her, should have a cooked dinner on Sundays. At first Geoffrey (until Mother got a bike that I could use) and then I took it. Granny lived the other end of town and it took some time even on a bike. Mother would do the meal up very well and hang it on the handlebars. I would try very hard to get past the churches before the people came out so that I wouldn't be disgraced with a shopping bag on a Sunday! We were instructed to sit and watch Granny eat her meal to make sure that she didn't give it away.

When I returned I would find the rest of the family had had their meal and, except for Geoffrey, had all retired to different parts of the house. I would hastily eat mine and then we would both wash up everything – all Mother's dirty cooking dishes from cake making, etc. We made our own fun while doing this job and it was usually about 3pm before we had finished. Then we would get the trays ready for tea, cut thin bread and butter and, if it was spring, prepare radishes and lettuces, etc.

About 4pm our disabled friends, John Watts and Jimmy Clarke (whom we always called 'mister' when we were children) would arrive and we would have tea and much fun. Geoffrey and I set the tea and cleared the table afterwards, but there our jobs ended, for it was time to get ourselves ready for evensong which we always went to together. Sometimes we were nearly late, but we could tell how much time we had by the Salvation Army on the corner of the road. When we returned Jimmy and Watty would have left and our parents would be sitting reading. After getting our things ready for school the next day we would go to bed. That was our patten in term time.

Our parents lived a queer life off and on. Mother had a quick temper and no logic and, after she had flared up, she would not speak to my father for days. It didn't really worry Geoffrey and me at that time – we knew no other family life – but when I was married to a husband with the same temperament as Geoffrey, the utter peace of it made life so much fuller and happier.

Some time in 1922, my father took up playing water polo again and with almost his same skill. On gala nights I was left to baby-sit David and Margaret. While Margaret was still being breast-fed this was sometimes a bit tricky. She would wake for her late feed and Mother would not be home. I discovered if I went up to her and didn't speak but let my hair fall over her and maybe even pick her up, that was all right, but as soon as Mother came in and she heard her voice, she would begin to cry and Mother would shout up to me to keep her quiet while she had some supper. I would sigh to myself – if only she hadn't spoken!

It was during this season of the year, 1922, that the Cheltenham Swimming Club went very *modern*. *Mixed* bathing was introduced for its members only – no single member of either sex was allowed to belong; they would come as a family one special night a week. They paid an annual

subscription and no one was allowed in without this family ticket. It was almost like trying to join a nudist colony!