

“WHAT I REMEMBER”. The MEMOIRS of Charles Egbert Cope.

NOTES about the Forest of Dean and Scowles. Coleford is the location of its Administration. If one is born within the Hundred of St. Briavels, which covers most of what is considered the Forest of Dean, one is classified as a Forester. This bestows on one, a number of rights, such as the rights to be a freeminor and to graze sheep in the Forest.

How people used to sing in those days before the first war. The rich were rich and the others were poor, some really poor. Yet they sang. That was the time before Radio and Television had brought their dead hand on people's music, before America had brought its dead hand on spontaneous expression with doleful and discordant ditties. I remember how, at college, between morning chapel and breakfast we all gathered in the entrance hall and sung lustily. Who remembers now those wonderful day trips by train from Coleford? How people sang all the way there and all the way back. Our favourites were "Who will o'er the downs so free" and "The Jovial Forester". Can anyone say where the music score for this type of song can be obtained today, especially the former? As a very little boy I used to love music, singing songs with the family round the piano on Sunday evenings - how the moderns would laugh at that. There were the brass bands of the Forest and they were really very good - but especially the singing in Church. I fidgeted impatiently through the interminable prayers waiting for the next hymn. On one great occasion I joined in not knowing the words; I was too young to read either the words or the music. I made it all up for myself, making my own music and words, and sang as loudly as my little voice could go until I became aware of a silence around me. The hymn had ceased, the congregation was seated and there was the Vicar smiling indulgently at me from the pulpit. Why did people sing so joyfully in those days, in spite of poverty and frustration? There was a pride in his work and satisfaction in his heart. The farm labourer found satisfaction in hoeing the turnips, keeping the headlands clean and making a neat job of binding the sheaves with a wisp of straw. Have you ever tried to do that? It looks so simple yet it is a work of art. A school friend of mine who became a very successful farmer told me very recently how he missed his horses; what a joy it was to him to talk to the horses as they pulled the plough, and how they listened to him and enjoyed his voice - moving their ears to listen to him. The tractor was more efficient but how soul-less.

Coleford was a colourful place in those days, unsanitary of course, yet it had character. The crowds in the street on Saturday nights, the street stalls, with their Naphtha flares, the cockles the brandy snaps and the ginger bread. Goodness knows under what conditions they were made. I had a great desire to taste the cockles; they smelt good

and looked luscious. My recollections of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee consists of two things.

The torchlight procession and those wonderful COCKLES. Mother had dug deeply into her pocket and somehow found me a silver three-penny piece and told me to do what I liked with it; that was to buy cockles. In the crowd I gave Father the slip and went to the Cockle store. Grasping the threepenny bit in my hand, I did not trust pockets. My money was gone. I had evidently dropped it in my excitement. I did not get my cockles and actually I have never trusted them to this day. An anxious Father found me, so I quickly hid my snivels. Strange to say Mother forgot to ask me how I had spent my money.

Then later on there was Mafeking. More torchlights, fireworks donated by J.W. Porter, and a brass band. I think this was the time when Syd Highley put his Gig on the bonfire. More fireworks by J.W. "Johnie" Porter. Again I was lost. Mother, I believe, was frantic - "He'll be trodden under foot" - "The Gypsies will have him". Father, quite undisturbed, said he would be watching the Band, and there I was, the drum beating "Boom Boom" and the brasses pressing mysterious buttons and going "Oom Pah", there they found me beating time with my foot. We had been brought up Nature lovers; Saturday mornings were the time for walks with Father. No doubt Mother was pleased to have us out of the way. It was usually Marion and me, sometimes Eleanor. Buckstone, Kymin, Symonds Yat were our favourite outings. We children started out with great gusto running backwards and forwards, miles more than Father did. It was always so very romantic. It was my ambition for a long time to run away from home and live in the Forest. I knew the Double Gates wood (as we called it) from end to end. I have wandered all through it, day dreaming, and sitting in little shelters I had made. One beautiful Summer day I was set for a really big adventure. I would go there in the afternoon and make myself a really good cubby hut such as I had seen in the Boy's Own Paper but I had decided that to stay the night might be rather dangerous. I had seen foxes there on several occasions. But it would be a good idea to stay there for quite a long time and really fit it up as I imagined the Red Indians used to do. So I told Mother that I was going for a really long walk and could I please have the lantern as it would be dark before I got home again. Mother said "you must not have any matches". She lit the lantern

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and I set forth happily. I improved my hut, made it romantically comfortable and sat there making up wonderful romantic stories in which I was naturally the hero. I played there very seriously for a long time, a long long time it seemed, but a strange phenomenon happened; the sun did not move downwards as it should have done. More games. I went through the Fennimore Cooper's stories I could remember - The Deeslayer - The Last of the Mohicans - and so on, talking to my imaginary characters. But still the sun would not go down. It was like the story Father had told us in school of Joshua invading the Promised Land when, so that he could complete the attack, the Lord had made the Sun to stand still. But I was beaten, night would not come on, so, disappointedly I made my way home. You see Mother would be worrying about me, and I was getting hungry. When I got back to the kitchen Mother said, "Home already, you have only been gone about half an hour".

I am not going to pretend that life at the Scowles was all so wonderful. Perhaps if it had not been for Father's illness, things would have been happier, but Marion and I went through periods of absolute terror. I have often wondered since, how much Mother suffered. But between whiles we had great fun. One of our greatest adventures was climbing on to the school roof; there was a way up at the back over the girls' closets. We, Marion and I, seemed to have been the only members of the family to discover this. And what an experience it was to be up there looking down on the world. It nearly ended in disaster one day. To get down we had to jump from one part of the roof to a lower level. It was a bit tricky because we had to avoid a skylight, so the jump had to be a very little one or a long one right over the skylight. This time Marion miscalculated and jumped too short and crashed right through the glass, landing on the school floor below. Of course she blamed me. She always did. But she was not hurt at all except for torn drawers. But she was stranded inside the school and had to wait there until I found an opportunity to steal Father's keys. And this time the SUN WAS SHOWING ALARMING SIGNS OF SETTING by the time she was released. Father was very angry and puzzled by the broken window, and we two wretched little cowards never owned up.

One of our best and most frequently used source of amusement was the Beech tree. There were other trees we enjoyed - the Yew tree impossible to climb but very mysterious - the Sycamore that could be climbed only by having a hoist up so that the one who did the hoisting had to be left down - the Larches from which we made pipes. But the Beech was wonderful. I spent most of the time on fine days up there. I hoisted sails which

took me round the world. I was Lord Nelson, Drake going round the World, Masterman Ready looking for landings for the deserted family on board. Talking to myself of course. Marion I thought was somehow inadequate not because she did not climb. She could climb with the best of us, but because being a girl she found the undergrowth excellent for making kitchen cupboards, cooking stoves, dolls houses and so on. All of which I regarded as female and inferior!

In the corner of the garden stood a large old apple tree on which grew the most delicious apples. To stop us raiding the tree Father let us eat all those that had fallen on the ground. I think it was my very wicked mind that suggested we should help them to fall. Many was the clod of earth Marion and I threw up. Since by Newton's law of Gravity that Father had taught us about concerning apples that things always always came down, not up, we did pretty well all except Eleanor, one of the most honest girls who ever lived for she would never tell a lie or steal. One afternoon I was playing in the garden with Eleanor when for some reason I called her a little "bitch". I must have heard children in the village using this expression. I must have remembered it. However, Eleanor gave me a look of shocked horror and said I shall tell Mother and she tore off into the house in such a hurry that her feet barely touched the ground. I waited with trepidation until the summons came to face judgement. Father was ready for me, put me across his knees and tanned my little bottom. I was not hurt, it was probably only a token punishment but it left two indelible impressions on my mind. One was the pattern on the carpet which I can see to this day, and the other was the word "bitch". Then I was sent as a further punishment into the garden to "mind the fowls". This meant that the fowls were not allowed to get on a certain patch. This was no easy task and one hen in particular defied me and looked at me out of the corner of one eye with a look of scorn and contempt. I shooed and shouted uselessly, and then with pent up anger and defiance called her a little bitch. Once I started I did not hesitate; I chased the fowls in all directions shouting Bitch, bitch, little bitch. Lord how they ran and squawked, necks stretched out and legs coming on behind, until out of sheer exhaustion they returned to their shed and held a noisy indignation meeting.

About this time we had a great sorrow; my little brother died. He was a wonderful little boy, less than two years old but very advanced for his age. A clever little chap. Arthur adored him and took him for walks and rides. It was lambing time and the fields next to us were full of lambs. At every opportunity Arthur came dashing into the kitchen and there was little Alfred jumping up and down

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shouting "Baa Dams Arthur". They ran off down the garden path with Alfred going Bumpety Bumpa on Arthur's back to see the lambs. He was very advanced for the age of 1 year and 10 months. Father was complaining in his usual definite manner that his tobacco was too dry to smoke. The little fellow took the tobacco, went into the back kitchen, primed the pump and then poured water on the tobacco and brought it proudly back, assuring Father, "Wet now!"

I was a very little boy, only 6, so it took a little while to realise something was wrong. Arthur was unusually quiet when we went to Coleford. A wellwisher stopped to ask us how Alfred was. Arthur's face went very red; he burst out crying and ran off. It was very bad weather, snowing steadily and a hard frost and the doctor refused to come. There they all sat in the bedroom, a steam kettle was boiling on the fire and Mother's eyes were full oftears as she held the boy to inhale the steam. He had Diphtheria. I was put to bed in a more distant part of the house. Presently Father came running in for me. Alfred was dead. I still have a clear picture of all the family crying round the bed. For the funeral. Mother drove in a "fly" with us two, Marion and I, sitting opposite. I did not understand but there was something different in the way Mother was sitting. As I said, I could not quite grasp the meaning of it all and held my flowers up proudly for others to see - Marion doing the same. That was January 29 1899. Many years afterwards I learned that the little boy next door had watched us drive off saying to his Mother "Can't I have a lovely funeral like that". The little chap got his wish next month. Mother never forgot, never quite got over it. She wept every year at the time of snowdrops and lambs and often out of all apparent context would say "Alfred would have been so and so old now". It must have been a dreadful time for all. Even I, as a little boy could sense the gloom and despair. All the family were ill except Eleanor and me. I think now that it must have been a period of financial stress. To add to the general depression the weather was wretched, February gales and rain with the wind blowing in the Bristol Channel. In spite of the rain wind mud and misery, Eleanor and I were sent to Coleford to buy oranges. I recall Mother's sad faced expression as she watched us down the garden path, "The sick children must have them". We struggled bravely along getting wetter and colder and then the bag burst. How to get the oranges home. I must have been snivelling by this time but Eleanor was loyal as usual. We must get them home for the sick ones. We had only two pockets between us. I tried putting them inside my shirt but my fingers were too cold to undo the buttons. I pushed some inside my breaches but they just rolled out the other end.

Then, a solution; I said shut the umbrella and put them in there. Wonderful but we had only gone a few yards when the umbrella turned inside out. Yes, it sounds funny now but it was serious. Then I saw Father coming down the road. I knew he was in a towering rage by the way he stamped his feet as he walked or was he too worried to be reasonable. Oranges stowed everywhere. Eleanor and I each carrying one. "Go on go on". His shouts drove us along the lane; cold water was running out of my trousers and down my back, and Father striding along with the inverted umbrella under his arm. What blessed relief to see Mother and feel the warmth of the kitchen. I was too numbed to undress myself but Mother stripped us bare and rubbed us dry before the fire, and how she could rub.

And now to something happier. It was only a couple of months after the tragic orange episode, too soon afterwards I now realise. It was a beautiful Spring day and nowhere have I ever experienced anything as lovely as a sunny Spring day in England, and especially so in our wonderful Wye Valley. Marion and I were sent out to play, and don't come in until you are sent for. Father opened the school for us to play in and there we ran about shouting aloud to hear how strange voices sounded in the empty classrooms. And then out into the garden I was so full of the joys of Spring and the freedom that I recited a little poem by a minor poetess who lived in the district at Whitecliff, Coleford.

"It is Summer, it is Summer,
How beautiful it looks.
There is sunshine on the old grey hills,
And sunshine on the brooks.
A singing bird on every bough,
Soft perfumes in the air.
A happy smile on each young lip,
And gladness everywhere."
(MARY HOWETT.)

Strange to say we played without fighting and never once went into the house. We had a visitor from Newland. We were playing down by the rhubarb bed when Mrs. Baker arrived. She came up the field and climbed rather awkwardly over the wall and went into the house. I do not know how long afterwards, it could not have been very long, when Bea came running out in a state of great excitement. "Mother has had a baby" repeated many times. She knew it was a baby for she had heard it cry, and someone was walking about as if they were rocking a baby. At last we were sent for and there was Father holding a baby all dressed up in long clothes. It's a girl said Father. I looked and then asked him how he knew it was not a boy. I wanted more explanation. Where had it come from? Mrs. Baker brought it under her cloak. I knew that was not true and I said so. When Mrs. Baker got over the

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wall her cape went up like that and there was no baby there. Life was becoming very mysterious so I said no more. But Marion was not so easily put off. Her questioning was received with evasive silence. What we children did not know was that we were living through a period when prudence was at its highest, perhaps better to say at its depth. Women did not have legs, they were lower extremities, and for them to show bare flesh or even a stockinged ankle, was monstrous.

Mother was most angry and embarrassed one Sunday on coming out of Church when the hot air coming out of the grating in the floor lifted her skirts and there were her ankles "for everyone to see". If we children were taken out visiting we dared not ask to "GO" and being children we did often want the "Aunty". I have sat wriggling and in pain until some kind hostess asked me if I would like to go and look at the flowers in the garden. And as for babies, they could not be spoken about except in sniggering whispers. The word had no such inhibitions for the Aristocracy. They played and loved, fashionable maidens took long mysterious holidays in the West Indies. The Prince of Wales and his gay and disreputable orgies in London, Paris and Biarritz, and people all laughed and enjoyed hearing of it. Queen Victoria was not amused. She could do nothing about it. As for the poor they just lived and copulated as they had always done. But with us and our friends, mock modesty prevailed. "Pregnant" was a dirty word. Women who were expecting did as Mother did and took quiet walks after dark. So Marion got no help but being Marion, persisted until Father, shocked and embarrassed, smacked her face and sent her off to bed and "stay there the rest of the day". A couple of days later I was sent to Coleford to get Father's paper from Miss Lee who asked me if Mother was better again. "She has not been ill said I". Mrs. Lee whispered to her daughter "He doesn't understand". So I went on being puzzled, and prudery and prudence were the way of life.

It was about this time that we had our great snowstorm. There was a long ice-slide in the playground where we slid up and down all the afternoon, I showing off my ability to slide on both feet and keep my balance, while Marion could only get along doing a "Cobbler's Knock", that is one foot on the ice and the other pushing on the dry ground. Presently Father came for us saying it was going to snow. Indeed it had started already. In the morning but quite dark Father carried me down to the kitchen. We could not see out of the windows for the snow. He opened the kitchen door to show the snow up to the lintel with the door pattern showing. Someone carried Marion. We went to the front door and then to one seldom used. They were

all blocked up and we were cut off from everybody and it was still snowing. This was wonderful for a while and then time began to drag. We then began to quarrel and Mother said "For goodness sake get these children out of my way". Somehow Father got out of the house; I think he climbed out of the top window. We did not see him for a long time but we could hear grunts and sounds of labour. He never used a swearword - and then the snow at the door collapsed.

Much preparation, boots were dubbed, two pairs of stockings, scarves, knitted hats and woollen gloves (these were a mistake) and out of the door we burst. We had been warned of cold hands and shown how to jump up and down, swing our hands against our sides. "Never blow on your hands". I think we nearly cried with the cold. Then Tom Brown appeared, I believe he jumped out of an upstairs window into a big snowdrift. We found a long trench under the wall where we had a wonderful war game (the Boer War was probably in progress) with plenty of ammunition at hand, while Marion made an oven and baked buns. Unusual noises came from the railway, two engines pushing the snowplough. I remember no more of the day except Father's warning not to warm our hands by the fire. Marion can probably recall more of this.

When I was about 6 or 7, I cannot just recall, I startled the family by playing a hymn tune. At school we were taught to read music and staff notation. We learned all the elements - E,G,J,B,J,D,F. F,A,C,E, and if the Doh is on a line Me and Sol are also on a line. For some reason the school harmonium was in our kitchen. I had to stand to play it. One foot on the floor and the other pumping the bellows and very quickly I mastered the right hand of Hymn 331, "We are but little children weak. One thing that beat me was where Octave C had to be played. My hands were too small so I played the bottom C with my left hand. In the bottom lines I was faced with difficulty, the notes appeared to be in the wrong places until Bea explained to me. Father came in one day tired and irritable "Can't you stop that wretched" and then realised that I was making music, real tunes. They gathered round to listen. I was going to be the new Mozart, the local Paderewski, but I am afraid that did not get very far. It was quite a landmark when at the age of ten I played for my first Church Service at the Scowles. I practised the hymns, my own selection, every day for a week until I was note perfect. I made sure of the Magnificat to the well worn old G Major chant, making quite sure of verse 5 changing over to the second half. The Cope family had shared the organ playing for several years, beginning with Reg and ending with me. In my very young days the services were taken by the Curate,

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Mr. Sanders, loved and respected by the people of the Scowles. Mother went sometimes when she could not get to Coleford and I can remember her singing "Jesus lover of my Soul". She had a beautiful voice which would have trained excellently but her only experience of music had been with a Choral Society in Uxbridge which gave some very good music including Handel, Mendelsohn and Gounod. At one time Father went with her before they were married.

We had some interesting characters in our congregation as did all places before life became standardised by Radio, press and Television. One was old Granny Thomas, somewhere in her nineties when I was little and could remember the battle of Waterloo or so I was told! She always carried her snuff box in her pocket, which she used immediately after the service, standing outside the porch door and to our great delight would offer it to Mr. Sanders who played up to her well by making very loud sneezes. Sanders was very much missed when he left. Another one to remember was Mrs. M., poor, shapeless, worn out by too many children, who sang lustily and not very tunefully in a loud nasal voice. Her favourite tune was 260 A.M. which she sang in a broad Gloucestershire accent "Ark my soul it is the Lard". She was rather much for my sense of humour, when she read the Psalm for Mr. Sanders, "Lard I am not 'igh minded, I 'ave no proud looks". Poor dear; I have thought of her since, how much she must have enjoyed those few minutes in Church away from the poverty, dirt and hunger of her home, and of her drunken husband. She really found something joyful and uplifting, some of the better things of life in her mind that her life had stifled.

It was after I left the Scowles, I am not aware of the date, that that little church was dedicated so that full services could be conducted there. Unfortunately the character of the village changed completely in recent years, the labouring population went away, and the houses bought by people either retired or with money, who built better homes and made the places very attractive but with no churchgoing population, or if they were churchgoers they used their cars and the improved road to attend bigger places. So the congregation drifted away until it was necessary to close. As it happened, I was in England in 1967, for the final Service, very appropriately the Harvest Thanksgiving. With me were Monnica, Marion, Bea, Eleanor, Monnica's sister Grace and a small gathering of locals. So ended our little church, very completely ended for it was converted into a private house. Strange to say came the closure of the school - another of Miss Brickdale's gifts. Miss Mary Fortesque Brickdale was evidently a very wealthy woman and had the school put there to help and

serve the people of the Scowles, Newland and Berry Hill before the days of compulsory education. She also endowed the school for about £80 a year, quite a good sum of money in the 1860's. She visited the school almost every day in all weathers and took an active part in the teaching, either riding her horse or being driven in her carriage. She had mounting steps put in but they have gone. I said she taught classes, all very old fashioned, needlework, singing and marking. Whatever marking was I don't know but I have seen it mentioned in educational books. She gave the children so much a week for regular attendance. All girls curtsied to her and the staff on entering or leaving the room. This practice continued until by strange chance Monnica took over the school in 1965. Miss Brickdale died in the time when I was a little boy of four years old but strange to say I do not remember her.

Another custom was the annual visit to Newland Church on Ascension Day. I remember these services in the beautiful old 14th Century Church. A hymn was sung. We always sang "Ye choirs of New Jerusalem". After church came the event the children liked. On the lawn at Dark House and later at Bircham House, we were all refreshed with a mug of milk and a bun. It was the bun and milk day to most of the children. When Monnica became the Head, changes took place. No one at Newland was interested in the service any more, so the service was held in the school or in the Scowles Chapel. By that time milk was supplied to the school daily and no longer held any romantic value so Monnica substituted lemonade and a do'nut instead.

Father was the first qualified permanently appointed teacher, going there sometime in 1888 and of course the old ways continued. It was a good thing to build a school but it seems to have been impossible to staff. At one time I understand that Miss Brickdale's gardener took over the teaching. Whatever induced Father to go there I do not know. He had been a clever boy, an excellent student - College 1871-1872 - and was successful in gaining a London appointment. I do not know where but I think he used to walk past Pentonville Gaol. He was at Uxbridge for a while and then went to the Scowles. He loved the country, revelling in all the scenery and always looking out on to the hills. For Mother it was exile. She had always lived in Uxbridge. Her only time away from there was when as a big girl she went with her older sister to Paris for a year - a great event in those days. Travel was not the fashion. It was always Uxbridge to her. If she wanted us to go to Coleford for her, she generally said Uxbridge. On one occasion she told me to get something from "Carrick & Coles", a well known Uxbridge shop.

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She had three children when she went to the Scowles, and eight before she left. Back to the school. In the Infant room I sat in the gallery, graduating from the front row to the back. Nearly everything was learned by chanting in unison, and what ignorant women we had to teach us. Every day we chanted aloud the colours on a chart until one day an Inspector pointed out to Miss B. that all the colours had faded. So they had, even I could see that. Then there was a chart of geometrical shapes. Remember I was possibly only three and we had to call the name, always in the same order. Square, Circle, Rectangle, and two that I really liked. Rhombus and Parallelogram. I could say those two over and over. I was taught to knit. Can you think of anything less suitable for a boy of my age? In - out - over - off, or whatever it was. Mine got so tight that the needles would not go through. Miss B. came round scolding, "What are you doing, look your knitting is quite black". How could it be black when the wool was white thought I. Just imagine a babe of my age with no hand washing facilities being given white wool. I had my moment of triumph. I had often seen someone being stood in the corner, the corner between the fireplace and the door. Now I don't know what I had done wrong but out came the order I had always wanted, "Stand in the corner". I stood in the corner proudly, nose against the wall until playtime. When we returned I went to my corner again but I was immediately sent back. My greatest moment was yet to come.

I had heard of very naughty boys who played truant and thought it must be a wonderful thing to do. One afternoon in late Spring or early Summer I slipped away from the playground into the garden. I heard the bell go for next session and quickly hid between the rows of peas. Father grew his peas on tall sticks (Pea sticks 6d a bundle, bean sticks 1/- from the Barnett women). The Peas were developing and were very tasty, and there was some fun pulling the blossom to pieces. I could hear lessons going on, children chanting what they learned. Miss B's shrill voice. It all sounded so funny outside. But time passed so very slowly, so slowly that I began to wonder what was keeping them. Perhaps they were going to stay all night, sleeping in rows, boys on one side and girls on the other. Miss B. in the middle. It must have taken some working out and then all at once the bell rang; there was stamping of feet then silence. I crept out and made my way to the kitchen. I did not know whether to be frightened or proud, but I was going to be punished. But Mother said nothing. Father did not speak, no one remarked on my absence. I HAD NOT EVEN BEEN MISSED, much to my relief and disappointment, was as black as a sweep and asked how I had got into that state. I washed my

face as best I could in the Spring. Then I saw Arthur's face. He was most indignant when I told him. He could not get dirty like me, oh no. But nevertheless he washed. I expect there was plenty of soot behind our ears.

All this about trains may seem tedious but it leads up to my next story. In the meanwhile let me say that Arthur took me to Lydney to see the really big engines go through. It was my fourth birthday. Mother and Father had been laying linoleum on the kitchen floor and out of a triangular spare scrap Father made me a flag. The late Autumn night had closed in on us, there was no more going outside. I was bravely waving my flag when the door opened with a crash and in walked Reg, Arthur and Bea calling out "Happy Birthday" and handing me a mysterious parcel, a birthday present. The first and the last for many years. They had to open it for me, and there was a beautiful wooden railway engine painted in G.W.R. colours. They had been all the way to Monmouth and back on foot to get it. I believe the price was sixpence halfpenny but the man let them have it for 6d. because they had come such a long way, 12 miles altogether. The wonderful joy I got from it. I have seen my Grandchildren with most expensive toys as Christmas gifts, but nothing so much appreciated as that engine. Eighty years ago now and never forgotten.

I so often mention the kitchen. We were there until late afternoon and this was where most memories linger. I was sitting in my high chair at breakfast time whining and wailing as I usually did I believe, and crumbling my bread on the floor. Our cat Tibbies was attracted to my toes and added to my misery by playing with them. I must have been a trial but apparently I was a frail little chap with not the best of prospects of ever growing up. I think I needed special food daintily served up which was not possible with such a big family and Mother always overburdened with many children. It was much later than this when Father tried to make me eat potatoes. Potatoes were the main product of our large garden and a most important item of food. I could not eat them. Scowles potatoes were supposed to be the best but I hated them and still do not like them. This became a battle with Father but I could not get them down. Father looked angry and fierce to me although probably he was not. He came round at me behind my chair banging my back with a knife handle. "Eat your potatoes". I made one more valiant effort and then brought it all back up on the table. No more potatoes for me ever at home, but strange to say, when I went to Cheltenham, I really liked them. This probably occurred about the time that Father's health broke down and he was depressed and bad tempered. As a very little boy I

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remember him very differently. I was still wearing my petticoats and drawers. He was in his armchair at the fireside giving me wonderful rides on his ankles. "This is the way the ladies ride" and then the great climax, "this is the way the farmers ride" and I bounded and bumped wildly in the air, probably asking for more. What we delighted in, and held us spellbound was his recital of what happened to Henny Penny when she thought the sky was falling in. Henny Penny, Duckies, Daddies and Cocky Locky all - and when we shouted in chorus "Went to tell the King". He was good at telling us stories. All this must have happened at the time before his health broke down. One of his stories stays in my mind mainly because it was told at an unsuitable time. He had taken Eleanor and me for a walk. I could not have been more than three but we were brought up as walkers. We got as far as the Swan Pool which always delighted me as well as frightened me, and then we crossed the road into the woods near Watery Lane. These beautiful woods are lovely, but what inspired Father to tell us stories I could not know, but the tales he told were most dramatic. The Babes in the Wood. My vivid imagination made it seem so real and so sad, while Eleanor was reduced to tears.

Talking about food, does Bea remember when Father and Mother went away for a holiday to London leaving her in charge of the house? This was some years later; Bea made a good job of it, cooking, and stopping Marion and me from fighting. It was probably a Sunday, but whenever it was, she made a great effort to give us a good cooked dinner but, alas, this was one of the days when the kitchen fire refused to burn. There was something radically wrong with it. Father always declared the chimney was too short, letting the downdraft from the steep roof cause the fire to smoke and the flames to blow back into the kitchen. Poor Bea, how she did work to no avail. The meat would not cook and the Yorkshire Pudding set. She finished up by making the pudding into pancakes. We enjoyed the pancakes, while I did not care whether the meat cooked or not. Thinking of it now I realise that Bea managed excellently. How often had I heard Mother say that the wretched stove had ruined her married life. Often I have seen the tears trickle slowly down while we children were waiting like a lot of voracious piglets.

That kitchen was the centre for many of our little joys and sorrows. In the late afternoon we all moved into the Dining Room where Father had a roaring fire waiting for us. This was Father's only extravagance, or not quite perhaps, for he liked his pipe, one ounce weekly of Lambert and Butler's Birdseye tobacco somewhere about threepence half-penny an ounce, and his daily glass of beer drawn

from the 4 gallon cask kept in the big stone-floored pantry.

Tapping a barrel is a skilled job which must be done correctly. It was one of Father's very few practical accomplishments, so much so that often a boy would come to the door asking if Mr. Cope would "Tap Dad's Barrel". Mother always sat down in the evenings on the left hand side of the fireside, her first sit and rest for the day, singing quietly to herself, however tired, and tapping the time with her right foot. Someone usually read to us. Mother at first, and later on Bea, until for a time I became the family reader. Masterman Ready, Hillside Farm, Swiss Family Robinson, Little Lord Fonderoy, Eric or Little by Little, Teddy's Button and Black Beauty. We took them seriously and Eleanor sometimes shed quiet tears, finding fiction and reality closely allied.

What was really sad, and something we could not quite understand, were Mother's old books that we found in the lean-to, all dealing with the sufferings of the poor and their efforts to earn an honest penny. "Won't you buy my pretty flowers" sang one little urchin in the street to the indifferent passers by. Mother, as I said, sat by the fire. I cannot remember her ever sitting in the kitchen - life was too occupied with sewing, mending, knitting, cooking, ironing and bread-making. Who remembers the one dough cake she put in the Baker's Oven with the bread?

Then there were the medicines, Mother believing in keeping the works going, or as she said, "always keep the back door open." Epsom salts, Brimstone and Treacle, Castor Oil, a dash of Friar's Balsam on Sugar and Senna Tea. I still have two lasting results of her treatment. One was the Orange Juice on top of the Castor Oil. "Drink it down and you won't taste it." This gave me a lasting dislike of Oranges - even the smell, and the other was Senna Tea. I was not a sturdy healthy boy and was frequently unwell. Senna Tea was always the remedy. How well I remember her giving me a cup of that stuff with the promise that if I drank it all, she would give me a silver sixpence! A lot of money in those days. I couldn't and next day I tasted Senna Tea, not sugar, in my tea and I have never taken sugar since.

Talking about sitting around the Dining Room fire. Mother's day did not always end there. Sick children required her attention. I recall how one night I was very unwell. Mother undressed me and put me to bed on the Sofa. I desperately wanted to sleep but would not let myself go. Mother sat there particularly patient singing quietly the little song that always comforted us, but I would not let go. Each time I closed my eyes I could feel myself swimming away into sleep, but I held on while Mother continued "Kind words can never die, never die." I remember no more, I must have slept.

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Sunday evenings were a little different. We moved into the Parlour, an attractive room with the Walnut furniture and Father's big two burner paraffin lamp. Behaviour had to be a bit more sedate for Father was strict on Sunday Observance, not permitting games of Snap, Donkey, Old Maid, or such like. But he told many stories and spent most of the time singing round the piano. Father and Mother sometimes ending the evening with their duet, "Larboard watch ahoy."

Quite unconnected with any of the above - on one occasion Bea came with us to visit the Goslings at Newland Station. I had a wonderful afternoon playing with her in and out of the Goods Shed and examining the trucks in the Sidings and then a memorable moment when Mr. Gosling took me up into the Signal Box, opened the Gates, put the signal to "GO" and let the up train to Coleford go through. On the way home Bea said in her rather grown up little manner, "Mrs. Gosling's face looked rather pale." Mother asked me when we got home how Mrs. Gosling was. "Oh" I said "She has a face like a bucket."!!

Sunday was an important day. Father, being a Chorister, went to every Service, two or three times a day. He scorned what he termed "The Oncer". I wonder what he would think of some of our Parishioners today, to whom that would mean once a month! I enjoyed going. I was dressed in my latest Sailor suit, the fashion everyone copied from the Royal Family, the worst part being Lord Nelson's three cornered hat. This was as stiff as a board - Mother pushing it on with an impatient hand - slap, and then the unpleasant moment putting the elastic under my chin with a sharp click, Father becoming impatient, but at last we set off. Half way down the garden path Mother called us back and whispered in our ears something that could never be said aloud. Off we rushed to the closet for our final pee, then Father grabbed us. We were becoming late by this time so he rushed us along the lane and down the meadows, one on each hand, me flying through the air - my feet only occasionally touching the ground. At the top of Fryers Walk he left us and went away running in his stiff legged way. The Church bell was going tang, tang. Father was in time. While we just made it. All round the Church was a large dado with words of the Te Deum, while over the door a wooden board on which was printed "A table of Kindred and Affinity" - "a man may not marry his Grandmother." Who ever would want to I used to wonder?

Once I was a very naughty boy playing and making a nuisance of myself. Then I peeped through the chair back and saw the two Wardens standing up stiff and straight. Tucker and Timothy Smith. Tucker shook his finger at me which I

thought was funnier still. There was some talk between Arthur and Bea, "We will take him out after the hymn" so when all was quiet and the congregation kneeling, we all three clattered out over the tiled floor and out of the door. I refused to go home. Then Arthur said that if I was good he would not tell Mother, so we trotted off happily, but hardly had the kitchen door opened when Arthur blurted out his account of my sins. I got to like Church very much as it became familiar to me. I liked the dramatic moment when the bell stopped and the choir came in. Compared to modern times this was quite big, about fourteen boys and ten men. George Butler, Charlie Saunders, Martin the Postman, Harry Rooser, Father, Charlie Jenkins were some of them. Father quarrelled with the Vicar Canon Bryce over his choice of hymns, some of which were very dreary; "Far down the Ages now", "I was a wandering Sheep", "Lord her watch thy Church is keeping". The Vicar was not musical and probably could not distinguish one tune from another. When I was quite young, probably about 4 or 5, I learned something very surprising. I was going up the lane with Father chattering away, when he said "When I was a boy". This WAS astonishing news. Father had been a boy. Very likely I was reduced to silence trying to work this out. Father had been a boy - I could see in my mind's eye a picture of him at school, with his lined, rather serious face, a big moustache, sitting in the classroom with the other boys chanting his lessons.

There are two stories I must tell. If the Church Service had been successful Father sang the Psalms to himself on the way home. He forgot us and let it come out loudly. We were on the way home up the White House meadow when he burst out "Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered - like as the smoke vanisheth, so shall thou DRIVE THEM AWAY" and gave a violent kick with his foot which brought him back to remember that we were walking along. And then another great day we were walking up Lord's Hill, just Father and I. When we were outside the gate of the Grammar School he said "In you go". This was the first I had heard of going to the Grammar School. "In you go" was the order which affected my life afterwards. There was an entry examination which we all passed. Thus life began at the School which then leapt to an entry of 23, all boys, after a lapse to about 6. It was before this time that Arthur was very ill with Peritonitis. He could have died but they pulled him through. It was Christmas and Marion and I were excitedly talking about Father Christmas and stockings and so on. Once again it must have been a time of financial stress. Mother called us into the kitchen and rather sadly explained to us that Father Christmas had so many very poor children to look after that Winter

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that he would not be able to bring us anything. We took it quite well and next morning we found in our stockings an apple, an orange and a walnut. We were quite happy, sang our Carols and refrained from quarrelling.

How different from some of my Grandchildren whom I have seen trampling expensive toys underfoot with complete indifference. Before we move on there is one little incident I would like to talk about. In the Boy's school in Coleford, a Jumble sale was in progress to which the entrance fee was one penny. I did not have that sum of money so had to wait outside. I became aware of a strange sound coming out of the room. It stopped occasionally and began again, a kind of nasal moaning with intermittent squeaks and what sounded something like a human voice rather stifled. I had to find out what it was and for once in my life was dishonestly brave. I saw a stout woman about to enter; I squeezed alongside her, farthest from the cash desk, and nipped in through the door. There I saw and heard for the very first time a gramophone or, more strictly speaking, a phonograph. A black revolving cylinder to which was attached a kind of trumpet. Edison Bell Record it announced in a funny voice and music of a sort followed. The only other modern invention I had seen up to then was a magic lantern, a very popular form of entertainment we sometimes held in the schoolroom during the evenings, entrance fee again one penny. I did not have to pay for this and just walked in importantly. Someone later had given us a Magic Lantern at home, a very little thing with a paraffin lamp to illuminate the slides. Father would hang a sheet on the big dresser and the brothers manipulated the lantern. There were I think about a dozen slides but I can remember only two; one was a picture of a Canadian train in the Rocky Mountains, the engine having a big wide funnel and a cow catcher on the front. I could never see that one too often. The other slide was very very naughty. It showed half a dozen naked little boys paddling in a stream all with their backs modestly to the viewer. We liked that and all ran up to the screen and smacked their bare bottoms.

Now to a big event - two events really. The Boer War was in progress. Naturally we were very pro-British, not like some dreadful people in Coleford who were called Pro-Boers. The War was going very badly. Father was very upset about Lord Methuen's defeat at, I think, Modder River. The British Army showed up in a very bad light for we lost many lives. Father was reading about it from the Daily Mail, becoming more and more angry with Methuen. "I could spit in his eye" he shouted. I could see the whole episode in my mind, the discharge of spittle going through the air into the

face of Methuen. I was endowed with a vivid imagination.

Then there was Uncle Bert's visit. He wrote from Berkeley saying he would come to dinner on a certain day, bringing Aunt Edith with him. A couple of fowls were cooked, the table set, and all the vegetables cooked, but the visitors did not arrive. We had our dinner. Next day they did not come, so we picked the bones and had just finished everything when Father said "Here's Master Bert", and there they were coming up the path and there was nothing for them to eat, nothing at all except bread and butter. For the first time in her life, and I am sure the last. Mother sent over to Browns to borrow some food. When we think of it, how stupid it was of them to walk past the shops up to us in a lovely village and not bring anything. Mother got some bloaters. Bert very nobly said they were the very best bloaters he had ever tasted. Talking about it later Mother said she could have thrown the dishes at them as they came up the path. This made a wonderful picture to me. The dishes going out of the door and flying through the air landing in Bert's face. What was Father really like? What part did he play in family life? It was only after he had died that we realised that he was, in fact, the ruling spirit. We had always thought that the family life revolved around Mother, but when he had gone we understood for the first time that he was the power that ruled our lives. Let me give two events that show how completely he was master of himself and an influence on the community. It can hardly be said that he was popular for he never went out of his way to make himself so. But he was liked and respected and exerted quite a powerful influence which people appreciated. There was an episode in the school that could have had serious consequences. We were all at our lessons one morning, when the door opened with a bang and in walked a mad woman. Mrs. Pancake Kear. How or when she became a lunatic I do not know. Her husband "Pancake" was one of the well known local characters. I believe that at one time he had been a drunkard and that he was notorious for his vile language but he found religion. Who influenced him I do not know, but in my time he was full of his religious feelings. He was a hawker of pottery carrying his basket of wares on his head, singing hymns all the while. His wife, however, was a helpless, hopeless lunatic, so far gone that she could not talk, only babble and drivel making incoherent signs and sounds. She came into the big room roaring wildly and staring round. Then she found what she was looking for, an ill tempered naughty boy. The boy was terrified and attempted to escape. However, Father stopped him. Then Father turned his attention to the mad woman. For some reason he had his bowler hat in his hand and

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this he held out. In his quiet manner he had his way. The woman was not allowed any farther but listened to his quiet determined orders to get out and go home, which she eventually did. If it had not been for Father she would have - well I don't like to think what she would have done to the boy but it looked as if she would have done serious injury.

Then there was his way of dealing with a very bad drunkard. Many men and some of their wives got pretty tight on a Saturday night. The Mason's Arms was the meeting place. I think they probably did not drink much but their half-starved bodies could not take it. They mostly came home in a state of happy inebriation. There was however one horrible man who returned home violent and dangerous, knocking his wife and children about and fouling the house. Now I don't know how often this happened but it was the Mother's whispered orders to "get Mr. Cope" that brought Father on the scene. He did not mince matters. In that quiet determined voice, he told the fellow what he thought about him, made him keep quiet and get off to bed - after he had cleared up. I saw this man come home drunk one evening, cursing and swearing at everything. I would not have liked to deal with him as Father did. Back to the story.

The great day arrived when I was to be promoted to Standard 1. I walked proudly out of the Infant Room and stood with Bumper Roberts and Fatty (Ernest) George outside the door of the Big Room as it was called. This was an important event. I was no longer an infant. I was going UP. I said to Bumper as we stood waiting, "Now we are in Standard 1 we must not stop in the middle of a word to dot the I's and cross the T's". Then we were marched into the Classroom. This was the room Monnica knew later as the school kitchen. Another prison-like room with high-set windows like the Infant Room. I could just see the tops of the lilac and laburnum trees. Here we had a succession of women teachers, mostly semi-ignorant. What Father could have done with trained staff. Mother was teaching in the Infant Room at that time. She did this very well, still continuing the old-fashioned method as was expected of her. C.A.T. cat interspersed with much singing. "The North wind doth blow and we shall have snow". It was a happy room. In our standard 1 we had several changes of staff, one of whom I remember very clearly. The moment she stood before us we summed her up as quite incapable. Young children have an instinct, almost like animals, in judging character and within minutes we were rioting. I have a clear memory of sliding backwards and forwards along the nine seater desk. When Mother asked me about it, I was surprised to admit that we were not enjoying ourselves. We would have been far happier under

discipline. Then we were moved up into Standard 2. We were now in the Big Room on the Gallery round the corner - a bitterly cold place in the winter time. "Silence, sit round square" (a strange order this sounded) fold your arms. In one of these periods I let fall a marble which went plonk plonk down the steps. Great wrath came down on my small head. Life changed completely. I was growing older. Gone were all the romantic ideas and dreams and it became clear that I was no longer the centre round which all life revolved. I had to adapt to an existence with ignorant uncouth and foul mouthed louts. The Scowles must have been going through its very worst period. Life at school became a nightmare where I had to put up with bullying and insults until one dirty beast went a bit too far, and I knocked him down. How, I do not know for he was much bigger and stronger than me, a semi-savage as were many other boys, but I knocked him down and had to be prevented and restrained from kicking him to pulp. But much worse than anything else, I lost contact with Father. We no longer walked to Coleford talking all the while. We were self-conscious with each other and I was rather afraid of him. I think I understand him now. Intellectually he was a lonely man; he had no one with whom he could discuss Shakespeare and the Classics. Poetry meant nothing to his friends and in his own private life became a disappointed and disillusioned idealist. It was not until the War years that we came together again, by which time I was grown up.

On my first leave from France I took him for a walk down the Burring Path to Newland talking all the while. He was happy to find a member of the family he could talk with. I took him into the Ostrich for a beer - just one. He would never take more - then home. Another thing I never quite understood until later was the strain they must have been under during the War. I came home on leave after the Somme, Vimy Ridge and Cambrai battles and noticed how much older they were becoming and then it dawned on me that with 3 sons at the front, the dread of the fateful telegram arriving at the door was always there. But back to school.

Father was a capable teacher, honest, hard-working and sincere. His scripture and history lessons were vivid and clear but the fault in those days was that the pupils were only listeners. There was no practical work, illustrated notebooks and general participation as in later years. And there was that uninteresting catechism every Friday morning. We learned by sing song repetition which was a feature of our school. What was the use of reciting the Desire and Duty to my Neighbour, I don't know. I remember one amusing thing we used to say and that was "Ann Dan, inheritor". Who was Ann Dan I wondered until I found the meaning - "A chief of

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God and an (Ann Dan) Inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven".

Boys and girls were rigidly separated in the playground by a high wooden fence. On one side were the infants or "Little Infunce" as they were called and the girls who were known by the old fashioned name of "Wenchen". The girls joined in many singing games, dancing in a ring and singing;-

"The wind, the wind, the wind blows high,
The rain comes pouring from the sky,
She is handsome, she is pretty,
She is the gitrl from the Royal City,
She goes courting, one, two, three,
Bring her across the water
Give her kisses, one, two, three,
Mrs. Cope's daughter."

Then there was London Bridge, In and Out the Window, Oranges and Lemons the Bells of St. Clements or as they used to sing "the bells are so Semmon", Bobby Bingo.

"There was a farmer had a Dog
His name was Bobby Bingo
B.I.N.G.O. - B.I.N.G.O. - B.I.N.G.O.
His name was Bobby Bingo."
And there was another one about:-
"The rain comes pouring down
Put the Chatters in the ground."

I would like to know the proper words for this if you can remember them. I would much like to know what others there were. All these they sang as they danced, while the See-Saw, laden with "little Infunce", bumped up and down.

Who remembers the conjuror who called occasionally? The entrance money was 1d. I remember two of his tricks. One was with a ball on a string held vertically, which would slip or fall down on the word of command. And there was the water trick. He drank a glass of water and then called a boy out, pumped his arm up and down and the water squirted out of his ear.

In class, I can still see Reg and Arthur sitting in the front row, and Bea in the third row among the girls. I could go on and on but I will content myself by saying that in spite of old fashioned methods, or because of them, Father produced pupils who could read, write and spell better than the present day children, some of whom, even at the end of their Secondary School life can do none of them, remaining almost illiterate. By a strange twist of Fate, Monnica became their last Head Teacher - thus the first and the last were Copes.

I visited Monnica's School several times and how different it all was. As I opened the door I

could hear a subdued hum of voices, everyone on the move, working happily and with a purpose on some project or other. The tedious class lesson was rarely heard. And then the School had to be closed. The population had changed, the school had ceased to serve a useful purpose and after 100 years Miss Brickdale's generosity had borne good fruit.

(Signed) Charles Egbert Cope