

The Garden Alley Studio.

I had been warned that my new Studio was in such a queer, out of the way corner that no one would be clever enough to find it. However, friends and pupils did find their way to it. My old iron Studio had been in the centre of the shopping district of Cambridge. My brick one is in the heart of the residential and educational quarters and yet it is in a forgotten roadway, closed up at one end. This alley is not a narrow alley - indeed it is a very wide one - but it is wild and rubbishy. About a hundred years or more ago the town had planned a wide, good road but, for some reason, did not take it over. As it was unused and neglected one after the other the owners of the Brookside house took bits of the road into their gardens. The thieving ended when it reached the coachyard gates. The coachman of the doctor from whom I bought the property lived in the cottage and this was attached to the stables and a small hayloft. In front of the cottage door was a little garden but there was then no entrance to the alley except through the big gates of the coachhouse yard. My working studio had plenty of light in it except along one wall. The outside of this wall troubled me for it was bare and uninteresting but I could see at first no way of improving it.



I taught not merely in the Studio, but also in the Convent school, in schools in the neighbouring towns and I held private classes. I had two assistants and I managed also by working myself, while teaching, to get many pictures painted. During the seven years after I bought my place until the war of 1914 started I was able to earn enough money to pay for my own small living expenses, for making trips abroad and for improving my property as I could afford it. I was for several years worried by my bare bit of brick wall but fate allowed me at last to improve even that.

May Hamblin-Smith, Signe Laven and I determined to have a long week-end at St. Ives near Huntingdon, before the summer term began. We stayed at the old galleried Inn in the Market Place. We sketched along the Ouse and explored the country round the town. On our last day there I got up early and went out before breakfast and made my way by a side street to the river. Workmen were in the street putting in a couple of badly proportioned, modern sash windows into an old house. Lying in the street were two very large, wide and rounded windows of the Georgian period. I went back to breakfast and described them and declared that I must have one of those windows for my Studio. "I must have the other for my Gymnasium" said Signe, fired at once. Out we sallied as quickly as we could, leaving May to sketch alone. Alas, the windows had gone! We had a busy morning, Signe and I, tracking them down



and their owner too. We found the windows on a rubbish heap in a garden of a country house outside St. Ives and we found the owner in the office of the best shoe shop in the town. He was startled by our eager request but was agreeable and quite interested in our plans. He said that we could have the windows at a pound each and he himself would bring them to us in one of his vans. The architect of my Studio designed a good setting for mine. It was let into the wall and behold my piece of bare brick work was made beautiful and a dull corner of the Studio made charming and light.

I used the two horse boxes of the stable underneath my Studio for my coal and coke. One morning it was discovered that a tramp had spent the night among my coals. He had made himself a comfortable bed among them and had smoked until my coal reeked with shag. He had been seen in the early morning climbing over my big yard gates. I stood at gaze on the arrangement of the cobbles that he had made for his bed and as I did so I thought that I had indeed got a palace for my coal. I had long wanted a drawing room. These stables, I saw, would make one. I would keep the heavy double stable door but it would open into a new hall - not the yard. I would build not only a new hall but also another sitting room and two bedrooms above. The stable-drawing-room could be made into a lovely room. I would keep the enchanting crisscross work of the stable ceiling which was unusually elaborate and well done. It took time to save money for this work but at last



the building was begun. I had stored at Harston from my other studio a long narrow picturesque window copied from one in an old print representing the room of the poet Milton. This came in well. I could not however find in any shop a mantel piece that would do. None would go with the woodwork of the ceiling and I felt it was important to have the right one. I failed to find it even in London.

When my building was nearly ready for its finishing details I went to call for some reason on our village builder. I was taken to his sitting room. In the corner I saw a little carved wooden pillar, I admired it. He said it belonged to a mantel piece he had had to take out of an old Manor House. The owner wanted a modern one. "But it is a bit of an Adams' mantel piece !" I exclaimed. "I am sure of it" - he said - "and I have got the whole of it . It was given to me and I will give it to you if you can make use of it". Indeed I could. It was a treasure and it became the glory of my drawing room.

I started a weaving school in connection with my Studio and a Swedish lady, Nina Lindell, came from Sweden to run it. To house it I had rented a very old place in Botolph Lane, opposite Corpus College, and I called it the Pelican and Lilies in honour of the Arms of that College. It had been long ago a house that backed the old Cambridge wall. It showed signs of having been the scene of some, perhaps sinister, medieval adventures. There was a secret chamber in it but that secret



chamber had to be opened up under me. The partition was taken away and, that done, a small room became a large one. The trap door in the floor of the loom room - which had evidently been the means of escape over the town wall - was now the means for lifting our tea, bread and butter and cakes from the lean-to kitchen below it to the weavers in the loom room above. There had been a curious long shallow recess in the thickness of the wall of the hiding chamber. That had held a ladder when I took the place. The recess I flattened out to give more room for the looms. I took a great fancy to the old ladder which I am sure had helped many to escape but it was stolen by one of the workmen and I could not find out the culprit. The heavy gloom that had hung over the old place was now dispelled by brilliant threads and draperies. These, the beat of the loom battens and the whirr of the warping mill, seemed to lay all old ghosts. I have heard a whisper that they have returned since I left the place.

We heard that an Art and Craft Exhibition was to be held in London at Westminster Hall. Nina Lindell was ambitious and asked me if I would hire for her a good large corner. I did so. It was a large enough corner to hold two of my biggest wooden looms. Nina Lindell and her Swedish worker, Brita Johannison, dressed in their national costumes, worked at the looms, displayed the beautiful stuffs laid on the counters surrounding the corner and took orders. Mr. G. K. Chesterton



came to visit the Exhibition. He looked round it but he stopped at, and entered, our gay enclosure. Miss Lindell hastily pulled out the strongest loom-stool she had. He sat down and asked a few questions of the tiny Nina who looked like a porcelain Dresden figure or a gaily dressed doll beside the giant author. When his questions had been answered he began to hold forth. His theme was the charm of wood. People gathered round outside the protecting counters to listen to him. It was like a delightful address. At last he shook his yellow hair, got up, thanked us and moved like a big friendly elephant through the crowds and out of the Hall. His visit to our stall was the peak of our successful venture.

When the weaving school started in Cambridge I had a little Studio maid named Maggie. She was about fourteen years old and wore her long thick, golden hair in Alice-in-Wonderland fashion down her back. We needed another demonstrator at the party I was going to give to open the School. Two days before the housewarming party I made Maggie sit at a loom which had been fitted with harness and warp and she was instructed how to weave. She took to it like a duck to water and on the never-to-be-forgotten afternoon she wove her material as fast, and with as good an edge, as many a professional. I went up to the room where she was demonstrating but found her not on her stool but in the middle of a circle of ladies who were examining her back and her position while standing for they



feared, as she showed such skill, that she must have woven for a long time and might have developed weaver's shoulders. After careful examination the ladies were satisfied. The child said nothing of her two days' introduction to the industry and I didn't say anything. The ladies of Cambridge are very careful ladies. The act of weaving is not difficult to those with a feeling for it but the management of the loom is very difficult.

As Maggie had now joined the Weaving School I took another little girl as Studio maid under Mrs. Belcher, my caretaker. Her name was Bessie. She was an odd child and said unexpected things. She loved polishing my brass tray. "Oh Miss," she exclaimed when she was at work on it, "if I weren't a Christian I would make this tray my god. I fair worship it now". Her parents were Nonconformists but she confessed to me that she sometimes went in to the Roman Catholic Church for service. "They do things so nattily there".

One day she brought me a bunch of lovely pansies. I asked her where she had got them. "I looked over a wall into a garden and I saw them. I climbed over the wall to pick them for you". "But that was stealing". (After a pause) "Yes". "Stealing is naughty". "God made me naughty". I tried to give her a lesson on Freewill. It was badly done but she seemed to take it in for she said - "I suppose we can choose whether we shall be good or bad because if we couldn't we should only be God's dolls".



Mrs Belcher lived in a cottage near. She was my caretaker and faithful friend. She was quick witted and had a ready tongue but always knew her limits. No affection shown her by the pupils, no nonsensical talk showered on her, ever made her too familiar. How I missed my caretaker when, during the last war, she left me to help her brother in an Inn and Restaurant at Kingston. "The bombs are certain to drop on you there", she was ~~assuredly~~ warned. "Well, if they do Death will be behind me" she said cheerfully. Oddly enough, considering how few bombs did drop, her restaurant was demolished by one. But she was safe and no one was hurt.

When the last war started in 1914 my work in the Studio and Weaving School did not decrease but increased. All my classes went on but with different pupils. My girl pupils went on the land or drove army lorries. I had shell-shock soldiers and more elderly people. In the "Pelican and Lilies" I could weave materials that cost no more and perhaps less than those in the shops owing to my large stock of threads. I worked hard and I began to be rather tired especially after my sister Florence gave up the care of Harston House to run a small holding of land, and I had to take her place as housekeeper. I then rapidly became overworked as well as under nourished for I shared in the universal semi-starvation. However I carried on my three occupations for some time.

One day Edith King, my second assistant, and I started out to take our weekly classes in a big girl's school at St.



Ives. After an early lunch we arrived there a little after two o'clock. Between the classes we had a dainty tea with the headmistress and, when our work was over, we started to catch the train to Cambridge. It was an exceptionally dark night in January but with no wind. We waited among other people for the train but it did not come. Then we were told that the would not come as "Zeppelins" were over this way". The people from the station drifted off - where to I wondered - and Edith and I were left alone. A porter made up the fire for us in the dismal waiting room. By quarter to ten we confessed to one another that we were very hungry. We decided that we must go and get something to eat at the railway Inn. By the time we had felt - smelt - our way across the station yard it was ten o'clock. We attempted to open the Inn door : it was slammed back in our faces. "We were too late" an angry, frightened woman told us. We still entered and I know what it is to beg for bread. I was at last successful but I have never seen rounds of bread cut from a loaf more speedily. A kettle was boiling on the fire. Cocoa was shunted into two cups and water poured on. We were told to swallow quickly the scalding liquid and a slice of dry bread for each of us was thrust into our hands. We paid, I am sure, largely and gratefully. The door was slammed behind us and we groped our way back to the station munching our bread as if it were ambrosia.

The porter told us cheerfully that he did not expect the



trains would be free from their jam for hours and hours. We occasionally walked up and down the platform. While we were at one end of it and we faced the heavy darkness in the direction of Ely we heard a bomb drop. How strange to think that for many a long year I was proud that I had heard a bomb drop from a Zeppelin. One bomb ! And the war lasted four years. That one was aimed, I was told, at Denver Sluice and it fell in a turnip field.

At about one o'clock the porter appeared again and said - "Come along with me. There's a train going to start for Cambridge". We gladly followed him and settled ourselves down in an inky black carriage. Just before the train started a man got in. We could see that he was very big by his silhouette against the night outside which seemed no longer, in comparison to our compartment, so densely dark. The train moved off, but when we had got some way it stopped midway between stations. "Zeppelins were returning" the guard told us from the lineway far below. It was wearisome waiting and after a time Edith and I began to talk frivolously. We told funny ~~stories~~ things that had happened to us. We spoke low and laughed low and surely we thought the man might perhaps be grateful to us but no, he was indignant. He gave us such a sermon on behaviour that I have never received before or since. He ordered us to be decently serious on serious occasions. We listened in silence to our scolding but an hour later - why, I can't remember



- we both tried to swallow a titter. He rose in wrath, opened the door letting in the cold January air, clambered down on the running board and made his way along it. I heard him struggling to enter the next carriage and, to my great relief, for I thought it a dangerous proceeding, he succeeded. Then we laughed outright. The train began to move and we reached Cambridge at half past five in the morning. We made our way to the top of Station Road and parted. I felt my way to the cottages near the Studio and threw stones at Mrs. Belcher's window. She put her head out. "Lor Miss Greene!" - She was down in a trice and had opened my Studio door. In no time I was in my tiny bedroom snug in bed after making her swear that she would call me in the morning early enough for me to take my morning class.

I was wakened by hearing a little noise in my Studio. Mrs. Belcher lighting the stove of course. I got up, dressed and opened the door to the Studio feeling quite ready for my breakfast. The Studio clock was at 12,30 and pupils filled the room! They were making still-life studies of groups of carrots, onions, a cabbage, a parsnip and one or two leeks. Mrs. Belcher had said to them on their arrival "You can leave off what you are doing under Miss Greene for I dont intend to wake her though I promised to. I think even I could teach you how these ought to look".

Through being overworkrd and underfed I caught whooping



cough from a little boy pupil. I had already realised that I could no longer do so much and had decided that I must give up the Weaving School and Studio, and stick to the management of Harston House and to painting. The very day that I succumbed to illness I had formally given my weaving school into the hands of a committee of ladies. I nearly went out of this world from the effect of that illness but recovered. A year afterwards I had shaken myself quite free of my teaching work. My Studio living rooms were rented as a dwelling house, while I was still working there, by a lady doctor. Mrs. Belcher had left Cambridge and a Mrs. Hines lived in her cottage and was my caretaker in her stead. For a few months the doctor went to Malta but came back to the Studio house for a week or two before she left finally at the end of the war. She gave me no address. She left a wooden case behind saying that she would let me know what we were to do with it. She never did let us know. It lived unnoticed in my kitchen and then Mrs. Hines put it in the coal house.

For some reason the Government seemed to suspect that arms might be hidden in houses. A paper of questions was issued. We answered that we had none at Harston House and I answered that I had none in the Studio House. I was in the Studio one day considering how I could make the place into two living flats, when Mrs. Hines said to me - "I dont like the look of that case of the doctor's". I had forgotten that it existed.



I enquired why she did not like it. She said that a knot had come out of the wooden case and she was sure she could "see a pistol through the hole". We dragged the box in and unscrewed it. About 24 very fine officers' revolvers were in it. My studio could easily have been turned into a fortress. I told my brother of my find who informed the War Office. At the expense of the Office they were repacked and sent to London. I could not inform the Government where the lady doctor was now living nor how the case had come into her possession. The mystery remains.

I carried on my plan of having my Studio divided into two flats. Later I had it divided into three. It is an odd sort of place and has fallen into three small homes fairly easily.

The day when I was on the look out for a tenant for the larger flat the Squire of a neighbouring village rang me up. He said a young lady friend of his wanted to take the rooms. She had seen them, had been to the agent and an agreement had been drawn up. The Squire, his wife and the young lady met me in my place the day before she was to take possession. She told me that she had not yet signed the agreement as she wanted to take it for a longer period than the three months written down in it. The Squire's wife said she ought only to take it for a three months period in order that she could see how she liked it and whether she could run it easily. The girl looked rebellious, especially when she was told that she was too young to



take it at all. She said she was 25 years old. She certainly did not look more. She promised that she would sign the agreement next day but begged to be allowed to come into the rooms that very afternoon. She gave her reasons and begged very prettily. It was said in the presence of people I knew. I was induced to say yes. How little I guessed what she was capable of. I heard later that the Squire's people had met her on a sea journey and really knew little about her.

She installed herself. She avoided signing the agreement. My simple furniture was spirited away into the background to give place to more elegant pieces. My plain, but pretty, cotton curtains were taken down and beautiful real silk ones took their place in the sitting room and bedroom. My grey carpet gave way to a crimson pile. My agent was at the Syren's feet although not a penny did she pay me. He could not believe that she would not sign or pay up so at last I put the matter into the hands of a lawyer. He told me that nothing could be done until she had signed the agreement, that I had made the mistake of letting her in before she had done so. At last - at the very last - she was forced to sign it. She was in debt to a furnishing and dressmaking firm for a hundred pounds. She escaped from Cambridge to London by an extraordinary clever trick, having defrauded me of six months rent. She was owing large sums to various firms for goods and the Squire for sums of money that he had lent her. All the beautiful



purchases she successfully carried off in spite of a watch being put on her.

I was so dissatisfied with many things I heard about her doings that I asked our vicar, Mr. Ward, to help me to feel that my little place was spiritually, as well as outwardly, clean. He told me there was a church service for cleansing a house from evil influence. I requested him to give it. He consented and came early one afternoon bringing his vestments. Members of my Harston household came in to share in the service and Mr. Ward asked that Betty, my youngest little maid, should be his server. When he was ready we gathered in the largest room. We knelt while he read a beautiful prayer. He had prepared in a bowl salt and water, the two emblems of cleansing. After the prayer I was asked to head the procession reading clearly the psalms of degrees. He followed me with his server who carried the bowl, the others walked behind. He went from room to room, sprinkling each room, and also the passages, with water from the bowl. I continued to read the psalms until we returned to our starting place when we again knelt in prayer. Then the ceremony was over. The Vicar laid aside his vestments and we sat down to tea which was a very merry one. I knew that I should not worry any more that my house had been occupied by an adventuress.

Some time after this the Squire had a letter from her saying that she was sailing to South Africa by such and such



a boat. He made enquiries but no such person was on the vessel. We heard afterwards that she had gone by an earlier one. The Squire had not lost quite as much money from her as I had done but he had lost in her a friend that he had trusted.

My flat was very soon relet. My Studio House, being now in the hands of three tenants, could no longer be the background of my life. My interest centred in Harston House and garden and in my painting and writing. But the place is still being improved for my own pleasure and for the good of my tenants.