

My School and Home at Bedford.

Even if I wished to write about the town of Bedford where I spent my early girlhood I could not do it for a clear memory of it has slipped from my mind. I did not care for it. I liked my school work and I loved my home life. A family of nine is a compact little society and the members are often independent of friends and feel complete in themselves. My sisters were not centred in their family life as I was. I made no lasting friendships even among my schoolfellows. Indeed the memory of their names and looks is very dim but it is clear of the teachers and of a very few people in the town.

My parents left Grantchester for Bedford for the sake of the good schools there. Florence was already at a "finishing" school at Brighton and Graham was now at Cheltenham College, but there were seven younger ones to be thought of in the way of education. Alice and I were sent to the Moravian School, then the best for girls in Bedford, Charley entered the famous Grammar School, Edward was sent to a Dame's School and Fred, Ben and Helen were still in the nursery.

Alice was nearly three years older than I was and so was placed in a higher class than I could enter. The arithmetic classes at the Moravian School were always held early

in the morning. As I was not supposed to be strong enough to start off so soon, I got off learning arithmetic to my great delight, but to my sorrow I often had to walk to school alone. Our house, East Lodge, was the last house in what was then called Potter Street and is now called Cardington Road. The Moravian School was in the further side of the town on the other bank of the river Ouse. It was a good walk from our house, and in parts a pretty one, but often one that I dreaded. Even with my sister with me I was immensely relieved when the long bridge over the river was safely passed. In those days it was the only bridge and Bedford, being in the middle of an agricultural district, had a big cattle market. The herds were driven roughly through the crowded streets and were wild before they got to the bridge and on that, to me, long and fearsome stretch, there were no shop refuges. Although I never see in these days such overdriven, frightened creatures my nerves are spoiled for cattle to this day.

Once over the bridge I knew I was safe. I turned from the main street and went some way by the side of the river along the embankment and there I opened my lesson books, often for the first time. All our lessons were pages of history, geography, science etc. to be learnt by heart. I had a good memory which, if it were not required to last too long (say much over a day) I could trust. In low tones I repeated my required pages as I walked along and I entered the school gates in complete confidence that I should be able to say them again and hardly

miss a word.

There were no examinations ahead of us to trouble our minds. Such things as public ones did not exist then and the little school examination at the end of each term was only a pleasant change of work. The work at the school certainly did not strain any brains that we might happen to possess but its atmosphere tended to develop character. Miss Ellis, the Headmistress, gave us an address at the beginning of every term. I remember well the first address that I heard and she is photographed on my mind as she gave it. She had a grave, plain face lined with former trouble rather than with age. The subject she chose was Fortitude and she drew a very dark picture of life as it was certain to be for us all. This was startling to me as I had acquired a very rosy outlook on life from my Grantchester friends. All the same, at once, and for the whole time I remained there, I accorded to Miss Ellis a feeling of deep respect and I gave her loyal obedience. The second Mistress was a power in the school. She was keen eyed, clever and satirical. I pitied my sister for being obliged to work in her class and wondered at and admired her bravery for she even declared that she enjoyed being in it. The third teacher had my affection and I gave her no fear yet I worked well under her.

Our tutor for Bible teaching and literature was the Moravian Minister. There was a belief in the school that he had to take the wife that fell to him by lot. That set my thoughts wondering. Did the lady that he really wanted to marry consent

to put her name down? If she did put it down because she loved him and if the lot happened to fall on another what a great disappointment for both it must have been! I was always hoping to see the minister's wife but I never did.

The minister was a stout man with white hair and a fresh complexion. He was very hot tempered. He once threw a book at a girl. That did really shock me. I was never afraid of him. Usually I was only observant in a detached way of the effect on himself of his extreme irritability. I watched the pink colour of his cheeks mounting to his forehead, from there over his head and much enjoyed seeing his silver hair shining against the vivid rose background of his scalp. My interest was unalloyed by any thought that his temper might be suddenly directed against me.

He gave out one day as the subject for our next essay "Flowers". I decided that it was not a suitable subject for prose so wrote about seven verses on Flowers and presented it without any self-consciousness among the other papers. The minister glanced through the papers and found my verses. He stammered out:- "What is this? Poetry eh? I don't correct verses!" His cheeks and forehead had turned pink. I felt a slightly puzzled scorn. Verse was as easy as prose and a great deal easier when you had to write on a subject like "Flowers". He did not correct my effort. It seemed to me silly to make a fuss and pass it over like that and so I determined in future

that that side of me should belong to my sister Alice for whose verses I had the heartiest admiration. I gradually lost my interest in the minister.

The drawing master I liked personally for he had such an old world courtesy of manner but I grew tired of copying his rather poor watercolours. They were nearly all of oak trees by roads or in woods or fields. I have avoided since then any subject with an oak tree in it. I should see it wrongly I know.

There were no sports for the girls. No hockey, no tennis and of course no cricket and there was no lawn for croquet. There was a giant stride and the whirling round on it must at least have exercised our arm sockets but it was only used by the youngsters. The older girls were very sedate and grown up. Also at fourteen years old our dresses were down to our ankles and very unsuitable for such games.

Alice was early at the head of the School. She left to devote herself to teaching the three youngest of the family and to study. Public examinations began, she entered for them and was successful. In those days for a girl to enter a public examination was hought very advanced.

I had become the head of the School by the time I was fifteen and I left before I was sixteen. Then I had French lessons and I worked assiduously at my painting and in the warm encouraging atmosphere of my home I know I improved. Alice

was the light of my life. She held umbrellas over me when I wanted to paint in the rain and would have held parasols over me in the sun if I had wished her to do it. I hardly remember any rebukes on my conduct from Father, Mother or teachers but I do remember some from her, but I have no memory of anything but fervent admiration from her for my art work. I do not think that admiration was bad for me.

I loved our house and garden. The house was a rambling late Georgian house built of stone. It was added to and enlarged by a former owner who, when he was made Mayor, built a stately room for his receptions. It had such a large window recess at one end that it could form a stage with exits and entrances into the garden. In the centre of the room from the ceiling hung a highly decorated gilded gas chandelier which barely lighted up the chilly expanse of the vast drawing room. A fire place, surrounded by a noble yellow marble mantelpiece, gave such scanty heat that even Father and Mother sitting nearest to it must have been in serious danger of being half frozen in winter.

Another addition was made to the house by a natural history-loving doctor who built museum rooms which formed our nurseries. He built them with/very thin walls. When I slept in the small museum room at the end I found to my delight one day that an ivy shoot was beginning to grow through the wall and I could watch day by day the leaf buds uncurling and becoming shapely and green. In winter my coverlets and those of the

four boys who slept in the next "gallery" would, in frosty weather, be whitened all over with a delicate rime. The day nursery was larger. It had a glass dome and was quite as chilly a "gallery" but it was light and there was in it what young people love - space.

The garden was full of trees. In the middle of the thickest group was a mound and hollowed out of the earth of the mound was an ice house built by the Mayor for keeping cool the wine for his banquets. It made a splendid place for our games. It was sometimes a lion's den or a witch's cavern or a brigands hiding place. When the light failed and it had to be passed in the dark it would be passed with speed.

We had half lived on the river at Grantchester and we half lived on the river at Bedford. The mill stream was at the end of ~~the~~ our garden. Down the whole side of it ran a little tributary of the river. Very often in winter most of our garden would be under water and the road in front flooded. To get into the town to shop or go to school we must have a boat or climb along the top of a low wall clinging to the railings. We found that great fun. Our old house would then get infested by rats. One evening Helen, roused from being buried in a book, was ordered to bed. She said good night, carried her book with her, opened the drawing room door, saw a rat in the hall, threw her book at it and killed the creature. It broke its back.

We were very free ^{and} in those days there seemed so much

leisure for everyone. There was no lack of servants. However busy the head of the house might be, the daughters did not work. They played. Florence was very lovely and a great favourite in society. Alice liked study, games and walks. Graham, when he was at home, was a tremendous walker. Florence walked with her dog every day. Walks ! Walks ! I was told I must walk to grow strong ! When I wanted to paint or read or be in the garden I was warned of the dreadful results of want of exercise. I had to go walking willy nilly. My mother, my beloved mother, herself too busy to walk, began to doubt about my walks and took me to one of the first of our lady doctors, Mrs. Garret Anderson. "Let her paint, read, write or sew. Never force her to walk. She is not built that way". Then I grew happier than I had been since the Grantchester days. I began to enjoy life. How I enjoyed acting in the plays we got up in winter. What glorious fun it was sailing and boating on the river in summer. I did not care much for tennis or croquet parties but the expeditions and picnics I cared for very much.

I was often down at dawn to see the sun rise over the miles of water meadows that stretched from our garden. Our garden was built high above the water in the vain hope of lifting it above the flooding level. From its banked up edge could be seen the Ouse bordered by willow trees winding into the blue or misty distance. I became almost foolishly devoted to willow trees. I remember sitting beneath one and finding

myself in floods of tears because I thought that perhaps in the future fate might force me to live in a place in which no willow trees grew.

That was soon to come and I not only survived the shock but was very happy. It was decided that I was to spend at least a year with my brother in London and go to an Art School.

My father died of a fever when he was on a visit to his sugar estates in St. Kitts. Cane sugar was being ousted by beet sugar and so we were in any case becoming poorer. Graham took on himself the care of the family and that at a time when we were all ready to take our final training and needed far more money than we had. It was a difficult task for him. It was necessary to leave Bedford as soon as possible and to live in London with him. I was the first to take flight by joining Graham in his lodgings in Highgate until the house in Bedford could be given up and one in London could be chosen. I was very sorry to leave my Mother, so many brothers and sisters and old East Lodge but gloriously happy to think I was to have a Studio training.