

Harston and its People.

I was a little girl of six years old when I first heard of Harston. We were all told by the Widnalls a story of what happened there one day and I found it a very exciting story indeed. Mr. and Mrs Widnall were driving along in their low chaise through Harston's broad street when a swarm of bees flew from side making for the other. Seeing Mrs. Widnall the queen bee decided that she liked her and settled on her shoulder. Quickly the swarm began to pile up round the head of poor Mrs. Widnall. Dapple was stopped. "For heaven's sake keep quiet !" Mr. Widnall cried to his wife. He need not have been afraid. She kept perfectly still and the swarm was taken safely from her shoulder by the owner. Then Dapple continued his leisurely amble through the long village.

Harston as it was when we first went there deserves a description so I will try to give a picture of it. The village was much smaller then than it is now. It was never a clustered village but a long one; now it is longer. One part of it consists of a wide straight road running North and South. After a slight bend to the West it makes an almost rectangular turn, narrows and runs East and West. The wide road has comfortable looking houses on each side of it nearly all set back behind gardens; the narrow road is closely bordered by old cottages

with gardens at the back or sides. An archeologist had a theory that this was a bit of the prehistoric way from the western counties to the flint mines of Suffolk. Only when London became important did the road North and South develop.

Close to the river and hardly seen from the road lie the Church, the Mill and the Manor House. The Church is a fine building giving almost a grand effect against its background of old chestnut trees. It can only be seen well from the Vicarage garden. From the road it can easily be missed for it lies quite off behind the rectangular bend. Many motorists and even pedestrians pass through the village without catching sight of the Church. The Mill also is difficult to find for it has a road to itself. The name of our river is the Rhee. It joins a mile or two below Harston a smaller river - the Ribb. After the rivers meet they lose their names and become the Granta which also loses its name at Cambridge and becomes the Cam.

The Rhee, above the mill at Harston and just below it, is very pretty. In both cases it runs by the miller's garden. When that is passed it suddenly becomes a gloomy and romantic stream. It is bordered by high chestnut trees. It sends inlets and little cuts round islands with groups of trees on them - trees so high and thick that the water is shaded almost to blackness. In the middle of the islands are sad, lost-looking bits of flower and kitchen gardens quite overpowered by

the huge growth above them. Near the river, separated from it by a bank on which are chestnut trees, lie two old fish ponds. These are at the bottom of a steep sloping lawn. At the top stands the Manor House, in the old days almost buried by yews cut into fantastic shapes. Now those which hid the house are cleared, but quite enough of the strangely shaped trees remain to give the grounds a distinct and charming character.

After the solemn Manor garden is passed the Rhee flows by the Vicarage garden where it takes on a very ordinary look. It is straight. The right bank is bordered by the Vicar's gooseberry bushes and cabbages. It then flows under a bridge and meanders dreamily and slowly, with many a hair-pin bend and almost hidden by pollard willows, towards its brother river and from there to Cambridge.

The vicarage is fairly new and is an uninteresting building. Harston House, our home, is a William and Mary house. I should say that the face of it is of William and Mary's time but the body of it is 1480. It was refaced in the seventeenth century and has been altered many times but the plan of it, the chimneys, some of the windows and certain details belong to a pre-Elizabethan period. It stands near the meeting of three important roads - the road to Cambridge, the road to North London and the road to Huntingdon. Opposite the garden is a Green on which is a fountain and a group of fine pine

trees. There is another Green facing our woodland, where the road branches off leading to the village station and from thence through Essex to London. Harston House garden is large and is as cheerful as that of the Manor House is shadowed.

Baggot Hall, on the way to the station is an early Victorian house. It is the home of the Hays family. There is another large house in the village belonging to the Hurrell family but it is comparatively modern. The miller's house is also modern. Some years ago a long row of villa-like houses was built stretching out towards Cambridge, but at the back of these houses are good sized holdings and most of the dwellers work their own land.

When we first came to Harston no one went into Cambridge daily. I was the first to do it. If the villagers wanted to shop they went by train on Saturdays when fares were cheap. There was no County School in Cambridge to gather scholars from the district round. The children of the village school were very different to what they are now, not only in mind and manners but in appearance. From the babies upwards they are better looking now than they were. The little girls wore drab coloured frocks and were often unkempt and unwashed. Miss Vernon, an old friend who often stayed with us, used to give a penny to every little girl she met who was clean and wore a bright coloured frock. It seemed to have a good effect.

We came to Harston in the winter. I found in January that there were about six clumps of snowdrops beginning to

come through in the woodland by the road. Now these clumps can be counted by thousands. I, straight from London and Paris, watched those six clumps with love and interest. Boys watched them too and when they were in bloom they got over the ditch railing and began to steal them. One day I happened to be about and by a ruse captured them and kept their caps. Their mothers had to fetch those caps from me. I had no more trouble after that. But in these days our roadside might be planted with flowers and no boy would pick them.

The Manor House was in the hands of an old lady and her bachelor son. The old lady - Mrs. Rowley - wore soft silk dresses and pretty lace caps. When I was one of her guests at a tea party I always enjoyed myself. She welcomed us and talked to us in a shy, soft, hesitating manner. The table would be set with a beautiful old service of china. It had a large family slop basin which was brought in half full of warm water. Mrs. Rowley would dip the foot of each cup into the water with ceremonious care to prevent it from slipping on the saucer when handed to the guest. Once I was alone with her for tea and she told me of the time when there was no bridge over the river. The walkers had to go round by the Mill and the traffic crossed the stream at the ford below the Mill. One stormy morning after a rainy night the river rose and swamped the baker's cart that was bringing bread to Harston and all the loaves went floating down the swollen stream. After that, she implied, the bridge was built.

When tea was over, with the permission of my hostess, I would leave the guests and wander through the cut yews to the river. I would look at the gaunt mass of the mill standing silhouetted against the afternoon sunshine. It looked so dark that it made the gleam and sparkle of the mill stream seem brighter still. I would pause near the fish ponds to study the reflections in it of the church tower and the yew trees all broken by the leaves and the flowers of the white water lilies. When I went home I always felt that I had had a very nice tea party.

A very different tea would I have at the Mill House. Mr. and Mrs. Smith had a family of seven. It was a friendly crowd. Mrs. Smith took a keen interest in all the activities of the village. How she got time with all her young people I do not know. She once told me that everyone of the seven at a certain age had fallen into the river and risked drowning, but, as I could see, each one of the seven had escaped it. The four eldest in after days became our helpers in village theatricals. One of the girls was a very good actress. Mr. and Mrs. Hays from Baggot Hall had a large family with some talent for acting. Miss Hurrell was very good at it, a girl from the Old Manor house was excellent and a young farmer also. Helen when she was at home was a good actress and producer of plays and pageants and wrote plays too. I was the lady of the robes and did scenery painting and much later I wrote some plays.

This was long before there were official village drama societies. We had formed on unofficially, never dreaming of the coming time when we should be taught our faults and placed in order with other village players by some grand unknown critic. The peak of our dramatic efforts culminated a few years after the last war when two pastoral plays and three play-pageants that I wrote brought in enough funds to give valuable help to the building of our Village Hall. It was opened in 1923. After that most of the members of our talented troupe scattered.

All my recollections of early days in Harston are coloured by our friendship with the Vicar, Mr. (afterwards Canon) Baldwin, his wife and their daughter Dorothy. The Vicar was little more than forty five years old when we began to live at Harston and he looked seventy five. When he was seventy five he looked no older. Now that he is over ninety he looks much the same, but bent. He has always reminded me of Father Time in Father Time's more benign moods but he could occasionally resemble him when Time is shown ready to shake his scythe in anger. He was a good preacher and told good stories in his sermons and told them in such a dramatic way that we sat in our pews thrilled. He read the lessons with just the right proportion of simplicity, reverence and drama so that to hear them would alone have drawn me to church. It would indeed have been a disappointment to miss the Song of Deborah or not to hear the musical instruments sound in his voice when he read the chapter beginning "Nebuchadnezzar, the King, made an image

of gold".

He was a great reciter of scenes from Shakespeare in the Henry Irving style. Gramophone records were taken of his rendering of some of them. When he recited to us he insisted that the room should be blacked out - "Thouroughly blacked out". We took great trouble to darken our Village Hall when he offered to recite to our Women's Institute. We had'nt the means of doing it so easily then as we have now in these war days. We also had to remind every one not to cough or sneeze. If any one made the slightest noise he would stop reciting. He was going to give us the Lady Macbeth scene, the murder of Julius Caesar and the end of Desdemona. Our W.I. secretary sat near me. She said "Please hold my hand. He makes me feel as if I really saw these murders and being in the dark they frighten me and I might scream or run away. I shall enjoy them even if I am frightened if I hold my torch tight in one hand and if you will hold the other ". She got through the recitation in that way without screaming or running away !

We always went in to the Vicarage garden after church in the summer to hear Mrs. Baldwin's frank criticism of her husband's sermon and to see her latest interesting plant that had flowered. "Really, Edward? I do wish you would not tell that story in your sermon. It may be an exciting one but I dont see that it does any one any good. Now Mary and Helen you can leave Mrs. Greene to talk to the Canon. Come and see my Ricardias". (She called all her flowers by their Latin names).



The Canon would smile benignantly at his outspoken wife before she swept us off to her arum lilies. I am sure that that story would be told again - in another church - or even again in ours. He sometimes told stories twice to us and we liked to hear them again.

Mrs. Baldwin was a treasure of a clergyman's wife. She was a wholesome terror to young evildoers and a perfect Sunday School teacher for she taught with absolute assurance and in a manner that children can understand. She was as self confident as any woman has ever been. She was very small but she dominated the village just as a bantam cock can dominate a farm yard. She was proud of her family - the Haigs - . She dressed less well than a labourer's wife of the present day and would have donned much the same clothes if she were to interview royalty although she had a profound respect for it. She was amongst the first people to take to a fountain pen and in those days most fountain pens leaked and she wore hers attached to the front of her dress and in a very frail and inadequate case. The result was that many of her dresses were spattered over with ink. She was a great gardener and her work in the garden no doubt induced her to wear the sort of dresses she chose to wear. Some days she was so busy among her flowers that she forgot her housekeeping. Once when it was nearly supper time the maid ran out to her. "What are we to eat, Ma'am? You have given no orders!" Mrs. Baldwin, keeping her trowel poised, turned round for a moment. "Boil some

eggs ! Boil some eggs !" she commanded quickly and went on with her planting.

She was interested in all natural objects. She joined, and got Helen and me to join, a Cambridge Nature Society. The members included many undergraduates. Two of them, brothers - named Hort - were keenly interested in it. Their parents lived in Cambridge. Every now and then the Selbourne Society lectures were given and Mrs. Hort often lent her large drawing room for the purpose. On one of these lecture afternoons it was pouring with rain. Helen was with me in Cambridge and we walked together to Mrs. Hort's door and met Mrs. Baldwin on the door step. She had bicycled from Harston and her old ulster was evidently soaking wet. The maid helped us off with our cloaks but Mrs. Baldwin would not take off her ulster. We two took our places in the drawing room but she was detained by our hostess at the door and begged again and again that she would take off her dripping garment. "If you dont mind I am sure I dont" at last Mrs. Baldwin said cheerfully, taking it off. Very likely she gave her hostess a shock for she stood, sat and had tea at the side table, in a flounced and yoked, tartan petticoat tied with a tape in a little bow behind. She was quite undisturbed and enjoyed her talks to the members with all her usual sharpness and ease. It was a triumph of self confidence and it was responded to by the Members.

She showed her power of getting her own way on another

Nature meeting occasion. All the members of the Society were to gather in the Hort's College rooms, go to the river at the lower Mill, take boats there and have a picnic at Byron's Grove. On that day the morning was fine but at midday it began to pour steadily. When my work was over I did not dream of doing anything but going to the station as quickly as I could to catch the afternoon train home. I was sitting in the railway carriage in a train which was under no sheltering station roof. I was looking at the rain streaming down the window when I saw Helen under a dripping umbrella flying by gazing distractedly in at my compartment hoping to see me. She saw me and called wildly "Come out !" I scrambled out just in time before the train started. "Mrs. Baldwin is in Mr~~X~~, Hort's rooms and says we are to start for our picnic!" I gasped. "She declares it will be fine later ". I glanced at the sky and again gasped. We hurried to the rooms. I found gathered there a few sullen, silent undergraduates and a confident Mrs. Baldwin. "Really, Mary, you might have come straight here. At any rate now we can start". We started, we three ladies and three young men. The other members had wisely remained at home. I wondered how the victorious Mrs. Baldwin had managed to chain those angry undergraduates to her chariot wheels. We got into our boat and held up umbrellas. The two rowers took off their coats and we put them under our seats to keep them dry. The one at the steering ropes kept his coat on. He was soon as wet through as those who had taken them off. He said nothing. They said

nothing. The conversation came from our leader. She told us the glass was going up. That information was received in gloomy silence. We had just passed through the dripping leaning trees of Paradise when it was discovered that the boat was getting full of water and that the coats under the seats were sopping. It was too much. There was a shout of laughter. As we laughed the sun came suddenly out of the black cloud and turned the raindrops into diamonds. We went on in high spirits and had one of the gayest picnics I have ever had. Yet we sat on grass grey with rain and the trees of the Grove shed their heavy load of moisture on us in little thuds. Mrs. Baldwin was radiant and did not forget to say often "I told you so!" I don't think we studied Nature in the way we had meant to do for we just wandered about along the river and by the pool rejoicing in the fact that nothing mattered, - we couldn't get wetter. Oddly enough we none of us caught colds.

Dorothy Baldwin is a worthy daughter of the Canon and his wife. As sharp as a needle and a companion who seems to irridate life. She married the Shakespearian expert, Professor John Dover Wilson of Edinburgh University.

My mother was great friends with Mrs. Baldwin. She occasionally had to scold her for the unconscionable means she took to get her wishes carried out but any rebukes were taken in good part. One afternoon I went to my Inn to drive back in the little pony chaise. I found the chaise filled up completely with empty butter tubs so that only by long and careful arrange-

ment could I get in myself and when seated, see the pony's head. That morning I had promised Mrs. Baldwin to bring back "a small parcel". Another morning Helen and I were going by train to Cambridge and had incautiously promised her to carry to the Town Hall "a little" produce for the church bazaar. It meant doint the ten minutes walk to the station with an extra load but we thought that we could manage it. In the end for other reasons we decided to take the chaise. The vicarage gardener arrived with an enormous Aylesbury duck with all its feathers on, two bundles of flower roots, (very heavy), a large bunch of f lowers and a basket of vegetables. Helen had to make three journeys up the long Town Hall stairs to deposit the produce. Next day Mrs. Baldwin received a very hard scolding from my mother but after all she had got done what she wanted to have done.

Our family at Harston, once consisting of Mother with nine circling round her, had dwindled down to Mother with me only as her companion. Its members had become quickly scattered to different parts of the world. Florence had married and gone to British Columbia, Graham was working during the week at the Admiralty although often home for week-ends. Alice was a teacher at a school in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, Charles was a master at Berkhamsted School, Edward went to Brazil and worked in the office of a Merchant Company, Fred had died, Ben was in Canada, Helen went to South Africa and on her return

became a Student at Madame Osterberg's College for physical training. Harston House was now the beloved home to which those far away could return at long intervals and where the rest could gather in holiday time. My mother was not very strong latterly. She rarely left the house and garden but the village people, rich and poor gathered round her. She had a warm and lively interest in them all. We began to be very anxious about her health. Edward and Eva, his wife, came from Brazil to visit us. They realised more than we could, who saw her more often, how frail Mother had become. I happened to be alone with her one day sitting by her side while she sewed and we talked about a shopping day in London that Eva and I had just had. She was giving me some advice on shopping (advice I have always followed since) when she laid down her needle and died. What a mother she had been to us all. Loving, practical, balanced and hopeful.

Florence, who had lately become a widow, now took the headship of Harston House to work it for Graham. No sister can quite take a mother's place and all the interest of my life began to centre round my Studio work in Cambridge. Harston needed me no longer though I lived there. I had made no attempt to get work in Cambridge but Cambridge had called me to it and I love the place.

I often drove into my work in the old chaise bought for my mother. It was very low, only about nine inches from the ground. The fat pony, Peggy, was very slow. One morning

I was wearing a driving cape lined with scarlet silk. As, it was a warm June morning I threw th cape back over my shoulders. I had no whip as Peggy went no faster for being whipped. She ambled along until we neared the road to Hauxton which enters Cambridge road at right angles. The roads are wide and were then bordered by high hedges. I could not see what was happening along the Hauxton road. Coming to meet me from Cambridge was a young farmer in a market cart. He was driving a very strong horse. He also did not know what was happeneing along the Hauxton road. What was happening was a mad cow which was rushing up it. I suppose that she did not like my scarlet cape for, the moment I came into view, down went her head and she made an ugly rush at me. I was immediately in a sort of bullfight without the toreador's weapons. I had just time to think - I shall soon be in heaven (I hope) or lying in a hospital - when crash - the big horse had come between me and the cow. The cow's horns were in the horse's side and her reared. His hoofs were well over my head. I saw the man pulling his reins with all his strength but I could not believe that he could save me. I remember thinking that I would rather be killed by a horse than a cow. The farmer, however, succeeded in pulling the wounded creature away from me but his hoofs came down on my wheel and smashed five or six spokes. The horse pushed my chaise bodily nearer the edge of the road and left blood and hair along the splash board. Then Peggy ran away. She actually

could sometimes. While guiding her I managed to look round and saw that the farmer was attending to his horse and the cow was dancing feebly about in the road. I never was able afterwards to discover anything about farmer, horse or cow. I often wondered what had upset the cow's nerves so thoroughly. I was trundled very slowly into Cambridge, Peggy making up for her quick run. When I reached the Little Rose Inn the condition of the chaise roused great interest. "Lor Miss"! the ostler said, "Whatever have you been through?"

I believe that I can say that I hold one record against all England. By telling my story I may perhaps test whether I hold or not. Has any young woman ever had an offer of marriage from a nice but unknown man, in less than nine minutes? I have had one and it happened in this way. Usually, when I went by train, I would walk slowly through the avenue to Hars-ton station. A sweep of meadows was on one side of the road stretching to the Gogmagogs and a narrow piece of woodland was on the other. It was much too pretty a road to be often hurried through but one day I hurried through it because I thought I was going to miss my train. The station master, when it came in, held it up and kept the nearest carriage door open for me. He was a cross old thing but I liked him. "You behave as if you thought the whole train belonged to you" he said but he helped me up kindly from the very low platform. I sank into my seat exhausted. Sitting in the opposite corner was a man who looked about thirty years old and was dressed



in a semi merchant service uniform. The conversation between us was as follows :-

" You nearly missed this train."

"Yes".

"I nearly missed it too. I wanted to be in Cambridge last night but at Hitchin a man ran along the platform calling out "Cambridge". It was dark and I jumped out thinking that I had arrived and let the train go off. I went to an Inn and they forgot to wake me this morning and I had to run for it".

"How annoying".

" I have only three weeks in England. I am on a holiday. I am a ship's husband."

"Whatever is that?"

"I get in stores for the ships. I live in Australia. Australia is a grand country."

"I am sure it is".

(He looked with interest at the books I was carrying).

"They think a great deal about education over there".

"Have you always lived in Australia ?"

"I was born there and I am proud of it. It is a good land to live in. Everybody finds it so and every woman, whether she is rich or poor, has a good time. There are so many tea parties, picnics and dances."

"How nice".

"Would you like to go there ?"

"Very much".

"Why not go ? "

" I could'nt get free from my work and besides I could'nt go alone".

"You need'nt".

"What do you mean ?"

"Will you come back to Australia with me as my wife ?"

(Considerably startled) "I could not do that."

"Why not ?"

(Still confused) "My people would'nt like it."

■ "Oh !" (drawing himself up) "If it comes to that I am quite willing to run away with you."

(I thought :- Are all Australian men as quick in making up their minds as this one ? I said :-)

"I cannot marry you and I cannot run away with you."

( We were now nearly in Cambridge station).

"Are you quite sure ?"

"Quite sure."

(He stood at the door near me).

"Must I open this door ?"

"Yes."

He jumped down and helped me out.

I said good-bye and he watched me out of the station rather sadly. I never saw him again. I hoped that he would be able to get an English wife but I felt that three weeks was a very short time in which to secure one.

What am I like ? What was I like ? I am small, about five feet two inches high. I have blue-grey eyes and I had dark brown hair. I have always liked to wear very old clothes when painting or gardening and very good ones at functions but even though thoroughly well dressed I can never look smart. I can remember nothing myself that would make anyone believe that I hold such a record. I wonder still if I have a rival.