Weeding the Flower-Patch

by

Flora Klickmann

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London and Redhill

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WEEDING THE FLOWER-PATCH

By the same Author:

THE FLOWER-PATCH AMONG THE HILLS
FLOWER-PATCH NEIGHBOURS
THE TRAIL OF THE RAGGED ROBIN
BETWEEN THE LARCH-WOODS AND THE WEIR

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Dedicated to
my Step-daughters
Lily Julian, Rhoda Henderson-Smith, Daisy Ingram,
who have brought me many flowers
but never a weed

All the characters in this book are purely imaginary, and have no relation whatsoever to any living person.

The passage from *The Outermost House* on the opposite page is quoted by permission of Messrs. Selwyn & Blount.

The world to-day is sick to its thin blood for lack of elemental things, for fire before the hands, for water welling from the earth, for air, for the dear earth itself underfoot.

HENRY BESTON in
The Outermost House

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Weeding the Flower-Patch

Preface

For the benefit of anyone who, after years of war and post-war dieting, may still have enough strength left to open this book, I would explain that it has been written in the confused, unquiet time following the Second World War (or whatever name you prefer to give it; we won't argue about that). At any rate I was suffering from the painful discovery that Peace, whatever else it might be, was not entirely an earthly Paradise!

F.K.

One
IT NEEDED IT!

"What amazes me," said Miss Bachelor, in the clear incisive tones of one who knows everything and never makes a mistake—"Yes, what positively amazes me, is why you ever let it get into this state!"

Miss Bachelor is lecturer on Literature at a Woman's College in a crowded town in the Midlands. She occasionally remembers my existence, and with the deepest affection, when she decides on an inexpensive holiday—though she draws a good salary. Indeed so much does she love me and long to see me at such times, that she refuses to take *No* for an answer. Merely arrives! convinced that the honour she confers by arriving ensures a warm welcome.

Having settled herself in, she regards the place as she would any boarding-house. I disappear from the centre of the picture.

We were surveying the luxuriantly healthy crop of weeds which were romping all over the flower beds and paths, trying to swamp the herb garden and climb the bean poles. I tried to explain, apologetically, that by the time the only man left me had seen to the enlarged area given over to food crops; attended to the cattle; got in the hay; cut down timber for fuel; kept the water-courses clear; trimmed over-reaching hedges according to law; and in addition performed such light domestic chores as retrieving a blown-away chimney-pot, disposing of the kittens——

She interrupted me: "Now I'll tell you exactly what you should do." (Miss Bachelor can always tell others what *they* should do) "First of all, you should ——"

"No, don't tell me! Just do it!... Do what? Why, anything! I don't mind what. Only lend a hand. It would be a boon to me if you would!"

She looked surprised, being accustomed to attentive silence when she voices words of wisdom; but said: "Oh, very well, I'll start at once, and soon make a clearance."

Before we had got out the tools, however, it began to rain. This gave her an afternoon's leisure to point out to me the weak spots—large splashes, in fact—in my household arrangements.

Pictures, it appeared, were entirely wrong. No one had them on their walls

nowadays.

Window curtains were quite out-of-date. No one had used any, much less white sprigged muslin, for years.

The ancient Welsh dresser in the living-room was just another dust-trap, it seemed. No one displayed china in the open, now.

I did defend myself here, remarking that I knew several women who only wished the enemy had left them any china to display. And I felt inclined to ask: who was No one?

But why waste breath!

Miss Bachelor did approve of one item, the big easy chair. There was only one in the room, the others having been taken upstairs to the bedrooms of the two invalid evacuees still with me, London friends who had lost their homes in the raids.

Settled in it comfortably, Miss Bachelor expatiated on the virtues of the chair—as though I didn't know them already! The curve in the high back exactly fitted one's vertebræ; the seat was precisely the desirable height, putting no strain on the leg-muscles; the slight slope backwards in the seat gave just the feeling of reclination that one's spine needed.

I sat and drank in the information gratefully, not to say enviously; for I was perched on one of the severely upright dining-room chairs, quite suitable for meals, when one has the table for balance, but not calculated to provide that feeling of reclination of which my spine is perennially in need.

Those upright chairs also came in for some condemnation. No one, it transpired, could use chairs of that design with an all-over dinner cloth, as I did. Since I couldn't see why not, I said so; and asked if we were supposed to stand on our toes for our meals? I added that the chairs were by a famous maker.

What had that to do with it? she asked. Why did I cling to the Victorian habit of ticketing everything with a label? Did Shakespeare bother about the date or maker of his furniture?

Realizing that she had now got well into her stride on the lecture-platform, I merely queried, "Who was the famous writer who mentioned his second-best bedstead in his will?"—and sought refuge in the kitchen.

Next day she set out airily to tackle the weeds. I would have asked the gardener to put her in the way of things; but he was out, scouring the hillside for a missing calf—a giddy little heifer who had been bawling at the top of her voice, "O, who will o'er the downs so free" the greater part of the previous day, to the indignation of well-conducted matrons in the adjoining field, who shook their horns disgustedly, and couldn't think what girls were coming to these days.

As no one apparently had offered to "o'er the downs" with her, she had

jumped the wall, gone off on her own at daybreak, and gate-crashed into a dairy farm.

Thus Miss Bachelor was left to wrestle alone with an expanse of weeds that would have daunted a less valiant heart. I had enough to attend to indoors.

She turned up for the mid-day meal, somewhat the worse for wear, but proud of her achievements.

"I've cleared several yards of that long bed; you can see it from the window."

I glanced out, as gratitude demanded, at the plot indicated, thanking her with emphasis—and took the shepherd's pie out of the oven.

I was desperately tired, having been up part of the night with Miss Smith, one of my invalid evacuees. I had no help in the house, having lost an excellent daily woman. She, being over sixty, and now eligible with her husband for the Old Age Pension, could only get it if she retired, or was engaged in her household duties; unless her job was only occasional. This was the law as stated on the paper she brought to show me.

Since then, my hands had been more than full, which was one reason why I had not desired Miss Bachelor's proposed visit.

Though not best pleased to see her when she arrived, I did wonder, hopefully, whether she might prove to be the Heaven-sent helper for whom I had been longing.

While she was discoursing on her infallible methods for keeping a garden free from weeds, an idea came to me.

"You won't mind washing-up after dinner, will you? I'm expecting the doctor to see Miss Smith at half-past two. And I also want him to look at Mrs. Brown's knee. It seems to me to be something more than rheumatism."

Miss Bachelor showed no interest in Miss Smith or Mrs. Brown; nor indeed in the washing-up! But any visitor who arrives after being told there is sickness in the house, and who presents nothing more than a scrap of butter (well flattened on the journey) and a screw of tea, having forgotten her sugar and ration-book, is surely entitled to do something to ease the domestic tension.

I didn't wait for her to agree to my suggestion, but hurried on with details of the necessary aids, and the whereabouts of a clean overall; then went upstairs to get my patients ready for medical inspection.

The doctor diagnosed Miss Smith's trouble as colonic disturbance, and assured her that he saw no sign of cancer, which she had suspected, and he approved the simple old-world remedy, beloved of our great-grandmothers, to which I had resorted when rendering First Aid.

He did not mention diet. What doctor ever does in these distressful days? He knows only too well what the patient can't get to eat, since he himself is equally rationed. But I made a mental note to omit pears from her bill of fare in future.

It was a gladsome sight, when I returned to the kitchen, to see washed-up crockery being stacked on the kitchen table, though I own Miss Bachelor exhibited no housewifely enthusiasm; on the contrary, gloom seemed to envelop her.

"I don't think much of your tea-towels," was her answer to the shower of blessings I was pouring upon her; "they're dropping to bits."

"Yes, I'm afraid they are. My late helper said to me: 'I don't know if you've noticed, ma'am, your tea-towels are rather ripe.' "

But Miss Bachelor was not in a conversational mood—for once too worn out to speak.

Pressing her to take a complete rest in the easy chair, I added all the appreciative remarks I could think up, and doubtless should have remembered still more, had not the gardener appeared at the door. He didn't seem more cheerful than Miss Bachelor; but of late he had worn the bereaved look of a man who heartily disapproves of P.A.Y.E., and the dimensions of his meat ration.

"Can I speak to you a moment, please, ma'am?" This formula, spoken in subdued tones, invariably portends some catastrophe which must be broken to me cautiously.

I sensed the worst, realizing that he must have found the heifer with three legs broken, and had been obliged to end her sufferings. But when I joined him out of doors, to hear details of the tragedy, I saw the hussy sitting in the home paddock with two wide-eyed young innocents, who were probably listening to her glowing description of the gay company and the luscious feed she had found on another farm—so different from ours! She probably did not mention that she was forcibly ejected at milking-time by an unsympathetic cow-man; and after kicking up her heels on highway and by-way, was finally chivvied home in disgrace by her lawful guardian.

Having commiserated with the man on the dance she had led him, I was asked if I would kindly look at the bonfire heap, and say if it was as I wished. Judging by his martyr-like tones, I was quite sure it wasn't! But I was a trifle mystified.

Going with him to the secluded corner where the rubbish is dumped, to my surprise I saw a piled-up assortment of garden plants, roots and all—forget-me-nots, aubrietia, white violets, foxgloves, sweet williams and similar items. But what pained me more than all was a scattering of muddy-looking onions—my cherished hyacinth bulbs!

“The lady said she meant to clear all the weeds from the bed,” said the gardener, fishing out my best scatters from among the clumps. “But so far’s I can see, she’s only chucking away the flower roots. Have you seen the plot she’s done?”

Wearily, I went to inspect. Sure enough she had left the roots of all the tough old veterans like docks, evening primrose, self-sown plums, brambles and hemp agrimony, cutting them off at ground level. But shallow-rooted plants, if they had no bloom on them to distinguish them from unwanted weeds, she had hawked up with right good will, and churned up the soil for anything else moveable—like the bulbs.

It was my own fault. I should have remembered that her own garden—about the size of a bolster-case—could not have taught her much about growing things, unless actually in flower.

We spent a little time, considering how best to check further deprivations.

“I’ll work with her,” I said, “if I can manage it.”

I saw he didn’t hope much from that!

“How would it be if the lady helped me gather the fruit? It’s two people’s work if we are to save much.”

“That’s an excellent thought. I’ll suggest it to her.”

After we had discussed the pros and cons of storage I went back and entered by the scullery door, noting thankfully that the saucepans were in an orderly row on their shelf. At least I was relieved of that task. It was not till later that I found they were unwashed! While looking in the larder for anything possible for supper, I heard sounds in the kitchen, like the spluttering of a boiling kettle. I went in to take it off the fire, surprised to find Miss Bachelor’s eyes and nose submerged in a handkerchief, from which proceeded sniffs and sobs. She tried to control herself, when she saw me.

Naturally, I was very concerned, and hoped nothing was seriously the matter?

In disjointed sentences, punctuated with gulps and sniffs, she told me that the post-office had just phoned through a telegram for her.

(Then it’s her mother, I thought. She’ll have to go back at once to see to the funeral.)

It turned out to be an aunt, however; one who had always been a second mother to her. Lying at death’s door—no one to do a thing—over ninety—great sufferer—Westmorland; well, really Cumberland, she believed—on the borders—no, not likely I had ever passed the house—very remote, off main road—longing to see her—hardly able to speak—doctor—at most forty-eight hours—first train in the morning—very wealthy—magnificent place—alone—only relative—rolling in money—titled grandfather—always devoted to her.

After more sobbing on this theme, I offered to ring up the station master

and find out about trains. But she had already done so, while I was in the garden. He was most obliging, and had looked up the connections for her. Now she would go and pack—unless she could do anything for me? It was so unfortunate, just when she was hoping to be some little help to me—her sole reason for coming (how I had misjudged her!) And now—to leave me in the lurch like this: but, she couldn't refuse to go to her aunt, could she?

We were up betimes next morning. I felt remarkably light-hearted, but suppressed it of course, in view of our not knowing—as she said—whether she would find the old lady alive when she got there.

I begged her to let me know how she found her aunt. She said she would, and there was no need for her to take the remains of her two ounces of tea with her; the butter would do for her sandwiches.

She had quite recovered her customary self-assurance—and I besought her most cordially to return and finish out her visit to me, if circumstances allowed.

It is painful to reflect on the warm invitation to "come again soon", that one sometimes extends to parting guests in sheer thankfulness for their going!

Two
STARTING WORK

A few days later my friend Ursula rang up to ask how things were going my end.

I gave her the headlines.

"You can't possibly go on like this," she exclaimed. "What will happen to the afflicted upstairs if you get ill?"

"I don't intend to get ill."

"But you probably will, all the same. I've met your good intentions before, and know how often they've led you astray. Hold on a minute."

She left the phone to speak to her sister, then returned with the news: "We'll both arrive to-morrow. We're free now, as our Dutch friends left us last week. We'll reach you by the last train. Virginia will take charge of Miss Smith's internals and Mrs. Brown's knees; and I'll boss the kitchen. You will then be free to entertain the next scrounger who plants herself on you."

This was a great relief to me. I had been anxiously wondering if I really could hold out, with no assistance anywhere in sight. The elderly among the former domestic workers were planning to get the rest which they certainly deserved; the middle-aged were beset with claims and worries in their own homes; the young were looking in other directions. The outlook had been rather depressing.

It was fortunate for me that my war-time evacuees were all personal friends, and though it meant strenuous work at times, I was spared the undesirable etceteras which accompanied so many of the poor children from town slums, making night as well as day hideous for many a distracted housewife. And no Keating's to be had!

Sometimes I had a helper in the kitchen; sometimes none. Nearby munition and other factories needed all the workers the district could supply. But I am certain it is better to be over-worked, rather than a person of leisure, during war years such as we have known; it allows one no time to sympathize with oneself.

I was not able to take more than two, or at most three, invalids at a time; but these provided a sufficiency of exercise, and trained me to sleep with one

eye open.

Knowing that when the sirens wailed, the plaster casing must instantly be adjusted on a broken leg that was not yet quite reliable; or that a patient who could not get up must be fortified with tea and talk—such-like duties made me forget to dissolve into a quaking blanc-mange, as I might otherwise have done when the noise started.

One invalid said: “Directly those sirens sound, my stomach turns completely inside out!” Fortunately for me, she was speaking figuratively, not literally. But I admit my own anatomy also played queer tricks at the wrong time.

One night, when I felt panic threatening, I said firmly to myself: “Are you a coward, or are you not? Answer me that!” And then I laughed (and was cured) as I suddenly remembered a very good lady whose reply to every suggestion with which she disagreed—and she disagreed with most!—was this: “I only ask: Is it Christian? or is it not Christian? Answer me that!”

Very difficult sometimes to answer!

The arrival of Virginia and Ursula was a great relief to me. It is not always the continuous routine that gets on one’s nerves, so much as the never-ceasing interruptions when one is single-handed; the phone and the door-knocker being especially trying!

“Please, m’m, mother says, could you give her a piece of strong brown-paper? She’s sending a pudding to my brother.... Yes, he’s still abroad.”

Strong paper is scarce, but a piece is found at last; the boys at the front are entitled to all we can give them. Small girl departs, after we have exchanged friendly talk about mother’s health, father in the shipyard, baby’s progress in teeth, and the latest news from brother in Germany.

Upstairs, I make the invalid’s bed—as far as the pillows—Knock! Knock!

“Please, mother says, have you some strong string?”

Equally scarce: but a handful of oddments must suffice. Less conversation this time.

The invalid’s bed now reaches the tuck-in and its day-time spread—Knock, Knock!

“Please, mother says, do you happen to have such a thing as a bit o’ sealing wax?”

Fortunately this is near to hand. No more time for polite nothings; I don’t even say “Tell her she is quite welcome.”

The invalid is now inserted carefully between the sheets; her hot-water bottle put where it is needed, her boudoir cap arranged “Just so”; and she is about to express the customary thanks, but instead exclaims: “Preserve us all! There’s mother again!” as the knocker is heard.

“Please, mother says, can you lend her your scales? We haven’t none, and she isn’t sure if the parcel is heavy enough!”

I only hope the pudding reached the lad eventually, for his mother must have spent an exhausting time!

All summonses to the door are not so long-drawn-out as this, of course. But no housewife needs to be told of the curious affinity that seems to exist between the door-bell downstairs and urgent duties upstairs, especially on one’s busiest days.

The advent of Ursula in the kitchen, close to the back-door, was a great saving in steps for me, in addition to still more valuable assistance.

As soon as indoor chores allowed, we three were out inspecting the miscellaneous collection of vegetation that had cheerfully settled on me, apparently anxious to stay. Like many another garden, my flowers had to take care of themselves during those weary years, when food, and still more food, was the aim of every farmer and gardener (and still is). Thus it was that in the portion not suitable for food crops—too steep, too stony, too shallow, or too shaded—the flower-beds were left, ignored and untended, the weeds soon realizing their opportunities.

Not that my place has ever been a weedless paragon. In all the years I’ve known and loved it, we have never got it really clear in any particular year, but were full of good resolves for the next spring, when the frost would be out of the ground, and so it would be simple to eradicate unwanteds before they grew too high. Yet every spring weeds appeared above the soil, old residents as well as new-comers, and some were soon chatting over the garden boundary to their relatives and friends on the other side, while ploughing, digging and planting were going on elsewhere.

Virginia walked off, searching a long paved path for items she had possibly planted in the past. Occasionally she bent down to disentangle some little gem from the too-hearty embrace of a sturdy interloper.

Ursula merely stood and gazed around in silence.

“It’s a sad sight, isn’t it?” I said at last.

“Sad? why it’s a lovely sight, a most beautiful sight,” she replied emphatically. The look on her face told me she meant it. “You haven’t been in London since the devastation. You haven’t seen where your own house used to stand and the garden you made—gone entirely. Nor the heart-breaking heaps of ruins, once homes and trees and flowers. You can’t think what the sight of this profusion here means to us!”

“Don’t forget that much of it is weeds.”

“I don’t mind if it is. I never realized till this moment how much I like weeds!”

“Even bindweed? What I’ve heard you say about bindweed!”

“Yes, even bindweed. If I had seen a sight like that——” pointing to a big white blossom that had climbed through the centre of a high laurel hedge, and was nodding gaily to the world below, “if I had come upon that plucky thing among London wreckage I believe I should have wept from emotional gratitude for its courage, and the reminder of happier days.”

“Then this doesn’t suggest a wilderness to you? It would to many people. Though I’ll confess it doesn’t to me; but I’m peculiar!”

“Anything but a wilderness. It’s a glorious expanse of green things growing—some of them in the wrong place perhaps, but all of them shouting that there is still life and loveliness left on earth, instead of universal tired ugliness.”

“You don’t mean you would leave the place like this?”

“Not exactly; but I wouldn’t turn out everything that might be called a weed.”

The gardener appeared just then. “Miss Ursula thinks we might leave most of the weeds,” I told him.

“Glad to hear it, miss; I’m not standing still for a job at the moment. Only they’ll be worse than ever next year. They’re a tough gang!”

Virginia had returned from her exploration. “I’ve found the Crete candytuft; I was afraid it might have expired; and it soon will if it isn’t rescued from smotherers. There is still a darling little pink bloom left.”

Ursula went off to greet it.

“And do you know you have several fine York and Lancaster rose bushes, growing in the very middle of the path further along, evidently seedlings from the big one, and all their roots under the flat stones! And what is the name of that tall plant blocking the way, that looks like horse-radish leaf, but isn’t?”

“Elycampane. That’s another seedling that planted itself there. Flowers something like smaller editions of the big sunflower. A grand plant, but it obstructs the traffic where it is.”

“Hadn’t we better make a start with the weeding right away? There’s plenty to be done!”

Weeding isn’t always so simple as it sounds, not by any means. There are two main alternative methods, neither being entirely popular, as both necessitate work.

In one case, you dig up the whole of a bed removing every growing thing, heeling in the desirables elsewhere, till space is ready to receive them, and carting the undesired to the bonfire. This is the gardener’s way when he feels like it, or has the time—which isn’t often! But when he does devote himself to the job, the beds eventually appear coiffed, though, alas! it isn’t a “perm”. A

little rain soon brings up more weeds.

The alternative course is to pull up and dig up every item you don't recognize as a well-born garden inhabitant. Or else to pull up and dig up merely the few things you do happen to recognize as weeds. This is usually the visitors' method. And the beds thereafter resemble nothing so much as the lawns when the badgers have made a night of it digging up their beloved pignuts; or when the cows have got in, and churned up anything they can lay foot on.

Fortunately, most visitors soon remember letters they must write, and quickly down tools!

Virginia and Ursula are in a class apart. Not only do they know the garden and the history and preferences of most of the plants, but they really love it, and through the years have grown to look upon the inmates as personal friends.

One bed at a time was our rule. We began on a miniature thicket. I should explain that as everything on this hillside is on the slope—a steep one as a rule—the borders and beds, as well as the woods and fields, all run uphill, or down, depending on the way you look at them. And the garden soil is propped up at intervals with low stone walls, built with the rocks got out of the ground when the flower beds were made.

But for these walls and buttresses, the soil would wash down to the river—in time. As it is, a big cloud-burst, or super-torrential rain, has on several occasions swept not only the garden soil, but the shallow-rooted plants, and vegetables, and seedlings, clean out of the garden through the boundary railings, down over grass lawns, till stopped by the huge wall which holds up this part of the hill to prevent the wood below from being washed out.

Clumps of meadowsweet occupied the top of the bed we were attacking, and branches were also lying on the ground, prostrate after heavy gales and rain which had done a good deal of damage in the summer. Groups of the meadowsweet had arranged themselves all down one side of the bed; so tall were they that they shut off to some extent one's view of the farther borders.

"How does all this come here?" Virginia asked. "Do you want it to remain? I should have thought there was enough ramping down by that far brook to satisfy even you!"

"You've forgotten the spring that rises in the orchard just above us, and rims down well under the path beside this bed. The seeds of the outlying meadowsweet soon found it, and took possession; but I'm afraid it can't stay there."

We lifted armfuls of the sprays, heavy with unripe seed, from the ground. Underneath we found an ancient lavender, its old branches sprawling about, but still sending up spikes of bloom, where it could get them through. But what did please me was the sight of clumps of green leaves, which the Madonna lily

throws up in the autumn. Those lilies had disappeared several years before. I concluded they had died; Madonna lilies have been somewhat temperamental in this garden. I was too busy to look for them, and finally had forgotten them. Yet there they were, striving to do their best under most trying conditions. The tough lavender branches had made a kind of tent over them, saving them from the crushing weight of the meadowsweet.

How we worked to release them! clearing away the corn mint surrounding them—another moisture-lover that must have scented the little spring running down below. Talk about water divining! I was surprised however that the lilies had not objected to the proximity of the water. But they were not actually over it, and it was not stagnant water—which most plants detest.

Another little favourite which I thought had disappeared was the wild pansy. At one time it was about the place in large masses. Then, for no accountable reason, it disappeared. I have had various wild flowers do the same thing. I had searched the fields and woods for the dear little heart's-ease, without success. Yet here it was again, mixed up with marigolds and nettles, roses and dandelions, its cheerful little face almost laughing at me. There is something very appealing about the small yellow and white flowers, with their touch of mauve, that is not so apparent in the large garden pansies, beautiful as they are. But little things—especially little growing things—are usually more attractive to me than big, over-developed show plants.

Farther down we came on a group of small but sturdy youngsters growing, not in the bed, but in the path. Several inches high, they were unlike any of the things in the borders. The gardener identified them as seedling lobelias. But how did they get there? I had had no lobelias on the premises since before the war! Some of these tinies had dark bronze-green leaves; some were light green; no two were exactly alike.

"But why have they chosen that stony path of all places?" Ursula asked. "If the garden hadn't been so neglected they would have been trodden flat. And in any case lobelias don't like to be too dry. Yet that path——"

"Is above the trickling spring," I reminded her. And in some mysterious way the water must have attracted the little clutch of seeds when they floated over to us from—we knew not where! The nearest garden to mine was some distance away, and, as it happens, they had never grown lobelias!

Next day I potted up those seedlings, eight of them. They have since bloomed luxuriantly, and are still going strong.

Town dwellers are at a disadvantage, compared with country folks, in the matter of garden surprises. The town plot may be cherished with the utmost care, and the things one plants may (or may not) develop according to plan. But neither during Spring-cleaning or Autumn manœuvres is one likely to

come upon much that is unexpected. Even the weeds bear a strong family likeness to the weeds next door, or are merely relatives of those we omitted to clear out earlier.

Rural gardens fare better. Seeds may be wafted a considerable distance from other gardens; and people who love growing things in the country—whether on a large or a tiny scale—have a far wider variety than is possible in towns, where impure air, insufficient sunshine, and sour soil kill off all but the most robust and courageous of plants. And some of these have to be renewed so often as to make town gardening an expensive hobby. I know whereof I speak!

The flower beds around country cottages often contain some cherished items of rare or sentimental value; also old-fashioned plants seldom mentioned in commercial lists. But this omission does not daunt the out-of-dates. They flourish happily in the plot of ground that may have been their home for generations. And in many cases they launch their children out into the world, to make new homes elsewhere for themselves.

And they do.

Also, I have known kind neighbours to come and plant in my borders, when I was not there, some little treasure they were dividing in their own garden, certain that I should value it.

There are so many mysteries in Nature's methods, which I shall never solve, though possibly wiser heads than mine already know the whys and wherefores.

For years wild strawberries were seldom seen on my land; two little clumps were all I could find, and they did not increase. Then one sad day a glorious wood, containing a large number of beech trees, was cut down on an opposite hill across the river, to make way for larches.

The following year, seedling strawberries began to appear all over my place—not only in the borders, but in the hedgerows; the paths; with the moss and ivy on the tops of walls; among the rocks; anywhere a few inches of soil afforded anchorage. They didn't seem to care whether it was in the open or the shade; they flourished in any position, though the fruit developed best in full sun.

An American gardening paper recently told of experiments being made with the strawberry (presumably the small wildling) as a ground cover for lawns; and it was pronounced satisfactory. Anyone who saw how they try to smother me might well call them ground cover.

The sudden appearance of wild strawberries after a beech wood is down is as curious as the sudden appearance of the rose-bay willow-herb after a forest fire, where it starts at once to clothe the desolation with beauty. It is often called the Fire-weed; and in America it is also known as Blooming-sally.

Foxgloves, again, appear by the thousand after mixed woods on these hills have been felled. Yellow broom is another feature of the denuded hillsides. But this loveliness vanishes when the space is planted with larches.

Have the seeds been waiting patiently in the soil till the chance came for their release? If so, for how many years?

It may be argued that the seed was not in the ground, but settled on the wood-ash after the forest fire, or among the leaf-mould of the forest trees, from neighbouring plants, finding the soil-conditions congenial. But this does not explain why many thousands of strawberry seeds should have settled and rooted all over my land, only after the distant beeches were cut. That the seed must have come in small clouds is certain, there was so much of it. But——

Nature's mysteries, so often inexplicable, will soon vanish, unless some check is put upon the indiscriminate spoliation of our lovely land, for military, industrial and other schemes, which seem ever on the increase, without necessarily adding to the nation's welfare.

Three
THE HAT

At best, our weeding could only proceed spasmodically; what with kettles and callers, meals and medicines, interruptions were ceaseless.

My spade was doing its best to remove a whole mat of dog's mercury from where it had no right to be, when I heard someone hammering on the front door, at the other side of the house. (Has anyone in the land an electric doorbell still working? Mine gave out early in the war; since then we've been thankful for some of the wire to tie up roses.)

It being the front door, I knew the hammerer was neither the baker, nor a gipsy, nor someone collecting for something, nor the five hundredweights of coal due, months ago, but not delivered. The front door meant a visitor.

It was a friend from St. Briavels (pronounced Brevvels), our neighbouring village. She was bubbling over with a joyous week just spent at Torquay. She is one of those blest women who find happiness anywhere, and see the best in everybody. She is always sure a spoon is sterling silver, even if it isn't polished.

She started off with a rhapsody on their boarding-house.

"I did so want to stay at a really smart hotel for once, and as my dividends had just come, I said I would gladly pay half the extra cost. But Edward said you never know the type of people you might meet there, and he was sure I would not like them. He is always so careful that I shan't be worried. So it was a boarding-house after all, and it really was the most one could desire—within reason of course.

"Not that you can hope for much, as a rule, from a place someone strongly recommends, can you? We're not all alike. But this time we landed on a velvet cushion ... so clean and airy. Of course they couldn't give us too much to eat; but as I pointed out to Edward, rations don't expand, even in the sea air. He said he must have expanded, as there seemed to be a big hollow inside him. Dear Edward is so humorous, as you know.

"We managed to deal with the hollows by going round the restaurants. After breakfast, we went out for coffee and sandwiches, they filled up the corners—— Home again for lunch—really a very fair lunch, considering——

High tea out—sausages lovely, perfectly cooked—such nice service—beautiful scones—— Home again for dinner—celery soup was a dream; even Edward said, if only he didn't hate celery, or if it hadn't been celery, he would have liked some; but he had a second helping of the delicious lamb in place of my portion, as I had a second helping of soup—and as for the fruit tart, I never tasted better. We only needed a last minute supper somewhere after a promenade—— We certainly didn't do at all badly."

How hungry the Travellers' Tales can make one!

"What were the shops like?" I asked, with the tied-at-home woman's natural longing for an orgy of buying—something, anything, so long as it was a change for my weary war-rags.

"Plenty of shops; plenty of things in the windows which no one was likely to want. But the prices! And the coupons! The dress shops were absolute gluttons for coupons."

"You don't mean to say you returned home empty-handed?"

"Well, I did think I would buy a hat, as I was in the midst of good milliners. I've worn this brown velour so long, my grandmother will easily recognize me when we meet again, though she's been dead forty years. Dear Edward urged me to get a new one. As he said, I had my recent dividends to play with, and if I hadn't enough, he would lend me some. He insisted that I had better get a good one that would last while I had the chance. He is always so thoughtful and generous. But what really made me think of a new hat, was seeing—— There now! to think I forgot to mention her sooner! It was seeing your friend Miss Bachelor, and the pecu—I mean the unusual hat she was wearing."

"Miss Bachelor? where did you see her?"

"Why, I'm telling you, at Torquay. She went there by the same train that we did."

"Really? What day was that?"

"The seventh."

"That's interesting. She was visiting me here, but went off hurriedly on the seventh to go to a dying aunt in Westmorland, or Cumberland, she didn't seem certain which; I suppose she told you she had been here?"

"No, I contrived that we never met, because Edward doesn't care about her. Of course, I'm sure she is very nice, or she wouldn't be a friend of yours. But whenever I've seen her, she makes me feel like an under-done jelly-fish by the time she's explained to me how much I don't know. She is so clever in the way she makes me realize my natural stupidity. As I said to Edward: I used to think I had a little intelligence; and he said he used to think so too, before he married me...

"Oh yes, I'm certain it was Miss Bachelor. You couldn't mistake her. She

was wearing a scarlet coat, a mauve hat with an orange feather sticking straight up somewhere on the top (I knew that hat!), very artistic of course; she once told me how artistic she is. I should have preferred a black hat or else a black coat with the general mix-up. But that's the worst of not being artistic—— All the same, I would have got to Westmorland by a quicker route than *via* Torquay, though I am so stupid! She's staying three weeks, till she is due back at her college, someone told me. There! I'm forgetting about my hat.

"First, I had a shampoo; then I went to another hairdresser, and had a perm. Not that I enjoy being hung up to the ceiling by the few remaining hairs of my head, but I knew I must present a respectable appearance, or the assistants in the hat-shop would flout me when they saw my old velour——"

"But why have your head harrowed by instalments? Why not shampoo and perm at the same place?"

"I didn't want the perm people to think I was not dainty in my habits, when the sand dropped out of my hair. Next day I went to a good shop in the best part. I explained that I wanted a *hat*, not an atom bomb that would go off directly it was on—a hat that didn't need to be put on, if you know what I mean, and would stay on when it was put on. What with hat-pins being exported to the heathen, and people so touchy if one forgets to return a borrowed one! I told my sister-in-law: 'If the enemy had got here, you wouldn't have had any hat-pins for me to forget to return; and where would you be now? or my hat either, for the matter of that?'

"Anyhow the shop assistant was a nice girl; said she knew exactly what Madame wanted; had the very hat, just come over from Paris. She brought two for me to try on. The first looked like a flower-pot full of buttercups and daisies and a poppy or two. But we both agreed this was not quite my style. My hair, she explained, was not exactly the requisite colour. It was beautifully soigné (or some word like that) but the delicate pearl grey tint, though so lovely in itself (where do they learn it all?) was not right for that hat—jardinette, by name.

"Had my hair been permed by Frizetti? She thought so, the moment she saw me come in. No one can get just that effect; she advised me always to go to him. When I told Edward, he said she had probably rushed to Frizetti as soon as I left and told him she had recommended me to go to him, and claimed a commission. Edward has such a wonderful business brain!

"The other hat she was sure I should adore, more queenly in accent. Believe me, it was one of those woven grass dinner mats, perfectly flat, with no indication how it was to stay on. In the front, standing bolt upright, was what looked like a small white serviette, folded mitre shape as we used to do them for dinner parties, before we were reduced to newspapers in private at home. At the back there was a floating bit of window curtain with an imitation

cabbage leaf hanging down at the back and a rosette of small brussels sprouts. She said the name of the hat was *déjeuner*, and wasn't it *elegant* (commercial French, Edward told me). I said I should want more than that for my *déjeuner* (just to let her know I understood that much), and what was the price? Fifteen guineas, and would Madame try it on? I gasped and murmured something about feeling faint, and going home at once. The girl was very sympathetic, and accepted the five shillings I slipped into her hand without any objection. Said she quite understood; couldn't eat the war bread herself.

"Yes, I did enjoy the holiday. I felt like the old lady who said, when she first saw the sea, she was glad it was so big, because there would be enough for everybody to have some.

"I really wanted to stay a fortnight, but dear Edward said he was afraid so much sea air might be too strong for me. He is like that, always considerate."

PS. Speaking personally, I am thankful that dear Edward was not allotted to *me* when husbands were being distributed.

PPS. A brief note from Miss Bachelor, a few weeks later, gave me the gratifying news that her aunt had rallied and made a wonderful recovery, enabling her to get back to college for the opening day of the term.

A useful aunt! She will probably be heard of again should need arise.

Four
AMENITIES

A question soon arose among my two assistant weeders: what was to become of the plants that were not usually classified as weeds, and yet could not remain in the borders? Some of them were big husky shrubs that were stifling every low-growing plant near them, and eating every bit of food they could find in the ground.

There were armies of evening primrose; big clumps of tree lupins; Michaelmas daisies in their hundreds; buddleias had become trees; forsythias —surely one of the loveliest of spring beauties—had thrown out branches and layered them free gratis, in every direction; I was able to give rooted plants to any friend desiring them.

Many of the real weeds (though I'm not certain where one should draw the dividing line) are charming. A big spread of comfrey was doing its best to extinguish a white moss rose; which certainly could not be allowed, though admitting the beauty of the comfrey in full flower. The blossoms of the blue crane's bill are an exquisite colour; yet its long, weak, jointed stems, flopping over primulas and pansies, and spreading into the paths, can become a trial. While such overwhelming adherents as balm, hairy mint, tarragon, peppermint, penny royal, and even winter heliotrope bid fair in my beds to become—well, a menace!

I was summoned to decide whether all should go on the bonfire, or what? A cruel question! For I am one of those feeble-minded persons who cannot bear to consign any living or growing thing to destruction, if it can be avoided. I know it is necessary at times, but I prefer to be out of the way on such occasions.

Many a time I have gone to the rubbish piles (after the gardener has gone home) when the beds have been overhauled, and I have sorted out all sorts of small rooted bits, and scraps from prunings that might serve as cuttings, giving them a chance to live, in pots on my upstairs veranda, or in sunny windows indoors. Rather a pathetic collection at first; but most of them take fresh courage, rewarding me with unlimited interest.

Unfortunately, when the rescued oddments have grown to normal size, I

seldom know where to put them, in a garden that is generally far too full.

Virginia and Ursula are afflicted with a similar mania for rescuing the perishing, and after a summer's evening spent in sorting over the bonfire heap, and each selecting what she decides "it's a pity to throw out", it sometimes looks as though the man might as well have left the garden as it was, if, eventually, he has to find room to put the throw-outs back again! Though he is too polite to tell us so!

Being determined not to sacrifice unnecessarily a single plant that contributed anything in the way of beauty or perfume, they called me out to say what I thought of a suggestion: why not transplant anything worth saving to the open spaces in the woods, and on the hillside where I had been compelled (most reluctantly) to have trees felled for fuel, since coal was so difficult to get, despite the fact that we are only a few miles from plentiful coal in the Forest of Dean? The ground where the trees had stood was thick with leaf-mould, and would accommodate a good many of the plants.

In every case where one tree is cut down, I have two youngsters planted to replace it—an excellent rule, which I found in force in Canada. Of course new trees are not put exactly where the old ones stood, for the ground there will be more or less exhausted. But wherever trees can be advantageously planted, I see to it that trees are put in.

I have known more than one estate bought cheaply when death duties compelled the owner to sell; and so soon as the price of timber has soared, as in war-time, the newcomer has had every tree cleared from the land, young as well as mature, not a sapling left. In a year or two, what was once a glorious wood of noble trees has become a jungle of briars, thistles, nettles, and small stuff only fit for kindling. Yet it could all have been avoided if the felling had been done with vision instead of greed.

An old clergyman, who had retired to a small house in the district, made it his hobby to plant baby trees in his field. A friend asked him: "Why are you so keen on this? You will never live to see them grown up!"

"No," he replied, "but someone else will."

Having decided on suitable spots, and the items most likely to flourish thereon, there was no need for me to supervise the work; I therefore went down the hill to inspect a beech tree which had blown down in a gale, and might obstruct the public footpath.

This path, very steep and narrow, tips down the hillside through one of the loveliest little woods in the kingdom. On one side of the path the ground rises sharply; on the other side it drops down at the same rate. All the land here in the Wye Valley goes either up or down. Locally this little wood is known as the Ruffet. Whether this is a corruption of the Rough Bit, I don't know, though

it well might be, for it was hard going before a proper path was made amid the rocks, for those who needed to climb the hill.

As I was making my way downwards I saw someone toiling up from below. Getting nearer, I recognized Mrs. Redd, not one of my favourites perhaps, but she had as much right to use the footpath as I had; the only difference being that I had to see it was kept in good order, and safe from falling trees, with none of the stone steps loose, or any other risk of danger to the public; while Mrs. Redd could use it as often as she pleased, free of charge and free from all responsibility.

She did not belong to the village originally, she and her husband being among various outsiders wafted to the district during the previous war, for some wise official reason hidden from the tax-payer and never since revealed. They did not do much work during that war, and still less since, until the latest conflagration set in—when they again found money flowing like water!

Mrs. Redd had a conspicuous talent for spotting items which might be extracted from other people, and promptly belittling them as soon as secured.

Hearing accidentally that a resident, who owned a few fowls, had put down some eggs in water-glass for winter use, Mrs. Redd appeared at her door, disreputably clad to indicate extreme poverty, and holding an empty basin.

"Could you let me have eight eggs for my Christmas pudding?"

"Eight eggs!" the lady exclaimed. "In war-time! And in any case it is only October!"

"I always put eight in mine; shouldn't call it a Christmas pudding with less. And I always make mine early," with smug superiority.

Being the soul of generosity, the lady gave her eight eggs.

Two hours later, Mrs. Redd returned, holding another empty basin.

"Two of those eggs you gave me were bad," she explained, waiting expectantly.

"Were they? What a pity. But it would be useless for me to give you any more—they might be bad, too!"

The basin returned home empty.

One day, before the war, she came to my door with a long, pathetic yarn about her need of a dress skirt. Could I possibly—etc.

The only one I could spare was far too good to give away; but I reflected that perhaps she needed it more than I did, and handed it over.

After glancing at it casually, she said: "If you're sure you really haven't any further use for it—and you wouldn't be likely to wear it again"—regarding it with sniffy contempt—"I don't mind accepting it, under the circumstances, I daresay I could find some use for it," her look and tone implying that perhaps it might serve in an emergency for a house-flannel!

A week or two later, she came to my door, arrayed in her Sunday best,

ostensibly to ask if she could get anything for me, as she was going into Monmouth. But actually to enable her to say she really must get herself a new costume, as she hadn't a rag fit to wear.

When I saw her climbing up the Ruffet, she was evidently returning from shopping by the look of her basket. We met at a very narrow part of the path; and though it would not necessarily have been serious had either of us dropped a few feet over the downward side, it might have sprained an ankle.

To let her pass, I rested my back against an oak tree on the upper side, though I guessed she would pause—and she did. Not from joy at meeting me, nor from any desire to hear my views on the world in general; she stopped because I made an excuse for stopping. And when one is climbing up that path, any reason is good enough, if it enables one to pause and get one's breath. I said: "Good morning"; and, in order to give her time to recover respiration, I was about to add the brilliant and original observation, that it looked like rain. But Mrs. Redd forestalled me, snapping out her words in the semi-defiant manner she always adopts, as though convinced she was going to be "put upon" and determined to kick against it to the last shoe button.

"I suppose you've heard that we are going to have amenities now," she began.

"Oh? That will be nice," I replied, rather inanely, wondering what she meant.

"Yes; the rich aren't going to have everything any longer; it's *our* turn now"—more aggressively—"and we are to have amenities, we're entitled to them."

I began to see daylight. I remembered that an amateur politician had been haranguing the valley, and promising the whole earth to any who were simple enough to believe him.

"Can anybody have them?" I asked Mrs. Redd.

"Yes, if they are poor; it's their due."

"That is very interesting. Where can they be bought? And what do they cost?"

"They don't have to be bought; they are amenities."

"Yes, I know, you said that before. But would you mind telling me: what are amenities?"

"Why, you know! Up the garden."

"Oh! I see! Amenities is just a new name for—er—for the 'Up the Garden'? But I thought you had one?"

"Of course we have. But the amenities will be indoors, in a bathroom."

"That will be very useful, with the boys coming home soon."

"Oh, but I shan't let anyone use it. There's no need to waste the one up the garden, and we've always washed in the kitchen. But the bathroom will be nice

to look at, when they build it."

"I'm sure it will be."

"And we're going to have a refrigerator too," with a further air of triumph.

"I should have thought we would be frozen enough in the winter, as we can't get coals! But as I haven't one, perhaps I had better see about it. Where do I apply for one?"

"You don't apply. They bring it to you. Though I don't suppose they would let *you* have one. It's only the poor who are to have amenities now."

I did not remind her that her husband was said to be getting £12 a week at war-work! I merely said:

"Then as I am poor, I'm surely entitled to one?"

She looked at me incredulously. "You can't be poor. This wood belongs to you, doesn't it?"

"Yes. But I can't eat it, can I? Nor exchange it for points. And they won't look at it when I offer it for clothing coupons!"

Suddenly she became all animation, her eyes gleamed, as a bright thought struck her—"I wonder if you could let me have a few coupons? I'm dreadfully hard up for stockings!"

Five
A SLIGHT TEMPERATURE

Miss Smith had been making good progress, after her shattering experience, when part of her hospital was down, and she beneath some of the ruin. Her nerves, which had suffered badly, though she would not admit it, were improving daily—or so I hoped.

When first she reached me, she was a sad wreck. But the rest and quiet and freedom from the perpetual strain under which hospitals worked in war-time, especially in big cities—all this was doing wonders in bringing her back to somewhere within sight of normal. Moreover, she helped herself, which some nerve patients cannot, or will not, do. She knew from her own nursing experience that a large part of the cure, in nerve cases, must be the work of the patient, and no one can do it for them.

In other words, she determined to get better, and allowed no temporary set-back to discourage her. So soon as she heard that no bones were broken, and that there were no apparent internal injuries, she believed that the paralysis from which she appeared to be suffering, making her limbs almost useless, could be conquered if she made an effort and persevered, even when she felt most depressed and hopeless.

It was a great day when her poor legs at last consented to support her body, and to totter along for about a yard, the rest of us holding her arms and buttressing her rear. What a satisfaction and genuine pleasure it is when one realizes that a sick person has, at long last, turned the corner and is heading in the right direction.

Naturally, she could only do a little at a time, and was still weak; but the massage was helping, and other treatment was to follow when she was strong enough.

Then just as everything looked rosy and smiling, she caught a cold. Nothing serious, but accompanied by a slight temperature which soon subsided; and a little trouble in one lung. The doctor attending her was a stranger to me, our own doctor being away. But he was very kind and attentive, though he lived ten miles off. He at once ordered bed for ten days. She must not risk any set-back as she had been doing so well. Everything

seemed quite straightforward; no cause for uneasiness. Somewhere between one and two o'clock that night, I awoke with a start, to find a most wild-looking, dishevelled Miss Smith leaning over me, clad only in her thin nightie, and someone else's outdoor coat which she had found, and turning a torch full on me. She was peering closely at me, and muttering to herself: "This is a man! Who can he be? Have I made a mistake in the room? Where can *she* be? I must find her." And off she went.

The dazzle of the torch shining in my eyes had confused me for a moment, but only for a moment. Springing out of bed, I found myself saying, "Jane Eyre! Jane Eyre!" Goodness knows why, for it was many a year since I read the book, and I didn't care for it when I read it. Moreover my friend bore not the least resemblance to that poor afflicted wife. Why I should have quoted a classic, even briefly, at such a crisis I don't know. Our brains are unpredictable —at any rate mine is.

Clutching at my dressing-gown, I gave chase, realizing that something was indeed very wrong. I found Miss Smith in her room, getting a treasury-note from her handbag.

"I've so enjoyed the concert," she said, having evidently forgotten that a minute ago I was "missing" and she supposed to be looking for me. "Such a good idea to have it on that lawn. Is the fête for a local charity? I'm going out to give them something.—I'll go down by your veranda, that will be the quickest way." Terrified, I rushed back to my room and locked the veranda door. That veranda has a drop of about thirty feet over the side, and no communication with the garden below! As she joined me I told her the people must have gone home, as no one was there now; we could give them the money to-morrow. She agreed cheerfully; then said as it was such a nice day, she would go into the garden and cut off the dead roses.

I said she had better wait till the morning, as it was 2 a.m. and raining hard. And in any case wouldn't it be more sensible to put on stockings and shoes, as she was barefoot.

She drew herself up reprovingly and replied: "Certainly not! I am most surprised that you, of all people, should have made such a suggestion!" I wondered what was improper.

This was the only verbal difference of opinion we had. For the rest of that long, long night we were perfect ladies, making social contact as complete strangers, on orthodox lines, with variations. I was careful to agree with all her remarks, anxious not to cause any upset.

Only she was constantly running about after some fresh imagination, apparently quite well and strong. An old man was hiding behind an easy chair in the bedroom; she must chase him out; it wasn't safe for me. Why did I allow these birds to be flying about the room? She would catch them for me. While

she was creeping under my bed in order to drive out some little pigs she said were there, I rushed downstairs and locked every door leading outwards, being afraid lest she should get out of doors (which she seemed determined to do) and I should lose sight of her in the dark, and be unable to see whether she was heading up hill or down, or among rocks which might prove dangerous.

On my return, she said she would now have a bath, having forgotten the little pigs. As I began to raise objections, she merely said, “Of course I must have a bath! I hope the time will never come when I shall forget to wash myself! I may be poor, but at least I can be scrupulously clean.”

Having already taken the key out of the door, and fastened the window, I slipped a little wedge under the door to prevent its being shut. She turned on the water, but was so interested in the fact that the door couldn’t be closed, that she thought no more about a bath. As she had not put in the plug, the water merely ran away, till I turned it off, and then followed her downstairs, as she said the band was playing again and she wanted to join in the dancing.

I was beginning to feel that some means must be found to quiet her, though I feared to upset her by crossing her in any way. As I was not alone at the time, I could have called one of the others, had she become unmanageable. But I did not want to disturb them unless actually necessary.

Then an idea came to me. Making a semblance of sinking on the bed, I said, in the far-gone tones of an invalid: “Nurse, I’m feeling so faint. Do stay with me a little while. It would be such a comfort to know you were on the sofa,”—perfectly true.

Immediately she was the professional nurse.

“Of course I will stay with you. I never leave a patient till the night nurse comes on duty. Now shut your eyes and go to sleep” (which was the very last thing I intended to do) “and I’ll rest on the sofa.” I handed her a warm rug, hoping in this way to get her covered up a little. But she merely threw it on to the stove—luckily there was no fire.

The couch was at the foot of the bed. She watched me for a couple of minutes, and then said: “I’m not surprised that you are unwell, after sitting among the geraniums on the window-box outside my bedroom window as you did, making grimaces at me. Anyone might be ill. I was terrified in case you fell off.”

“Oh, but I didn’t mean to make grimaces at you. Perhaps my teeth were chattering with the cold.”

“I didn’t think of that. But tell me, how did you get there? Did you climb down from the roof? Most dangerous and unwise.”

She remained silent for a few more minutes, still studying me intently. Then she started again.

“Do you usually get into bed head-first and sleep with your feet on the

pillow? I don't think I've ever seen it done before."

I explained that my feet were on a rug at the bottom of the bed, and it was my head she saw on the pillow.

"Oh, I see. It's such a queer head; rather like a sheep's head, isn't it?" Silence for another couple of minutes (I was so thankful for even these short respites), and she still studied me very intently. Then she remarked: "Of course, I don't mind staying with you, as you're not well, but I don't know who you are, nor how you come to be here. In any case I feel it my duty to tell you frankly that I don't like your face, no matter who you are. I don't like it at all."

I said I was afraid many other people felt exactly as she did. And I avoided mirrors, as what I saw there pained me so deeply.

Nodding her head in complete agreement, she continued: "And your nose is even worse. Tell me, do you take it off at night and stick it on again in the morning? Or do you wear it always like that?"

"I keep it on all the time, as a rule. It is less trouble than taking it off and putting it on again every twenty-four hours."

"Yes, I expect it is. And of course it is less likely to shrink, if you don't take it off to wash it. Though it is very unfortunate for you to have such a face, isn't it? Yet I ought not to blame you, for I suppose you can't help it."

Next moment she was up and trying to catch someone she said was peeping through the door.

In this way, we passed the night. I didn't phone the doctor till the morning, though he said I should have called him as soon as I realized her mental condition.

But one hates to disturb a doctor at night if it can be avoided. At best he gets so many broken nights. Also, for a doctor who is new to the district, the hillside lanes and innumerable turnings can be bewildering traps in the night.

He responded immediately to my phone message in the morning. The sedative he gave her calmed her and presently she slept, though it was two days before she became normal. Then she woke up one morning perfectly rational and clear in her mind, but as weak as a baby, and with nothing approaching the gay activity she had shown during the night watches, and not the faintest remembrance of her recent merry-go-round.

Evidently she had had a recurrence of the temperature, which had induced delirium.

All the same I prefer that temperatures should be kept discreetly in bed!

One thing surprised me greatly. Miss Smith, though getting better, had been equal only to the minimum of exertion before the cold caught her. Yet, in the delirium she seemed to be perfectly well and strong. The way she ran about

the house chasing imaginary birds and animals and old gentlemen tired me out, but did not seem to tire her at all!

And seeing that she had not yet recovered from her cold, I was terribly concerned about her bare feet, yet nothing would induce her to get into stockings or bedroom slippers. She just kicked off my well-meant attempts.

Yet, when she recovered her senses in bed, though she was exhausted, her lungs did not suffer, and her cold soon left her. I could only conclude that as the house is well carpeted, and kept fairly warm on account of the illnesses, this saved her.

Another thing interested me. Though the others in the house were all light sleepers, that particular night they all slept soundly, and were quite overcome next morning when they heard of Miss Smith's "goings on". Indeed they looked at her in awe, after I had got her back into bed by telling her the doctor would be displeased if he found her up.

The knowledge that the well-balanced, calm, strong-minded Miss Smith could have such a lapse was distinctly disturbing. I fancy we were all wondering privately which of us would be the next!

Six
MINOR EXCITEMENTS

It is odd how at times one does sleep through a crisis, for no reason at all.

After a long illness I was taken to Littlehampton, to rooms on the front, two nurses going with me. As I suffered badly from insomnia, which refused to quit, one nurse slept in the room with me, and as I was unable to walk upstairs, the lower room in front had been turned into a bedroom for me.

The window was always open a little, of course. One night I was certain someone was in the room. My nerves were in a wretched state, and it did not take much to make them worse. At last, when I could endure it no longer, I woke the nurse. She was an angel of kindness and patience, and said she would soon see who was there. No one could be found.

She left on a light just to calm me, telling me that she quite understood; one often had fancies like that when unable to sleep and I must not hesitate to call her the minute I felt panicky. She got back into her own bed. Next moment a huge black cat ran from under my bed and out of the window. That cleared the air. I was glad to realize that I was not quite such a weak fool as I must have seemed! The light was then put out, as the room was fairly light from a street lamp outside, and we settled down to sleep (if possible!).

Half an hour later, I saw the figure of a man outside, silhouetted against the light beyond, his hand on the window trying to raise it. My heart seemed to choke me with fright. Once more that dear nurse jumped out of bed, and, slipping on her coat, she ran to the front door, to find a policeman about to ring the bell and tell the household a window was open on the ground floor, and to ask if anyone had entered the house unlawfully. Everyone was sympathetic in the morning; and I heard one nurse saying how unfortunate it all was, as I should probably be more wakeful than ever now.

Next night they joked about black cats and attentive policemen, but they shut the window at the bottom I noticed. I dozed off, rather early, expecting to wake again in half an hour as usual. A big gale was blowing and the air was very strong.

When I opened my eyes again, it was bright daylight and sunshine in the room. To my surprise, both the nurses and the landlady and her niece were

standing looking at me.

"Is everybody up?" I asked. "Have I slept all night?"

"Oh yes! You've slept all night. And we are all up, because we have not gone to bed yet! Take a look out of the window."

I sat up, and, to my amazement, instead of the wide green common stretching in front of the houses, to the parade in the far distance, I beheld the sea outside our front railings, and the green grass and bushes of the common piled in all directions with shingle.

The gale had increased after nightfall and washed away part of the parade. The River Arun, which there flows into the sea, had burst its banks, and flooded the country far and wide. Pebbles from the stony beach had been flung up by the great waves, smashing some of the windows on the front; and the Fire Brigade pumps were already at work, pumping out the water that had swamped the basement below the room where I slept serenely through it all. The household had been standing by ready to move me if the storm smashed the windows, or the water rose higher—thankful, I am sure, that I slept for once!

That cured my insomnia. The fact that I could sleep all night, and through such a hurricane and havoc, rid my mind of the idea that I couldn't sleep. For in some cases insomnia is a habit, a very distressful habit, as I know. But even that habit can be broken.

More recently, a friend living near me, who was anxious to help, at the outbreak of war put down her name for V.A.D. work. I was surprised, as I did not see exactly how she could help, since the Centre was over a mile from her house, and she herself unable to walk so far.

I asked what she would be required to do.

"When bombs are dropped, and the injured are being brought into the Hall, I could get hot water, hold bandages, and do some of the many little things that will be required in such emergencies—that is, if I am needed."

"But how will you know if they do need you? You haven't a phone."

"They will send someone to fetch me."

Well, it sounded all right; but I thought it would be more likely that everybody would be far too busy to trail a mile each way to collect one person, should the village be bombed.

In due course, we had our share of trouble; but though buildings and livestock suffered, fortunately no one in the village was injured, and my friend was not called out to render assistance.

One night, however, I was awakened by a sickening roar in the distance, as though a host of air-machines was bearing down on us. The noise swept right over my roof: the whole house shook. I guessed it must be an aeroplane (or

more than one), but why was it so low? Looking out, I saw it skim down apparently off my roof, and I wondered if it had taken the chimney pots! It sped downhill at an appalling rate, getting lower and lower every second.

Remembering my friend's house, and a little cluster of cottages adjoining my place, I felt exceedingly alarmed. It looked as though the huge machine would sweep them into the river. But it fell to earth on the only bit of open meadow-land in the vicinity, some of it stretching out over a garden and part of it in a field.

I saw a neighbouring farmer and his sons racing straight downhill over walls and crashing through the wood to reach the plane. I could not leave my invalids, who were awake, and in a state of tension. Moreover I did not know whether this was a British or an enemy 'plane—nor why it was tearing downhill and landing in our midst.

In any case there were sufficient people lower down, able to do whatever was needed, and two houses had telephones. I could not remain on my upper veranda, listening to the clamour below, though I was keenly anxious to know what it was all about; wondering what I should do with the invalids if it were an enemy 'plane and my house commandeered by the crew. I could only do my best to soothe the patients, till things quieted down and they dropped off to sleep.

In the morning we soon heard that it was one of our big bombers returning from Berlin, where, fortunately for our village, it had left all its bombs, otherwise there would have been terrible disaster for us.

Engine, or some other trouble, had compelled the pilot to make a forced landing. He had insisted on the rest of the crew's baling out, but remained himself to guide the machine as best he could, till it was past the cottages. Then he got himself out, and left the plane just before it struck the earth. This is not a technical description; but so long as it is clear that there was a huge noise, and next minute portions of a bomber lying about on the grass, with the pilot safe—that is all that matters.

The Home Guard on night duty were stationed about a mile lower down the river, in charge of the bridge, where, it was said, the petrol-tank, which had flung itself into the river after the crash, floated down alight on the water, till it reached the bridge, where it was received with full military honours!

It was not many seconds after the pilot stepped on solid earth before others of the Home Guard, who had been on day duty, jumped out of bed and into some boots, when they heard the ominous noise of the descending machine.

"I was the first man to reach the pilot," one man told me dramatically. "He was walking along the path to a house. Laying my hand firmly on his shoulder, I said: 'Who are you?' and he told me." The pilot was soon phoning his headquarters, while someone got him some tea. In an incredibly short space of

time, our lane was alive: R.A.F. men, Military Police, our own faithful local constabulary, air raid wardens, Home Guards and everybody else who could get there.

By the morning reports had been received from all the men who had baled out, excepting one—each man in a different spot miles away from any of the others. The missing man had had ample time to report, if safe.

This is not a nice district for a parachute descent. Not only are there lonely mountains and hills covered with thick woods and forests, but there are deep and very dangerous rivers, rushing with tremendous force over the weirs. Universal praise was given to the pilot of the bomber for the way he managed to land his machine on the bit of land he did, instead of crashing into the tree-tops or diving into the river. If the missing man had fallen into the Wye, he might be hard to find, the current is so strong. Or if his parachute had become entangled with the upper branches of trees he might have difficulty in extricating himself.

When we heard that a man was missing, the gardener and I started to search our wood, going in opposite directions. It was pouring with rain, and the undergrowth was very thick. We searched thoroughly, calling out at intervals to the tree-tops—some of the trees are very tall—but we found no trace. Later the police phoned that the man had come down at Usk, ten miles from here. Every man was now known to be safe and sound.

That same afternoon, my friend, the V.A.D., came up to see me. I asked her:

"What time did you go to bed last night?"

"Oh, about ten o'clock, my usual time, though I seldom get to sleep till the early hours."

"But you got up again?"

"Got up again? No, why should I?"

"You didn't go out with hot water and bandages to help?"

"Did anyone have an accident?" She looked at me in surprise.

"Do you mean to tell me you don't know that one of our biggest bombers came down outside your bedroom window in the night?"

"Then that is what it's all about! I did see parts of a 'plane being dragged about when I got up this morning, and a number of R.A.F. men all over the place. Some came in my garden. But I concluded they were having some sort of a practice or manœuvre; or perhaps they were looking for something they might have lost... No! I heard nothing in the night. Did it make a noise?"

Speaking to one of the Home Guard later, I said how pleased I was that all the crew had landed safely.

"Yes," he replied, with a touch of sadness in his voice. "So was I. But I'd

have been still more pleased if it had been that there Goering come to look for Hess!”

Seven
A BOUQUET OF HERBS

"What on earth is the world coming to!" exclaimed Miss Smith from the other side of her newspaper. "Just listen to this!" And she read out details of the latest turn of the screw. "Why, we shan't be able to call our souls our own very soon!"

"I wouldn't worry about that, if I could call my stomach my own," sighed Ursula. "It's this Nationalization of the Interior that I object to! Here we are to-day with scarcely a bite in the house—and all because of Peace, or so we are supposed to believe. Anyhow, I had better hunt around and see what I can find, before I'm too faint with hunger to hold on to a saucepan handle for support."

Things really were difficult with us, in a way people in town would not believe. We were ten miles from everywhere, with neither cafés nor restaurants as there are in towns. I had a letter that morning from a friend in London who explained how well she and her husband managed. Both being in a large business house, they had the major part of their food at their canteen, or, for a change, went to restaurants, and thus had ample from their ordinary rations for supper!

"For supper!" echoed Virginia. "Did you ever!"

Lucky people! I know all Londoners could not manage like this, but many do. And I was glad to think everyone was not as empty as I was just then!

There is a general idea that we who reside in the country can live on the fat of the land! As one townswoman said to me:

"But of course you have plenty of poultry and pork and butter and eggs."

Do we! Poultry disappeared early in the war when there was nothing to feed them on that would put any flesh on their poor bones or make them lay. One irate poultry farmer said to me:

"I believe the stuff they have allowed me this time for my poor birds is just sawdust!"

Probably this was not quite correct! but it is certain that feed was hopelessly inadequate; also it was extremely difficult to get either fowls or eggs, because those who did manage at the outset to keep a semblance of a poultry farm going for a year or two, had to send their eggs to the packing

station, not to their registered customers. These last-named in due course received occasionally an egg, or perhaps two (if a large family) from abroad. When these were not quite bad, they were often only one grade above what used to be known as “Electioneering eggs”.

Why it should be sound business or war economy to pay for the transport of eggs *from* the place where they were laid, to no-one-knows-where, and in return bring eggs all the way from Canada and New Zealand to the homes of the departed “new-laids”, is not clear to an ordinary person like myself. Only one thing is obvious to me: it is the tax-payers who pay for such brilliant organization, and for the many Forms connected therewith, and not the Great Ones who frame the regulations.

In the end, the hens were killed off in all directions, as there was no feeding stuff to give them. And I should imagine the over-worked farmers’ wives must sometimes have heaved a sigh of relief, at having got rid of the hens, not to mention the weekly income-tax deductions from the workers’ wages, since in many cases they did the book-keeping; and what with eggs and milk and pigs and cattle and different types of crops, the Forms to be filled up sent some of them nearly demented.

Farmers have been some of the hardest worked and least appreciated people in the whole country, and especially in a district like ours, where the land is least suited for farming. Nature intended these hills for forests, and provided rushing streams and springs, under as well as above ground, to supply the tree roots with the water they need. In addition, huge rocks which were flung about all over the landscape weighted down the roots of the great trees, anchoring them firmly to the steep hillsides.

Such land is the last thing the farmer wants. Once the trees are cut down, the water washes down the soil, till much of what is left is nothing but thin sand. The rocks are never entirely cleared. In more than one cottage a big rock has been left by the original builder, and forms a good sized kitchen table, the house being built round it. On my own place, big rocks have had to be left standing in land that was being reclaimed for food crops, because we couldn’t find their bases. As the gardener said: it wasn’t worth wasting time to get to Australia that way; we could get there quicker by air.

Another man said to me: “It’s precious little use digging one big stone out; it only means that the one underneath immediately pushes itself up, and then you’ve got to dig that out next.” Not quite logical perhaps; but I knew what he meant.

All this means very laborious work for the farmer in this district, if he wants deep rooting for his crops. The stone that is dug out has to be placed somewhere: it is therefore built into walls round the fields; but this means many enclosures of few acres each. Such small fields are not always easily

worked by machines on very steep inclines; so different from the magnificent vistas of varied crops, on the rich rolling soils of the big farms in parts of the Midlands and the southwest counties. But even in these, where up-to-date machinery can be economically employed, the farmer has had a strenuous time, with insufficient workers, and some of these untrained.

One thing that irritated the farmers, those I know at any rate, was the literal cheese-paring policy of Whitehall, which decreed that the farmer and his sons and daughters should not receive the extra eight-ounce ration of cheese, allowed to all the workers. The farmer and his family were—and still are—the hardest worked of all on the farm; liable to be up at all hours looking after the animals; doing the work of every man or woman who failed, as well as their own; responsible to the Government and always being urged to produce more. Yet because they were employers and not the employed, they had to be deprived of the piece of cheese which would have been so welcome in the pocket when out of reach of the home larder. Men doing agricultural work have told me that they would far rather have cheese, poor though it is now, than war-time meat; it is such a stand-by, can be carried with them and eaten easily no matter how rushed they are. To an outsider like myself, it seemed a short-sighted policy to cut it off from these valuable men, who have done so much to keep us alive during our terribly lean years.

Joining Ursula in the kitchen, I asked if food was really as low as she said.

Yes! It was the last week of a points period; hence we were on the verge—as always, till the new points goods were available, provided enough would be left in the shops when next week arrived, which was by no means certain, despite all the oratorical flummery of Whitehall.

"We've used the last tin of every and any thing; there isn't even a herring-bone left: Billie and Poppy finished that. There's no flour, we've needed all our B.U.s for bread. But I'll manage something; and by to-morrow the gale may have dropped a bit, and I'll go out and hope for more herrings.

"I try to be grateful for my mercies; but I do wish herrings would sometimes grow into grouse, or York ham, or genuine pork sausages. But at any rate I'm thankful they haven't developed into whale bones so far. I wonder how our Victorian ancestresses would have taken to the idea of living on corsets! Well, the rain is lifting: I'll go out and around and see what I can find."

As I had ironing on hand, I did not go with her. She soon returned with a basket of vegetables and bunches of herbs.

By one o'clock the aroma of a most appetizing soup made us all even hungrier than usual, and glad to hear the gong.

"Is it permitted to inquire the name of the joint?" Virginia asked, as we inspected the soup tureen.

“I’m calling it Savoy Soup,” Ursula told us. “It contains some cabbage, among other things. But Savoy sounds better than cabbage, as it suggests a recipe emanating from the chef at the Savoy Hotel.”

Served with the soup were potatoes, well mashed with a little hot milk and a dust of nutmeg till they were soft and fluffy—not sloppy or lumpy.

This was followed by a sweet course, “Apple Chit-chat” by name.

All the diners expressed utmost satisfaction with the meal; and even asked for a repeat performance soon.

As some readers might find a make-shift of this kind useful on some extra lean occasion, I give the recipes. Without professing that they are either very novel or remarkable—they are neither—I will say we have found them fill gaps on several occasions, and always much appreciated by strangers as well as the home circle.

Eight
SOUPS AND SUCH-LIKE

Recipe for our Savoy Soup:

Into 1½ pints of boiling water, or better still stock, if you have it, put:

One large outside cabbage leaf (the tougher the better): break into two or three pieces to get it into the water, but do not cut up small; also a turnip, or a piece of swede, a carrot, a fair-sized onion and ¼ medium-sized apple, a teaspoon of salt. Boil for half an hour.

Then add (all tied up in a piece of muslin): 2 peppercorns, 2 cloves, 1 sprig each of mint, thyme, parsley and marjoram, 2 large sage leaves, ¼ teaspoon celery seed, half a bay-leaf, 2 small leaves of winter savoury and also of rosemary. Boil for another hour, making 1½ hours in all.

Next strain. Return liquor to saucepan. Add 2 teaspoons of Bovril, ¼ teaspoon Marmite, 1 scant teaspoon sugar, 1 small nut of butter if you can spare it.

Now see if more salt is needed. Thicken with a little potato flour. But if potatoes mashed, or plain boiled, are served with it, these added to the unthickened soup are sufficient for most people.

This may look a formidable list at first sight, and anything but a simple soup. But actually it amounts to this: use any vegetables you may have (except parsnip) and all the fresh herbs you can lay hands on, as it is the herbs that give the distinctive flavour to the soup. Only, go easy on sage, bay-leaf, celery-seed, and winter savoury, as these give a bitter tang if overdone. The sugar and pieces of apple are important. Many of our friends like ¼ teaspoon of spice added.

Some of the items named may not be in your garden or larder, in which case use what you have. And if you don’t seem to have anything in the herb line, then it will have to be dried packeted herbs; but these do not give anything like the same result as the growing herbs.

If the vegetables are not to be served with the soup, there is no need to peel them; merely wash well and cut in half. The apple need not be peeled, as it is

not served in any case.

When you haven't this or that, don't be afraid to try something else, especially if you are not expecting company that day, and any set-back won't be a serious matter. A teaspoon of Yorkshire Relish may please you, or a teaspoon of chutney, or horse-radish. An artichoke is liked by some, but the flavour of parsnip is too aggressive. A short piece of celery stalk will serve instead of celery-seed. On the continent, a few carraways are sometimes included, though I don't care for them myself.

One's aim should be to avoid any outstanding flavour, or the adding of too much of any one ingredient which might annul the others.

We have experimented with various things. Wild sorrel we found fitted in well; but nettles, lettuce and dandelion we discarded as being too bitter; we favoured a non-bitter soup. Moreover, nettles and lettuce need to be boiled a little first of all and that water thrown away, in order to take off the bitterness. But as this involved extra work and time, with no special advantage in return, we cut them out.

On the whole we found that the cabbage leaves which otherwise would be wasted, and others of the cabbage family, such as kale and turnip-tops, served our purpose best of all for the vegetable foundation, with roots added; the freshly-gathered herbs supplying special flavours, and a certain piquancy, as well as being aids to health.

Of recent years we have learnt much of the value of a vegetable diet and vegetable soups: peashell-soup, for instance, is excellent. But I think they should have the addition of milk or butter (or both) if meat or Bovril is not liked, or is not very forthcoming, as of late.

Town dwellers do not always realize how valuable home-grown herbs are for varying the flavour of everyday cooking. Nothing quite equals the sprays brought in from the garden and used straight away in soup, gravy, stuffing or rissoles. The next best thing is to gather one's own herbs on a hot day in August (if there happens to be one!) and dry them for winter use. If you had none in your garden, it was possible in pre-war days to order some bunches of fresh herbs from a herb-farm; or a good greengrocer would get some for a customer. Once having used your own, you will never use dried packeted herbs if avoidable.

Few scents, in this weary world of bad odours, are more refreshingly delightful than the perfume of a basket of thyme, sage, marjoram and mint, spread out on the kitchen table, to be put into paper bags for drying, the loveliest of all, to my mind, being sweet knotted marjoram which is quite distinct from the ordinary marjoram. Unfortunately this won't stand frost, and in our climate should be sown afresh each spring; though at the time of writing, the seed has not got back on the market since the war. Doubtless it

will soon be available from the big firms, who have always had it in the past.

While on the subject, I do not recommend storing in glass containers, though they do look business-like, unless the bottles or jars can be kept in a warm place. In our damp atmosphere, moisture sometimes collects in the bottles, no matter how one may have dried them, and then the herbs are spoilt. I myself use the old-fashioned method, paper bags, hung up perhaps on the top hooks of the dresser, unless a warm cupboard is handy.

A very dapper inspector called to see me one day, on some business connected with an employee. Looking at some paper bags in the kitchen, suspended from the bacon-rack (now quite empty, alas) he inquired, what were they for? I told him they contained dried herbs. He looked at them quite sentimentally.

"My grandmother had bags of herbs like that in her kitchen," he said reminiscently. "It was such a nice place. I loved going there. I've never seen any bags like that since."

You would probably find it well worth while to grow some, if you have never thought about herbs. They are quite easy to grow, even in towns. I have even seen some grown successfully in window-boxes. Mint needs much more moisture than thyme or sage. Parsley, I own, is very uncertain. The old saying —"Six lots of seed must be sown, as the devil takes five, and you need one for yourself"—may be a trifle wide of the mark; but it often takes two or three sowings to get any results. Who is to blame, I don't know; but don't give up if the first sowing brings nothing!

Sweet basil, like knotted marjoram, is raised annually from seed, but nice plants of the ordinary marjoram, thyme, mint and sage can be procured from a good nursery, as well as a small bay-tree which can be grown in a pot.

Never throw away celery leaves, because fresh or dried they are excellent for flavouring soups. We dry ours for use throughout the year.

While on the subject of vegetables, I have noticed that people in towns who grow scarlet runners—and many do, if they have any garden or allotment —do not trouble about pods that have been left too long and have become coarse and stringy; and I have seen these thrown on the bonfire with the vines, after frost has finished them. Here in the country, we value those ripe pods almost as much as the young green ones. We grow an extra amount of beans (rabbits permitting!) so as to have a fair number left over for winter use.

Leaving them to get quite ripe, and the outside brown and withered-looking, they are gathered and put in a place out of the damp, like a shelf in a cool greenhouse, and left to dry out. They are not shelled till needed, but left in the pods. In the cold weather these make one of our favourite dishes, either boiled, fried or baked.

The day before they are to be cooked, shell as many as will be required. Put into a basin with a teaspoon (or less, if for a small family) of bi-carbonate of soda, cover with boiling water, leave to soak all night. Next day, drain off the water, cover with fresh boiling water, add salt, and boil; or bake in a casserole till soft—about an hour or less. Test them after half-an-hour; beans vary, and they must not go to smash, but must be quite soft, and floury when drained. I always add half a teaspoon of sugar to the water; this brings out the flavour.

Plainly cooked in this way, they are nice with meat and gravy, and can serve instead of potatoes.

There are variations, however, which are very good. When bacon that really *was* bacon was procurable, and bacon fat was expected as a matter of course in the frying pan, we drained the beans when soft but not broken (the water will be very dark) and fried them lightly with or without onions, in very hot bacon fat. This is really a nourishing meal in itself, as well as delicious.

Or again, if you would like Boston baked beans, the Saturday night supper dish in every New England cottage or farm; instead of boiling them in a saucepan, put them in a casserole (a bean pot is the correct receptacle in U.S.A.), cover with boiling water, add salt, a teaspoon of treacle, and a small piece of bacon or fat salt pork on top. Bake in an oven that is not too hot for about an hour—or till tender.

The flavour of these beans is quite distinctive, and unlike butter beans, or the insipid character of haricots.

I can recommend these dishes.

Before leaving this chapter, a word of caution must be added about wild vegetation. While a number can be quite useful additions to one's vegetables, on no account experiment with anything unless you know what it is and what its characteristics are—for good or evil! It is, quite easy to poison yourself, or if not quite so tragic to make yourself uncomfortably ill, by eating some unfamiliar leaves.

Animals and birds are generally considered very intelligent in this matter, and it has been said that they have a special instinct (or sense of smell) which warns them of harmful plants. Yet the very week I am writing this, three geese apparently in the best of health, belonging to a neighbouring farmer, suddenly died mysteriously. A post-mortem showed foxglove leaves in their crops; and foxgloves, as most people know, contain a very dangerous ingredient. The geese who unintentionally poisoned themselves were probably hungry; grass was getting scarce, and Government poultry feed was not satisfying, so they evidently hunted around to find something to supplement it. I have never known another such case.

Another mistake was not connected with vegetables. Some years ago, a friend of mine suddenly taken ill had to rely on the kind offices of a neighbour, who came in and saw to the children's meals, till a relative arrived. There was stewed fruit in the larder, the sick mother told her neighbour; it would need a little more sugar, as the children liked to see this added when on their plates.

Anxious not to disturb the mother, the neighbour hunted for the sugar, and at last found a tin, and sprinkled it lavishly on the fruit.

"Mine isn't nearly sweet," complained one child, after a couple of spoonfuls. "And neither is mine," said another. To keep them quiet, more was added all round. Further complaints; but she insisted on its being eaten.

After dinner the mother inquired what the argument downstairs was about. The neighbour explained.

"Where did you say you found the sugar?"

"In a round tin on the top shelf."

"That is Epsom Salts!" moaned the mother.

The children returned from afternoon school almost immediately! It was several days before they went back!

Nine
LAST JOURNEYS

It has often seemed to me that the less conventional classes, the unspoilt country people, are far more natural than the sophisticated townsfolk when it comes to matters of life and death. They accept these certainties as being among the inescapable laws beyond human control; and when the end comes, the whole community either in words or deeds will rally round the bereaved, and so far as possible attend the funeral, "as a mark of respect" they say; that is, a sign of sympathy and understanding, and also with a lingering of the old-fashioned, kindly idea of supporting those who are in the depth of sorrow.

I once heard a cynical stranger remark, when watching a quiet orderly procession winding along the lanes, following the bearers:

"Of course it's a rare entertainment for them, poor souls; and they go out of curiosity and to see who else is there."

Nothing of the sort! And no people as a class are less of the "poor soul" type than the natives born and bred in our English countryside. They have a knowledge of the things that really matter that comparatively few townsmen possess, though, fortunately for the spiritual and mental health of the nation, a good deal has been learnt by the town dweller, driven by the war to find some sort of refuge in the country.

The funerals themselves are carried out with marked dignity as a rule. No matter what ructions may occur before or after, among the far-flung battle-line of family quarrels, nothing of this is allowed to appear in public, or to mar what is considered the right thing.

It is true there are occasional lapses, but these are very rare. In another village—not ours, I hasten to emphasize—there was a certain Mrs. Hughes, whose reputation was not by any means so chaste as it might have been. As she liked to know what was going on, she attended every funeral within reach. But, realizing that her room was preferred to her company by all respectable women, she never went farther than outside the lych gate, where she could see the main details, and note the company, without being openly avoided.

In due course, her husband died in the Infirmary. As usual she went to the churchyard and took up her customary stand outside the gate.

As the funeral did not arrive from the Infirmary on time, she wandered back to the village, and inquired of the first person she met:

"Has Hughes been along this way to-day?... If you see him, tell 'em to hurry up."

This, however, was exceptional. It is the rule that relationships are observed in proper order. When it was a walking funeral—as was considered the correct thing in the olden days—the various next of kin arranged themselves in due sequence, each carrying a wreath, or a posy of flowers.

The coffin was borne by relays of bearers, stalwart men who were known to the family, or belonged to the village. This was not considered a matter to be handed over to outsiders such as the undertaker's men, if it could be avoided. It was too personal for that. And I have never known a man refuse to be a bearer when asked, unless he was physically unable to stand the strain of the work. Many a time has one of my own employees asked me something like this:

"Would you mind if I am away to-morrow, they've asked me to be one of the bearers for old Mr. Dash—I should like to show proper respect; he was a friend of my father." (I always like that word "respect". It is fast disappearing from our social life, alas!)

The bearers changed at certain recognized points *en route*. I have often marvelled at the endurance of the men; I have known them carry their burden three miles, uphill all the way, from the village in the valley to the old Norman church on the hill top, most of the villagers following decorously, to join a further group, perhaps from another village, waiting at the church gate.

To-day, a motor hearse and cars skim over the ground and the journey is undoubtedly less laborious. Yet it has lost as much as it has gained, by the change.

In the past I have followed, with others, some neighbour to his or her last resting-place, and it has seemed to me that the orderly, unhurried approach to the burial in God's Acre is more reverent, and in keeping with the service, than the manner of some city funerals I have occasionally seen, where the main object apparently has been to get it over as speedily as possible and with the least trouble to anybody.

Family traditions are usually strong in country districts, especially before the war turned homes as well as whole villages inside out and upside down. The little churchyard is often a rallying point for scattered relations, especially on Flowering Sunday, when all who can manage to do so tend the graves of their own people the day before, making them as beautiful as they can with flowers. Next day—Flowering Sunday, which is the Sunday before Easter Day—you will see men and women quite early in the morning carrying wreaths to the churchyard, that they may be as fresh as possible when everyone comes to

see the flowers, and in their own way calling to remembrance those who have passed to their rest.

Funerals are curious in the way they affect the onlooker. Relatives and intimate friends will be preoccupied with the solemnity of the occasion and the sense of personal loss, and probably oblivious of small happenings.

On the other hand, when one attends merely as a mark of respect for those concerned, some unexpected occurrence, though slight, can be quite enough to upset one's gravity, or put a strain on it. Some perfectly harmless remark may be the undoing of several people, for no real reason except that they have been suppressing their ordinary feelings, and enveloped in the general atmosphere of tension that prevails at a funeral; and their self-control may suddenly give way!

The President of a big Women's Organization having died, I received an invitation to attend the funeral—not because I was connected with it in any way, I was not; but because I was editing several women's periodicals. I was allotted a seat in one of the carriages, with three ladies considerably older than myself, and, apparently, prominent members of the organization, or so I judged. All were strangers to me. Each bowed to the others on taking the seat indicated by some official hand; then all remained absolutely silent for about ten or fifteen minutes, though it seemed an hour to me.

We had a tiring drive ahead of us, with horses, not motors, and, as the procession was long and imposing, the speed was not rapid. As I was undoubtedly the most inferior individual as well as the youngest of the quartette, I realized that it was not for me to utter the first word, so I studied my companions' hats; wondered what had induced them to put the erections on their heads; tried to visualize the effect if I could transpose the hats all round, and put them on the other heads. Doubtless they found my appearance equally uninteresting.

Having done all I possibly could with the hats, under the limitations of existing circumstances, I tried other devices for passing the time and getting away from the sense of oppression caused by the partly-lowered blinds, only slightly opened windows and the all-enveloping silence. I counted the number of children we passed, and busied my nearly torpid brain endeavouring to discover whether boys or girls were in the majority.

As a rule I prefer silent fellow-travellers who leave me to get on with my book—a British trait which our American friends think most singular, not to say cold and even haughty! I object to having to listen, as once happened, to the life-story of a woman all the way from Paddington to Falmouth, save when she was eating!

But when we four women were going to a funeral in which we were

supposed to have some interest in common, it seemed odd to me that no one said a single word about the deceased President, either praise, reminiscence, or regret.

Just as I was feeling I simply could not count any more children, and decided to start on street lamps, a full-bosomed voice beside me broke the spell with this impressive remark:

"How I do wish dear Lady So-and-So could have come with us to-day; she would have enjoyed this drive so much." The others murmured heartfelt agreement, all ignoring the obvious fact that dear Lady So-and-So was accompanying us, beneath the wreaths in the leading vehicle!

It was a ridiculous remark under the circumstances. But I pinched my fingers very hard, added my murmur to the others, thankful that I had not disgraced myself, as I nearly did, by smiling.

One of my brothers had a somewhat similar experience. The deceased was a well-known figure in the City of London; his business friends and associates, as well as all his employees, were invited to the funeral.

The whole affair was very badly managed, however. The interment was some distance out of London where the family grave was situated. A very large number, all men, forgathered at the house in accordance with the directions on the invitation. There was a long wait, the January day was bleak and bitterly cold, and there wasn't a drop or crumb of refreshment offered the waiting mourners.

When the signal was given to leave the house, the undertaker said no list of names had been given him, nor the order in which they should go; therefore, would the gentlemen kindly seat themselves as they preferred.

My brother found himself with three unknowns. One looked like a departmental manager, another like an elderly superannuated clerk, and the third like a respectable packer or warehouseman in his best clothes.

Complete silence, except for chattering teeth! Possibly my brother was the damper, as no one knew him, or who he might be. Just as my brother decided to start some sort of conversation, the packer, who had been gazing in a melancholy reverie at his own boots, forestalled him, as though talking to himself:

"And to think—just to think—that a little drop o' whisky would 'ave made all the difference!"

An occasion when I had some difficulty in keeping a grave face was at a house in my own neighbourhood. We had long known and revered the old lady who had died, and Ursula said she would like to go with me to the funeral. Incidentally it needs more of an effort to retain one's gravity should any diversion occur, if accompanied by a kindred soul.

We had been warned that an old uncle made a practice of turning up at every funeral in the family, no matter how remote or diluted the relationship might be. And it was his unvarying custom to present each of the assembled mourners with a pair of very thick black woollen gloves—a useful gift if they had been wearable, but unfortunately the old gentleman insisted on the very largest size obtainable, to be on the safe side! As a result, most hands were completely lost inside the gloves, and several inches of black tubes dangled like a fringe beyond the tops of the unfortunate fingers. The real job we found was to keep the gloves from falling off, if we were not gripping them firmly. We were told that Uncle Andrew revelled in the importance of this presentation, and would be so hurt if anyone refused them. We therefore knew exactly what to do at the solemn moment when he entered the room where we were sitting in the usual silence, with a number of relatives and elderly friends, and handed a pair to each with great *empressement*, as though bestowing an order of chivalry.

Though I had been prepared for the event, when I saw the size of those gloves I had resolutely to refrain from looking at Ursula, though I dearly longed to know how she was managing, as her hands are exceptionally small.

The daughter of the house was sitting nearest the door. I was sitting next to her, and then Ursula. We were waiting for the undertaker to announce completion, as the casket had been kept open to the last minute, awaiting the arrival of a relative from a distance.

No one spoke. No one even coughed. All I could do was to fix my eyes on my gloves, and wish I had two elastic bands to slip over my wrists to help keep them on.

Then the door opened noiselessly. We all looked up, expecting a start to be made. But it was the nurse who had been in attendance on the old lady. Speaking in a very low tone to the daughter of the house, she inquired where she could find the old lady’s dentures, as the undertaker was waiting for them.

The daughter was in an exhausted over-wrought state of nerves, which was not surprising. But it rather startled the silent circle in the room when she snapped out in a clear voice:

“Her artificial teeth? What should he want them for? She isn’t likely to need them in Heaven, is she?”

The nurse retreated hastily!

Ten
THE MOURNER

I had been thinking about funerals, when Mrs. Tattle arrived, wearing her professional visiting-the-home-of-mourning-for-last-offices expression.

"I suppose you've heard, m'm, that Mrs. Blanket's gone at last?"

"Yes; someone told me yesterday."

"Very suddint it was at the end. Her daughter-in-law hadn't been downstairs more than a minute, getting a cup o' tea. Of course I went up there at once."

"And I'm sure you would be very helpful."

"It's not for me to boast. 'Tisn't in me. But I do say, and it can't be denied, there's no one in the district what has laid out as many as I have, and done it proper and dignified. Ah, well! It's what we all have to come to sooner or later. And I determined that Betsy Blanket should have her due, even if she wasn't me dearest friend. I regarded it as a perfession'l case."

Remembering that the Tattles and the Blankets had various mutual connexions by births and marriages, I well understood that there might be divergence of opinion at times. In isolated, much-related rural communities, it would be a marvel if there were no small feuds to keep things lively. But I had no desire to hear one-sided details.

"I'm sure you did your best," I said warmly. "I didn't see Mrs. Blanket very often, since she moved to St. Briavels. But I always thought her very kind-hearted and pleasant."

"Yes, I've heard others say the same sort of thing, who didn't know her. But there—say nothing but good of them as is gone, is my motto, even though she did say what she did. Many's the time I've held my tongue between my artificials when I've been in the house of mourning, and heard folks saying what a saint him or her was, as they handed over their wreath with yards written on a card. I could have added a lot more to it; but there——"

Being anxious to change the subject, I inquired: "When is the funeral?"

"To-morrow, at St. Briavels, of course, and I shall walk directly after the fambly mourners," suddenly changing from her air of decent gloom to one of prideful anticipation. "Yes, I only discovered it last night, when I was talking

things over with Tattle. He said: ‘Ain’t you related to her somehows?’ And then I remembered. You see, it’s like this: My mother’s brother was nephew to Betsy’s second husband’s first wife. And barring the fambly, there’s no one left now nearer than that. So it’s my place to show respect, and that I know what ought to be. I always say however poor you are, do the right thing——”

“She had a good many sons and daughters. I suppose they will all try to be there.”

“For certain they will; and they’ll all have their eyes on her best china tea-set locked up in the glass cupboard. Her daughter-in-law was saying that the ugly old Welsh dresser would fetch a mint o’ money these days. But——”

I had had more than enough, and decided to terminate the interview as she showed no sign of leaving. And for all I knew, she might presently be going round the village attributing all sorts of remarks to me, that I had never uttered!

“What was it you wished to ask me?” I interrupted her, being quite sure she wanted something, yet couldn’t manage to steer round to it gracefully.

Producing a memorandum book from her bag, and a short stump of lead pencil, she explained: “I’m going round collecting something for her pore daughter-in-law. I thought you would like to head the list, knowing how highly you thought of Mrs. Blanket. If I got something real generous to start with, others would follow.” Holding book and pencil in my direction.

“But why a collection for the daughter-in-law? Surely the old lady left enough to pay her funeral expenses? If not, it is her son’s place to see about it, not his wife’s.”

“Oh yes, there’s plenty to give her a real handsome funeral. She’d insured for that. Not that it will be as good as her husband’s was. She buried *him* with ham and a nice little bit of brisket. But o’ course they can’t do that now. I expect it’ll be corn beef. Only her daughter-in-law has took on something dreadful since Betsy died. Says she don’t know how she’ll go on living without her; and she doesn’t s’pose one of ’em will think to bring a bit of marge. Her husband’s no good at all, not a bit.”

“That’s very unfortunate for her.”

“And she don’t need no one to tell her that, poor dear.”

“But I’m afraid I can see no necessity to give to a collection for her, though it is kind of you to think of it. Her husband is earning good wages and should provide for her. And I thought he did? Why it was only the other day I heard he had bought her a very good churn they saw at a sale, as her old one was nearly useless. And also he bought some sheets.”

“I daresay. Yes, I believe he did. But *she*,” suddenly becoming vindictive, “she’s as mean as the bread ration! Would you believe it, she won’t give me a penny for all I did for Mrs. Blanket, said she never asked me to come! *If* you ever heard of such a thing! So I thought if I got up a little collection for her, it

would look nice and show the right feeling. Then she couldn't refuse to pay me out of it."

"I see! You really are getting up the collection for yourself! Well—I'll give you this, for yourself. But don't you dare to put my name down on any list."

"Oh, thank you," eagerly stretching out her hand, and then looking at the money. "Of course it isn't as much as I usually get, but it will help. I shan't bear none of 'em no ill-will. I shall walk quietly, next after the fambly—it'll be that Althea-Jane, being the youngest, who'll be at the end I expect, unless they bring some of the grandchildren—and I shall mourn quite dignified, as I ought, being a perfession'l so to speak."

By this time I had risen, and was gently but firmly urging her towards the door.

"And one thing I will say, m'm, there's no one I'd sooner lay out than you. And you may rely on me, I'll do so, no matter how unconvenient it may be for me to come when they send for me. I always say that though you may not be so taking-looking as you was when you were a girl—looks never are the best part of some famblies are they, and we all get plainer as we get older—at any rate there's one thing certain, you'll make a beautiful remains."

Eleven
THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

For some time past, I have known that I am peculiar; though I have consoled myself with the notion that most other folk are peculiar too. When you come to think about it, many people—quite nice people—have some queer kink that hurts nobody, but seems to give them a surprising amount of satisfaction.

"No! I never touch Jerusalem artichokes, unless it's a month with R in it. Even to look at them at any other time of year turns me completely yellow, a brilliant yellow." And it's useless to point out that most of the months when Jerusalem artichokes are under discussion do contain an R, hence, why worry? You won't iron out the kink that way! The speaker will still proclaim his or her (particularly her) unique tendency to turn that brilliant yellow.

Sometimes it's just a carefully cultivated habit, which is given frequent publicity: "It's my fixed rule to drink half a pint of spring water between the meat course and the pudding—granting one can get meat and pudding. I allow nothing to interfere with this."

Perhaps it's a fad. "I always walk three and a half times round the lawn before taking a bath, otherwise I should be down with pneumonia immediately... Oh yes! cold of course—who can have a hot bath these days!"

Then there are delusions: "If I ever dream about chopping suet, it's an absolutely certain sign of a wedding in the family. Look at last December 18th. There I was, chopping suet for all I was worth half the night! What did Marjorie do but go out next morning, slip on some orange peel, and fall right into the very arms of the man she married later!"

Superstitions are rampant: "For pity's sake, child, take that hawthorn blossom out of the house *at once*. You should *never* bring it indoors before the first of May. It's *so* unlucky." Variations include snowdrops, peacock feathers and such-like innocuous objects.

Laying down the law about nothing is another peculiarity, usually masculine: "How many times have I stated that I wish the box of matches to be left exactly where I put it? But of course no one pays the slightest attention to what I say, in *this* house... Oh! did I leave it there? I'd forgotten—sorry."

Then there are inexplicable likes and dislikes in which most of us indulge. To the individuals attached to them they seem quite reasonable; while to the uninterested they may appear extremely odd. Which brings me to one of my own specialities.

The sight of a clothes-line full of washing, hanging out in a country garden, billowing in the wind and gleaming in the sunshine, always gives me a particular pleasure—provided that they are a good colour, of course. I have long cherished this queer delight, but never mentioned it, thinking that no other person in the land would understand it. But recently an afternoon caller chanced to say, over the meagre tea-table: "I did a splendid wash yesterday; got up at six, and had the line full by eleven o'clock. I do so love to hang out the clean things and watch them blowing in the breeze with the sun full on them. No matter how tired I may be with the unaccustomed work, it vanishes when I see how nice they look, and how still nicer they will be when they come in, so sweet and fresh, at sundown."

This interested me, as I share her feelings exactly; only I had never hoped to meet a fellow enthusiast. Most women, if they mention washing at all, think only of the dingy, sordid miscellany seen in town backyards, from train windows in passing. Even in better-class houses, if any washing is permitted in the garden (which is seldom) it runs the risk of soots and smuts, and it may get torn, if within bowing distance of shrubs and rose trees. A disheartening business as a rule.

In the country there is usually a field or sufficient garden attached to the smallest cottage to allow a clear space for the long clothes line, and usually a tank of soft rain-water for the work—and what a difference the water makes! Moreover, the air will be clean, and possibly odorous with wood smoke. No soot to fall in flakes.

My own pleasurable reaction to the sight of swaying clothes on a well-filled line is probably due to the subconscious knowledge of their wholesome sweetness when they come indoors again; a sweetness which is owing to the many perfumes that have blown about them, from trees, flowers, fruits and grass, with the scents from the vegetable plot, such as turnips, broad bean blossom, thyme, mint and sage; gathered also from moorlands, farmlands, forests, and perhaps the sea, over which the winds have crossed; and all aided by that most powerful of sweeteners, the hot sun.

And if there is one scent that excels all others in this category, it will be found when one's fine cottons and linens, having been left out all of a summer night in the open, to be soaked with heavy dew, are then allowed to dry in the hot sun. Sheets and pillow-slips are delightful after such a night out.

But—beware of the gipsies!

In saying all this, I am not rhapsodizing sentimentally. I know that washing

is hard work, especially when, as in my case, there is no machine to help. Until 1939 I had had very little practical experience; but when war came, I had of course to take on many household tasks I had not done before, like thousands of other women all over the land.

Before I left London, most of my time was spent in my office, and the laundry van called each week with exemplary regularity. How we took such service for granted in those days, never imagining that it might disappear, perhaps permanently!

Here at the Flower-Patch we are ten miles from a laundry; and even they couldn't look at one's things earlier in the war, having all they could do to cope with the needs of the various Services and the hospitals.

Even now, when matters are easier, their van does not pass my house. I have to send my consignment to the care of a kind resident some distance away on the van's fortnightly route. And this must not be too weighty in consideration of the one who has to toil up and down the steep hill with it. Therefore much still remains to be washed at home.

In the course of my search for guidance, I turned up an early edition of Mrs. Beeton, where I read that experienced washer-women never now rubbed the clothes on their knuckles; this was only done by the untrained. The correct method was to rub two portions of the article together; thus not only saving the hands, but also rubbing double the amount of material at one time.

Those Victorian laundresses could not have been as bright as I had imagined them to be! It would never have occurred to me, in my earliest attempts, to use my knuckles for the job.

In pre-war days there were one or two excellent laundresses in the village —one indeed was a real artist; her work was beautiful, and she took such pride in all she did. But evacuees and war-factories ended all that—not to mention soap shortage.

After years of tribulation, a very capable nice girl came, to help us keep the household from utter collapse. The first week—being the alternate week when the laundry-van did not tour this district—to my surprise, I saw a scene that was really charming, and reminded me of the lovely landscape paintings of the late Mrs. Allingham. She must have shared my liking for fluttering clothes on a line, she so often included them in her pictures of country cottages and their gardens.

In the orchard nearest to my house, I beheld a very long clothes line, which had been fastened to a big plum tree near the top, carried downhill to another plum tree, both of them hefty and firm in root, branch and stem. And this line appeared to be holding most of the contents of the linen cupboard; while the indefatigable girl was hanging out still more on a subsidiary line, fastened to another branch. She had evidently hunted up all she could, without waiting for

next week's van.

As she stood there in her pretty blue overall, shaking out and pegging up the whitest of "whites", and colourful pretties of various description—the two cats, Billie and Poppy, playing around her and scampering up and down the trees with the sheer joy of living—any artist would have wanted to paint the whole scene. A background of hills, still more hills, and valleys: an intensely blue sky with piled-up huge white clouds; trees of many tints; green orchard grass flecked with yellow hawkweed, purple knapweed, wild carrot, moon daisies that had escaped the mowers, and reddish-purple plums with the blue bloom that is so lovely, lying under the trees on the grass among the wild flowers, clover and creeping-jenny; add to this the figure of the girl giving just the human touch that we needed.

Ursula had come out to get some herbs for her cooking. I joined her and called her attention to the orchard picture.

"It's lovely," she said. "And it's genuine, not a pose, like that cottage garden we saw in Cornwall, where that pair of bright blue slacks always hung on the line and were never taken down, because the artist thereabouts considered them picturesque. Remember?"

Speaking of Mrs. Beeton, as a child I pictured her an imposing, middle-aged matron, amply rotund, extremely well-fed (how could she be otherwise?), spending her days at an immense desk, writing down mouth-melting recipes which she evolved from her own inner consciousness, and handing them out (to be served for dinner) to scores of cooks who flung about dozens of new-laid eggs like snowballs.

As it happened, however, I followed, in direct line, a number of other editors who, one by one, had succeeded Mrs. Beeton down the years. And I heard a good deal about her, though she had been dead so long.

A friend of my family, Mr. James Bowden, offered me the sub-editorship of a new magazine, about to be launched and to be called *The Windsor Magazine*. This was my first glimpse of Fleet Street and office life. *The Windsor* descended in a straight line from *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* edited by Mrs. Beeton, one of the very earliest women's monthlies in England. Her husband, Mr. S. O. Beeton, was one of a firm of publishers, and Mr. James Bowden as a lad obtained his first job under Mr. Beeton in the very firm where years later he (Mr. Bowden) became an important Director. He told me many things about those early days.

Mrs. Beeton, far from being the august, overpowering lady of my imagination, was in reality a pleasant, attractive girl. She had several children, four boys if I remember rightly; but sadly enough she died when she was about twenty-seven years old.

Though her name was attached as editor of the magazine and to the

cookery-book ("The Book of Household Management", as it was first called) both were actually edited by her husband, though she took a great interest in the ventures, naturally. But she herself had her hands fairly full with her babies, her home claims, and then her own health. Her early death cut off what might have been a still more useful life.

Mr. Beeton was a very clever, go-ahead man, and ran the publications well, with a team of competent assistants. The Cookery Book was, in the first instance, compiled from recipes sent to *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* by readers asked to send their favourites. The idea caught on, friends also contributed; in due course there was ample to fill a large book. The recipes were all checked by good cooks; tabulated, re-written according to one formula, i.e., the ingredients at the head of each recipe; the method of preparing and cooking next; then the time to be allowed for cooking (a most important item, and one that is omitted in a large number of printed directions for cooking). The current prices was also added and the number of persons the specified amount of ingredients will serve.

Then followed a really valuable note, in many cases, about the growth, origin, or life history of the article of food mentioned. These carefully prepared paragraphs are in themselves a most useful collection of Natural History facts to which I have often turned for some needed information.

All this preparation and arrangement required a good business head, and an expert staff to check every detail. Add to this yet another virtue, the Index is a model. No wonder those early, beautifully illustrated editions were among the "very specials" in the bookcase of every well-to-do house mistress.

Not long ago, when looking up a recipe in my old edition of Mrs. Beeton, I was more than usually amazed at the number of eggs, pounds of butter and quarts of cream called for! As the cookery book was first published in 1861, I wondered if earlier cooks used still more dairy produce, since it certainly seems as though fresh eggs, butter that is butter, and unadulterated cream, become less and less available with the passing of the years, till now they seem to have vanished entirely from mortal vision!

Reaching down a book published in 1812, I turned up a recipe for the same dish, and to my surprise, found it was word for word the same as that in Mrs. Beeton. I then looked up many other recipes, comparing the two books, and found many of them with identical wording. Evidently the readers of the *Domestic Magazine*, having been asked to send their favourite recipes, had done so, never thinking it was necessary to say where they had come from. So few women, even in these days, understand the significance of the copyright laws, much less would they have troubled about them all those years ago.

But the fact that some of the recipes date from 1812, or earlier, explains to a great extent the lavish use of home-produced butter, eggs and cream: for it

was not the rule in 1861, I've heard my grandmother say. In 1812 rich fare was mainly for the tables of the wealthy, and they had no lack of dairy produce to draw upon.

Since Isabella Beeton signed her name to the Preface of the First Edition, in 1861, the book has been revised and brought up-to-date continuously, and always well done. And though the number of cookery books is legion to-day, Mrs. Beeton has never been superseded, and it is unlikely it ever will be—unless our rations get so many cuts that they are no longer there!

But all this is by the way.

To return to the weeding: though it was slow, and somewhat haphazard, it showed all sorts of new loveliness we had scarcely noticed before. The weeds, having been left unchastened and unrestrained for half a dozen years, had revelled in their freedom, and immediately set out to live their own individual lives, so far as possible, according to the design originally planned in the great Order.

I had always regarded chickweed as a weak straggler, sending out long, thin, many-jointed stems which struggled to climb the flowers in the window-boxes, sending out a few tufts of leaves and its little white stars, when at last it managed to escape suffocation, and reach light and air. Quite useful for the budgerigars and the fowls, before they had to be killed to save their lives, so to speak; but otherwise unnoticed, save when it drew too much public attention to itself, and the window-boxes had an overhaul.

But coming on a garden tub, which in the happy past used to hold bulbs, followed by a mixture of geraniums, eschscholtzias, clarkias, and anything else handy, it surprised us to find it now monopolized by a single plant of common chickweed. No weakly wobbly stems with apologetic tufts of leaves at the top, and not enough backbone to keep them from flopping. Here was a lovely great rosette, twelve inches or more in diameter, almost a complete circle. It lay flat on the soil, evidently its natural position; no wonder it was so puny when it had to strive upwards to get all the light and air it needed merely to keep alive. Now it was free to do its best, in sun and rain and air, its stems radiated, closely laid, from a centre, all the way round the circle like spokes of a wheel, each stem clothed from base to tip with its little oval leaves. Above the first circle lying on the soil was a second circle, the stems just as regularly placed, but an inch or so shorter than the lowest layer. Above this was a third, and buds in the centre showed that it would go on piling up tier on tier, should weather conditions allow, every stem raising its top tuft of leaves about an inch, making it end in a small upward curve. The whole effect was most surprising. It suggested some of those wonderful carvings of foliage and flowers in Gothic cathedrals. Though too fine in detail for such stone work, it

would have delighted the eyes of those long-ago artists; and they would certainly have developed the idea and used it somewhere. Perhaps they did so. Unfortunately life is too short to allow for the study of more than a very few of the great cathedrals.

One thing that surprised us often, when turning over and out the coarser weeds, was the persistence of life that is inherent in so many plants, whether wild or tame. Both white and yellow jasmines, forsythias, and certain climbing roses, for instance, had sent out long stems over the ground, beneath undesirable rampants, layering themselves and rooting, many already starting to make new "satellite towns" beyond the family tree. The only drawback in such cases was the difficulty in finding suitable places for the newcomers. When one's ground is mainly devoted to food crops, space for what one would like to have in the flower-beds is not easy to find.

Some of the efforts of plants to set up their young people in new homes were less popular. I intended to go into an orchard through a side gate which had not been used since before the war. It was approached by a path about twelve feet wide, a wall on one side, and a high bank on the other at the top of which was a bramble bush, the path being thus in a miniature valley.

In the past, we used to gather blackberries there, when we had all the sugar we wanted. Happy days! When I now saw it, the bush had sent down streamers several yards in length, in order to reach the ground below the bank. These had rooted sturdily in the grass below, making a curtain of firmly-anchored bramble stems that entirely blocked the passage to the gate. Many of the rooted sprays were twelve and fourteen feet long, having started their voyage of discovery from the upper part of the bush.

Such enterprise is wonderful, but very painful to deal with! And after we had cut it down, what a business it was, in the first place, to disentangle oneself from the clinging, twisting, piercing lengths; and then, after cutting it into shorter lengths to make it easier to handle, what a job it was to induce it to stay put in the rubbish baskets, long enough to get it to the bonfire department. How it loved to reach out, catch hold of one's garments, and by this artful device manage to jump out on to the path and be left behind.

It takes a clever amateur to deal with a bank of brambles as hefty as ours always are. The thorns take little count of thick gloves, even if we had had a decent pair left; whereas ours went into a spate of holes about 1942, at the essential spots where a bit of glove rather than a hole was the more desired!

Despite all one says about this doubtful blessing, one has to remember that blackberry jelly, as made by the competent housewives in our village, is most delectable; while strained blackberry and apple tart topped with real cream is a thing to dream about.

But as such superb delicacies were only dreams at that time, and seem

inclined to remain so for the present, it was imperative to check further developments on the part of that bush. This involved pulling up the rooted foot of every streamer with its round tuft of rootlets like a mop, as well as cutting them off at the top. Merely to cut off the stem at the ground level would have resulted in a still more healthy crop next year.

It was a tedious job. Indeed there was a moment—when a particularly vicious spray slapped my face and left its mark upon it, while another grabbed the hem of my underskirt and refused to be ousted—that I wished I had left that gate to its fate and gone round to another more civilized entrance.

Ursula meanwhile was fastening rents in her overall with safety pins. We ought to have worn land-girls' dress for the job. Virginia, who was stoking the bonfire, remarked: "It's as bad as when the monkey-tree was cut down."

It is astonishing what an amount of trouble per inch a bramble can supply free gratis!

As the weeks passed by, the leaves changed their tints. Some of the wild maples became clear yellow sunshine; others a golden bronze; while the garden scarlet variety became a mass of unbelievable colour. Golden yellow light crept all over the woods and garden. Mosses began to uncurl in moist shady spots. The cup moss, one of the most charming of our native mosses, laid out its tiny cups fit for fairies, on any damp stone it could find; so lovely in their milky-green tone, and the daintiness of their design.

Not to despise the day of small things, has been one of the lessons of the war. Many of us found out that (contrary to Mr. Euclid) a part can be far greater than the whole. We discovered in a multitude of unconsidered trifles, values exceeding anything we had previously imagined, not only in the material things but in the spiritual and moral sense. In unexpected places we came upon beauty we had never noticed before. The black-out brought to some a fresh revelation when, at last, they saw the stars.

Even with some of our own, whose characteristics we thought we knew in minutest detail, what unimagined courage and marvellous heroism came to light, often where least expected.

In reality there are no small things.

Twelve
NEIGHBOURLY CALLERS

How few of us really know anything of the methods and mentality of the little creatures around us, who haunt our gardens and the countryside, and to some extent share our living space, whether we wish it or not!

I imagined I knew something about the mole: how he makes his runs underground, especially below my newly-planted roses, and any bed just dug up and dotted over with choice seedlings, or up-coming green peas. Naturally I regretted his preference; but I did sympathize with his desire for the easiest going; and I understand exactly his wish to avoid unnecessary work (my own chronic state of late!) and his pleasure at finding soft, well-worked soil, where he is not barking his nose against a stone every few inches.

I had often picked one up when above ground on some business of his own, and stroked the lovely coat, but put him down again immediately in response to a sharp nip at my finger, and a pathetic little squeak. But only recently have I discovered this small animal's surprising power of abuse—indeed the rest of my household called it swearing!

Coming downstairs, I heard unusual sounds coming from the small greenhouse, or porch, outside the front door which was standing open; it was a noise similar to the loud scolding of the red squirrels when disturbed at their cache of buried nuts, and they run up the nearest tree and shower down insults on the intruder.

"Whatever can that riot be?" I said to the Nice Girl who was following me downstairs. She listened half a second:

"It's a mole in difficulties." Being the daughter of a line of foresters, few out-door sounds escape her.

We hurried to the porch, to find Billie and Poppy equally interested, Billie mounted on a flower-tub trying to get at the noise which was just out of his reach, in a corner behind the tub; Poppy looking on, ready to help if needed.

Picking up the two cats, and shutting them in the kitchen, we then moved the tubs and rescued the terrified little creature, still protesting vigorously, opened the porch door and set him free.

Outside the porch door is a built-up plateau, to save one from promptly

tumbling downhill on stepping out of the house! This is made of firm rocky earth thickly embedded with stones, and bordered with flower-beds. In the past, this plateau was kept free from weeds and grass, as it enabled the water in rainy seasons which ran down the steps from the hillside above, to rush unhindered down the opposite side, where another flight of steps led down to the hillside below. Being left to itself in the war, the ground was now fairly matted over with the tiny yellow-flowered oxalis, wild violets, creeping-jenny, self-heal, London Pride, and many other "don't belongs".

On the top of this thick, soft mat, we placed the little stranger; with one quick movement he dived, but only under the green-stuff; the ground beneath was almost as hard as the rock of which it was largely made up. On and on he went, hoping to find something softer, the green carpet undulating like waves, as he ploughed away, talking to himself at the top of his indignant voice—probably about us! It was so odd to hear all this rumpus coming from underneath the vegetation.

Presently he reached the soft earth of the border. Under the big edging stones he plunged; one faint murmur of his protestations came from far away, and I hope the poor distracted mite had struck a trail of some sort to take him home. We heard no more.

The reasoning powers of wild birds are often extremely sensible. Archibald, a very friendly blackbird, used my kitchen as his own, before the advent of Billie and Poppy who had other views. They arrived after the death of my white West Highlander. How I miss him! But it was kinder not to replace him, with food such a problem. He was very wise and understanding, like most Scotties. He realized that I wished Archibald to be left unmolested, and when the jaunty bird strutted into the kitchen looking for the bits I put down for him under the table, the little dog would retire with dignity to his box, and pretend to be asleep.

Only in the early days of the nesting season did Archibald take his wife a dainty bit, after he had done himself particularly well! Later, when the nestlings appeared (and they had four nests that year), he swallowed a hasty scrap, and then stuffed his beak to capacity, and hurried with it to the family, ramming it into their gaping beaks, and flying back for more and still more. Quite a properly-minded father!

At last the small dog got bored, not to say exasperated, with this perpetual usurpation of *his* kitchen, and devised a way which he hoped would prevent the interloper's getting in. After Archibald had carried off the second instalment of the nursery breakfast, the dog came out of his box, and, in a leisurely unconcerned manner, strolled out of the kitchen into the back hall and laid himself down on the mat by the door right across the doorstep, with not an

inch of space, either nose or tail end, where an overworked father could squeeze through. Then he closed his eyes and feigned sleep.

When Archibald returned from the nest in the laurels, his indignation was very vocal. He scolded, chut-chutted, advanced as though to dig his yellow beak into the obstructor, but backed when he saw the dog half open an eye. He flew up into a syringa and started to shout his grievances to the world—only his wife came and gave him some domestic advice. But he was reluctant to leave so well-stored a larder as that kitchen. Then an idea occurred to him.

Returning to the path outside the back door, he evidently measured distances. First he went near the dog; keeping his eye on the door, he backed and backed till he felt sure of his position. He then took a flying leap and landed in the hall the other side of the dog. From here he strutted proudly into the kitchen, with more chut-chuts to register triumph. When his mouth was quite full, he returned to the hall; measured his distance as before; another flying leap and he was out in the open once more. He tried to tell the dog what he thought of him, but his mouth was too full for words. In this way he continued to supply his family. But it was too much for the dog; he rose and, ignoring Archibald, went off on his own.

One thing about bird life has puzzled me: when a young bird falls out of a nest to the ground, why do the parents make no attempt to feed it, but leave it to its fate? While the babies are in the nest, they are most devoted to them; yet they seem quite callous when one disappears. If a jay or magpie steals the whole nest, they are most distressed; but one more or less seems to make no difference.

At the vicarage, a young rook was picked up, where it had fallen from a tall tree in the rookery. They fed him and he seemed to enjoy being brought up by hand. When fledged, he was given his freedom, but remained about the place, either indoors or out, and identified himself entirely with the family.

One day he arrived at the scullery door with a stick, which he laid on the boiler. Day by day more sticks were placed in the corner, till quite a heap were nicely to hand for fire-lighting! Then, to everyone’s surprise an egg appeared there, and “he” decided to sit on it. That didn’t do however, and finding sticks and egg removed “he” (now spoken of as “she”) must have fulfilled her maternal duties elsewhere; though she continued to visit her old home, till, presumably, domestic cares left her no time for friendly calls. She was seen with the other rooks and evidently was admitted to the rookery without question. Had she been caged till adulthood, it is possible they would have regarded her as a stranger, and resented any attempt to gate-crash. As it was she divided her early days between the rookery and the vicarage.

We had a big cage of budgerigars standing in one of the living-room windows. One day I heard a heavy bang on the window; it seemed far too loud and heavy for a bird; more as though a big football had hit the glass with a thud. I searched inside and out, finding nothing but the budgies lying gasping at the bottom of the cage, nearly dead with fright.

Ten minutes later, another bang. I wondered if it were some sort of a bomb being dropped for practice—only no machine happened to be in the air at the moment. Again I went outside to explore, first having removed the frightened birds from the window.

Searching among the plants in the border outside the window—close to the back door—I was startled to find myself nearly touching a big hawk perched motionless on a stake supporting a rose bush, and looking most arrogant. When I reached out to touch him, he merely lifted himself a bit higher into a nut tree, but still within my reach. Again when I went up to him, he gave me a scornful look, and floated up to a still loftier perch on a garden arch, this time beyond my reach unless I had a ladder.

He seemed quite fearless, well aware that he could always elude me; but equally determined to stay—and bang the window once more, in the hope of getting the budgies, as soon as I should disappear.

Getting annoyed with him, and fearing that his next blow would smash the window, I got a garden broom and had a tilt at him on the arch. As before, he appeared to lift himself up leisurely, and float up to a branch of a tall spruce, where neither I nor my broom could inconvenience him. And like Poe's raven, he gloomed at me with a Nevermore expression, "perched and sat and nothing more."

I hoped I had shown him quite clearly that he was not welcome, and concluded he would now abandon his quest.

The house has a hall running right through from the back door to the front door, which usually stands open, and admits into the small greenhouse or porch already mentioned. Half way along this wide passage, another hall turns off it at right angles; the living-room opens into this side hall.

I had hardly got back to my work, when a huge clatter and smash brought everyone rushing to see if a bomb had hit us. But it was Nevermore back yet again!

Apparently he had watched me move those little birds from the window, and had reasoned that if he went through the back door as I had done, he would find them. Only, not having yet learnt his way about the house, he had flown straight through to the far end where he saw glass windows, instead of turning into the side hall.

When he found himself unable to get out that end, his great wings swept down the plants from the shelves all round, smashing fancy pots, glass saucers,

and bowls in which the plants stood; the more noise they made as they crashed on to the tiled floor, the more he banged around trying to escape.

Like so many other birds, bats, bees, wasps and butterflies, it did not occur to him to turn round and retrace his steps. Wildlings when caught like that seldom attempt to go back by the way they came. Possibly in their fright at finding themselves entrapped, they lose their heads, or at any rate their sense of direction.

Going forward quietly, I was amazed at the extent of his outspread wings as he banged still more furiously against the glass. With one quick movement, I pinioned his wings from behind with my two hands (he was indeed a strong bird!) keeping an eye on his wicked-looking beak! I didn't want him to escape for a few minutes, as Virginia and Ursula were out and would be back immediately, and I knew how interested they would be to see him at close quarters, as all we had seen of these birds hitherto was while they were hovering, almost motionless at times, in mid-air, over some coveted bird or animal down below.

An empty packing-case happened to be standing outside the back door. Telling someone to bring a large tray and some flat irons, I slipped him into the box, and the tray over it with the weights on top. In a few minutes my two friends returned, and I told my tale.

"Now just peep inside while I shift the lid a trifle, and see what a handsome bird he is, and how beautifully marked"—as I cautiously moved one flat iron, "and then I'll let him go."

I shifted the tray one inch—that was enough for Nevermore! With one violent bang, he knocked the cover out of my hand, and sailed off!

He learnt his lesson, and has not returned.

When the gardener came back after his dinner, and heard the catastrophe in the front porch, he said: "Surely you didn't let him get away, did you? Why, a hawk can kill chickens faster than the hens can lay the eggs—a bird like that will go on——"

"Yes—I know all that. But the remedy is to do as we do: wire the chicken-run. In any case, I couldn't have killed him, or anything else so beautiful."

"If only you'd a' kept him till I came, I'd soon have wrung his neck for him."

"Yes. I know you would. That was why I didn't keep him till you got back!"

Thirteen
HAPPY LITTLE SLEEPER

A garden, whether large or small, can be a real solace when personal worries, or affairs in the outside world, seem to weigh on the brain in a menacing manner. At such times the silent faith and the courage of the little wild things that merely wait, and even rest, through the dark days and the hard times of universal shortage can be a real encouragement, when for us no sunrise is yet visible.

The summer had gone, and part of the autumn; likewise our eggs, flour, and part of our cheese, bacon, milk, bread, fats, soap, coal, and most other things that were really necessary. It took even more points to buy the little we had been permitted to get before. And the word "coupon" had become an absolute boon to the comedians who had to keep the air buzzing with jokes.

Weeding being still urgent, I went out of doors to clear my head as much as to clear a weed!

It was a sunny morning, and autumn days in this valley can be exceedingly lovely, and delude one into thinking—it will soon be spring now!

Though the golden glow had faded from the beech wood and the maples, there were plenty of late roses in bloom, and buds ready to go on opening, till frost intervened. Primroses, yellow, pink and purple were beginning to bloom in sheltered spots; the violet borders were scenting the air, though the flowers were not as plentiful as the primroses; garden cowslips and a few polyanthus were holding up bright bunches of colour, just to show what they would do when conditions were better.

We had less inclination to weed now. Many of the undesired, such as bindweed, had retired into winter quarters below ground now that their tops had died off; and what the eye doesn't see the heart doesn't grieve over! Once again it seemed easier at the moment—if it rained or was rather chilly—to assure our consciences that we would do it thoroughly in the spring.

This morning however I started to take some of the luxuriant ivy off the big rocks that had been allowed to remain in the wild garden. When rocks are too big to remove without dynamite, we sometimes leave them standing—indeed it is often the only thing to do on land as steep as this. Upstanding rocks

can be most attractive, especially those that have plenty of white pebbles embedded in them, if not in ground useful for agriculture. They give a certain untamed character to the landscape, and even suggest the Matterhorn or a Colorado canyon in miniature! If flat-topped they often form seats and convenient halts.

When the ivy starts work at the base of the rock, it sends up most endearing sprays of tiny leaves which look like delicate mosaic on the grey stones. One hasn't the heart to pull them off, they are so innocent and appealing. But let them remain unnoticed even for a year, and the head-way they make is surprising. At the same time other small enterprises may be joining them—little oaks, nut bushes, a young birch: all sorts of juvenile forest-trees quickly settle around then, from the acorns and nuts and other seeds shed from the woodlands, and brought by birds and squirrels.

Once the ivy is neglected and gets the upper hand, as in war-time, it soon smothers every trace of the rock, and turns the place into a series of monotonous hummocks and mounds, with neither character nor special beauty.

Taking away some thick clumps of ivy, closely-matted stalks and leaves, with tall ferns beside the stone in front of the ivy, I came upon an oval ball, about the size of a turkey's egg. It was made of dried grasses and straw, and was hidden away in a mass of ivy, and partly supported on a little branch of a young hawthorn that was growing close to the rock. The oval ball was beautifully made, the dry stalks of the grasses were evenly arranged from the somewhat rounded base to a pointed top. Very carefully I prised apart a few of the stalks that met together at the top. Inside, fast asleep, was a little grey dormouse, the happy little creature whose conscious life is just one long summer. The sight of the dear little mite gave me a real thrill. One may read volumes about some attractive wildling; see it photographed, painted, diagrammed, filmed; but nothing approaches the pleasure it gives one actually to hold the living morsel in the hand, especially if—as in this case—the little creature is not frightened.

It seemed so amazing to me that it should have put itself to bed and then to sleep, with no anxiety for the future, no one to share its loneliness, no one to watch over it during its long night of sleep, save the Father who cares for us all, and forgets none.

I have found many unexpected treasures in my plot of land. Here was one more to add to the list.

Drawing the stalks together again, very gently, so as not to disturb it, I replaced it as well as I could where I had found it, putting a piece of wire netting over the top of the clump of green stuff—a sign understood by all weeders and gardeners that there is something underneath which must not be disturbed. When the tiny sleeper awakes from his long siesta, he can escape as

he wishes, by way of the sides, or downwards. You may trust any member of that family to know how to slip away to safety. But neither owl nor any prowling animal would find it easy to get him if they started on the sharp thorns and spines of the hawthorn around and below him.

What completely puzzled me was the way he had wrapped himself up in his winter blanket. Did he begin with himself inside? If so, how did he manage to arrange the outer coverings? If he made the outside shell first of all, how did he get himself and the rest of the materials inside and then shut the door after him?

Mentioning the matter to a friend who is a keen naturalist, she told me she had once been so fortunate as to see a dormouse put himself to bed.

She had chanced to come upon a collection of lengths of grass stalks, laid out in an orderly manner on a bit of flat surface. Waiting motionless she soon saw the tiny creature arrive with some more grasses to add to his hoard. When he considered he had enough, he spread out the stalks evenly and all lying the same way, with his front feet.

When quite satisfied with everything, he lay down on his side, and, with the uppermost feet, caught hold of a clutch of stalks, rolled himself over with these under him; caught hold of more stalks and grass with the other two feet. In this way rolled over and over, till he had entirely covered himself and used up all his material. Then when securely inside, he arranged it to his satisfaction, brought the ends together so as nearly to close the top and bottom, only the merest pinhole left, perhaps for air.

How my own little dormouse managed to tuck himself away out of sight among the concealing vegetation, I do not know. But as he was just over the edge of a large flat rock, possibly he made his little sleeping bag on that, and then rolled himself over the edge into the thicket. At any rate one is sure that an animal who could make such an ingenious, cosy dormitory for himself, and for a long winter's stay, would take some care to hide it if possible from acquisitive eyes.

Ursula came out as I was showing my treasure to Virginia. They were as intrigued as I was at the marvel of the affair. I wished I could show it to the invalids indoors; but feared lest the movement and warmth of the hands should disturb his peaceful sleep. It was kindest to put him back in his little hiding-place as quickly as possible.

Ursula announced that mid-day dinner would be ready in five minutes.

"But it's not half-past twelve yet?" looking at my watch.

"No. But it will be when dinner is on the table. Have you forgotten that meeting this afternoon? And the car coming to fetch you at two-fifteen?"

Fourteen
THAT MEETING

That meeting! Yes, I had forgotten it. But only since finding the dormouse. I had gone out, in the first place, to divert my mind from the fact that I had promised to speak at the Annual Meeting of the Ladies' Auxiliary of one of our leading Missionary Societies. It was to take place that afternoon.

Some people love to speak at meetings, and there are some fine women speakers in various walks of life. But I have always preferred to sit at the back of the hall and listen to others, rather than be on the platform.

Yet, at the time, it is often difficult to refuse when asked to speak in aid of work in which one is interested. It is so easy to say, "Certainly I will, with the greatest pleasure," when the date is a couple of months ahead. But in my own case, as the months wear themselves down to weeks, I wonder why I was ever so feeble as to agree to speak. I try to forget the shadow looming ahead. I even have a lurking hope that something may occur to prevent the meeting indefinitely—but nothing ever does!

At such times I am rather like a local woman who inherited some property, which, coupled with her husband's wages, made them liable for income-tax—it was before the P.A.Y.E. era.

One day she arrived at my door in a terrible flurry. The brokers were in (or else they were being summoned, I forget which) and what was she to do? She protested they had no sort of idea the money was owing; and so forth.

"Didn't you receive a printed paper saying the amount of tax that was due?" I asked.

After much incoherent circumlocution and irrelevant data, she at last remembered that she had received two income-tax Demands.

"What did you do with them?" I naturally inquired.

"Oh! I put them on the fire. I thought the tax man would forget about them in time!"

Forget! No income-tax collector has ever been known to suffer from loss of memory. The trouble is, he remembers too much!

With regard to my own misfortunes, I also had received two reminders of my obligations—a poster with my name set forth in large letters, and a

handbill with my name ditto. No use for me to put them on the fire. Go I must!

It was a tiresome, cross-country journey to the market town where the meeting was being held. A car took me to a distant junction to meet a train which would take me to the place. The meeting was to start at 3.30 p.m. I was to speak on Medical Missions—an easy subject for me, as so many members of my family have been, and still are, doctors in various parts of the foreign mission field.

The Hon. Secretary of the Ladies' Auxiliary wrote that she would meet me at the station, and would I please wear a chrysanthemum, or something, so that she might recognize me. Rather vague! And in any case, I certainly intended to wear *something*!

We met in due course. As soon as I saw her, I realized that I need not expect much of a gathering.

I have frequently urged that honorary secretaries of women's organizations —no matter what their object—should have some sort of training, or at least some knowledge of the essential duties connected with the office. I have seen much of women acting in this capacity. The majority have been fine workers, capable, and keenly interested in the cause they were helping. But I have also seen some who were such born muddlers that—well, the less said about them the better. Excepting, that it is a huge mistake to let anyone undertake a position of this kind merely because no one else is willing to act; or because Miss Blank says she will have a try though she hasn't the faintest idea what to do.

Looking at the Hon. Sec. who annexed me, I decided that she must either be ill, or depressed, or suffering from what the Victorians would have termed "a disappointment". Perhaps the word frustrated would best describe her. Not the slightest animation. No enthusiasm when I said I was glad they had such a bright day for the meeting. To this she replied that in any case there would not be many there; there never were (I could quite believe it, having seen the Hon. Sec.!) and the Vicar who was to have been in the chair couldn't come, as he had to take a funeral and could hardly be back in time.

Altogether—most discouraging for the speaker.

We were very early. I had to come when a train was willing to bring me. I had asked if they could have the meeting at 3.15, instead of 3.30 as they had originally said. But the Hon. Sec. replied that it was always at 3.30, so that settled it of course. Only, as the last return train left at 5.30, and I wanted to see my home again that day, I hoped the programme would be kept to time.

The place was only beginning to be occupied when we arrived. The Hon. Sec. took me to an ante-room, rather dark and chilly. I asked for her programme, in order to know where and when I came in, and who else would be taking part.

She said she had not made a list yet, as she was waiting to see who was available. But she had concluded that I would play the American organ for the hymns, as she had heard I was an organist.

I promptly refused!

Well, would I take the first prayer?

Again I said No. I would give the address, but nothing more. I found it too tiring to do more.

Oh dear! Then she would have to find someone! She had quite relied on my taking most of the items, she said. So she left me to go out into the hall and look around for a possible organist. From where I sat in the ante-room I could see her. The hall was filling very fast now. At last she secured a player.

Back she came to me, quite elated at the success. And she added naïvely: "I am surprised to see so many people here. I can't think why, because as a rule hardly anyone comes."

By this time the lady chairman arrived. At any rate she didn't look frustrated! Ample, cheerful, and radiating smiles, I was indeed thankful to see her, as things had been looking hopeless so far. The Hon. Sec. asked her if *she* would take the first prayer? She hesitated, and said she expected there might be someone in the audience who would undertake this. At that moment the Hon. Sec. exclaimed: "There's the Biblewoman, she has just come in. I'll ask her," and off she rushed.

I was on the point of asking the chairman if she had a programme, or list of the proceedings, as I had no idea of the order of the meeting. But at that moment I heard a masculine voice outside. Everybody seemed to know him. I wondered what part in the programme had been assigned him. The chairman was saying, "Yes, Doctor, she's in here. Come in." Then she tactfully disappeared, while the stranger came forward to greet me.

"I wonder if you remember me?" he began.

I scrutinized him, but drew a blank.

"Surely you haven't forgotten how you let me have a suck of your liquorice stick at a Christmas party, when you were a nice little girl, and I was a horrid little boy, and gave you a brandy ball? Don't, don't say you've forgotten!" and his eyes twinkled.

"I'm afraid I had forgotten it, till you mentioned it," I laughed.

"You had forgotten it? Ah me! Whereas it is one of my treasured memories! Anyhow, when I saw you were to be here, I determined to come if only for a few minutes; I wanted to recapture that episode in my misspent youth, and see you again. Unfortunately I can't stay, as a patient is waiting for me. And here are more people wanting to see you," as committee ladies arrived, who all greeted him effusively. "I must say good-bye now," he said in an undertone, after asking about my brothers. "Come again soon."

By this time, the Chairman and Hon. Sec. were in conference outside. The Biblewoman had agreed to take the prayer. But both of them caught sight of the Curate from the Parish Church.

Most unexpected! Of course he must be the one to take ... and the Hon. Sec. was off again to secure him for the prayer, and to tell the Biblewoman that she must read the Scripture portion instead.

Things seemed to be moving!

While the organist was asking: What hymns? and explaining that she didn't know the tunes for this or that, a second clergyman arrived.

"Oh! There's the Vicar after all!" The Hon. Sec. was getting quite animated. And she hurried off to request him to take the prayer, telling the Curate that he must read the Scripture portion instead, and relieving the Biblewoman of further duties.

Time was getting on, and the hall was quite full. The Vicar came into the ante-room beaming benevolently, the Chairwoman immediately said of course he must take the Chair, and she would merely read the minutes of the last meeting.

I don't know how much longer this game of "Family Coach" would have continued, had the Vicar not recognized a Canon Somebody coming down the hall, and fetched him in to introduce us.

The Canon said he couldn't stay long, but would like to hear what I had to say. And wasn't it time to start?

It was. We were five minutes late already, and I hate an unpunctual meeting. But still I had to ask "Where do I come in?" They had given me no indication of the order of procedure!

By this time I was being shepherded on to the platform by the Vicar and clergy, supported womanfully by the enthusiastic members of the Ladies' Committee, the Hon. Sec. murmuring directions as to when I was to take over, which I could not hear, as the large audience was clapping appropriately.

We were now ten minutes late. I could only hope for the best!

After the opening hymn, Scripture reading and prayer, the Hon. Sec. and the Vicar had a few whispered words, and he then announced that she would read the Report.

She did. Official Reports are dull enough in most cases; but to hear one read in a monotonous uninspired manner, and in a voice that was almost lost behind her paper, was most trying. There were lengthy statistics that no one wanted to hear or could follow; of sums received and sums paid out, and sums required; of hospital patients cured and patients waiting to be admitted; of nurses working, nurses needed, nurses hoped for; of people who had died, and babies born—and so on, and on.

Would she never end?

At last she sat down—and I sat up, wondering was it my turn now? No; another long hymn.

Then the Vicar said Mrs. Smiling Lady would read the minutes of the last meeting. She did. They seemed nearly as lengthy and detailed as the Report—only they led nowhere.

While she was reading, the Canon leaned over to me and said: "I'm very sorry, I must go now. I came on purpose to hear you; but I have an appointment I must keep." And he went.

The Vicar now rose, and said he must not take up much time, as he knew they all wanted to hear me. But he would only say——

And he did! For about twenty minutes.

I was now watching the clock. It was past five o'clock. I knew I must catch that train at 5.30. Fortunately the station was close to the hall. If the Vicar would only stop, and not announce yet another hymn, and leave the collection to the last, I reckoned that I might have fifteen or twenty minutes, and then must leave the platform before the final winding up.

In the end, I had fifteen minutes! It hardly seemed worth while to have come so far for so little. But I was glad to hear, later, that the collection was very good.

Hurrying across to the station, and feeling it had all been a lost opportunity, I found the doctor waiting for me.

"I wondered if anyone would come to see you off," he said. "I'm just as pleased they didn't—though they ought to have done so. As I hadn't any brandy balls I've brought you these; they are boxes of pre-war cough lozenges and pastilles and delicacies of that sort; you can't get them nowadays." And he handed me a large package, as he put me into the train, with the Stationmaster & Co. looking on interestedly.

"Keep well. And—God bless you," as the train puffed off.

I sat back and forgot the meeting. Even my longing for a cup of tea faded. I was a little girl again, in a fluffy pink frock, at my very first party, fascinated by the excitement of it all, also frightened at the hilarious romping of the crowd of children around me. I didn't know how to join them, but stood still, too shy to move. My brother, who had been instructed at home to take every care of his little sister, had been whisked off by some unknown lady and told to dance with another little guest—dancing he hated.

But soon he brought me a long stick of liquorice. "Look at this nice boot-lace," he said. "It's ever so good to eat." I took it and just held it in my hand.

Then a boy came to me and said: "Here's a brandy ball for you; they're topping." I knew him, as he was often at our house. Only, like my brother on this occasion, he too was in "Etons" with a deep white collar, and much cleaner than they were when playing at home! I took the brandy ball in the

unoccupied hand. Then feeling that I also ought to be generous, I held out the "boot-lace" to him; I was too nervous to speak.

"Oh, I won't take it all," he said magnanimously, "I'll only have a bite," which he did, and expressed approval. But just as some gay and festive lady came and said, "Now children come along, we're going to have musical-chairs," a strident voice yelled "All change here," for we had reached the Junction.

Years ago, the late "Elizabeth", of German Garden fame, said she liked people to bless her, it made the day brighter. I, too, like to be blessed, if it be sincere, and if reverently spoken. It certainly made the rest of that day brighter for me. Instead of feeling depressed, and counting the afternoon a failure, I realized once again that pleasant meetings and happy surprises may be coming to us any time just round the bend of the road.

Then again, the very articles I had been trying for months past, without success, to get for Miss Smith's cough, were now in my hands without any effort on my part.

Also I had a glimpse back into a past which I had nearly forgotten in the crushing impact of war. And that glimpse revived other happy memories which could not be taken from me, unless I chose to forget them.

As the car skimmed along the familiar roads, my thoughts went out in blessing to all doctors, whether in far-off isolated mission stations, or in unspectacular small-town work at home. For they are among the very few shining lights remaining steadfast and undimmed, with their selfless devotion to humanity's need, in the world now gripped with suffering and fear.

"What a charming man!" Ursula exclaimed as we laid out the tins and cartons and packets of pre-war glycerine and black-currant pastilles, cough drops of various flavours, gelatine lozenges, glucose sticks, and other sugary examples of Physic Without Frowns! "Yes," she continued. "*Most* charming! He is precisely the type of man I've been searching for, for years! I feel convinced we would understand each other perfectly—two minds with but a single thought! Therefore as I never know when I might be ill, I'll trouble you for his name and make a note of it. You haven't told us yet."

"I'm sorry, but I can't remember his name." (I felt foolishly apologetic.) "I've tried to recall it all the way home. I recognized him as the Boy with the Brandy Ball directly he mentioned it. But got no further. Everyone who spoke to him in the hall, addressed him as Doctor, and so did the stationmaster. I had completely forgotten his name and no one else gave it. And I couldn't exactly ask him, could I!"

They gazed at me in surprise.

“I sometimes wonder,” said Virginia pityingly, “whether it is really safe to let you go out alone!”

Fifteen
BY THE WAY

In times of stress and misfortune, a garden is somewhat like the community at large: the staunch and reliable people (and plants) stand by loyally, ignoring neglect, and doing what they can to keep things from going to utter ruin; while the fair-weather friends, so devoted in sunny prosperous times, simply fade out should there be no further personal advantage to be gained.

We soon discovered who were the most reliable inmates of the garden, plants willing to live and bloom amid a smother of grass and weeds, allowing nothing to impede their growth.

When I mentioned this striking analogy to Virginia, she replied that the same could be said about the weeds. Never had she seen such all-pervading love and devotion as that shown by the ivy, buttercups, agrimony, winter heliotrope, ground ash, and others, not to mention bindweed, all equally determined to stand by us no matter what might befall, and live with us to the bitter end.

All the same, she was glad the thought made me happy!

Virginia had decided, in the early days of weeding, that the whole affair should be conducted on business-like lines. It was futile to go around pulling out a bit here and a bit there, making about as much impression on the whole as a sparrow tapping on the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral. (I asked why was he tapping and what did he want? But this natural question was ignored). Continuing: the weeds should be classified, and the method of dealing with them systematized, and everything scheduled with Forms in attendance, if I could supply the paper.

Ursula agreed this was precisely the right way to set about it and get the work done. She knew, having aided the National Effort in a Government office during the war, that Talk was the beginning and the end of Modern Enterprise —and then More Talk! There was only one question she would like to ask: what was the aim or object of the scheduling apart from Talk? Not that she expected an answer, certainly not! She hoped she was not so out-of-date as all that. But it would be so home-like if she could once again handle Form 285176-0/3/A25/x230 and read the inspiring words "will receive attention".

(Virginia was making copious notes about something on an old envelope.)

Only there must be a slogan, Ursula told her. “Go to it,” would not meet the case at all. Nobody seemed to have any inclination to Go to it. They preferred to go from it, like Miss Bachelor. How would “Out with it” do? So applicable to a weed.

Virginia looked up from her writing. “Oh—er—did you speak?”

There was usually some idea behind Virginia’s pretences of nonsense. In this case her scheme, as expounded later to the sufferers upstairs, was the grouping of weeds, according to the physical strength required to “out with it”. This would enable the weeder to select at a glance the work most suited to his or her personal inclination at the moment.

For example such easy-goers as groundsel and lesser willow herb would be listed under “Casual Labour—after dinner” with sub-heading “Requiring no energy whatever to uproot.” Whereas dandelion, dock, wild parsnip and similar deep rooters came under “Hefty gardeners only need apply”; with sub-heading “Picturesque vocabulary and strong gloves required.”

Bindweed, brambles, and bryony were catalogued “Stranglers All! Gone to-day: back again to-morrow!”

Such persistent trailers as buttercups, ivy, the cinquefoils, wild strawberries, and others that run across country apparently for several rods, poles, and perches, rooting healthily every couple of inches, were labelled “Faint yet pursuing”.

This harmless little occupation was really designed by Virginia to provide some fresh topic of conversation for the invalids. Only those who have had the same sick people remaining in their care for months at a time know how difficult it is, after the first few weeks, to think up fresh subjects likely to interest them, or at least to distract their minds from their own troubles, and keep them from giving way to the depression that inevitably haunts them if their progress is slow. More especially when, as at this time, the newspapers seem brimming over with little else but accounts of the devil and all his works, apparently flourishing apace over half the world!

Reading soon palls if the patient’s sight is not too good. Knitting used to be Sedative No. 1, in the way of handwork for women—and sometimes for men; but with the scarcity of wool even this was not always available. Virginia was indefatigable in her search for quiet games that could be played without much tax on the brain, Patience, a modern revival of an old-fashioned game, was the most popular with all the invalids; and I was surprised to discover how many men, when convalescent, preferred this to any other game, because they could put it down the moment they felt tired, without reference to any partner.

The unfailing interest was my scrap-books. For years I have collected old scrap-books. I don’t mean the childish sort popular in the nursery; but the type

prevalent in Victorian days when Christmas cards (then coming into fashion) and pretty valentines were cherished by older people. Often there would be verses which particularly appealed to the owner; or amateur sketches, pressed leaves, and seaweed. I valued anything of this sort when it came my way, and I had a secret notion that the original owner, who had pasted in the cards and oddments with such care, would be pleased that someone was dealing carefully and sympathetically with their treasured collection (for such items were treasured in the last century) and understood why they had preserved this or that.

Then the idea came to me: why not start a scrap-book for myself, to find a permanent home for the many engravings, sketches, pictures and what-not I myself had gathered around me in boxes and drawers all over the place. It was not long before two large volumes were full.

When war came, I found that these various scrap-books were a real boon, when invalids were at a loose end, too tired to read, and yet needing something fresh to think about. And the pictures provided so many different styles, and periods, and subjects—flowers, cats and dogs, fashion plates, landscapes, mountains, old valentines, pretty Christmas cards (and many of those of a past generation were charming). I only let one book appear at a time to avoid fagging anyone's brain! But as an antidote for a dull or rainy day, or a day of depressing news, these books did valuable service.

Neither Mrs. Brown, nor Miss Smith, had youth on her side to help her. They were middle-aged women with experience and common sense; and they did their utmost to be patient. But the very effort to be patient can be exhausting sometimes, when one is ill, and when the future looks very grey—if not black.

Each had lost most of her income and all of her home. In addition, Mrs. Brown had lost her husband in the previous war, and her only child in the latest war, and now she seemed threatened with paralysis in her legs. Miss Smith's whole system was verging on a complete breakdown, and her nerves were in such a wretched jangle, that I feared it would take more than a year to straighten them out again. Further hospital work seemed out of the question for her.

More than ever at this time did I realize the pressing need for some sort of Harbour of Refuge for middle-aged and elderly women of the educated classes. So many who never imagined they could come to want, have lost all in this last and worst of all wars. Even if the income has not gone entirely, in many cases money is of little use if no one can be found to look after confirmed and helpless invalids.

Hospitals cannot help them. Indeed even in legitimate hospital cases, just

occasionally one comes upon odd occurrences!

A friend of mine went into a well-known provincial hospital for a major operation. She was not poor, and was paying well for a private ward. Her instructions were to arrive at the hospital at 4 p.m. on a certain Saturday; the operation to be on the following Tuesday.

Everyone who has had to enter a hospital for a similar reason will know that one is too nervy and agitated to make much of a meal before leaving home; especially if, as in this case, it is a long journey to the hospital.

My friend, who was very ill, arrived at four o'clock as requested, and bordering on collapse. Her one desire was for a cup of tea; though probably she was faint from lack of food. After she was in bed, a plate of dry bread was brought to her and a cup of milkless, sugarless tea! She was told that she could not have anything in the way of butter or margarine, etc., till next day, as her rations only started then (she had sent on her ration book). Surely a big hospital would have some margarine and milk—if nothing more—seeing that they could not buy the next week's rations on the following day—Sunday! It would also have been possible, one would have thought, to provide the necessary items on the Saturday, and deduct them from the final day at the other end!

During her stay in the hospital, when her friends came to see her, and brought her an egg, the spoonful of porridge which otherwise was part of her breakfast was stopped. When she asked why, she was told that being war-time, she couldn't have egg *and* porridge.

How illogical! We know that food was not plentiful in the war years; but the hospital was not providing the egg, whereas the patient was paying for the porridge.

My friend came to me later to convalesce. She spoke very highly of the care and kindness she received. The food regulations seemed very unreasonable, she thought; but being a regulation it had to be observed.

I could not help thinking, however, that had she been a younger woman (or a man) who insisted on her rights, she would probably have secured something better. But being elderly and patiently acquiescent, she didn't matter so much!

The schemes already materializing, for the providing of living quarters, and the needed attention for the elderly poor who deserve something better than the workhouse, are an important step in the right direction.

But many of the middle-classes (always the last to be considered) are now stranded, with no one to care for them, no one wanting them, unable to look after themselves, and sometimes classified, as I saw it callously expressed recently, as "useless mouths"!

Useless!—when both the invalids staying with me, and thousands of others too who are now stranded in their declining years, have put in the best part of a

lifetime at work valuable to the community. Each had planned and looked forward to peace, and freedom from want, for their tired-out years, when their strength might no longer be equal to work as it had been in the past. Like so many others who are now facing a desolate outlook, they had hoped for a quiet old age in their own homes, in congenial surroundings, with just the small reasonable comforts that the old, who have lived useful lives, have a right to expect.

Was it any wonder if occasionally—though only occasionally—it seemed hard for them to shake off depression, and difficult for us to know how to cope with it?

Sixteen
OLD FAITHFULS

My search for pre-war garden friends resulted in many sad disappointments—naturally. But there were also joyful surprises.

The heaviest casualties were probably among the roses. When war broke out, there were about two hundred and thirty rose trees around the place. When war ended, I doubt if one hundred remained. The losses were primarily due to unchecked suckers. The beds bristled with fine up-standing rods of the Japanese rugosa and English briars—bristled is the right word! It seemed a terrible waste of energy to grow so many thorns.

Searching among the briars, we found the dead, or nearly dead, stems of roses that once were glories of pink, crimson, or yellow.

Yet all was not lost. Great bushes there were of old friends, faithful and prolific in spite of adversity, such as Madame Butterfly, with its lovely colouring and delicious perfume; Mrs. Wemyss Quin, which still had plenty of half-opened and full-blown yellow blooms; the Rev. Page Roberts, another yellow; Maiden's Blush; rosa alba, a white rose beloved of our forebears; York and Lancaster, which had most obligingly seeded and given us four young plants (all of them had already bloomed, two in the middle of the stone flagged path). La France, that exquisite silvery-pink old-fashioned favourite, made two large bushes; General MacArthur was another stalwart; Frau Karl and Gloire de Dijon were a credit, while the two darlings of my heart, white moss rose, and pink, held up their heads along with the other valiants. Here, there, and all about the place were the little white Scotch Briars, so charming and so courageous; nothing discourages them; beautiful in young green leaf, even more so when autumn colours the foliage in rich reds, while the little white roses are fit for fairies. All the roses here are bushes, or climbers; standards are unsatisfactory on this high ground; a strong gale takes off the whole of the top with one smack!

The ramblers and climbers of the old hardy types stood up to everything; American Pillar, Dorothy Perkins (how they both love to take the whole earth!) and others of the Perkins family. For a climbing scented white rose, I have never had anything so lavish and so lovely as Sander's White. Every year it is

smothered with dainty double roses, perfect in shape and pure white, the size of a camellia, but much more lovely. It had climbed up a six-foot wall, over a bank up above, up again over another six-foot wall, then it reached the foot of a big laurel about eight feet high; this was quite to its taste! Catching hold of the lowest branches, it finally waved out sprays of white flowers at the very top of the bush. I can cordially recommend this most enterprising rose.

There is another climber that has amazed us with its prodigality of growth and flowers—Easlea's Golden Rambler. It was planted here in 1938. I did not know what it was like, but got it on a friend's recommendation. It was planted against a long south wall, ten feet high, in an orchard, down-hill below the house, in company with Mermaid, Dorothy P., American Pillar and something else which I've forgotten. Then we thought no more about it, in the problems the war thrust upon us.

Two or three years later, it had climbed the wall and was waving long arms in the air, with lovely great blooms showing various tints and tones of yellow and gold. I went down to the orchard to investigate and found tangles of long stems, smothered with buds and blossoms in various stages. Gorgeous was the word for it. I forgot to look at the other climbers, this one was such a surprise; and I had to fetch the family and the gardener to look at it.

Then came a big gale that took the whole of it down, flattening it out on the orchard grass, entangling it beyond help in the barbed-wire fencing that had kept the calves from chewing it. No hope for it but cutting it completely back to the base. Was it downhearted? It was not. In another couple of years it was again waving above the wall and over it, doing its best to cling on to anything within reach. This time I said it must have proper attention, despite the need for concentration on potatoes, swedes, hay, fruit, and still more hay. I went down again to see what was needed to give it safer anchorage. Also I wondered how the other roses were faring.

Mermaid had been swamped out of existence by its exuberant neighbours. Golden Rambler was already fighting with Dorothy P. for the whole length of wall, while American Pillar had annexed a big hawthorn and flung itself over the fence rails; and was having a really good time—quite American in fact. No need to worry about either of them! Where the fifth climber was, no one could discover.

Among other roses that defied neglect were the lovely Penzance Sweet Briars. They spread and developed stems as thick as young saplings. Probably the climbers did so well because they were up in the air, instead of being suffocated at ground level, as many of the newer bush roses were.

I felt quite remorseful and ashamed of myself when I looked at such buoyant vitality, and remembered the generous flowers they had showered on us during the war years—scrambling over barns; clothing dead tree trunks, and

decorating some that were not dead; spilling over arches, pergolas and hedges; the bushes giving radiant colour and perfume all about the untidy flower beds. I remembered how I had planned to scrap quite a number of these, just before the first bomb desecrated our lovely land.

Yes, I was actually intending to replace many of the older sorts by more modern roses. I had started the overhauling, and several batches of "Moderns" had been delivered and planted. Most of them by now are fine crops of rugosa rods and will soon be on the bonfire. My fault, I know; they were not the sort to suffer neglect gladly!

All gardeners know that every now and again, when they are nearly bursting with pent-up pride as they survey the flower borders and the roses they have grown, that is the moment they may be caught unawares by the Chastener of Pride, in the form of some truly superior person, who calls, takes casual stock of the gardener's treasures, then proceeds to point out what isn't there, as though the gardener didn't know already.

"Of course you have *Mrs. Jemima Jones*?... No!... I *am* surprised! Such an exquisite H.T., though personally I should have called it a pure Tea. Not a rose to compare with it. Only this week, we've gathered umpteen blooms," etc.

Vague murmurings from disgruntled owner of garden who, in vain, tries to get in a word about the number of roses she (or he) gathered this week from ——

"And I haven't seen *Fat Boy*!... You don't mean to say you don't know it! Why, it's the most dainty and ethereal rose in existence, positively marvellous colouring. Once you have a *Fat Boy* you'll never look at that again"—pointing disdainfully to one of the gardener's particular pets.

Self-appointed nuisances of this type were numerous in pre-war years, owing largely to the spread of garden literature (quite distinct from gardening books and periodicals), and the spaciousness and popularity of the Royal Horticultural Society's unrivalled shows. A few moments' conversation with the obliging attendant watching over Messrs. Somebody & Co.'s breathtaking stall of dazzling roses will be sufficient to equip the Nuisance with enough data to drench with cold water every rose-proud amateur encountered that season. And no matter how one may resolve not to be overawed by criticism of this kind, sometimes it not only undermines one's self-esteem (which may be beneficial, though I'm not sure about this), but it plants doubts in an otherwise happy care-free gardening mind.

A visitor of this brand was explaining to me how hopelessly behind the times I was, and how deficient in—well, in nearly everything. I had unblushingly delighted in the American Pillar, since the first day I saw the rose, and we all looked forward annually to its robust masses of colour. Imagine how painful it was to hear it described as a vulgar blatant alien.

Dorothy Perkins had been a staunch, reliable friend for many a long year, in various London gardens, where Mrs. Jemima Jones, for instance, would have turned up her *nouveau-riche* nose and departed without an apology. Yet I was told that Dorothy's colour was a most objectionable magenta, which outraged all one's æsthetic sense. Evidently we had no æsthetic sense in my home, as we were not outraged the least little bit, but really loved Dorothy. La France was another rose to be scorned; shape all wrong and constitution quite worn out. And so on, down the range of roses of long repute; the refrain each time being: "Modern roses are so very superior. Modern roses are so much better."

Of course I admit the beauty of the newer roses, and their improved manner of growth in many cases, though a fault of some of them is a weak neck, which does not hold the blooms upright. Being also devoted to the R.H.S. Shows, I see most that is going. Also, in happier days, I was keen every year to get those of the new varieties that were likely to succeed on my soil and with this aspect. But it did not occur to me to turn out all the old and tried friends, in favour of still more newcomers, until the visitor had worked on my inferiority complex, and convinced me that many of the flowers I cherished were mainly suited to the back garden of Noah's Ark; certainly not desirable in an enlightened age, when Progress should be one's watchword.

Pondering the matter, after she had left, I began to see my garden with my visitor's jaundiced line of vision, not with my own affection for each detail, small or rampant, no matter how wayward. It was fortunate that the contemplated clearance was never carried out. Otherwise, we should have lost much gladness and beauty from a world that needs it beyond all telling.

Many old friends, beside the roses, turned up smiling faces as I went round exploring. A long row of Globe Artichokes, for instance, seemed to have formed a low hedge of silver-grey-green, with their handsome violet thistle head towering above the beautiful foliage. They did not appear to be at all put out by the bindweed, which had found the flower-stems ideal for their natural inclination to soar aloft. In one case, a saucy white bloom had its arms round the neck of an artichoke, both blossoming together, cheek by cheek.

It is surprising that the Globe Artichoke is not more cultivated for its beautiful foliage and magnificent flower-heads. As a vegetable, it does not appeal to me; it takes up so much time to get through even one globe, and it does not amount to much but a plate of "done-withs" when one has got through. But we are not all alike; and many of my friends gurgle with delight when they see it in the garden. I only allow one globe per head, however. I can't have the blooms wasted more than this! Besides, the butterflies love them.

One of my indoor treasures is a painting of this row of artichokes, by the late William Giles, who was President of the Society of Graver Printers in Colour. He was so charmed with them, when he came upon them in the garden, he appeared next day with his painting equipment, sat down on the grass, and painted them from that unusual angle. On the top of the purple flowers are poised Peacock and Red Admiral butterflies.

Among other flowers that had spread at a surprising rate were the Crane's-bills, pink, large royal blue, smaller violet and white, and the native wild blue. They had seeded and spread, then catapulted more seed and travelled still farther, even reaching the lower woods.

Rhododendrons had raised their dignified heads far higher than when last I had seen them, ignoring the rabble of weeds creeping up, as near as they dared, to the dark shining leaves.

A plant catalogue can be very monotonous, however, unless one is planning to spend more than one can afford in the spring and "making out a list"—such a happy, soothing occupation—on a wild winter evening. But two pleasant discoveries in after-war perambulations shall be chronicled, instead of a longer and probably boring recital.

The little wild pink cyclamen in the wood had spread luxuriantly, and beside it had sprung up a fine clump of tiny white cyclamen, all hidden away under overhanging branches of a beech.

Walking around after a summer shower, a delicious apple-like scent pulled me up. Surely it was the true old-world Sweet Briar, nearly lost now, since the universal craving for larger, and brighter, and more showy blossoms had ousted the little rose-pink blooms of the parent briar. Beautiful as are the Penzance and some other briars, and much to be desired, the perfume of most is negligible: scent has been sacrificed to size. For some time I had been trying to get the real old-world sweet briar, but none of those given me had the true scent. Now, at last, here it was, quite a nice tall plant, in the midst of a thicket of dog-wood, Michaelmas daisy, seedling cherry and knapweed.

What beauty for ashes Nature does bestow: only a little higher up the hill, the ground had been pitted with bombs!

Seventeen
A VISIT

In the good old Victorian days, the properly-minded novelist loved to show us the come-down-in-the-world spinster, or the poor widow of refined birth, hiding her poverty in an attic, and zealously concealing from the public eye (which usually meant that of a callous landlady) the pitiful fact that her larder contained nothing but dry bread, some cold porridge and the cat's empty saucer.

How times have changed! At the time of writing, no matter how refined we are (we have all come-down-in-the-world) we leave our cupboards, safe, refrigerator (if we are poor enough to have one) open for the inspection of any prying eyes. No one can then whisper the dreadful words Black Market! or Hoarding! And we gossip cheerily on such topics of world-wide interest as: "Not a crust in the house at the moment; not a single B.U. left, and nothing but potatoes and a strip of bacon rind for dinner."

Ursula and I were discussing the leanness of the pantry, when we received a letter from Miss Totty asking us all to tea, and offering as an inducement a recipe for a new cakelet she had invented and would cook specially for us. Of course we accepted. Knowing her hospitable nature, we were also sure she would give us some for our invalids. It was decided that Ursula should come with me, Virginia holding the fort during our absence.

Miss Totty is a dear. Everyone who knows her is certain to say: "Such a dear soul, isn't she!" and criticism goes no farther. Why we never get beyond "dear" I can't say. I have tried to think of a less hackneyed word without finding anything better. What we all mean is this: she is very kind, unselfish, unspoilt, affectionate, envious of none, gives nobody any trouble, almost child-like in her outlook on life despite her seventy-odd years, anxious to give anyone pleasure if she can, and to serve them in any way within her power.

Now what word is there to embody all this?

Though she may tell one very trivial items about her cats, or give lengthy explanations about her bees, one couldn't get bored; in fact one gets as fond of the cats and the bees as though one owned them, because—well, you see, she is such a dear.

Personally, I always look forward to seeing her, on the rare occasions when I can get so far. She lives on a stretch of upland near the top of one of the opposite hills across the river. We often say, if it were not for an intervening high hill, we could see each other with our field glasses.

Fortunately we were able to get a car, and it was an ideal day for the journey. As we wound up and up, the world seemed to get more and more beautiful, and still more worth fighting for. A loudly-chattering stream was rushing, full spate, down-hill at the side of the road. The heather was out, high up on Cleddon Moor, clumps of purple bells ornamenting rough stone walls and the roadside. I think I caught sight of some white tufts of cotton grass, but a car runs along far too quickly for my enjoyment. One can see so little in comparison with the old days of horse vehicles, though I am truly glad that the horses are now spared the toil of mounting these steep roads and lanes, dragging loads up after them. There was a glamour about those days when we stopped the vehicle every little while to examine some unknown flower, and give the horse a breather.

Some years ago, I found the sun-dew growing on the Moor. But I have had no time to search for it since. It is not a plant I admire, though the flower is pretty; to me it is more of a curiosity than anything else. It seems so unnatural for a plant—especially a little plant—to eat flies and insects. But if it attracts mosquitoes, I will say it serves a useful purpose. For mosquitoes—the genuine foreign variety, which seem to be coming to Britain in numbers of late—are my bane. When one does get into my room at night, he rushes at me pell-mell, trumpeting like a—well, like a horrid mosquito. And in the morning I'm an object of pity!

Reaching the summit of the hill we were scaling, we saw lying below us, on the other side of the range, one of the most beautiful landscapes in the country—or so it seems to me. The Welsh Black Mountains, the Sugarloaf Mountain, and others, standing out on the right; the Vale of the Usk far down below us; miles and miles of cultivated fields, woods, and farms—a patchwork of various tints according to the crops and the colour of the soil. We did stop the car at this point, it was such a glorious, expansive view, stretching away to Glamorganshire. I know it is not like Switzerland or the French Alps; it is like what it is—a British landscape, with an endearing charm quite distinct from anything one sees in other lands. To a Canadian or New Zealander, the fields with their tangled hedges would look like tiny toys!

Each country has its own physical and natural characteristics; most can show something very lovely, if only the demon of war can be kept from its spoliation. But the English country-side is like no other in its suggestion of a long heritage of peace and prosperity, coupled with an innate sense of fitness in the way the farms and rural cottages harmonize with their surroundings.

Miss Totty had seen us coming along the winding road, and was at her gate to welcome us, literally with both her hands. What a difference there can be in greetings. Our hostess was almost inarticulate with pleasure; but her repeated "Oh, I *am* so glad to see you! I can't tell you how glad I am!" meant more to us than many a more elaborate welcome.

Like so many of the other large mansions in the district, her home had been commandeered for some supposedly urgent need at the beginning of hostilities. She had moved a good deal of the furniture into a smaller house on the estate. What could not be squeezed in there, was being stored in a barn. All her staff, women as well as men, had been called up, or else had gone of their own accord in quest of adventure plus big pay.

Indoors it looked something like the corridors in the warehouse of a dealer in antiques. There was a clear central walk in each room, banked with choice furniture, of various periods, but all of it showing exceptionally fine craftsmanship, and undoubtedly valuable. One set of chairs upholstered in needlework of a century ago showed battle scenes, each with a different, gorgeous-looking commander in the foreground waving a sword of encouragement to the fighters in the background. Some other chairs showed magnificent parrots with gay plumage. But one would need a bulky catalogue to name the things that were stored there. Many of them ought to have been on show in a museum.

Of course we were enthusiastic in our admiration.

"Friends are constantly urging me to sell all except what I actually want for everyday use," she said, rather pathetically. "I know it is crowded here. But I couldn't sell what had belonged to my far-back ancestors, could I?" with an appealing look, as though begging us to endorse her action in hoarding them.

"I know I should hate to part with a single thing," Ursula replied promptly, ignoring the obvious discomfort of the arrangement.

I agreed with her. I realized it was not so much for her far-back ancestors that she was cherishing these things. They represented her lost youth. If ever the time came that she really had to send most of it away, it would mean losing very much more than chairs and tables, and no money they might bring back to her would compensate for the snapping of the link with her girlhood, or the vanished nostalgia they once evoked for days that had seemed to promise a life of perpetual sunshine.

Without in any way wishing to detract from Miss Totty's virtues, which were many, it could not be claimed that she was a model housewife. Quite the reverse! This was not surprising, considering her upbringing in a wealthy Victorian home, with its well-ordered routine carried out by a competent

household staff.

But taxation and death duties had reduced the wealth to the minimum; while wars had eliminated not only the staff but the men of the family, leaving Miss Totty the last lonely remnant of what had been a line of fine, able men, famous for their devotion to the country's well-being.

Miss Totty did not repine. She had inherited hopefulness, and belief in the ultimate triumph of good, from her forebears; and she tried to play as useful a part as she could, in the present array of muddles. But it did not extend to cookery or household management!

Like the rest of us, she had next to no coal; and had turned her dining-room —with her one and only fire—into a combined living-room and kitchen, minus the useful adjuncts of a kitchen. An oilstove standing on a beautiful sideboard covered with newspaper served for most of the cooking her small appetite, and still smaller rations, needed. Part of the polished dining-table, also covered with newspaper, was where she prepared her meals, washed up, etc. Jars and tins and bread-pan stood about on other valuable pieces of furniture.

She soon got down to the important business of making her new cakelets. On a lacquered Chinese side table (likewise newspapered, I was relieved to see) stood a large jar of her own honey. Some little distance away on the dining-table was the mixing bowl, also flour and the oddments needed for cake-making. Farther away in the opposite direction was the oilstove, which she lighted and then left burning with nothing on it. Miss Totty was too much agitated and excited at the prospect of launching her new recipe on society to notice what she was doing. I soon saw, however, that no matter what her aim, the unbalanced assortment of ingredients she was tipping, haphazard, into the bowl would not result in much but disappointment and waste.

Talking all the while, she spooned out honey from the jar on the side table, carrying it, dripping generously, to the bowl of flour on the dining-table. Then, remembering the frying pan, she placed it, empty, on the oilstove, where it soon started to burn. Watching the increasing rivulet of honey dropping on the beautiful carpet, I wondered what we could do about it?

Ursula was quicker than I was, at a solution. "How would it be," she asked, "if *I* made the cakes under your direction? Then I should know exactly how the recipe should be carried out." (At the same time she quietly removed the burning frying pan and put the kettle in its place, *pro tem*).

"And I could help you get the tea," I brightly volunteered.

Miss Totty thought it an excellent idea.

We had brought with us, as a small "coming-in present", a carton of superfine dried fruit, sent to me in a Food Parcel by one of my stepsons in Australia. Ursula first of all put the jar of honey on the dining-table beside the mixing bowl; then, opening the dried fruit packet, she soon made some little

flat cakes from her inner consciousness, and with little reference to Miss Totty's involved directions, which were intermingled with items of local interest.

In due time the atmosphere calmed, and we sat down to tea at the other end of the dining-table; our hostess proclaiming that these cakes were much better than anything she could make. Her recipe was even better than she had thought! And what a genius Miss Ursula was, to be able to turn them out like that the very first time of trying. But where did she find the currants and sultanas and peel?

Of course we asked sympathetically how she was managing for household help.

Mrs. Jones looked in for a few hours, one morning a week, and tidied her up nicely. She came about eleven o'clock and stayed to dinner—"not that I have much to give her; but she is not too particular. I save half my meat for her. Yesterday I gave her rissoles; they didn't turn out quite as I expected. But she said there was never any need to apologize, as she always had a good meal when she got home; because of course rissoles and such stuff would never do for Da-da; he always insisted on the best of everything."

We said much! And still more! And wondered how she got it for her husband? For Da-da was notorious as one of the laziest drunkards in the parish!

I remembered a charwoman who came to help with the spring-cleaning in London, during the previous war. Meat was none too plentiful then. But we were congratulating ourselves on having liver and bacon for dinner.

When it was put before the lady in the kitchen, she looked at it contemptuously, pushed the plate aside, saying to the cook: "Give me some bread and cheese. When I come out to work I don't expect snacks for my dinner. I can get liver and bacon any day at home."

So far as my own experience goes, London charwomen (the only ones I know) are most unpredictable; one can never forecast what they are likely to say or do next.

One very pleasant clean-looking woman used to disappear, if asked to do out a bedroom. Later, when it was hoped the bedroom would be nearly finished, she would be found, when searched for, turning out the very large coal cellar (in the days when we had coal) putting large blocks in orderly array on one side; smaller lumps sorted out and deposited in another part; slack put in a spot to itself; also coal hods and shovels assigned their special resting places. Then the centre would be swept clear and clean. Why? No one knew!

Even she was eclipsed by a house-proud mistress I heard of, who used to have all the coal removed from the cellar annually, at spring cleaning, and the floor washed and scrubbed with a stiff broom till rid of all black marks. Then

when clean and dry, back went the coal.

Both of these people must find life very dull and empty now!

"One thing about Mrs. Jones I find rather unsettling," Miss Totty said. "She constantly tells me she has done something partially; and I never know how much that means. Yesterday she said: 'I've parsh'ly washed out the tea-towels, miss; I expect they'll do for now.' Or else it may be: 'I've parsh'ly done the bedroom; just a lick and a promise this week.' Still, I don't mind so long as she doesn't parsh'ly wash the vegetables!"

With honey on the table, we inevitably turned to bees. When a person with a hobby specializes till he really knows something about the subject, he can be interesting. Whereas the hobbyist whose knowledge of his hobby is merely superficial, and mainly for display, can be a tedious bore.

Our hostess had studied bees, their habits and divergencies, with zeal. It was commonly said that what she did not know about bees, wasn't worth knowing. She explained how the bombs and the gales and the inferior sugar for winter food had told on the hives.

What interested us particularly was her description of the various types of honey. Never having had much to do with bees, I had imagined that honey was very much the same all over Britain; even though there were, in pre-war days, lovely little jars of exquisite colours, containing honey marked orange-blossom, or myrtle, or various Greek names. So attractive those jars looked, they were cherished long after the honey had been used. For myself, my taste was so uneducated that I could not detect any difference between the flavours marked on the jars.

Miss Totty seemed surprised at this. She felt sure we should soon be able to discriminate if we had much to do with bees. Honey, she told us, was Nature's remedy for our need of glucose. As a life-giving food, its value had never yet been fully appreciated in our country.

Were there different kinds of honey in England? we asked. If so, what made the difference? So far as my casual observance went, all bees seemed to follow a similar procedure, going round to the flowers, humming "all contributions thankfully received."

That might be so, she replied, but when certain flowers that the bees loved were blooming, they concentrated on them as long as possible, and the resultant honey had a distinctive flavour, and often a distinctive appearance.

Bean-blossom honey, for instance, was often the colour of dark treacle. Apple-blossom honey was a very pale green. The yellow charlock helps honey to solidify quickly. Heather honey also solidifies quickly, but it needs a different method of extraction. Australian honey has a very distinctive flavour, possibly due to the prevalence of eucalyptus and wattle. And so on.

I soon realized how great was my ignorance of even so everyday an item as honey! Since then, I have learnt more; Miss Totty's enthusiasm infected me. And I know how much wiser bees are, in many ways, than I am.

It was time to go. Miss Totty produced two glasses of honey for us to take home.

"I should think this granulated honey would be just the thing for Apple Chit-chat," Ursula said to me.

"What is that?" our hostess asked. We told her, and added that it might be a useful make-shift sweet for her, when flour failed. So we wrote down directions—it could hardly be called a recipe, being a concoction only fit for children.

Core and peel some good cooking apples. Allow for each large apple or two smaller ones, 2 cloves, ¼ teaspoon cinnamon, one-inch thinly cut orange or lemon peel (no white), a small cup of water, sugar to taste, or some jam. Slice apple into boiling water with the other ingredients, boil till all is reduced to a liquid puree free from lumps, but not sloppy.

Cut thin slices of bread and butter, remove crusts; allow two for each person, to be served on individual plates; place two slices of the bread and butter, with the buttered sides together, and a little jam (or honey) between, on the puree; the unbuttered sides will be top and bottom. Smother the sandwich with plenty of the apple. Grate a little nutmeg on top of each, if liked. Leave in a warm place five minutes or more, until the bread is soaked right through—this is essential. It can be eaten hot or cold.

"It sounds exactly right for me," said Miss Totty, "but why Chit-chat?"

"Because the bread and butter can gossip with the honey or jam," I told her.

Eighteen
ROUND THE VEGETABLE PLOT

Though not a vegetarian in the exclusive sense, I am increasingly convinced that we need far more green food than we generally consume, and we need it fresh.

One of the very serious aspects of the nation's health to-day is the increasing number of sufferers from what is commonly called rheumatism—crystal in the joints due to acidity. The trouble is widespread; and in addition to being painful, it can cripple its victims in a distressing manner. It is true that some constitutions are more liable to this ailment than others; but the fact remains that the war-time necessity for the use of preservatives in our perishable foods is the cause of some of the present trouble.

Doctors are doing their utmost to combat the malady. But there are some things we ourselves can do to help thwart this insidious enemy, and the eating of fresh green vegetables is one.

Salads have grown immensely in favour in modern times; but—there are salads *and* salads! Some of the plates of limp scraps of stale lettuce, with other out-of-date oddments, that I have seen served as salad at some restaurants, are not much use as an antidote to rheumatism. Neither are the elaborate mixtures, containing vinegar, mustard, lobster, and other exotics, which are well calculated to annul the virtues of the green stuff.

What is needed is the fresh green vegetable, before the essential juices have run out, or died out. To add vinegar is to add more acid to the already over-supplied body. The less we tinker with our saladings, and the less we try to camouflage the raw vegetable, the more beneficial will they be. I agree to all that can be argued about the fillip vinegar and dressing can give to a plain salad. But that is partly because we have pampered our palate, and allowed it to degenerate.

No fixed rule can be laid down for everyone. Some people prefer green vegetables raw; others can only digest them if well cooked. Undoubtedly they are generally more beneficial to the system if raw, provided they are well masticated and can be digested. They also are helpful if boiled; and the water in which they are boiled is equally useful, and should never be thrown away,

but used for a light soup.

For town dwellers it is not so easy to get green vegetables absolutely fresh as it is in the country. But those who have gardens, even small ones, can often grow something, particularly scarlet runners. Low-growing things are not always advisable, if cats and dogs are about, or there are fumes and soot in the air, as in industrial areas. But under glass, quite a lot can be raised. Scarlet runners are very accommodating, however; and they do give a succession of green food that can be gathered fresh as needed.

One invaluable aid in providing a household with fresh vegetables has been the vogue for allotments. Not only have they helped the larder; they have helped the health of the people. Many householders had never tasted really fresh lettuce, cabbage or beans, till they cut them from their own growing on their own allotment. Moreover the work of digging and planting in the open air, tending the seedlings and the growing plants, watching their progress with possessive interest, enjoying them in imagination many times before they actually came on the table—all this helped to steady the nerves and divert the thoughts from the ever-present anxieties of those war years.

It is to be hoped that every effort will be made to carry on this form of gardening. No matter how full the greengrocers' shops may be, there will always be a need in the home for the freshly-cut vegetable; and the more they are available, the better will be the health of the consumers.

Obviously one can't grow everything the kitchen requires. Some things are better grown by the professional market-gardener, who can keep his eye on his crops. Peas are a case in point. Most beginners at vegetable gardening think of green peas instantly, as the first important, and most desirable, crop. How we all visualize those early, crinkly young peas, after the winter's austerity routine of roots! But, speaking from my own experience (but only as an amateur), green peas are the least profitable of almost anything one can plant in so limited an amount of ground as an allotment.

Unlike lettuces and the cabbage family, peas do not necessarily deteriorate if they have been a few days off the vines when sold in the shops. Hence it often pays better to devote one's energies to things that, when freshly cut, are far superior to those that have been a few days off the ground. Also, pea seeds are beloved of mice, and the number that come up may be considerably less than the number planted! After the pods are maturing, and one is counting the weeks (or days) to the Sunday dinner for which they are destined, there is every chance that birds will get some of them, unless the owner is on the spot to guard them.

And it is no help to say: "Shoot the birds!" That was done wholesale in the previous war, with the resulting plague of caterpillars which not only riddled the vegetables all over, but stripped the trees bare of leaves in many places,

that summer.

Incidentally that plague has never entirely subsided. The white cabbage butterfly is everywhere, and will be, till we can get more birds to deal with the caterpillars. At the time of writing, there seems to be a universal shortage of small birds; magpies appear to be the only birds on the increase. I have been told this shortage is due to the migratory birds' being caught on the Continent and sold for food, particularly in Italy, where many alight after crossing the Mediterranean from North Africa. I do not know if this is the reason; but I do know that for every hundred birds we had about us before the war, we have only twenty now. And once again slugs and caterpillars are a menace and have a good time.

Netting the peas is advocated by some growers. I tried it once—but only once. The little birds popped in and out quite cheerfully, though the mesh. Thrushes and blackbirds managed to get inside, but became entangled when they tried to get out. Several died there. That settled the nets!

On one occasion I watched a mother blackbird make herself an entrance under some netting around raspberries, leaving her three youngsters outside in a row. She wasn't going to risk their being trapped! One by one she gathered raspberries, slipped under the opening she had made, and fed the gaping mouths of her babies. To and fro she went, till something startled her, and then she seemed to lose her head with fright. She said something which the youngsters understood, for they flew up at once into a tree, while she struggled wildly to find her exit, and got more and more entangled. I went and lifted the nets to set her free; and then I cleared them away altogether!

Each allotment holder will judge for himself as to what will be most useful and appreciated by his own family—more particularly by the lady at the head. In more normal times you will probably need to grow only a few early potatoes, if living in a town, as potatoes can be better dealt with in large quantities by the big growers; and town shops will be well supplied.

Roots need not be enlarged upon here. According to our tastes, we all grow carrots, turnips and beets. Parsnips, however, are not so popular on the whole. Yet they rank very high in the matter of nutriment, and contain sugar and calcium—among other good qualities. The flavour is distinctive—liked by some, disliked by others. It is a pity to neglect these; especially as they come at a time when the vegetable dish is beginning to lack variety. I have found that people who object to plain boiled will usually eat and enjoy parsnips if cooked in the following way.

Put into boiling salted water, with a teaspoonful of sugar. When quite tender, cut quickly into long thick strips, and while still hot put into the baking-tin with meat cooking in the oven: bake till nicely brown. A still more

popular way is to fry them with, or without, sliced onions, in bacon fat. Sometimes I dust a little sugar over them in the frying-pan, which slightly glazes them. But in either recipe, the parsnips must first be boiled till tender, and care taken not to allow them to start dropping to bits. They must still be quite hot when put into very hot fat, either in the baking-tin, or the frying pan.

Parsnips should not be dug till after there has been some frost.

I asked a youth who was visiting us if he liked parsnips. He said he wasn't sure, but he didn't think he did. "You see, it's just this; Mother doesn't like them, and what Mother does or doesn't like, goes!" That is very often the case with a family's menu, I have noticed. Indeed, I'm rather like it myself I'm afraid!

I tried him with them fried—and they went!

Swedes were not very popular in London, before the war made us thankful for anything we could get. I remember an elderly gentleman exclaiming in amazement that anyone could eat "cattle food", and I can picture what my grandmother's horror would have been, if anyone had prescribed swede juice for any of her thirteen infants!

But times have changed; here, at any rate, my family fall on swedes as soon as they are ready. Like parsnips, they need frost to bring them to their best, and should not be dug till after frost has touched the ground. It is to be hoped they will be more used in future; they are far richer than the white turnips in qualities that make for health. But whether they are suitable for allotments is another matter. As they are large roots, space available must decide this.

Onions we all grow; especially shallots. Here we plant on the shortest day, and harvest on the longest day: a useful rule, as one has more time for planting in December than in the spring, when there is a universal rush to get the many seeds in.

Spinach is everybody's vegetable, valuable for its iron content, and said to be a substitute for fat—though I can't vouch for this.

It is to be hoped that the cabbage family has a large share of the allotment. All the tribe—brussels sprouts, cauliflower, thousand-headed kale (a most enterprising vegetable, as the more it is broken off, the more it grows!) turnip tops, spring and summer cabbage, savoys, broccoli—are valuable; remembering that they require a rich, well-dug deep soil. Having a certain amount of sulphur, as well as potassium, in their make-up, everyone cannot easily digest them if not well cooked. Raw cabbage has been constantly advocated as a desirable food. For some people it is. But it needs a first-class digestive apparatus; and the flatulence it causes can be very trying. Boiling makes it a very desirable food where it cannot be taken raw. In any case no

soda should be used when boiling cabbages and their relatives. And all the water should be saved and used for soups. The water is as valuable from a medicinal point of view as the boiled vegetable itself.

Lettuce and cress we have known from our childhood. But parsley must have a very special word of approval. A scientist, who had given time and investigation to food values, told me that wholemeal bread and butter eaten with fresh parsley makes a complete meal.

A friend who had been a real wreck with nervous trouble, sleeplessness, and general all-over weakness, was looking wonderfully better when she came to see me after a couple of months' absence. I was surprised to see such a marked improvement, and asked if she was sleeping any better.

Yes, she was feeling a different person, she told me, and, at last, seemed to be getting the better of insomnia, and was able to digest her food much more easily.

I asked what the doctor had given her?

She hadn't been to him recently. She attributed her improvement to parsley! She had found a regiment of young parsley seedlings coming up all about her vegetable garden—evidently some of the old plants had ripened and shed their seeds. Absent-mindedly at first, she had plucked a few leaves and munched them while working. Gradually she ate more and more. She put some between bread and butter and ate them as a cress sandwich. From that time she started to improve. And as parsley was the only thing she had eaten other than the usual rations, and she had done nothing else to induce the improvement in her health, she could only put it down to the green stuff.

After hearing her story, and seeing with my own eyes how much better she was looking, I, of course, didn't feel very well myself! And decided I must try a parsley cure. I began; but there were two hindrances: first of all, I don't like the flavour of raw parsley taken neat, though I like it and always use it where possible in cooking. And secondly, our row of parsley, never too flourishing, threatened to give out, if I ate very much. So what with this and that, I didn't persist with the cure.

Nevertheless, I am a great believer in the medicinal value of parsley, especially in the case of nerve weakness; and I strongly advocate its use in soup, sauces, gravy, indeed in all savoury dishes; also as a sandwich filling. Anyone who is suffering from that general "don't seem able to do a thing" feeling, would be wise to give it a trial for a month or two; as it undoubtedly has very decided restorative qualities. Parsley jelly is sometimes ordered for invalids who seem slow in regaining normal strength.

Other herbs have already been mentioned. I will only add that a little bush of rosemary should have a corner in every vegetable plot. A useful flavouring

much overlooked. And something to rub with the hand, and evoke memories as well as perfume.

I try so far as possible always to have near the entrance doors to the house bushes with sweet-smelling leaves—balm, rosemary, bay, hairy mint, lavender, santolina—any or all of these are welcomed; it is a pleasant and harmless indulgence to rub a leaf in passing and enjoy the scent.

Celery is very important in the diet of rheumatic people. It should be eaten in one form or another daily, if taken as a cure, and if it can be digested. When it is fully mature, I have several of the biggest heads to dry for winter use.

Nothing is thrown away. The outside shabby stalks are well scrubbed and used in soup, or stewed as a separate vegetable. The other stalks are separated, well-washed and cut into lengths about eight inches long, and dried *very* slowly in a cool oven. When quite dry they will have shrunk to miserable-looking bits of string. But that is as it should be. When put into soup later on, they swell out to normal size.

The leaves also are well washed with a little salt in the water, in case any insects may be on them. They too are dried in a slow heat—too much warmth ruins them. After two or three days, they can be put into paper bags and hung in the warmth to finish drying, when they can be rubbed to a powder. The leaves are excellent in soup, either in their fresh green state, or in the dried powder. Never throw them away. Celery seed is also much used for rheumatism and should be put into soups, if no other celery is available.

Beans have been left to the last. Broad beans are useful in the allotment, though the black fly is a trouble, and sometimes the crop of pods is disappointing. But those who enjoy broad beans will wish to grow them; and those who do not care for the vegetable will certainly enjoy the delicious scent of the flowers. Scarlet runners are more or less a hobby with me. Their season is long, once they are up the poles; and they are a good vegetable in every sense. They are not subject to much in the way of set-backs and misfortunes, excepting in baby-hood, when the slugs and snails are a trial, especially if grass surrounds the vegetable plot. In that case, the marauders lie low in the grass by day, and sally forth at night, when they have a clear walk-over, with neither humans nor birds to interfere—and what a helpless-looking slug can do in one night is amazing!

We usually put a circle of powdered alum round up-coming shoots, and also when the plant grows taller. But it should be put down on a dry day. It is not so effective if rain washes it into the earth. Alum is certain death to slugs and snails, and hurts nothing else.

Having already mentioned the way we use the beans that remain on the

vines till too tough to cook as a green vegetable, I need only add that these should not be gathered till quite ripe and the shells brown and withered. Frost will not hurt them, but they should not be left out all the winter. Gather when the really cold weather sets in. Put them in some dry place (spread out on a greenhouse shelf if you have one) and only shell as you need them.

These beans are highly nutritious. The gardener said to me recently: “A plate of these beans satisfies me as much as two or three eggs for a meal.” I asked him: who ever manages to get two or three eggs for a meal these days!

In conclusion, we need to remember that no amount of increased pay, shorter working hours, more sport, cinemas, faster and faster cars and airplanes will compensate for the absence of actual contact with the soil; and the planting and harvesting with our own hands, whether for food, or for the sheer beauty of trees and flowers.

If we are planning for the war of ultimate annihilation, then speed at all costs is of paramount importance. But if a land of happy children and healthy contented men and women is our desideratum, we shall have to get back—if we can—to the more elemental processes of life, to a slower tempo of living; to a more intelligent recognition of the vitalizing powers that are inherent in Nature; to learning some of the stupendous secrets of the good earth, and watching its undeviating rhythm of seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter; without which, we should revert to chaos.

Nineteen
“HOW FAR A LITTLE CANDLE——”

Once the bombs ceased, there was not much excitement locally, for which we were indeed thankful.

The various matrons with their children, evacuees from the slums of London, Glasgow and other large towns, having left us, we were relieved of their moans for fried fish and chips, and their never-ending amazement when they discovered that no public houses are opened on Sundays in the county of Monmouthshire. It was quite a good while before they were able to believe this last was a fact. Then they wondered how we managed to live!

Like every one else in the world, once fighting ceased, and our homes were (more or less) our own, we hoped things would soon return to normal, and we talked about Peace like hopeful children. Little knowing!

It is true, our next troubles were only minor ones, but they were sometimes irritating for all that.

There had been a certain amount of petty pilfering round about the neighbourhood, not surprising when one remembered how many people from the poorer quarters of crowded cities had been brought into the district.

Among other thefts, young trees had been cut down and carried off, for firewood, posts, and such like, from my place; and this in spite of the fact that an extensive acreage of Free Woods, where any parishioner may cut down trees, is only a few yards farther along the lane, with enough timber to satisfy the requirements of the village over and over again.

One night, do what I could, I could not get to sleep. The household had quieted down as usual by half-past nine. We kept early hours at night because we were always up very early in the morning. Hour after hour went by. I remained most intelligently awake. Insomnia had me in its grip that night. At last, when the clock pointed to 2 a.m., I could stand it no longer, and decided to try a fresh air cure.

Putting on bedroom slippers and a thick coat, without turning on my torch, I stepped out of the french windows, which were open, on to the upper veranda, which I sometimes used for open-air sleeping; meaning to sit there till I felt some inclination towards drowsiness.

It was a black, windless night; no moon, and clouds above shut out the stars. Not a sound anywhere, even the owls were missing. I might have been utterly alone in a world enveloped in silence and darkness, only—lower down the hillside, among some fir trees at the edge of a wood, out of sight of everyone and everything except this veranda, was a light! A small light, a white light, and it did not flicker as the night was so still.

To make sure I had not at last gone to sleep and was dreaming, I crept back into the room and felt for my field-glasses, which are kept just inside by the door. Of course they showed nothing in the blackness but the light; that however was unmistakable. Evidently I was not dreaming.

I felt sure this must be the thief at work, who had already helped himself freely, and carried off promising young trees. I also was fairly certain the light was from a piece of candle. This surprised me. Why did he not use a lantern? Night marauders seldom used a light, but when they did, it was either a lantern or a torch. I listened to try to gauge what he was actually doing, but not a sound of sawing, chopping, or anything else could I hear; and although the light was a good way off, I ought to have heard the slightest movement, in the stillness of the night; the valley echoes every sound in a surprisingly insistent manner.

Returning into the room, I decided to investigate. Getting into some clothing in the dark (I dared not show a light), I tied a scarf over my head, put on rubber boots, stuck a couple of torches in my pockets in case one should go out—I wanted to flash it in the robber's face!—took my stoutest stick, and, as a last bright thought, added a broken useless revolver that someone once brought me as a souvenir from the 1914 war! It had lain in a drawer ever since. I thought it might look convincing (if I could only remember how to hold it) should any unforeseen emergency arise. The thing was pronounced double antique by the lad who brought it home. When I passed through the kitchen, the dog looked up hopefully; a midnight jaunt would have been exactly to his tastes. But I told him *No*, he must go back to his box, which he did sorrowfully. Then I stole quietly out of a back door the other side of the house —the only door that could be relied upon to make no noise when opened.

It seems so easy to walk down paths you know well—in daylight, or even with a torch. I had never tried it in Egyptian darkness before. And I soon found myself floundering into a rose arch, barging into bushes, stumbling over the stones edging borders, before I even got outside the garden gate. My rubber boots did not make any noise, however, as I was mostly on the grass. I did not let my stick touch a stone, or the metal ferrule would have announced itself. In short, I felt I was behaving in a style that any professional detective might envy!

Once out of the garden, I had to descend a flight of uneven stone steps,

leading to a lower orchard. Luckily the small entrance gate was open. Still lower I went, and ran into barbed wire which I had forgotten, and which kept any calves that might be there within bounds. A gate to let me through the barbed wire was found after a search—though of course I knew every inch of the way, as I kept on assuring myself! On getting safely through it, and clear of the barbs, I was warmly greeted by several calves, who surrounded me joyfully, making those pleasant little murmurs some animals make, to show their pleasure. I hoped I could disperse them—not so! They showed every indication of their intention to follow me through thick and thin—hoping it would lead to cabbage leaves.

I stood still to get my bearing, which had got a little askew in my search for the barbed-wire gate. I could not see the candle-light, now that I was on ground-level, as there were a couple of moderately high walls, with conifers between, which shut off everything down below. And I remembered I had to get through those walls, which meant finding more gates. But I knew the direction exactly and that I must find some more stone steps before I went any farther. (Would those calves never go?)

On I went. Every alternate step I took seemed to be on a stick that snapped or a fallen branch. I hoped the thief would think the crackling sounds were made by the cattle. I knew the next gate was half-way down the first wall: a gate with a tiresome fastening. I must get through it very quickly to prevent those wretched calves following me!

I admit that, just about here, I began to wish I had stayed in my own bed, for I splashed into a small brook I had forgotten, and my boots were heavy with water. But I was sure I was near the gate, though I couldn't find it—when bang I went over a clump of boulders sticking up out of the grass. My stick went in one direction, the torches flew out of my pocket and rolled downhill into brambles and bracken, the calves kicked up their heels and scattered.

I was so shaken, I was unable to get up at first, and I wondered if I had broken my leg—both of them perhaps! If so, how was I going to crawl all that way back, uphill? I wished I had left a note saying where I had gone, so that at least I might be found in the morning. And why had I forgotten to bring my whistle with me?—a railway-guard's whistle that I usually carried in case of just such an accident, or need for help. As it was useless to lie there meditating on my misfortunes, I pulled myself together, as I heard the snuffling of those wretched calves, evidently returning.

The legs seemed unbroken, but not in the happiest condition. I got home at long last, very much bruised; and decided that my bones were worth more than a few trees to me. I was thankful when I got back to my own room, and took a look out before going to bed.

The light was not there! Had the thief heard me? Probably he had. I may

have said “Oh!” unconsciously, when I fell.

Well—it might have been worse! I was soon asleep.

In the morning light, my midnight prowl seemed very unnecessary, not to say silly. The only argument in its favour was the desirability of finding out *who* was the thief who had stolen much besides my trees—fruit from orchards and fruit packed ready for market; eggs from fowlhouses, and even from kitchens and pantries—a number of people had been robbed. One knew that eventually the man would be caught; but until we knew who was on the job there was not much useful data to give the police. And as the war had cut down the Force to one sergeant in our district, who had to keep an eye on a radius of about 15 miles or so from the constabulary premises, and his headquarters were three miles away from my place, obviously the officer could not be expected to sit on a stile all night, in the hope of catching some apple-stealer in our village—though he certainly did some very good work, and the more lawless of the evacuees learnt to keep a wary look-out, as they never knew when that stalwart form would emerge unexpectedly from woods and by-lanes. Six feet six inches in height, which became seven feet in his helmet, he had only to look at the youth whose conscience was a trifle uneasy to make him slink off as unobtrusively as possible, even if he had to leave his ferret behind in a wall.

On one occasion, when the sergeant came to see me about some of the depredations on my premises, a quiet tired-looking man, a little below average height, who was only recently out of hospital, had come with a message. Gazing with awe at the sergeant as the tall form gave him a quick professional look-over in passing, the man said to the gardener: “If that policeman came to arrest me, I should go off with him meekly without another word. I should not attempt to get away.”

“No use if you did,” replied the other. “You’d never get the better of him.”

I was stiff with bruises when I awoke, but told no one of my exploit, except Virginia and Ursula, and what they said concerns only my private character and the condition of my brain, and does not matter here! If one is trying to catch a thief, the less one says about it the better. Also, I did not want the invalids to hear that anyone had been seen about in the night. I myself strongly suspected that the man was a gipsy, and as I heard no sound of wood cutting or carrying, I concluded he was poaching, though poachers prefer a good moon, and do not have a light as a rule.

In any case, it was most important that nothing should come to the ears of the patients, that might suggest either gipsies or poachers. The average Londoner has such wild ideas about both types. There are plenty of gipsies

only a few miles away in the Forest of Dean. I admit many of them are past-masters at making a living without working. Yet some of their women are pleasant enough. Those who used to call on me regularly with clothes-pegs, baskets, and brooms, were welcomed with tea and something to eat, as they rested under the trees in the drive. They were always polite, they were particular to empty the dregs from the cups and swill them round after a fashion at a water trough. As we didn't indulge them in spoons, and kept an eye on any clothes hung out on a line, we never missed anything.

One morning a woman came to the door, after a night of terrific bombing —one of the worst we had. "Where were you last night?" I asked her. "I hope you got into some place for shelter?"

"We were out in the wood as usual," she said. "Did you get up?"

"Yes: I also was out in the wood. I never stay indoors during a raid, if I can leave the house. Last night I went out under the trees, as there were others indoors. I feel safer there, though no one agrees with me.

"But it is safer," the woman said. "And I think you must have been told it by a gipsy. For believe me, lady, no gipsy will go under any other shelter if he can get under trees. They don't come down on you wholesale as buildings do, and they often help break the force of the blast."

Whether she was right or wrong I can't say. But it was trees for me, every time, when I could be spared.

However, I did not discuss gipsies or poachers with my sick friends. I wanted their nerves to be as little agitated as possible. It is useless to try to make most Londoners understand that poachers are often quite respectable folk by day. I don't say I have known any to be churchwardens; but I did find a most praiseworthy man, and the husband of a member of the Mothers' Union, putting rabbit snares in my fields, and I heard he was a first-class poacher, and made a good deal out of the wild pheasants in my woods.

"How can you sleep in your bed at night," a visitor asked me, "if poachers are about the place?"

"Quite easily, especially as they often leave behind them, or hang on the gates, the netting they have borrowed from the garden. If I went out, they would clear off faster than I could go after them. My main annoyance is when they pull down walls to get out a poor little bunny, and leave them down, for me to have built up again."

No: it would not have been wise to say a word to anyone but my two friends about the night's adventure.

When our faithful, undauntable Postwoman arrived up-hill in the morning, her first words to me were: "Have you heard the news?"

"N-no," I said, rather anxiously, wondering whether after all the poacher

had seen me splash into the brook and then somersault over the rocks. “What has happened?”

“Why, they’ve caught those German prisoners who escaped from the camp in the Forest three days ago.”

Oh! Escaped prisoners!

Of course we all knew that the Forest was studded with Prisoner of War Camps, embedded in barbed wire, sentries with loaded rifles, guards and so on; also various other interesting data concerning persons and things. But these were strictly hush-hush topics, not mentioned in any circles, no matter how one desired to appear well-informed.

“Caught them at last, have they?” I was bound to say something; though it was the first we had heard about any having escaped. Statements about prisoners getting out from camps appeared in the daily papers from time to time, but we had not heard of any locally. Still, one likes to appear up-to-date, so inquiries continued:

“Where did they find them?”

By this time fresh tea was being made, and the Postwoman took a minute’s rest in the kitchen. We here have always appreciated the words of the ancient prophet: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings.”

“It was like this” (in answer to our queries): “The Guards were sure they were somewhere along this side of the river, and they were combing the woods yesterday. Someone said they had seen two strangers in the Nun’s walk, and some food was stolen from a cottage further along. But the men seemed to have vanished. ... No sugar, thank you.”

“Do have some cake, though it’s only plain. When and where did the Guards catch up with them?”

“Just below you, shortly after dawn. They saw two figures come out of the wood and cross the meadow to the river, making for the boat tied up to the bank there. I wondered at first if they had been in your wood; but surely you would be certain to have seen them?”

“Quite certain,” I said emphatically.

“They couldn’t have been there,” volunteered the Nice Girl, pouring out another cup for the Bringer of Good Tidings. “I was down there yesterday afternoon, getting up some of the dry wood that is lying about. No one was there.”

“Besides, there are miles of cover all along the hillside,” said Virginia. “They could be hidden in the Free Woods for days, if they had food.”

After more details as to who were the lucky Guards who actually cornered the men, the Postwoman rose, thanking us for the tea and giving the usual formula: “Well, I suppose I must be getting on up: others will be wanting their

letters. And I'm late already this morning, as I had to answer questions about it at every door." Shouldering a heavy post-bag, and carrying parcels, about twenty-five pounds in weight, the girl continued her round up-hill.

The gardener wasn't at work near the house that morning. But later on he appeared, and asked to see me. Looking very mysterious, he murmured that he wished to speak to me in private. I walked down to the greenhouse; and when out of earshot of the kitchen he told me he had been hearing an account of the capture of the prisoners, from this one and that of the Home Guards, and he thought it best for me to know.

"It's evident it was a *very* near thing for *us*," he said (identifying himself with the family, in the pleasant way employees did in the old days). "I've just heard that they must have had an idea of burgling our house. For they were actually in the Lower Orchard. The police found"—subduing his voice—"two torches among that mass of nettles and bracken in the far corner. Dropped accidentally in the dark."

Of course I exclaimed my amazement at the news!

"But that wasn't all! They found"—(in an impressive whisper now)—"a revolver!"

Then I stood still abruptly in my astonishment!

He seemed gratified that I appreciated the seriousness of the situation. But what overcame me was the fact that I had completely forgotten that broken old fire-arm. I knew the torches were down there somewhere, and meant to look for them myself, when the coast was clear. But I had thrown off my coat when I got back to my room, with never a thought for that fearsome weapon, which was intended to strike terror to the heart of any thief who might be—well, we'll say ill-mannered.

Pulling myself together, and in order to show proper interest in the discoveries, I asked: "Where were they found? Were there any foot-marks, or finger-prints?"

There were marks about the earth near the brook, but they didn't find any foot-prints. The men would be careful to keep on the grass. He had been down himself to see if he could find any other weapons or traces of their doings; all he could see were signs that the calves must have torn about in a rare panic: and the barbed-wire gate was partly unfastened. It was a mercy we were alive in our beds in the morning, he assured me. And I heartily agreed. I couldn't help wondering what the Guards and the Police would have said, had they found me down there with a broken leg!

And what a blessing no one knew of my escapade but my two friends! I had no desire to be the laughing-stock of the county.

Nevertheless, I mourned those two torches. It was not easy to replace them.

When I related the gardener's shocking revelations to the two indoors,

Virginia merely shook her head sadly and said: “It just shows...!”

That afternoon a gay youth called, sent by his mother, a great friend, to ask after me, but also I am sure to let me see how smart he looked in his uniform—and also on his own account! He was home on leave. He had picked up the local gossip, *en route* from Chepstow, and greeted me with:

“Oh, what a chance to be famous you’ve missed, Aunt!” (courtesy title; no relation). “I heard in the village that they caught two German escapadoes just below your wood. Wouldn’t it have been a thrill if you had found them hiding on your place? Think what the papers would have said!”

“Probably they would have stated that two German P.O.W.s who had been missing from the Camp at Blank-blank had now been recaptured. And no more.”

“Don’t you believe it! Not if *I* had a hand in the case. I’m aiming to be a journalist when I’m demobbed.”

“Well; what more could you say?”

“Let me see”—thinking a moment. “I should head my para: ‘Poor decrepit widow, single-handed, captures escaped German P.O.W.s in dense forest.’ ”

“Very interesting! May I ask who was the poor decrepit female?”

“Of course it would be you. But——”

“Really! I know the income-tax consumes most of my cash, and I remember I had a cold in my head about three years ago. All the same——”

“My dear Aunt, you surely know that every widow mentioned in the press must either be bewitchingly, palpitatingly glamorous and beautiful, or else be prone on a bed of penniless poverty, with a fading memory that can only remember the day when Napoleon landed at Hastings and said ‘England Expects’.”

“What a memory! Must have been a Professor of History in her better days. Please go on.”

“Now, I’ll fight anyone who says you are not beautiful—am I not hoping you will remember me in your will, or even sooner——?”

“I quite understand. Debt or extravagances? Do continue.”

“After the headlines, I should say: ‘A poor widow, living in a desolate lonely cottage, miles from any other habitation, heard mysterious sounds coming from a dense forest some little distance away. Though it was the dead of night and pitch dark, she crept stealthily through the trees, till she came upon two burly ruffians eating a pork-pie, which she recognized as having been stolen from her pantry; and drinking beer from a bottle, which certainly was never her property, she being a strict teetotaller.

“ ‘Realizing that they were escaped German prisoners, she promptly seized them by the back of their shirt collars, one in each hand, while she blew the police whistle she always carried. The men (who were most dangerous S.S.

men) struggled violently, but, owing to the beer and the pork-pie having stuck in their throats, were nearly throttled. Marching them half a mile up-hill to her cottage, the brave woman locked them in the scullery, while she phoned for the authorities. By this time the Military Police and the Home Guards from Monmouth, Gloucester and Glamorgan (only too thankful for exercise on a cold night) were swarming through the forest and up-hill to the cottage.

" 'Unfortunately, in the excitement of the moment, the honest soul had forgotten what she had done with the prisoners. But, undaunted, the valiant Guards, soldiers and police searched every nook and corner, and finally ran them to earth, snoring under the scullery sink.' "

"Yes, my boy, I should advise you to take up journalism. How much did you say?" getting out my cheque-book.

Twenty
CHRISTMAS FORETHOUGHT

Christmas was not far away, though there was very little in the landscape to indicate this. The trees certainly were leafless in the woods, as a whole; yet as conifers abound here and only the larches of the tribe shed their needles, there was plenty of dark green in the open and among the woods; also hollies flourish in numbers, and their shining green leaves light up the hedgerows and all sorts of odd corners, where they have seeded. Ivy is certainly not a benefit to the trees when it climbs the big trunk, and then tries to take complete possession once it gets to the top. Yet what beautiful patches of a bluish green it makes, when seen in the winter beside the yellower green of the holly. The oaks, though supposed to be bare, have lots of brown leaves clinging to them, a colour that takes on a real glow when the sun is on them.

Plenty of shrubs in the garden are anything but bare. The rhododendrons are holding up fine flower buds, in the centre of each rosette of dark shining leaves; they look ready to open, but they will remain tightly sealed till the spring. Many of the roses are evergreen and a few blooms still struggle to do their best. The winter heliotrope—actually no heliotrope, but a relative of the coltsfoot—is scenting the air. The winter jasmine is green in leaf and cascaded with yellow. The wych-hazels are tufted with yellow from the lowest branch to the topmost twig; and the perfume is delicious. I wonder why we do not see this more often in our gardens? I know it is not particularly exciting during the summer; but it is not needed then, and its quiet green leaves fit in with any background. When it bursts forth in December with its uncommon blossoms, which look like tassels of canary-coloured silk, on every stem and spur, and the air is redolent of its sweet unusual perfume, it is a prize indeed. The blossoms do not like hard frost, but very few flowers do. Yet with us, it stands mild ground frosts, and being battered by the wind.

Primroses are showing all about the borders. These in themselves are enough to banish thoughts of winter.

Ferns are everywhere, and of many kinds, from the tiny wall varieties to the tall hart’s tongue, male fern, lady fern, hard fern; some of them with fronds several feet in length. But if frost sweeps over the tall ones, their foliage will

wither. The wall ferns stand the cold much better.

One sight is very lovely in winter—the fluffy seed-pods of the wild clematis now come into their own. Having been wreathing themselves over barns, trees, among the roses on the arches, climbing wherever they can climb unobserved, they are soon in flower; it is when the seed-pods ripen that one sees the full beauty of this energetic vagrant. Then, on a dry day, they foam over tree tops and wherever they can, white and silvery, and looking as light as down. A shower of rain reduces them to draggled grey, and looking masses of hopeless desolate ruin. Yet a drying wind soon puts things right, and a gleam of sunshine lights them up again to shine like snowflowers; and though the winter gales dismantle them in time, it is surprising how firmly these frail-looking bunches of feathery material hold to the parent stem, only disappearing by degrees, a bit at a time.

This is a region of wind and water, rather than snow and ice. Yet on one occasion that remains in my memory we had an exceptionally severe winter. Of course it would happen to be the year when I had ordered eight scarlet horse-chestnut trees, having set my heart on having a row of these beautiful trees to border a large field. They arrived as soon as the frost had taken hold of us. As it was impossible to plant them that day, they were stacked in a barn, as they had arrived, without undoing the packing.

"The frost is sure to break up in a few days," we all said. But it didn't! It got harder and harder, black frost; and the ground was like iron. Some snow fell, but not in great quantity; it was the implacable cold that gripped the earth.

After these poor trees had been nine weeks in that barn, I determined to end their incarceration. I told the men they would have to come out and be planted; they could only die, and they would do that very soon if they remained where they were.

"But the ground is iron," the men said in chorus. "You couldn't get a pickaxe down an inch in it."

"Then we will thaw it," I said.

They looked at me; and then at each other, with a look that said: "Poor thing! Then it's gone to her head! Better humour her, it's the safest way."

I should explain that the holes had been thoroughly excavated, rocks removed, and in every way prepared for the reception of the trees, some weeks before the frost overtook us. But good earth had been quickly packed into the cavities, to fill up and keep out the cold.

We had plenty of hot water in the kitchen. I had each man carry two cans of boiling water to the field, which was ten minutes' walk up-hill. (At that time they were living on plenty of good strengthening food; not the meagre rations of "stuff" doled out to them later.)

It was slow work, but there was little else but tree-felling that the men

could do in that weather, and at least it kept them warm. Everyone took up a jug or kettle or pail of water to aid them. One hole at a time was thawed out, and when moist and ready, a tree was unswaddled and planted. Of course, it took all the heat out of the water to thaw the frost, and the ground was not warm when the roots were put in. But the men worked with a will—if only to prove to me how idiotic I was. Though I think they had a certain amount of interested curiosity as to whether any would survive.

It was a long job; it had to be done quickly and carefully so as to keep the cold from touching the roots when unwrapped. But it was carrying up the water that took most time and effort.

After all was done, the trees tied to their supporting stakes, and hurdles put round to keep off the cattle, the gardener sighed with thankfulness at being quit of that nightmare in the barn that had haunted us.

And how we watched those bleak branches! For months they remained as though dead; till I forgot about them. Then one day someone hurried to tell me a few buds were becoming slightly—only very slightly—sticky!

They all lived and are now flourishing trees, showing scarlet pyramids of bloom each year.

The gardener takes a special joy in informing visitors: "We always plant *our* scarlet horse-chestnuts in boiling water." And they look incredulous, and ask me if he thought they were quite simpletons.

It was about ten days before Christmas that dear Edward called (it may be remembered that his shadow fell faintly across Chapter 3). It was not often that he honoured us with a visit; like most men, he dodged "all that", and left such social dissipations to his wife. He brought a note from her, inviting us to dinner on Christmas Day. But he did not wait for me to read the note. He started right away with:

"We are so hoping that you and your two friends may be able to spend Christmas Day with us. And an idea occurred to me, as I was coming along: why not pool our Christmas birds, and get one large turkey between us, and then Miss Ursula could come early and cook it?"

I gazed at him in blank astonishment. Did the man really mean what he said? Were they trying to get Ursula as cook for the day?

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand," I said, when I had recovered my breath. "We could not leave my two invalids in the house alone——"

"Oh! We heard they had returned to London."

"Also we have already ordered our Christmas bird. Moreover Miss Ursula is overworked enough in the kitchen in normal times, and I don't intend her to be plagued with the Christmas cooking. I am doing that myself, to give her a chance to do something pleasant for once. And if we had been able to accept

Mrs. Edward's kind invitation, I could hardly have asked my friend to take on the cook's job for the dinner."

It was dear Edward who now looked surprised. "But—but—why, I thought she *liked* cooking?"

I was too exasperated to say much and got quit of him as soon as I could. What use to try to explain to such a man that Ursula was spending much of her days in the kitchen in order to lift excessive burdens off my shoulders, and to help our two sick friends to get back to normal strength as quickly as possible?

Presumably, dear Edward thought he would be giving her a treat! That her life had been consistently one of service for others, he would not have understood, had I mentioned it. Or if he had understood, he would have seen no reason why she should not serve them.

Going upstairs, I found that Miss Smith and Mrs. Brown were settled in the sitting-room. I had converted an upstairs room into a sitting-room, and they were wheeled there by day when well enough.

I told my tale.

Their indignation can be imagined.

"I can't understand Mrs. Edward's ever thinking of such a thing," said Mrs. Brown. "She isn't a bit like that."

"I don't believe she did. It doesn't sound at all like her. I believe her husband concocted it. You know how mean he is."

"But the idea of that wretched creature's imagining that her reason for doing all she does, is merely because she *likes* cooking!" Mrs. Brown, the most charitable of women, became quite heated in her denunciation of that wretched creature.

Miss Smith was more disgusted than vehement. "Isn't it strange," she said thoughtfully, "how few people are willing to believe that someone else does a kind act from disinterested motives, and purely in order to make another happier?"

"And also, how many there are who will do their utmost to belittle a disinterested kindness, if it is self-evident that the doer makes nothing out of it," I added. "And if they themselves are under an obligation, they will not even say thank you."

"Yes," corroborated Mrs. Brown. "I had a dear friend, middle-aged and independent, who made it her special vocation to go to a relative, or anyone she knew, who might be ill and unable to leave a family of young children to fend for themselves. My friend would take charge, and do the work herself, if there was no servant, till the mother got better. Some callers were talking about her one afternoon, at my house. One of them remarked on her kindness and unselfishness. But another said: 'Oh, she enjoys herself hugely. Nothing pleases her better than to go prying around in other people's homes, and

looking into their cupboards and drawers.' "

"Some people will invariably belittle a good deed done by another," Miss Smith added, "in order to excuse their own selfishness or laziness. And as for thanks—only one out of ten returned to give thanks long ago, and that proportion seems to have been maintained, on the whole, down the centuries. In my work, I have seen a remarkable amount of disinterested kindness, scattered around by doctors, nurses and others, with no thought of thanks; though some patients have been very grateful and appreciative. I am sure, however, there is only one way to get real, lasting satisfaction out of any effort one makes to help others, and that is to do it solely as work for Our Lord, and with no thought of gratitude or thanks. Then there is no feeling of disappointment if one's attempts to make life easier for others are never recognized. I know this sounds like a preachment—but it is a fact, as I have proved."

An hour or two later, I was surprised to see Mrs. Edward. She was terribly agitated and incoherent.

"I've come to apologize," she began. "I really don't know what to say. When Edward came back and told me what he had suggested, I sat down and cried. That man——Oh! you will think I ought not to say it—but there are times when I nearly pack up and go."

Well! Well! I had no idea his wife felt like that about him. How wonderfully she had managed to dissimulate. But there, we all have our weak moments.

"I never know what he will do next," she went on, "or what trouble I shall find he has landed me in, and then I have to explain to people that he didn't mean it. I'm tired of inventing excuses. Of course I had ordered our goose. Do forgive me for saying so much. I never should have dreamt—I don't know what you must have thought——"

"Now don't waste any more tears on it," I told her. "When Mr. Edward spoke about the dinner, I thought that he was like most other men—without a ghost of an idea as to what cooking means, or anything else about housekeeping. I have always maintained that every head of a household should be required by law to take over all his wife's duties in the home for one whole month, while she goes away for a care-free holiday. He should not be allowed to depute the work to anyone else, and should be required to leave everything, at the end of the month, exactly as he found it. But do you think any man ever agrees with me, over this?"

"It would do Edward all the good in the world," she said feelingly. "But should I ever get the mess cleaned up when I got back?"

When we parted, she was much more cheerful. As I told her, there was no perfect wife in the world, as far as I had seen; hence we had no right to expect

a perfect husband.

But I was glad she had explained. It cleared the air. It must be so wearing to have to spend one's days whitewashing a tiresome relative in order to make him publicly presentable!

In the evening, when we had forgotten the incident, Virginia inquired of anyone who cared to answer:

"How did you suppose we should have pooled the cold remains of the goose? Should we have divided them in half? or in fifths, leaving two portions for them, and carrying home three for ourselves? And would that include the stuffing?"

"There wouldn't have been any dividing," Ursula replied. "Dear Edward would have stuck to the lot. And you know perfectly well that none of us would have had the moral courage to claim our share."

Twenty-One
ADVERTISEMENTS

"But how can anyone!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown in mystified tone, which made us all look up. She was reading the newspaper. "It says in this advertisement 'Grow more underclothes'! How can anyone?"

Animated babel immediately!

"Perfectly absurd! Of course you can't."

"Well, tell me how to do it, and I'll start at once!"

"I'm sure it will be a boon to *me*, for *my* intimate garments are—yes, indeed they are!"

"I can see how to do it." (Thus Virginia.) "Hang the combinations on the clothes-line with legs touching the ground—and plant them in. Then next morning or next year, little combies would spring up all round. Quite simple."

"Must the coupons be planted with them?"

"But will they be new? Or all holes like the parent stock?"

"So many patches adorn mine, that I can't see how they would know what to grow—whether patches or the other thing!"

"Do go on, Mrs. Brown, and tell us what the rest of the advertisement says," I raised my voice above the noise, "and end this unseemly conversation!"

"I can't see, the print is so small. Perhaps you can," and Mrs. Brown handed the paper to me whereon I read: "Grow more under cloches"!

As Mrs. Brown did not want the paper any more, I glanced at oddments in it, while folding it up correctly, in accordance with an early precept, dictated by my father to his scatter-everything-about family:

"When you have done with anything, leave it exactly as you would like to find it."

This embraced a wide variety of impedimenta, such as hanging up bath-towels; replacing books on their proper shelves; cleaning garden rakes and spades; putting tools back in their home quarters; returning gum-bottle or india-rubber when borrowed from study; also—most important—folding newspapers with the title outside and the pages in correct order.

Mechanically I folded the paper with the title outside. And in so doing my

eye fell on a paragraph in the column of legal notices, requesting Miss Claribel Egerton Smith, a nurse, formerly of Tulse Hill, London, or any person who could give information about her, to communicate with:

Pater and Pipkin, Solicitors, Lincoln's Inn, London.

I read it a second time. Paused. Looked over at Claribel Egerton Smith, who had returned to her reading, and was deep in *Barchester Towers*, and probably longing to have Mrs. Proudie under her rule in hospital for the benefit of disciplinary treatment.

Should I show it to her at once? or would it be better to wait till the morning? But of course she must know. What had I better do?

I handed the paper silently to Virginia, indicating the notice with my finger. Then I got up and went out of the room. Virginia soon followed.

We realized that she must be told, and the sooner the better. We could only hope it would not bring on another of those nerve storms, that were so distressing as well as weakening.

Returning to the room, I apologized for interrupting her reading, but asked if she had noticed an advertisement inquiring for the whereabouts of a Miss Claribel Egerton Smith? Trollope was flung to the winds. And we were all immediately immersed in speculation as to why Messrs. Pater and Pipkin needed her address. We tried to assist her to some solution:

Had she ever possessed an uncle who had emigrated to Australia, or gone gold-digging in Klondyke? Had she ever befriended some old gentleman in a bus, who had lost his money and his memory, and paid his fare for him? Had there ever been a missing Will among her ancestors which might now have come to light, and would she be the sole heiress in such delightful circumstances?

None of it took us any further. Her antecedents appeared to have been most orderly, respected, will-preserving, non-adventurous members of middle-class society—with the customary lack of fortune appertaining thereunto.

Virginia looked at her watch. "The post goes out in an hour. Wouldn't it be wise to write at once, and start establishing your identity? Then you may discover why you are wanted, or at least hear something about it. Here's paper and pen; if you will write, I will go down to the village with it. Only you must be quick about it, or we shall miss the post. I can't do it under half-an-hour, however fast I trot."

Miss Smith was too experienced a business woman to waste precious minutes in moaning that she didn't know what to say. She wrote a short concise letter, stating who she was, where she was, and why; saying she would send whatever they needed for identification purposes, and asking for further information.

In the meantime, I had recalled that my husband had had a good deal to do

with that particular firm of solicitors, in the course of business. I therefore wrote them on my own account, explained Miss Smith's inability to call on them personally; promised to produce all the necessary evidence as to her *bona fides*, but begged them to give her some sort of indication as to why they were searching for her, as in her present weak condition, all strain and nervous tension were disastrous for her.

Both letters went out by the afternoon post.

In a few days, the lawyers wrote. They did not give away much information, but the little they did was quite satisfactory. They said they were executors for a Will wherein the name of Nurse Claribel Egerton Smith appeared among other legatees. Would she kindly state if she had ever nursed any of the following persons; if so, give dates and any other information likely to aid them. Then followed the names; Mrs. John Paine, Edgar Pront, C. Halliday, Ethel McClure, J. Winterbottom, Mrs. Judith Levy, R. Green, Nathaniel Wood.

"Then Mrs. Winterbottom has died," exclaimed Miss Smith. "I wondered why she did not send her usual Christmas card."

"Do you know any of the other people?" we eagerly asked.

She shook her head. "Of course they might have been patients in the hospital. I couldn't possibly recall all the names of the people who pass through. But I nursed Mrs. Winterbottom first of all in a private ward at Mildmay. After I left there (I wasn't very well), I went with her to Bournemouth as nurse-companion, for a couple of months while she convalesced. In the end, I stayed with her two years. She said it would do me good as well as herself.... How long ago was that? Let me see—it must be twenty years ago."

"Was she rich?" we clamoured to know!

"Yes; she must have been very well off, but she was very simple in her tastes, and plain in her dress. She never made any display of wealth. She lived in a charming house on Sydenham Hill, with extensive grounds sloping down on the Kentish side of the hill. There was a marvellous view. The lodges at the two main gates were little gems; I used to wish I could live in one of them. There were a couple of fields with cows in them, apart from the beautiful gardens. Indoors it was solid Victorian; everything of the best, but no vulgar show. If her oriental carpets are sold now, they will fetch a small fortune."

"Let us hope you will get some of it."

"I can see no reason why she should leave me anything, though I shall be very grateful if there is a little to come to me. She was very generous and considerate while I was with her. But I haven't seen her for years and years. She always sent a card at Christmas, that was all. She knew I was extra busy at Christmas-time, and told me not to attempt to acknowledge it. If she left me

£10, it would be more than I deserved, for she paid me more than well for what I did for her."

"We'll hope it's £100," said Mrs. Brown. "You deserve all she leaves you, and then some more."

To which we all agreed heartily.

"Listen to me," I interrupted; I had been making a few notes. "Talking won't get any of it. We must set to work. I am going to write down what you have been telling us, and anything more you can think up. You can then sign it, and we will get it off to-day."

She murmured something about giving me so much extra work; but I saw she was not fit to do more. So commanding silence, and bidding her think up all she could and let me have it to add to the letter, I wrote and wrote! I felt sure her description of the inside of the house would be useful verification for the lawyers, as one or another of the partners must have been there.

"By the way, can you give a description of the lady's personal appearance?"

Yes; she gave a general outline of Mrs. Winterbottom as she had been those years ago. She had only seen her once since she returned to hospital work.

There was the inevitable "wait", after the long letter was sent off. How tedious such waiting can be! We filled spare minutes with speculations as to how much? Though Miss Smith took no part in our surmises, but wisely tried to busy herself once more in *Barchester*.

The information, so far as it went, seemed satisfactory to the lawyers; and a little later, after she had supplied official evidence of her identity from people in authority, they relieved our anxiety by telling her, guardedly, that she was one of two residuary legatees; but until the estate was finally settled, they could not say how much would ultimately come to her: but possibly it might approximate to nearly five figures.

Five figures! That set our tongues wagging. Five figures must mean £10,000!

The lawyers were becoming slightly more expansive, for they went on to explain that the sum would be larger than had been contemplated when they had drawn up the Will for their client, nineteen years before, owing to the death of several people who would have benefited under the Will.

Reading this, a feeling of uneasiness came over me. Nineteen years was long enough for the old lady to have changed her mind several times over, and made other Wills! Supposing she had done so—and making fresh Wills is a well-known recreation of rich, elderly women—and if a later Will should presently turn up, how would Miss Smith fare?

Being worried about this, I wrote privately to the lawyers, asking if there

were any remote chance of this, as if so, it would be better for Miss Smith to face the possibility now, and shape her plans accordingly.

The reply was reassuring. There was no likelihood of a later Will. They had managed all the lady's business affairs for very many years. She had added two codicils to the Will, one of which was made only last year. But she did not wish to alter the residuary legatees, of whom Miss Smith was one.

They added, that they would be pleased to advance £500 on account, if Miss Smith would find it useful in her illness.

I also received an unofficial letter from Mr. Pipkin, the partner who had known my husband. He said he was sure Mrs. Winterbottom would be very glad, could she but know, that the money was going to help her friend Miss Smith at a time of illness. His client had always emphasized that part of the residue was to go to the nurse who had done so much for her. She considered it wrong that anyone who had spent the best years of life in looking after sick and suffering—often in most depressing circumstances—should be left inadequately provided for when unable to work any longer, more especially as the salary a nurse receives is so small in comparison with others.

When I showed this letter to Miss Smith, she said quietly: "She was always kind and considerate for others."

"Was it a very serious case?" I asked, forgetting that a nurse of any standing never discusses a patient.

"Yes, it was from one point of view, but it wasn't incurable. As she is no longer here, there can be no objection to my saying it was a bad nervous breakdown. Some of her people wanted her to be put under restraint——"

"Said she wasn't capable of managing her money, I suppose!"

"Yes, something like that. At any rate I stood out about it. It seemed so wicked, considering that her mind was as clear as mine. I practically fought to keep her free, and one of the doctors agreed with me. She had left the hospital, and I had gone with her at her earnest request. I was glad she wanted me, for I felt there was some truth in her saying that I was the buffer that stood between her and the mental home. I was with her for nearly two years, till she had quite recovered. But I wouldn't remain with her permanently. I wanted to get back to work as there was such a shortage of nurses. Moreover, I knew what that cousin of hers was saying!"

So now, all we could do was to assist the heroine in planning the expenditure of her fortune, against the day when it materialized.

Not that she had any reckless tendencies. Her mother was a Scotswoman, which accounted for many of the daughter's sterling qualities, including abundant common sense.

One result of the affair delighted me. Instead of becoming worried and extra nervy with the excitement, her health began to improve. Slowly, but none

the less surely, some of her old courage and self-reliance came to the surface. The dreadful fits of depression, and the night terrors, that had been so hard to combat, gradually disappeared. The only danger now was lest she could overtax her returning strength in her desire to be up and doing.

The very day after she heard the probable size of the legacy, I guessed she had turned the corner.

"Did Ursula say she was going into Monmouth?" she asked me.

"Yes; are you wanting anything?"

"I should be so much obliged if she could get me some pipe cleaners."

"Pipe cleaners! Good gracious! Are you proposing to start your celebrations by learning to smoke? And a pipe, of all things?"

"No," she laughed. "I'm in want of hair curlers. I must really make an effort to look more respectable. One can't get decent curlers now, so I must make-do with pipe cleaners; they are not too hopeless as substitutes."

I knew then that she had started to mend.

In so many nerve illnesses, if only one could remove the fear, or the anxiety, that is at the back of the patient's mind, a cure would follow. Often, the fear is of a future without adequate means. At first, Miss Smith was suffering from the shock of her terrible experiences when the hospital was bombed. But later, she was haunted by fear of the future. Now that there was no longer any cause for that fear, she became a different person.

"We must celebrate somehow," I announced, though we had nothing in the cupboard of a celebrative character; but at least we could dress for dinner, and dine late for once!

Ursula went out early, to see if she could get anything for us to eat: but returned sadly with only a knuckle of veal.

Deep regrets on the part of the butcher, but owing to certain somebodies being on strike as usual, it was all he had. And, it would be as well to cook it to-day——Oh yes, quite right at present, only——

So in the end, it had to be soup once more. But we did try to grace the great occasion with a change of apparel. Miss Smith got into a gorgeous dressing-gown-quasi-teagown someone had sent her at Christmas. Mrs. Brown donned her best boudoir cap and a pink and white fluffy bed-jacket.

Ursula and I put on our nearly worn out Sunday frocks, under overalls, as we had to dish up and carry up the feast; but I own our wardrobes were suffering from the doldrums. However I was fortunate in having a new hair net someone had kindly sent me, and Ursula pinned on a lace jabot, to strike a festive note.

Virginia said life was real, life was earnest—in the main; and she had no time to waste on fripperies and frivols as a rule. But considering the overwhelming importance of the occasion, and the pleasure that was rampant

in her breast (if that was the correct place for it to ramp), she would certainly see if she could find a clean pocket handkerchief without a hole in it, as a contribution to the gaiety of nations, and for the edification of the distinguished guest.

What she did, however, was to decorate the dinner-table with little bunches of primroses and snowdrops and violets in moss, with taller vases of catkins, stems of red willow, yellow jasmine and the scented yellow sprays of the wych-hazel. Being January, there were not as many flowers as would be showing a few weeks later, when daffodils would be out, and snowdrops thick all about the place. But with abundance of fern, mosses, and tiny ivy, and winter heather, it made a lovely setting for our festivity.

The soup was excellent. Ursula's soups would appease even a Frenchman. With it were fried slices of swede, brussels sprouts and baked potatoes. For the next course there was a beautiful Christmas pudding out of a tin, from my Australian stepson; followed by delicious cheese which had arrived in a food parcel from a friend in Sweden.

"Talk about the United Nations," said Miss Smith, "they seem to be feeding us to-day."

Our libations consisted of Fortnum & Mason's Persian Sherbet from half a bottle I had been cherishing for just such an occasion. We ended with coffee.

"I did hope I could have got something really nice for the first course," sighed Ursula, "instead of that old bone."

"That soup was exceedingly nice; couldn't have been nicer," said Mrs. Brown.

"Yes indeed, and exceedingly nourishing," said the guest of the evening, in the practical tone of a hospital matron.

"But what I wanted to get you for once, was something exceedingly nice, but *not* nourishing!" Ursula explained.

Epilogue

Since Miss Bachelor wrote, telling of the wonderful recovery of her mythical aunt, she has not written again. But a mutual acquaintance, happening to meet her, and hearing that she had been to see me, made the usual polite inquiries as to my health, and doings, and so forth.

What Miss Bachelor said as a whole, I do not know and do not wish to know. But one item my friend retailed to me.

"What did Miss Bachelor mean by saying your kitchen is hung with texts?"

It was a small matter, not worth answering. There is no law, so far as I know, against hanging texts all over the house if one wishes to do so, and texts would certainly be more helpful than some of the monstrosities I have occasionally seen on the walls of ultra-modernity. But, as it happens, I have only one text hanging on any wall; and that one is going to remain there. Some readers will understand, when I explain the reason for its being there: others may not. It must be left at that.

When I had the sad task of going through my husband's papers, I came upon a small text card, the type that used to be given away by many clergy and Sunday-school teachers. At first, it went into the waste-paper basket, with hardly a second glance; there was so much to go through. But remembering that it must have been kept for some special reason, I took it out of the waste, and read the text:

And the Barrel of Meal Wasted Not.

It struck me as a curious line to have chosen for a text card; but having much else to think about, I hung it on the handiest nail in the study, and there it remained unheeded for several years.

Then the horrors of war descended on us, and I seemed to be going under with it. It was not the destruction of material things, so much as the destruction of lovely promising young lives that weighed me down. Women all over the land were treading the same weary road, with heavy hearts and a hopeless outlook.

When life seemed to have sunk to zero for me, I sat at my desk, wondering, wondering, trying to settle what I ought to do; deciding that nothing was any use, and no help anywhere in sight.

Cowardly? Yes, I know it was. But one can be very weak when bereft of all human support.

Looking around, I noticed the text on the wall. I read it mechanically. I read it as a momentary diversion from my own unhappy thoughts. A curious idea to have detached that line from its context! Was it now a sign that we should at least have bread throughout the war and that the nation would be fed by unexpected means?

Perhaps so. But I was indifferent to food. I had not as much backbone as the widow of Zarephath, for I had not the slightest desire to cook and eat a meal before I died! But of course there was her boy; he made all the difference. And I am sure he got his mother's share of the bread, as well as his own.

While my thoughts were wandering aimlessly and apathetically around the subject, there suddenly passed through my mind our Lord's rebuke to the tempter:

Man shall not live by bread alone.

Though I had known those words from my childhood, I was arrested by them, as something new. I repeated them to myself; and I looked at the text card from a fresh angle.

Was it possible that the record of the widow's meal was intended to convey something much more important than merely an incident in the life of a great prophet, and much more than an indication that our food could be guaranteed by our Heavenly Father, despite war's devastations?

I thought and thought. I seemed to be reaching out and groping in the darkness for something to hold to, and Someone who would not fail me.

It came to me then as a revelation, that I and many others were needing food for our spiritual existence far more than the ordinary daily loaf. We were starving for the Bread of Life promised by our Lord. If we had faith to believe it, sustenance would be given us day by day, and for each day's special need as it arose. No matter how near we might seem to be to the end of our resources the supply of strength for the day's needs would not fail. How often we need a fresh reminder of this!

It was a new consciousness of a background of unfailing Strength that carried me through the trials that lay ahead—but which had only to be dealt with one day at a time.

When it became necessary to dismantle the study and use the room for another purpose, I moved the text and hung it conspicuously on the store-cupboard in the kitchen, as I now spent most of my time there. People sometimes noticed it. One would say:

"What a good motto for a kitchen cupboard."

Or, "I wish I wasn't scraping the bottom of *my* flour-bin!"

Others make tactful openings, giving me an opportunity to state the why and wherefore.

But I do not enlighten them.

How could I explain? The growth of our spiritual life cannot be reduced to words. The fresh strength that comes to us, again and again, just when we most need it, cannot be assessed by any earthly measure. If Miss Bachelor herself asked why I kept such a Victorian relic, would she understand if I told her it had helped me to weed my own soul?

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Obvious errors and inconsistencies in spelling and punctuation have been corrected. Inconsistencies in hyphenation have been retained.

[The end of *Weeding the Flower-Patch* by Flora Klickmann]