

CHAPTER I.

I was nine years old, with a crimson frock and highly starched white embroidered pinafore, dark hair which required many knobbly curl papers on Saturday nights and a fringe, when my parents brought me to Wandsworth to live with the gentleman known to me as Grandpa and to my father and his brothers as "The Governor". (1900)

Spencer Park, with its very genteel houses, entirely surrounded an enchanting private park where the birds sang and nested amid the pink and white chestnut trees, and the sweet perfume of lilac, or flew chirping amid the golden chains of the laburnum and the budding walnut trees.

Old Bradford, the chief gardener, would have fallen in his tracks had a weed been found in his glowing flower beds or a dandelion on his immaculate lawns, where in summertime a comfortable brown horse gently dragged the lawn mower up and down.

The Park was sacred to the tenants of the surrounding houses, each of which had its private gate and key. And the rules of its use were as stern as any tribal laws of darkest Africa.

No games except the well-bred, non-turf-destroying recreation of croquet were permitted and the nicely

brought-up children were trained not to walk upon the grass or pick a single flower. All was decorous, neat and deadly slow. Grandpa was a keen croquet player, but sad was the occasion if anyone so far forgot themselves as to defeat him. My Mother did so once, but never, never again.

On one inauspicious day an enterprising young lady broke every rule by slinging a hammock between two of the sacred trees and ensconcing her pretty person within it. But not for long! Grandpa, breathing fire and sulphur, appeared upon the scene and in vehement tones commanded her to remove the obnoxious object immediately. The lady, far in advance of her times, entirely refused to obey the voice of Authority. But a little thing like a girl in a hammock would not deflect Grandpa from what he considered his duty, so that without further argument he produced a business-like pocket knife and cut down the hammock, complete with girl. Rushing into her near-by home the girl's complaints brought her Mother on the scene, brandishing a horsewhip with which she proposed to teach old Job Caudwell a lesson. But that wily gentleman had disappeared within the fastnesses of his own garden and the incident, as well as the gate, were closed.

A few years earlier, when Father and his brothers were boys at home, they had indulged in a continual feud with the girl-in-the-hammock's elder brothers, so much so that one dark night they crept across the park to their adversaries' garden gate, screwed several business-like screwdrivers into it and then knocked off the heads. No doubt the atmosphere was somewhat lurid round the said gate the next morning, but the Caudwells were all too far away to be inconvenienced by it.

Four Miles from Charing Cross! So stated the old indicator let into the railings of the L. & S.W. Railway on one side of Spencer Park. All cab fares were regulated by this radius and it was a sad story for those who lived outside it. Today if a London taxi-driver is asked to drive to Wandsworth Common he promptly refuses, with as much scorn as though the destination were somewhere in the Sahara Desert.

One such driver summoned by the receptionist of a Harley Street oculist, accepted a Wandsworthian temporarily blind in both eyes, and in much pain, then set ^{him} down in Sloane Square in the No.19 bus queue and told him he could find his way home. Money was no bait and only the kindness of the bus conductor and one of the passengers brought him safely home.

Wandsworth Common, supposedly the possession of the people for all time, is sadly cut up by two railway lines, various buildings, pre-fabs and other oddments.

Formerly it was wild and lovely, Spencer Park itself being a delightful lake named the Black Sea, where yellow irises grew in profusion upon its borders. It was owned by a gentleman who added an island to it every time his wife presented him with an olive branch - this happy event occurring on thirteen occasions the corresponding number of islands arose above its waters. The only water near it now is in the Frying-Pan, a deep hollow bordering the Windmill Road which fills with unwanted water immediately there is any rain. Several efforts have been made by the Borough Council to retain the water and turn it into an ornamental lake like its brothers on various other parts of the Common, but sooner or later the Frying-Pan springs a leak and all is dry until the next shower of rain. In the last world war it was turned into a reserve tank for fire-fighting. The water remained long enough for a confiding little water-fowl and family to move in and take up their residence, only to find that the water supply unaccountably failed and they were left high and dry.

An artificial tank was built near, beside a little thicket of cream flowering may bushes, which proved a

handy receptacle for the infants of the neighbourhood to endeavour to drown themselves and bestow their rubbish.

Bordering the Frying-Pan was the fatal thirteenth tree where one day in high summer, three people were killed by lightning as they sheltered beneath its branches during one of Wandsworth's worst thunderstorms; four more being killed under another tree about a mile away.

A double suicide has been credited to the old Black Lake, probably terminating a Victorian love affair.

Grandfather bought the second plot of ground in Spencer Park and had his house built to his own design entirely of concrete; floors, staircase, walls and ceilings, to obviate danger of fire. ~~Built~~ Four square, with a front door bell sufficiently loud to rouse the local Fire Brigade, it had a flat roof from which a considerable part of London was visible, including a first-class free view of the fireworks at the Crystal Palace. Later inhabitants had an equally interesting view of the approach of more deadly fireworks in the shape of flying bombs.

Grandma was scared to death of thunder and lightning, perhaps with good reason, seeing that in her childhood her nurse had been killed by her side during a storm. To overcome this trouble Grandpa had a room built in the heart of the earth beneath the house, very much like a railway

carriage in shape, where Grandma retired out of reach of the lightning and of all but the worst claps of thunder. The afore-mentioned later inhabitants found it very handy as a ready-made air-raid shelter.

At the time of the family entering into residence the large plot of ground at the back of the house was uncomfortably symbolic of the stony ground mentioned in Holy Writ. But this did not worry Grandpa, who soon found a remedy. Collecting his three eldest sons every Saturday he promised them a day at the Crystal Palace when they had stoned the garden and in order that the thing should be done properly settled himself comfortably on the roof and watched proceedings. Paul, my father, the eldest, was tall with a long back, which grew very weary, but if he dared to stand erect and stretch himself, a voice, loud as the trump of doom, came from the roof announcing his inefficiency to all the world, "Lazy Paul! Lazy Paul!". The garden was eventually stoned, entirely by this forced labour, but the treat to the Crystal Palace was discreetly forgotten and neither of the poor young stone-removers dared to give a reminder.

Grandpa, in spite of his many gifts, had very little love of beauty for beauty's sake, so that the garden which might have been so lovely was strictly utilitarian, black

asphalt paths, with ~~huge~~^{large} beds of vegetables and fruit trees bordered by nasturtiums and a few bushes which bore huge pink blossoms with tightly packed petals rightly designated cabbage-roses.

Mother was allowed to pick the nasturtiums because they grew better if the flowers were gathered, but not another living thing was she allowed to touch, even though the fruit might rot and drop from the trees while she was buying what was necessary from the greengrocer. Even if an onion appeared in the stew Grandpa made severe enquiries as to its source.

I kept a diary in those days but as we were never allowed to have any visitors unless they were friends of Grandpa, the entries consisted chiefly of the romantic remark, "the gardener came". This "No Visitor" regulation prevented my schoolfellows from Wandsworth High School coming to see me, the only entertainment I was able to offer being to conduct them across the Common within view of the gates and show them where I had the privilege of living. The gates were a copy of those of the old Manor House far away from London where Grandpa had spent his youth, with identical round knobs on either side. This I understand, was a mistake on Grandpa's part as these knobs,

strictly speaking, although often appearing on villas and like residences with such names as "Clovelly, Mentone," or "Kosey-Nook", should only be used on the gates of an actual manor.

Wandsworth Manor, whose site is now covered by small streets, a fried fish shop, a first-class undertaker's and other useful amenities, was a fine old house with that abomination of all cats, a monkey-puzzle tree, in the middle of a huge flower bed and a glorious staircase later removed to Scotland when the building was pulled down in 1891.

The same fate overtook the picturesque Fishmongers' Alms-houses standing well back from East Hill with lawns and gardens in front, now occupied by blocks of unexciting flats, into the midst of which there later descended a landmine bringing with it grim death and agonising disaster. The lovely wrought-iron gateway, the only relic remaining of the original alms-houses, remained unhurt, with its proud coat of arms of the London County Council, yet not so proud as its former inscription, which the latter august body had ruthlessly removed, "All glory be to God only". The ancient foundation was also known as St. Peter's Hospital, a very suitable patron saint when it is remembered they were to provide a refuge in old age for "Citizen Fishmongers of London, or their widows, whose fortunes have

failed through age, broken health, or adverse circumstances."

A sinister and distinctly unhealthy tradition maintained there was a plague pit in the walled kitchen garden at the back of the alms-houses, one of those frightful deep caverns where by the light of flickering torches, London's dead were nightly thrown during the Great Plague of 1665. The supposed site was marked by a stone statue of a man and his dog.

Two legends accounted for this statue, doing honour to both man and beast. The first declared it was the effigy of a gallant physician who at the time of the plague paid no attention to the warnings of his dog, who tried its canine best to prevent him from entering infected houses, and thus caught the dread scourge and gave up the ghost. The second story is more romantic, stating that the statue represents a hero who, after visiting the sick, contracted the plague which first appeared in his knee *and* was observed by the faithful dog who licked away the poisonous virus and thus saved his life. Unfortunately like the "poor wise man" of the book of Ecclesiastes no one knows what became of that same poor wise dog.

Other people, to whom romance is a mere waste of time, have said that neither tale is true, but merely an invention made up to explain the statue. In any case,

supposed plague pit and statue are now completely buried beneath tons of bricks and mortar - a genuine human rabbit warren.

Opposite the Alms-houses stood the original Wesleyan church, also crushed into a pathetic mass of rubble by the land mine which caused such havoc on the other side of the road. John Wesley paid several visits to Wandsworth, prefacing his first appearance by the remark that he was going to preach to the "wicked Wandsworthians", a not altogether tactful opening. It is to be hoped he did not get this impression from his wife, a lady who was courted by the fiery John when she lived in Love Lane, a romantic thoroughfare leading from Wandsworth to Putney through hedges thick with honeysuckle, now complete with rows of villas very much unadorned, petrol stations and motor buses, its entry into Wandsworth High Street being ominously designated an "Accident Black Spot".

A picture of Wandsworth High Street taken in 1850 shows ladies gossiping to a man on horseback, with a shepherd leading his sheep quite happily down the middle of the road. Today such proceedings would have landed the whole lot in the neighbouring mortuary in double quick time.

The courtship in the honeysuckle environment of Love Lane apparently did not fulfil its early promise, for

Mrs. John Wesley is said to have knocked her husband about quite shamefully. Evidently the great evangelist was another sample of the lamb at home and the lion in the chase.

His uncomplimentary name for Wandsworth was "Sleepy Hollow", a title he would have rapidly altered if he had to nip across the High Street in this present Year of Grace.

My Grandfather came to Spencer Park while Dr. Chave, a gentleman whose love for souls was somewhat sketchy, reigned as Vicar of the parish. The Reverend Edward William Tanner Chave, D.D., was noteworthy for a patriarchal grey beard, portentous clearings of the throat and the ownership of a pet pig, who even wandered into Confirmation classes to the infinite delight of the candidates.

The grounds of the vicarage, now covered by a block of exceptionally uninteresting flats, were really lovely, but were concealed by a high black fence, which must have been nearly a quarter of a mile in length, sheltering the doings of the said pig and his owners from the ignoble gaze of the proletariat.

Mrs. Chave never appeared in public without a red sunshade, whether out of extreme modesty befitting a Vicar's wife, care of her complexion, or a superiority complex has never been revealed.

It is to be feared that Dr. Chave, whose thirty-four years in office was the longest to which any Vicar of St. Anne's, Wandsworth has attained, did not die of overwork in pastoral visitation; rumour having even dared to suggest that he remarked if the church were empty he could not help it; but of course rumour may have been unjust. One invalid parishioner, upon whom he paid an occasional call, was always greeted by a mighty clearing of the ecclesiastical throat and the remark, "Ah, you are like the evergreen, you never fade".

On one unfortunate occasion the old gentleman fell asleep during a service, being quite lost to the world when sermon time approached. There was a long pause, during which his faithful people imagined he was engaged in private devotion. The vergers approached and tactfully aroused him, whereupon he muttered several times, "Fill 'em up again. Fill 'em up again." After several repetitions the vergers gave him a good shake, ^{which} whereupon he arose and noisily stumped out of the church.

His curate, later to become the celebrated Dr. Fellowes, the church music expert, tactfully completed the service. It can be assumed he did not choose "Awake, thou that sleepest", as the text for his distinctly impromptu sermon.

Unfortunately my imperious grandfather, in his younger days a member of the revered order of churchwardens, found fault with Dr. Chave which resulted in a most frightful row, terminating in Grandfather shaking the dust of St. Anne's from his shoes for ever, and alas the Church of England as well. As he was simmering in his wrath the Minister of the Wesleyan Chapel called and with brilliant strategy, combined with careful sympathy and well-applied flattery, secured the ruffled sheep for his own schismatic fold.

From that day onward Grandpa was seized with the grim fanatical zeal of the convert. John Wesley and his followers were exalted to the heavens, the church of his forefathers being utterly condemned as hopeless and helpless. Grandfather even went so far as to keep a horrid little scrapbook in which with fiendish glee he pasted every press cutting he could collect where any Anglican clergyman, Bishop, Priest or Deacon, had been so naughty as to break one of the Ten Commandments.

As a gesture of supreme defiance to every tradition of his former years he insisted on his gardener working on Good Friday, an action which in those days would not have been considered strange by the Wesleyans, but which to church people would be regarded as nothing less than sacrilege.

My long-suffering Grandmother, herself the daughter of a lady who went to church every day of her life and was acquainted with that great Anglican saint and reformer, Dr. Pusey, used to say with bitter, though restrained passion, "I hate these Wesleyans." Poor lady! It was not so much the Wesleyans she hated, as the mad zeal of her husband. A faithful churchworker, she was torn away from all the spiritual consolations she had known and forced to worship in a white-washed tabernacle where the dominating feature was the pulpit in which a man, in those days often poorly educated, preached interminable sermons, interspersed with dreary, unsatisfying prayers in which the Almighty was informed of various things such as the state of the weather and the righteousness or otherwise of the assembled Congregation.

Much Anglican worship in those days was dreary, but it was counterbalanced by the glories of its liturgy, the beauty of its architecture and the glowing appeal of its music.

Sometimes in that old Wesleyan Chapel on St. John's Hill, Brother This or That in the congregation would be asked to lead in prayer. The response to the request might often be embarrassing, as when the Brother turned

his nasty little soul inside out, or as on the occasion when one gentleman explained at length to the host of heaven that his wife and daughter were miserable sinners, but that he himself had always served the Almighty damned well."

Grandfather took much delight in entertaining visiting preachers for the week-end, when Grandma was expected to provide meals fit for the gods on the ordinary housekeeping allowance. No drinks, of course, for Grandpa belonged to the Blue Ribbon Brigade and pursued his Temperance Crusade to such an extent, both at home and abroad, that it is amazing that not one of his family ever took to drink in later years out of sheer cussedness.

Fashionable temperance reformers of the day, of whom Grandpa was a well-known leader, loved to bestow royal blue buttons upon their converts. Grandpa always had a supply of these natty little adornments ready for every emergency.

Family Prayers were a great institution with Grandpa. Night and morning the household assembled in the dining-room at the sonorous roll of the gong in the hall - the maids in their starched cotton frocks, blue, pink or lavender, stiff white aprons and caps upon their heads complete with long streamers. I still remember as a little girl of nine,

the shiny smell of the leather-seated chairs when we all turned round and knelt on the floor with our noses on the seats, exhibiting a queer posterior view to the Unseen Angels.

On one of these occasions in my Grandmother's time a visiting local preacher took Grandpa's place as "High Priest" of the ceremonies and delivered an extempore prayer of prodigious length. All might have been well if the gentleman had not asked for blessings upon the maids "those beauteous damsels who have so faithfully ministered to our comfort" and concluded his intercessions by commending for a special benediction "thine handmaid, the wife of our gracious host". Grandma declared she would never entertain another local preacher if she lived for a thousand years. As for the beauteous damsels, they became so haughty, she could do nothing with them and they were soon radiating their charm in someone else's household.

Not all the sermons to which St. John's Hill congregation listened, comfortably seated on well-cushioned seats, were dull and dreary. For example, there was the one delivered by an enthusiastic preacher who probably saw an alarming number of his listeners falling asleep, their heads dropping down, then bobbing up with self-conscious wakefulness. In impassioned tones he spoke of the golden

gates of heaven, of the wise virgins sedately entering with their flaming lamps all bright, of the awful clang as that eternal barrier closed behind the last of them; the frenzied rush of the foolish virgins, the awful cry of St. Peter, "Too late! Too late! Ye cannot enter now."

Slowly and dramatically the preacher sank out of sight within the pulpit, one arm still waving over the edge, as his tremulous voice came from the hidden depths, "Too late! Too late! Ye cannot enter now!" So far, so good! But unfortunately one unruly lock of hair stuck straight up within the line of vision keeping time with the moving hand, "Too late! Too late!"

One thing only gave any sense of spiritual enjoyment to my Grandmother, this being the funerals, and happy was she if one of these events fell on a Saturday or other holiday, when she could collect the whole family and take them with her. Poor little wretches! On the return journey she occupied the time by informing them that the next funeral they attended would be her own, a prophecy which took at least a dozen years to reach its fulfilment.

Not that she had not come near it several times, for she was a delicate woman and of the ten children, including two sets of twins, with which she presented Grandpa, five

died in very early infancy. My father remembered one of them, Sidney, an exceptionally sweet natured little fellow who used to sit on the stairs sharing a boiled potato with his favourite cat.

Grandfather had all five buried in the old cemetery on Battersea Rise, not far from Clapham Junction, where they lie beneath a large and flat and most indigestible slab, with an outsize stone book on the top recording their names and the short span of their mortal lives. It is strange to think these infants were my Uncles and Aunts.

Mother was my Grandfather's niece as well as his daughter-in-law, but she never came to Wandsworth until she was grown-up, when she arrived on a short visit. Grandpa met her at Clapham Junction and by way of a treat, immediately escorted her, plus bag and baggage, complete, to the cemetery to admire the tombstone before he took her home.

The flying bomb which three quarters of a century later landed in the cemetery, turning up the earth and toppling over the grave-stones in a manner gruesome to behold, did not disturb the infant Caudwells' monument.

Grandfather's name being Job, he declared on being married that he would follow the example of his Biblical

namesake and have seven sons and three daughters. And he succeeded! Happily he did not name the three girls after the daughters of Job the First - Jemima, ~~Rezia~~ and Karen-Happuch, but by the slightly more civilised ones of Rhoda, Adah and Afra.

One of Grandpa's favourite hobbies was to lay foundation stones, so that chapels and halls far and near are emblazoned with his name - "Job Caudwell". The procedure was usually the same. A Wesleyan Minister or local preacher would call and apply flattery of a rich and unctuous mixture into Grandpa's attentive ear. "You know, my dear sir, what a faithful and God-fearing man we all know you to be, what an example of piety you set to us all!"

Grandfather would purr like a satisfied tiger whose waistcoat is comfortably distended and the minister would proceed.

"You know, Mr. Caudwell, there is that charming old village in Essex I mentioned to you last week. They are wanting someone to lay the stone for their little Bethel. Of course it means only a matter of two hundred or so pounds to put under the stone."

Grandpa would begin to become a little fidgety. His

visitor would give a genteel little cough and continue.

"Of course, Mr. Caudwell, ~~knowing~~^{realising} your generosity in the past, we could not possibly ask you again so soon - but there, the Lord loveth a cheerful giver and we know it is very hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven."

At this point, Grandfather, feeling his eternal salvation was in jeopardy, would hastily arise and seek his cheque book. With the result that a few weeks later he would sally forth in his festival garments to lay the foundation stone of still another schismatic place of worship.

The visible result of these activities was an ever-growing collection at home of the various trowels with ivory handles, many of them complete with leather cases lined with velvet, with which he was presented, the occasion and his name being neatly embossed on the electro-plated business end of the trowel.

My father, as his chief executor, had ultimately the task of disposing of the things. Several of the most handsome if supplied with a fork, made quite natty fish servers, the rest he pressed upon members of the family, his visitors and his clerks. What with them and Grand-

father's very extensive library which was also parked on us for distribution, our home acquired the appearance of a super junk-shop.