

CHAPTER III

After the death of Grandmother, the home at Spencer Park was run by two faithful maids, Wallace and Emma. My recollections of Emma came years later long after she had left and entered the state of matrimony, as she used to call on us at intervals and ask for a gift of Father's nether garments, which most happily exactly fitted her husband. He seemed to wear out a considerable number of that useful article of attire and probably, as a small boy once remarked of his parent, "not-with-standing." Where Emma's husband obtained the other garments he presumably wore remains a profound mystery!

Wallace and Emma inhabited a bedroom with a due East aspect somewhat apart from the rest of the house. Being human they felt the cold and unbeknown to the family, privately indulged in a cosy little fire. One evening the whole house was filled with smoke in a manner alarming to feel, smell and behold. Grandfather sat in

his easy chair in his usual attitude, his legs crossed, aggravatingly wagging his toe. Although the room was like a London fog of richest vintage, not by a single word or sign did he acknowledge anything unusual. The frantic Wallace and Emma finding the smoke came from their so far happily secret fire, made frantic efforts to put it out. Nothing was said and the maids began again to breathe freely, hoping they had not been discovered, until one unhappy day a walk to the other end of the garden revealed that Grandfather had been up to the flat roof of the house and securely tied a sack over their particular chimney. There were no more cosy fires in their bedroom, only the usual atmospheric conditions when a room faces north-east.

Yet when Grandfather fancied a little fire for his own convenience things were entirely different, especially in the bonfire line, as he made a practice of having a real hefty one, worthy of Guy Fawkes' night, on the occasions when a tennis party was being held in the park, announcing that it was such a very healthy smell. The comments of the tennis players were fiery, but certainly not healthy.

The kitchen had a pleasant outlook on the garden

including those people who took an airing down its asphalt paths. One visitor drew a remark from a watching housemaid.

"My! How she do waddle!"

To which came the swift answer.

"My! She do!"

Most of the bedrooms were named different colours. Whether the Blue Room were so called because it faced due east and turned its inmate that colour, is not recorded. I remember I had a violent bilious attack in the Green Room, which made that title quite appropriate. All the doors had chirpy little knockers which gave a note of gaiety to that otherwise somewhat gloomy house.

Grandfather loved to think the place was haunted, but some people rather lost faith in the idea after one of his daughters-in-law, hearing spooky noises in the dead of night, looked over the banisters and saw him moving the furniture in the hall.

His only surviving daughter, my Aunt Afra, loved to frighten people with tales of spectral visitations. When quite a child ^{she} had her cousin Bertha to stay with her for a few days and sleep in her room. On retiring for the night naughty Afra told Bertha the room was

haunted and there was no telling what she might see and hear before morning's dawn. Bertha heroically said she did not believe in such rubbish and that if one said one's prayers properly before getting into bed all would be well.

But alas, for this expression of faith, for at that very moment her portmanteau moved across the floor, followed by a chair or two and other bits of furniture. The result on poor Bertha was quite catastrophic, but Afra watched unmoved, knowing that it was no ghostly intervention, but merely her young rascals of brothers pulling strings beneath the door, which they had previously laid under the carpet, after attaching them to moveable bits of furniture.

Grandfather had one special friend, Dr. March, a retired medical man who lived on the other side of the Park. Real cronies, they indulged in terrific rows and at one time wrote the most scurrilous letters to each other in the local paper. Having thus publicly told the world in general exactly what they thought of each other they were as friendly as ever.

Some years previously, when Dr. March had been in practice, he had attended Grandma and was so ill-advised

as to order her some brandy. Grandpa, that rigid, blue-button teetotaler, refused to allow it, so the wily old doctor delivered it in a medicine bottle. But the even more wily Job Caudwell took the cork out of the bottle and indulged in a generous sniff. The result was awful and Grandpa told the doctor his hat was too often in his hall and he hoped never to see it there again. But the affair blew over and all was peace and joy - until the next time!

Dr. March was immensely proud of the luscious black grapes in his greenhouse. In my ignorance I thought grapes just grew, but not a bit of it; for they seem to be quite chancey things requiring endless attention. The old doctor spent much money on them and possessed a small library dealing with their culture. An ancient nurseryman who lived opposite spent hours with him in the greenhouse ostensibly attending to the grapes, but in reality discussing all the spicy gossip of the neighbourhood. Some of it was later dished up for Mrs. March's benefit; it is to be feared the remainder was strictly pour les hommes.

Mrs. March decided that 5 p.m. was the correct time for "John's" dinner and it was served on the dot. John

himself never noticed the time and had to be hauled in from his gardening and made to wash his hands. Their niece, Lily, a beloved friend of our family, often stayed with them for months at the time, but if she were delayed in town after a matinée it was more than her place was worth to be late for that sacred dinner, so she used to buy a huge wedge of Genoa cake and eat it, saying when she arrived home that she had already dined.

Visitors to the March establishment were served with an excellent tea at 4.30, after which they would stay gaily chatting about this and that, not knowing they were running the risk of sending Mrs. March into a fit and the cook into a herculean rage owing to the postponement of that violated dinner hour.

Dr. and Mrs. March had an adopted daughter, Trotty, who married a so-called doctor, whose mother was real Italiano, with long hands, finger nails to match and a yellow face due not to art, but to nature. Before the marriage the young man used to spend long hours at the March's describing the vast number of patients who had consulted him that day and how they were all coming again. After the marriage his medical zeal seemed sadly to decline and on one occasion poor Trotty had to go round

to all his patients saying her husband could not call that day as he had been kept awake during the night by the attentions of an insect whose name is not usually mentioned in select society. The end was tragedy, for the pair moved to Africa, where the delicately-nurtured Trotty, unused to roughing it, caught a fever and died. Probably for her it was the happiest solution to her many problems!

Mrs. March was a nice old dear, but had an irritating habit of resuscitating the doctor's small shortcomings, so that he used to whisper confidentially to Lily,

"Don't do anything to offend your Aunt, my dear, or she will remember it all the days of her life and forget all the nice things you have ever done."

Another eccentric, old Mr. Hansler, lived in a charming house on the other side of the Park with masses of scarlet-berried pyracanthus over the porch. Modern taste has converted the house into flats, building pieces all round it, in front and on the top, so that now it looks like a square cardboard box. At one time Mr. Hansler announced the end of the world would come on a certain specified date. On the day in question my Aunt Afra sent a maid with a polite note enquiring if he had gone to heaven.

As a small girl I used to love to look over Grandfather's garden wall on Sunday mornings and watch the old gentleman coming across the Park from church. When nearing home he used to stop dead, take out a large white pocket handkerchief and well polish his shoes before disappearing from view through his own garden gate.

When at length the old gentleman died, Mother bought two of his pictures, one a lovely scene of mist breaking over soft coloured mountains and alarmingly horned Highland cattle in the foreground approaching over a stony path with green bracken and brown reeds on either side. The other picture was much more coy - a peasant girl in a scarlet bodice and green shawl, fallen asleep in her chair. A dark-haired man kneeling behind her is deftly extracting a love-letter from her pocket. I fear there will be trouble if ever that girl wakes up.

Grandfather, although often so careless of his own appearance, had a profound respect for anything which upheld the family's honour. For this reason he really spread himself on the Caudwell coat-of-arms, with its splendid motto, In Deo Spes, "Hope in God", emblazoning it on his notepaper, his envelopes and his bookplates.

Unfortunately he passed from this scene of action

many years before a great-grandson proudly bore it emblazoned upon his pram, like a scion of the House Royal. The shield bears three fishes' heads, the crest being a militant looking cock, with a sabre in his mouth. This appearance of the fish, the cock and the sword have made me wonder whether St. Peter were the patron saint of the family, seeing that he was a fisherman and drew his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane to protect the beloved Person of his Divine Master, only to deny him before the "cock crew thrice", even as that Master had warned him.

A less picturesque tradition states that the Caudwell family and minions had fish for supper when encamped one night dangerously near an enemy district. Unfortunately after supper they all fell asleep, plus the sentries. In the midst of darkest night a cock crew suddenly and violently, awaking them just in time to spoil the enemy's stealthy approach.

When Father, at the age of eighteen obtained his London B.A. degree with honours in that mysterious subject entitled, "Mental and Moral Science", Grandfather's delight knew no bounds and Father was made to have all his clothes, even down to his collar and cuffs, marked

"Paul Caudwell. B.A." Well-starched, spotless cuffs, which spent the majority of their existence sliding down over the knuckles, were then deemed essential to every gentleman's attire, both young and old.

Grandfather's love of having his name on everything began early, for I possess a tiny tin box, gaily painted in gold, red and blue, which if turned upside down reveals in bold lettering the inscription, "Job Caudwell, Drayton Manor, 1834". A wooden box, shaped like a miniature Noah's Ark, is inscribed "J.C. 1833".

In adult years his name appeared in most unexpected places - on all his gardening tools burnt into the wood of the handles, engraved on the brass labels attached to the key of each door in the house, even embossed on his brass shoe-horns. His clocks bore his name round their dials in place of numerals, one o'clock beginning the circle with "J" for "Job". There being only eleven letters in his name, twelve o'clock was marked by a shield bearing the family motto, "In Deo Spes". To each of his sons he presented a watch and two clocks with their names used in the same way instead of numerals. Father's name, "Paul" and his second brother, "Eber" both made the requisite twelve letters; Uncle "David" had thirteen

letters, so the two "ll"s in Caudwell were interlaced together for twelve o'clock. Uncle "Ben" had but eleven letters, so had the shield and motto for twelve o'clock like his father.

Grandfather and his ten children had but one christian name each - and not very christian at that, some of them, including his own. My Mother and I also have but one each also. In fact our little family, Paul, Ada and Irene have but twelve letters in the total of our christian names and Mother's spells the same backwards and forwards - a distinct difference from one of my schoolfellows, "Theophila Phillipa Frances Milne Robertson," whose full name thus designated had to be inscribed on every sheet of examination paper.

Grandfather's stern hand on his children lasted long after they were grown up, which is shown by his treatment on one occasion when Father spent the weekend with his Uncle and Aunt, his fiancée's parents, going straight to Chancery Lane from Paddington on Monday morning, where he was kept working very late. Ten o'clock precisely was the Cinderella hour at Spencer Park, when all Grandfather's flock were expected to be safely gathered beneath his roof and presumably nothing but sudden death

would be forgiven the unfortunate sheep who arrived after the hall clock had struck that fatal hour. On this unhappy evening poor Father arrived direct from Chancery Lane, but on the wrong side of 10 p.m., to find every door locked and the house in total darkness. In vain he knocked and rang that terrifying front door bell, but all to no effect. It was after zero hour and he was locked out of his home, with the result that a neighbour took pity on him and put him up for the night. Did that worry Grandfather? Not a bit! He simply sat and wagged his everlasting toe.

Grandfather knew London by heart, including its short cuts. When on a visit he used to take Mother to see the sights, even penetrating into the sinister byways of the Seven Dials which stood near the present Cambridge Circus. In this case so dangerous was the locality he warned Mother to look at no one, to avoid any expression of distaste or surprise and to keep close to him.

Wandering through some of the old squares of aristocratic Mayfair and Belgravia was amusing though sometimes terrifying, in a different sense from the Seven Dials, for if Grandfather saw a front door open

he would conduct Mother inside, examine and admire the furniture and fittings of the hall and then walk out as coolly as if it were his own home. It was amazing they were never caught thus trespassing. But if this unfortunate occurrence had transpired, Grandfather, with the air of a Grand-Duke and the smile of a visiting seraph would have glided out of the situation with everything pleasant and comme il faut.

An incident illustrating his infinite resource occurred in a short cut down some unsavoury back streets ^{in Battersea} when he was accompanied with both Father and Mother. A child appeared in sight torturing a mouse tied to a piece of string. Grandfather grasped the situation in a split second and seizing an unsuspecting tabby dozing nearby he hurriedly carried it to the mouse. In a few more seconds, cat, mouse, string, Grandfather, Paul and Ada, had disappeared and the street ^{was} as empty as Aberdeen on a Flag Day, with the exception of the bereft child yelling its head off for its Mother.

After his marriage my Father did not return to live in Wandsworth for twelve years, when I was just nine years old. In the meanwhile my Aunt Afra had deserted the parental roof and gone to live in various apartments

in Putney from which when she and her landlady ceased to be bosom friends, her fiancé rescued her at various intervals, with the fur flying freely from ^{both} Auntie and the landlady.

Our arrival at Spencer Park was due to the fact that Father had been appointed Solicitor to the Borough of Battersea, a post which he was destined to hold for twenty-seven years. Grandfather had urged him not to take a house saying that he freely gave his own house to him, Father meanwhile to be prepared to foot the bill for all housekeeping expenses. But the fact that Father, his wife and inoffensive child were living rent free did not suit two of his brothers and truly fearsome was the jealousy it caused, a jealousy which the strange contrary temperament of my Grandfather delighted to foster. Curiously also this jealousy was chiefly vented on Mother and me, rather than on Father. Dear Father! So extreme was his loyalty to his family that not even the most outrageous unkindness brought more than a quiet rebuke.

The day on which Mother and I entered Spencer Park was the beginning of a year of Purgatory, so deeply engraved on my childish mind that even to this day I

never pass the house with its grim stone walls, flat roof and ivy-circled windows, without an inward shudder.

Mother had brought two well-trained maids with her, buxom farmers' daughters and great was their horror at the state of the house and furniture to which Grandfather's very inefficient staff had lowered it. Moth and rust indeed did corrupt and spiders reigned unmolested. Even the removal men coughed and choked, grumbling ferociously.

Early in the evening one of my Uncles and his wife descended upon the turbulent scene, the latter, also a cousin, and a life-long friend of my Mother, demanding supper for her poor husband who was tired and hungry after his day's work in the bank. Grandfather retired to the garden, returning with a large bundle of spring onions which he delivered into the fastidious hands of Esther, Mother's housemaid, demanding they should be prepared for supper - a good half-hour's work. Esther took an immediate dislike to my Uncle, the first cause of the trouble, a dislike which increased to a positive hatred on future occasions, when she complained to my Mother he used to "walk right over her" when she answered his imperious ring at the front door.

A reign of terror began for me. Grandfather disliked

all children, so that I was never allowed to speak in his presence unless someone spoke to me, which in such an Arctic atmosphere, as far as I was concerned, was a very rare occurrence. At mealtimes I was placed at the other end of the long dining-room table in case my short, dangling legs should come into contact with any part of my Grandfather's sacred person. As I was not allowed to speak nor to touch anything on the table, darling Mother used to keep her glance continually on me, so that if I wanted bread, water, salt or a second helping, I gazed solidly at the desired article until it arrived on my plate.

One day I borrowed the "Swiss Family Robinson" from Grandfather's extensive library and went out to read it on the garden seat. Grandfather found me - and I never touched anything of his again! Not in his lifetime anyhow, but the fatal "Swiss Family Robinson" now lives happily in my bookcase between Sax Rohmer's "Tales of Chinatown" and W.W.Jacob's "Captains All".

One night, I heard a strange sound I could not identify and in an agony of terror I cried, "Daddy! Daddy!" In a moment that dear person arrived from his room on the other side of the passage, minus his

coat and waistcoat. It was practically the only time in my life I saw my Father without these useful garments, except during his many illnesses when he was in bed, or wearing a dressing-gown.

"Daddy," I said urgently, "Daddy! What is that noise?"

Soothingly he replied, "Nothing, my dear, only the steam roller going home!" I was immediately comforted. But on maturer consideration now, I wonder - Was it the steam-roller? Do they usually go home between ten and eleven p.m.?

I took a lifelong dislike to gardening while living in Spencer Park, a dislike which has increased with each advancing year, owing to an incident on one semi-tropical summer day, a Saturday morning, when Grandfather conducted me into the garden and set me to weed his beastly onion bed. Miserably I toiled beneath that burning sun, faint and giddy with the heat, yet not daring to leave my task, my little hands getting grubbier and more oniony every minute. At length, when half-unconscious, my Mother's beloved voice spoke to me and her tender arms lifted me up, carrying me indoors and laying me on my little bed with tears not far from her eyes. To this day, a raw

onion is to me the most obnoxious item of an Englishman's diet and even the customary rubbing of the salad bowl with its odoriferous person has no charm for me.

Those were the early days of the bicycle or velocipede, when the "Penny-Farthing" had become a museum piece and the shape which is still modern had become the fashion. Gentlemen toiled upon them for many miles wearing voluminous "plus fours", horrid flat tweed cloth caps and "Norfolk" jackets, that is, coats a little longer than a dinner jacket, fastened down the front and belted at the waist, a coat which was favourable to all except those endued with "too too solid flesh".

A family who owned large and romantic vineyards in Portugal lived with four sons and three daughters at the other end of Spencer Park. They kept a "Penny-Farthing" bicycle, with its one immense wheel and second tiny apologetic one, the rider's seat fearsomely erected somewhere between heaven and earth, beside the great kitchen range, both polished to an amazing degree. It was a real old-time kitchen, complete in its entirety until Adolf Hitler's airmen blasted the final member of the family, youngest of them all, out of house and home.

It was a basement kitchen, with dark, breakneck stairs leading from the upper quarters, a freezingly cold stone floor, that awful kitchen range which ate up buckets of coal like the insatiable furnace of a giant, glittering steel meat covers vast in circumference on the walls, a wonderful collection of china, including many colourful jugs on the dresser and an interesting view from the top of the window of people's feet passing to go to the front door. The front door itself was approached by a long flight of steps which were hearth-stoned every day, and guarded by large tubs bearing agapanthus plants with their lovely blue blossoms. Agapanthus the flower of love! But love was not encouraged within its walls, for after her husband died, the disconsolate widow took a huge dislike to any idea of her daughters getting married. She was a regal little person with very long skirts which swept the pavements and her friends' doorsteps as she moved on her stately progress. She answered to the name of "Mamma" uttered in suitably deferential tones and wore immense Spanish earrings of golden filigree, of great beauty, reaching almost to her black-clad little shoulders. Their weight was too much for her tiny ears, so that at times

they forced their way gradually through the living flesh and new holes had to be pierced. She was a true subject of Queen Victoria, greatly resembling her in mind and body - religious, autocratic, haughty, yet generous and hospitable, a veritable matriarch in all her ways.

Her's was a home filled with endless visitors and a table overflowing with luxuries, complete with the superb port from the family vineyards. Yet in spite of enormous, most generous fires, the atmosphere of the house throughout the winter was usually Arctic.

Fun and games for the young people abounded and the girls' beautiful dolls' house was an exact replica of the first home to which the late lamented Mr. Dixon had brought his young bride. The drawing-room, a large apartment with many windows and a very small fireplace, contained more chairs than I have ever seen in a private house, but like so much early Victorian furniture there was not a really comfortable one among them. The mantelpiece was four deep with ornaments, priceless china mingled with oddments worth only a few pence. The grand piano was entirely covered with knick-knacks of every description, good, bad and distinctly indifferent.

Coloured models of the peasants and oxen who worked

in Mr. Dixon's Portuguese vineyards abounded and special features under glass cases were churches exquisitely ^{fashioned} ~~made~~ from cardboard with every detail complete, made by Mr. Dixon's own hands. The whole room was a museum piece, with its setting of the rich rose-red carpet entirely covering the floor. Here, well into the beginning of the first World War, Francie, the last surviving daughter, held her At Homes on every Saturday afternoon, when a most luxurious tea was served and everyone was pressed to consume a large quantity of cakes. The cakes were always the same variety, sent as a "standing order" from Arding and Hobbs every week. Dear Francie, she always wished everything to remain as she had known it from her earliest youth and how bitterly she ~~was~~ to suffer from change, bereavement and upheaval in her latter years. And how dearly we loved her!

Mrs. Dixon slept in a huge fourposter which long after her death in its voluminous depths remained exactly as she left it on her last journey to Wandsworth Cemetery, until heavy bombing made the house uninhabitable. The latter end of the bedstead was even more honourable than its beginning, for its beautiful carved posts were converted into standard candlesticks for use before the

altars in two churches.

A room in the basement of the house, distinctly reminiscent of the tank inhabited by the clerk in Dicken's "Christmas Tale", was used in the good old days as a sleeping apartment for the butler, but in my day that gentleman had departed with the crinolines, the bustles, the pointed shawls and the bonnets of a previous generation. Not that the bonnets were so very far away, for even in my childhood and early youth old-fashioned people would say,

"Put on your bonnet, my dear",

Meaning of course, a hat. Old ladies still wore the bonnet itself, dainty creations usually black, made of silk and lace trimmed with flowers or ostrich feathers and tied under their chins with wide satin ribbons of blue or lavender, acting as a frame to their white hair and sweet, calm faces.

Only one of ^{Francis's} ~~the~~ four brothers married, the other three lived at home until the day of their death, although one owned a delightful country house, a yacht and a car. In his latter days he became a permanent invalid and sat a great deal in the old nursery, a delightful first-floor room with a large window overlooking Wandsworth

Common, so situated that it appeared as if one were sitting among the tree-tops. In a corner of the room, opposite the dwarf bow-fronted chests of drawers which stood on either side of the fireplace, were cases continually filled with pots of delicious jams and chutney which he presented to his fortunate visitors.

Two half-tame pigeons lived in one of the tall trees at the back of the house, whom Francie named "Mr. and Mrs. Wilberforce".

The Reverend Francis Evelyn, one of the clergy of St. Anne's, who was connected with Wilberforce himself, expressed himself as much intrigued to find he was related to a pigeon!

A quince tree also grew in the garden, surely one of the nearest in England to Charing Cross!

The third brother resided for years on the top floor. Downstairs an entire room was consigned to his collection of newspapers, of which never a one was ever thrown away so that they stretched from floor to ceiling. As a sideline he collected an enormous quantity of hats in which he rivalled Mr. Churchill, while of cameras he had at least twenty, most of which mysteriously disappeared on the first of the five occasions when the

house was blasted in the second World War.

As time went on, two of the daughters fell in love, the elder of them with a Canon, the other with a nice young Priest, son of a house on the other side of the Park, whose immaculate appearance even in boyhood days led my father and his brothers to name him, "Old Collar-and-Cuffs."

But even these very eligible suitors did not commend themselves to the mother's matriarchal eyes, so that one propitious day the Canon's beloved disappeared from the home nest, returning a few hours later to announce she was married, and that was that!

The Reverend Collar-and-Cuffs was not so fortunate, for his girl, one of those truly beautiful characters which it is a privilege and honour to know as a friend, refused her lover's urgent entreaties to become his bride, remaining at home to help nurse a querulous mother and afterwards her sister and three brothers through many long and weary years. One by one she watched them pass from earthly sight and be carried down the great steps between the blue-flowering agapanthus to their rest in the family vault, leaving her utterly alone, the last, brave, pitiful survivor of the family, with her adored

home so badly blasted with bombing ~~around her~~ that it was no longer habitable. Much as I loved her I never dared to ask her if she could answer the perpetual riddle, "Is it better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all?"

Her lover was faithful to her, literally even unto death, after nearly half a century of devotion he was found one Sunday morning by his churchwarden dead beside his bed from heart failure. The whole of his life had been devoted to one unattainable, beloved woman and the service of Holy Church.

By the same hand of coincidence that same beloved woman was found by her maid lying stricken down on the rose-coloured carpet of her bedroom. For a day and a night she lay unconscious, then passed to the nearer Presence of the God she had served for over seventy years with the deepest devotion. And none of us who loved her so dearly could grudge her that passing, nor the reunion with him whose ring with its flashing great diamonds remained upon her finger until the end.

In the days when we first came to Spencer Park this sorrowful romance was only in its infancy, but tragedy had recently visited the house. The only son

of the Canon and his wife, just twelve years old, on a visit to his grandparents, playing with his proud possession of a new bicycle, was killed directly outside their gates.

This shocking incident so impressed my own parents, that I, who was not an only son, but certainly an only child, was never allowed to own a bicycle from that day to this. Seeing that from my youth up I have never been good at balancing myself on anything that was not good solid earth, I do not think my parents were altogether unwise.

In St. Anne's, Wandsworth, our mutually beloved church, the sorrowing family erected a beautiful window of softly tinted glass, showing the Child Christ, another twelve-year old beloved only Son, standing in the midst of the grave, heavily-bearded doctors of the law, both "hearing them and asking them questions." In certain lights the golden-haired head of the Divine Child glowed with a soft, almost supernatural radiance. But the window, erected in remembrance of a deep sorrow, was itself destined for tragedy, as it crashed in fragments into the churchyard when nearly half a century later a flying-bomb shook the building to its very foundations. Out of the pathetic heap of shattered glass I salvaged the head of the Christ Child, still lovely and unharmed.