CHAPTER IX

Immediately after I left school Mother and I took part in the English Church Pageant in the grounds of Fulham Palace, under the inspiration of that dearly-loved Bishop of London, Winnington-Ingram, whose voice with its slightly husky note became as familiar as his wide friendly smile.

The Devil always seems to have a spite against pageants, appearing to rejoice in providing copious showers from above and oceans of sticky mud beneath. Our Pageant quite came up to form in this particular, yet succeeded in being magnificent. The scene allotted to Wandsworth and Putney was the acquital of the Seven Bishops.

Mother and I were some of the foremost who had to run shrieking with joy to welcome the Bishops as they emerged from their prison gates. One evening an enormous jovial auctioneer from Putney stepped suddenly

backwards upon one of my toes. From that hour it ceased being a really happy carefree toe. The Bishops having passed out of sight beyond the trees, the gates reopened to allow the coach and pair of the Lord Chief Justice to pass through. This gentleman having held unpleasant views concerning the reprieved Bishops was greeted with torrents of abuse and an ugly rush on the coach. Some nights we were rather too realistic and nearly overturned the coach, complete with the Lord Chief Justice, so that the coachman turned white with the stupendous effort of keeping his prancing, terrified horses under control. I always hate to see horses trying to stand on their tails with their front paws in the air, so that I took particular care to hurl my abuse at the Lord Chief Justice from a safe distance.

Even in those days Mother was rather deaf. On several occasions we took part in the episode showing Latimer preaching. A photograph of the scene taken unknown to us one evening showed Mother close up to the pulpit with her hand up to her ear, an excellent example of how to listen to a sermon.

Some very prim and proper persons objected to the charming gold and black, quite discreet, draperies worn

by the girl dancers at the Coronation jollifications of King Edward VI. But as Grandma Elizabeth, that dear lady of very saintly memory, used to remark,

"My dear, if you see people extra prudish, or over-religious, beware of them."

The ladies who objected to the King Edward's dancers should have seen Eve in one of my own Passion Plays the other side of London!

I think I could literally count on one hand the number of times I remember my Father going out in the evenings, except to his business meetings at the Battersea Town Hall. The first time in my recollection was to a Variety Entertainment in the West End with a brother-in-law up from the country. The theatre was apparently so astonished to see him that it caught on fire - a conflagration which was happily soon put out, but not before most of the audience had made a hurried exit. Daddie and Uncle remained in their seats, explaining afterwards that their overcoats were in the cloakroom.

A second occasion was the inauguration of the great organ in Battersea Town Hall, for whose installation Father had taken a considerable part. My Godmother, up from the country, with Mother, put on their Sunday

best to grace the seats of the Mighty with Father. At the last moment that fastidious gentleman decided he was not wearing the most suitable trousers. As though anyone would be looking at his trousers on such an occasion! But he insisted on changing them, with the unhappy result their arrival was so retarded that he and his two disgruntled ladies occupied the back seat in the gallery.

His third evening outing was to a Victory Ball in the same Town Hall, after the First World War. For several weeks beforehand he and I had private dancing lessons where we were able to pass muster with our instructors, but provided really comic turns when dancing together. Somehow we scraped through the Victory Ball, returning home in the small hours to find Father had forgotten to move his latchkey into his evening suit. This was awkward, seeing Mother was too deaf to hear us knock and it would practically take the trump of doom to wake our housekeeper. Father was unsuccessfully endeavouring to open a window catch with his penknife, when we were suddenly enveloped in the bright light of a bull's eye lantern and a policeman's voice sternly hailed us.

Father pulled out his watch with "Paul Caudwell"

round the dial in place of the numerals, remarking,

"If you can get me into my house I can show you two clocks with my name round the dials like this."

The policeman concentrated on the housekeeper's room, flashing his light continuously across her window, accompanied by a considerable portion of gravel from the path. After some time the lady awoke and eventually let us all in at the front door. The policeman having identified Father's watch with the two clocks was regaled with half-a-sovereign and light refreshment of a liquid nature. We parted very good friends.

Fortunately the maid we disturbed from her slumbers was not the one whom Mother rounded up before Father on a charge of stealing.

"Call yourself a gentleman, do you!" cried the infuriated damsel, "accusing me of being a thief!"

"Oh, no," said Father, with his usual legal calm, "Certainly not! I have never called myself anything."

Father was usually unfortunate when trying to become the "handy-man" about the house. His beautifully shaped fingers, although so neat and meticulous with everything they touched, seemed to go all to pieces if he used a hammer, so that it was I who became the

amateur carpenter.

On the occasion of King George V's Coronation, Father was perched uneasily on the top of the steps in the drawing-room doing something above a brand-new china cabinet. Mother and I were in the garden with a friend hoping to hear the Minute Guns which would proclaim the Crown was safely on the royal head. Instead, we heard a violent crash from the house. Rushing in, we discovered the cabinet, a dish belonging to our precious hand-painted Rockingham dessert service, a tea table, the steps and Father, all mixed together on the floor, very much in bits and pieces, Father happily being the only portion that was not even chipped.

It was when he was well over forty, that Father discovered he could paint in oils and took several lessons from a somewhat moth-eaten artist who ran a picture shop as a sideline. In the latter capacity he managed to encumber our house with various gilt frames of prodigious size and alarming weight, together with a habit of shedding small pieces of their decorations at frequent intervals, which it was my unhappy duty to re-stick with seccotine, and an abundance of patience. In Father's boyhood days he had expressed a wish to paint, but Grand-

father, who like one of our former kings had not much use for "Bainting or Boetry", although he was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, persuaded Father it was a messy job, which was quite sufficient to put Father off the idea. Yet somewhere the artist's outlook took root in his clever brain, for whenever Mother asked him to describe a person his nimble fingers produced a two-minute sketch with exactly that individual's characteristics. Such as the picture of Grandfather in his cope-like overcoat. Chiefly I remember a sketch of "Stanley Carrots", a youthful gentleman whose large eyes and forehead, topped with orange-coloured hair ~~which~~ used to appear unexpectedly, facing the wrong way for decorum, over the top of the pew in front of Father in his own youthful days. "Bessie Milner", was another lightning sketch, a study of a relative of Alfred Harmsworth, afterwards Lord Northcliffe. Bessie appeared in a small hat, which crowned a large face covered tightly with the spotted net veil of the period.

The moth-eaten artist proved an excellent instructor and in a very short time Father in his very limited time was painting really beautiful pictures, copied and enlarged from postcards or colour prints. One of

his first attempts was a large copy of Soord's "Lost Sheep", that lovely picture where the Divine Face of the Good Shepherd is hidden, as he bends over the fearful precipice to gather the frightened lamb in his arm and silhouetted dark against the distant mountains the waiting vultures take their flight. This picture, mounted on a strong pole, was carried night after night, through the streets of Wandsworth during a ten days Mission, followed by a long procession of men, robed in cassocks, full white surplices and black velvet skull-caps, the two latter having been concocted by the devoted fingers of their respective wives. At the end of the Mission the picture was hung in our daughter church, St. Mary the Virgin, Iron Mill Place, where it was badly damaged in the Second World War owing to exposure to the weather when the building was several times blasted.

Its companion picture, a copy of Hoffman's "Gethsemane", was painted by Father a short time later and shows the Lord Christ kneeling before a rock in that sinister garden. The Agony is over, the complete surrender to the Will of God has been made. A ray of moonlight piercing the dark clouds falls full upon

the upturned Face, the clenched hands, the lovely blue of the robe. The Son of God has accepted the burden of man's redemption, the coming torture, the approaching Cross, the ignominious death. But there is more than that in the serene beauty of the Face and Figure, a foreshadowing of "Resurgam" - the Resurrection and the life everlasting.

A somewhat different use of Father's brush was ~~a~~ in connection with St. John the Baptist. The picture of his head, neatly arrayed on a dish in the process of being presented by that little minx, Salome, to King Herod, hung behind the drawing-room door in Mother's old home. The sight of the dead, bearded face, surrounded by gore, made my childish heart sick with horror. Many years later, when it came into our possession, Father, Mother and I all felt squeamish at the sight of it, until he had a brain-wave, deciding that as it was one of Herod's birthday presents it should pretend to be a surprise, one of those surprises you know is coming. He therefore painted a cunningly draped black veil over the head and ~~the~~ dish and all was well. Eventually the picture was discovered to be the work of a minor Old Master and we joyfully sold it.

What became of Father's painted veil remains a mystery!

As he grew more skilful Father spent an occasional, very occasional day off, either in the National Gallery, or the Victoria and Albert Museum, producing several delightful copies of pictures far exceeding in merit the ordinary student's "pot boiler". Sad indeed was the time when he no longer had the strength or will to take up his beloved paint brushes. But a little later, when all the posters of the district announced his death, one of them printed beneath it, "Solicitor, Scholar and Artist," and even in our grief my Mother and I rejoiced at the tribute.

Twice his painting had caused him severe trouble. The first was at the National Gallery where, stepping back from his picture to compare it with the original, his stool slid along the highly polished floor, taking him with it in a very nasty fall. Somehow he managed to get home on the good old 77 bus from Charing Cross and crawl to our gate from the top of the road, where Mother put him to bed and sent for the nearest doctor. He was a strange individual, who gave ~~one~~ a look at Father, made no examination whatever and sent him one pill. Father recovered, possibly from sheer astonishment!

One morning, quite early, the same doctor arrived on our doorstep in a pair of carpet slippers and somewhat sketchy attire, and began walking in, saying to our maid,

"I have come to see the person who has fallen out of the window."

"Fallen out of the window," said the maid, "no one here!"

Happily she was right and it proved to be the maid at a neighbouring house, who apparently walking in her sleep, had fallen into the garden from her bedroom window, a matter of twenty-five or thirty feet, yet by some miracle was not only alive, but without a single broken bone. She also was treated to a casual inspection and one pill.

Father's chief managing clerk, another lawyer, whose unfortunate initials were "A.S.P.", fell over the tall bannisters of his home near St. Anne's one Boxing Day, causing an unkind rumour to fly round the parish that it was Father and not himself. Mr. "A.S.P." was uninjured, but he must have had a nasty surprise. His brother-in-law nearly followed his example, by suspending himself precariously over the hall nailing a tiger skin on to the staircase wall - in my opinion a very unsuitable

place for a tiger skin and an ideal residence for the Moth Family.

Father's second adventure while painting was in his studio, in the part of the house then known as the attic, but in these more enlightened days described throughout Wandsworth as the second floor and in many instances advertised as an ideal flat complete with H & C; mention not being made of the thirty-one stairs required to reach it. Father's studio was heated by one of those ancient death-traps, comprised of pieces of asbestos in a round openwork container warmed by gas. One day, literally by the mercy of heaven, I had one of those mysterious urges which come perhaps from the Ministry of the Holy Guardian Angels, to see how Father was progressing with his latest picture.

I mounted the stairs and as I approached the studio door Father opened it and stood swaying in the entrance, while the fumes from that horrid heating contraption nearly knocked me over.

"I feel so ill," said Father, "I can't think what is the matter."

I knew at once and realised that as he had practically no sense of smell and could scarcely distinguish the

scent of a rose from a cauliflower, he had been asphyxiated. Hastily calling Mother, we managed with much difficulty to half-drag, half-carry him down the stairs to his bed and then summon the doctor. This time it was our old friend Jimmie Thyne, who soon put matters right, but we were only just in time.

Later that evening I thoroughly enjoyed smashing that gas stove to pieces and dropping the remains in the dustbin.

Dear Daddie! He always looked somewhat pensive on Mothering Sunday, the fourth Sunday in Lent, when like all nicely-brought-up church children I presented my Mother with a gift, so that I gave him a tie at the same time, that he might not feel left out in the cold. These tokens of affection being offered at breakfast time he used immediately to leave the table and hurry up to his room, reappearing wearing a beatific smile and the new tie.

Occasionally Father took me with him when he visited barristers in chambers in the precints of the Temple and round Chancery Lane. He disappeared into the inner sanctuary with his shiny black deed bag. I remained in the clerks' office, usually a glorified cupboard

with a smell of stale sandwiches and mouldy looking documents tied with red tape, ornamented with spiders' webs. But it was all full of interest. Sometimes Father would take me into the Law Courts where important looking barristers in gown and wig with sheaves of papers fluttered among distracted clients, terrified witnesses and austere Judges.

The Court of Appeal fascinated me most - the three Appeal Lords in their robes, with the Counsel trying to wreck each other's case in an atmosphere of decorum, uncommonly like a church. Here, with the exception of the House of Lords, the highest Court in the Empire, no witnesses are called, only the wretched plaintiff and his adversary fidget in their seats, or stare stolidly in front of them, vainly endeavouring to understand the flow of legal language which will win or lose them their case.

Father always declared that the best lunch in London was to be enjoyed at the Law Society in Chancery Lane, but as in those days no lady was allowed into the sacred precints of its restaurant, I had to be content with tea at the A.B.C.

Sometimes we turned into the National Gallery or

the Victoria and Albert Museum on the homeward journey. One day I wandered into an adjoining room to my Father where a gentleman was showing the pictures to some admiring lady friends. I was much intrigued when he pointed to a low-hanging one with his foot, for my careful upbringing would not even have allowed me to point at it with my finger. I was even more intrigued, when my Father coming into the room the gentleman entered into conversation with him. It was John Burns, "Honest John", as he named himself, the celebrated Labour Member for Battersea, who proclaimed that no one should have more than £400 per annum, but who did himself quite well in a pleasant house on Clapham Common, where callers were often informed that "Honest John" would be with them in a minute, he was just cleaning his boots!

Another idea Father had in connection with my education was to have me in his office for a short time to learn the rudiments of business methods. The office was very pleasant, up a flight of steps with large columns ~~at the top~~ on St. John's Hill, a few hundred yards from where many years later the first flying bomb to fall in this district was to descend with its fiery load, bringing widespread misery and destruction.

Father's own room was at the back, where quite according to legal traditions a grape vine looked in at the window, spreading its dainty leaves and tiny rope-like tendrils in picturesque confusion. Of grapes I remember none, but if they were, I féar they were very very sour and distressingly small and hard, for the window faced directly north and would have given an interesting view of the other side of the river had not interfering houses and chimney pots stood in the way. A mile or so away on Lavender Hill, from the top of the side streets near the Town Hall, the towers and pinnacles of Kensington, on a morning where there is a suspicion of mist, float in the air, blue and mystical in a golden haze.

The secrets of many hearts must have been revealed in that quiet room where my Father interviewed his clients, and they were secrets which were well kept, for Father regarded his profession in something the same way as a Father Confessor his confessional, or a doctor his consulting room, where burdened souls come for comfort and advice, whispering things which will never be repeated. Father considered that his work was such that it should never be discussed at home and it was only from other

people we heard of his successes, or knew the names of his clients.

From his private secretary I learnt to type with all my fingers instead of with the amateur's first two fingers only, also that if one makes a mistake in typing a letter it is certain sure it will be followed by two more, as they always seem to hunt in triplicate. I was also initiated into the mysteries of carbon copies, letter files, elastic bands and office tea.

The very efficient secretary eventually fell in love with "George", a romantic brother of the office caretaker, who arrived home after the First War wounded and covered with glory. Mother and I visited him in St. Bartholomew's Hospital, of which the only recollection I have is going up in a large lift with one of the porters, who pointing to a nasty looking tin in the corner, remarked pleasantly,

"You'd never believe there's a man's tongue in that, now would you! But there is, they've just taken it out."

Mother and I were willing to believe anything, provided we were not expected to view the evidence.

Various secretaries followed - one poor girl lost her leg, but fortunately not in Father's office. Another apparently lived on eucalyptus and a cheap perfume

of most appalling vintage. Occasionally, when Father began to break down with increasing ill-health, she used to come to our house for dictation in the afternoon, to save Father having to go twice to the office. Our home was like an open-air sanatorium after she had gone, as Mother rushed round opening every window, whatever the weather, to get rid of the odour of eucalyptus-cum-perfume.

One of the office boys had a curious habit which much annoyed our maids, of vigorously scrubbing his feet on the hall door-mat, before going out of the house.

Mother, in common with many deaf people, has a very strongly developed sense of smell, so that she always said the passing of the choirboys by her seat in church in the winter was like a procession of eucalyptus and paragoric. Nothing in our larder ever has the chance of enjoying corruption, for Mother is aware of it the moment it starts on the downward path. She can trace the smell of gas to its source as surely as a bloodhound the scent of its victim, and knows if anyone is smoking from every corner of the house. The very opposite to Father, for where she would be almost fading out from some obnoxious odour he would remark that he was not sure, perhaps there was something unusual!

Moths are another arch-enemy of Mother and no sooner does she see one than she dances round the room, clapping her hands in the hope the obnoxious insect is between them. Usually this hope is unjustified and the insect escapes to the top of the curtain or is caught by the cat, who joins in the hunt with delighted co-operation. These manoeuvres often ~~took~~ take place in the midst of an interesting conversation, whereupon Father in his day would lie back in his chair, with a sigh of complete resignation.

"It is no good talking to your Mother, my dear, while there is a moth in the room."

The Caudwells have the unfortunate affliction of sneezing violently. Mother, being Father's first cousin, is no exception, and once really going is kept busy for several minutes. Father's face used to wear the same look of martyred resignation as during the moth episodes, and sitting back he would merely remark,

"All over for some time!"

But Mother was a mere amateur in the art compared with one of our clergy, whose sneeze one Sunday morning while a colleague was preaching, almost shook that poor lad out of the pulpit and caused the Vicar to take a

hasty look round to see if he and the church were still in status quo.

My Father's sense of law and order was colossal. Even when desperately ill he would struggle to sit up in bed to shave while a nurse or I held the mirror. Sometimes the barber came and for the last two years the doctor advised him to grow a beard, a smartly pointed affair like a French artist, but it was not our "Daddy", so that Mother and I never think of him with it.

Every sock, handkerchief and collar in his chest of drawers was as carefully arranged as if it were mathematically set in position, often he would jump up from a meal several times to put a picture straight, where our less meticulous vision could see nothing amiss. His sister, my Aunt Afra, when staying with us, used to go round the room before his arrival from his office, putting the pictures slightly askew and altering the ornaments just "to give Paul something to put straight."

Rows of little windows, heavily barred, dark and sinister by day, except when one of the occupants hangs his shirt or towel out against the wall for reasons unknown to any but himself, vivid spots of light after dusk, extinguished precisely at 9.30, are the most

easily observed features of His Majesty's Guest-House, otherwise known as Wandsworth Prison.

Residents of Wandsworth away from home, who in all innocence reveal the name of their home town, grow accustomed to the tactless remark,

"Wandsworth! Oh, yes, that is where they hang people! Do you see anything of the executions?"

To which the answer is emphatically. "Certainly not!"

Originally named the Surrey House of Correction, it was built in 1851 on the site of what was formerly the house of the curate-in-charge of St. Anne's, Wandsworth. Reputed to be the healthiest spot in London, the prison, with its five arms stretching like a starfish from its round central tower, bears a strong resemblance to its brother structure at Dartmoor. The life that circulates behind its immensely high walls is as secret and far removed from Wandsworthians as if the whole edifice were surrounded by an iron curtain which only lifts by an inch or so during long intervals.

Somewhere within its innermost mysteries there occurs at times the execution of a person who has transgressed the laws of both God and man. Often I

have wished that the date of execution need not be announced in the Press.

Sometimes at night, on the eve of an execution, I have looked out of my window, where behind the dark, graceful silhouette of a Scotch fir in my garden, the moonlight has thrown a mystic mantle of silver over the prison buildings a quarter of a mile away, turning even their sinister outline into a thing of beauty. And I wonder whether the man in the condemned cell, who so long has been watched day and night lest he cheat the hangman's noose, is awake, perhaps tossing and turning on his narrow bed. Is he penitent, or merely resentful that his sin has found him out ? Has he said his prayers tonight, or will he go down into the darkness that most awful thing on the face of the earth - an unrepentant sinner, his brother's blood upon his hands?

Some years ago, the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, in whose parish the prison now stands, together with my own parish of St. Anne's, in which it stood before St. Mary Magdalene's existed, observed the laudable custom of mentioning the name of the criminal before the altar at the first service of the day on the morning of his execution. An excellent practice, but it would

have been even better if prayers had also been offered for the soul of the victim, who had probably been hurried out of the world with no time for repentance.

Until the beginning of this century an execution was a signal for the general public to take a self-bestowed holiday. Streaming across the gorse-covered common, laughing, shouting, joking, they assembled outside the prison entrance, flanked on either side by the barn-like respective residences of the Governor and the Chaplain, waiting to hear the tolling of the bell and to see the notice, stating that justice had been done, which is always fixed to the massive door after an execution. Those a little farther off were rewarded by seeing a black flag hoisted upon the central tower.

In my younger days I have heard that dreadful bell, fifteen solemn strokes, one a minute, but the black flag was abolished much earlier. The fifteen minutes tolling was eventually reduced to one single stroke and now it has gone the way of the black flag. Perhaps it is a pity, as the tolling, even if only once, acted as a reminder to pray for the soul of the condemned.

Rumour used to state that the prison clock, with

its far-reaching note, can always be relied upon to tell the proper time, as it dare not do otherwise, seeing that on the morning of an execution, news of the prisoner's reprieve or unexpected evidence in his favour might arrive. And there would be no remedy if he had already been executed owing to the prison clock being fast.

Another rumour states that a certain gentleman whose father had been the unfortunate centre of one of these episodes, on being asked by a stranger the cause of his parent's decease, replied,

"He was assisting at a special function and the platform gave way."

A certain Wandsworthian has been known to answer when urged to hurry or he would be late for an appointment.

"Don't worry! I am like a man going to be hamged. They can't get on with the job without me."

A few years ago a certain lady, an anti-capital punishment campaigner, used to descend on the prison before an execution with a loud-speaker van. The said van used to parade down our road playing, "Abide with me", until the horrid event in the prison was ended. Meanwhile the lady had rows of people on their knees

outside the prison doors sobbing and praying in real mass hysteria. After one or two little melodramas of this description a cordon of police guarded the entrance to the three roads leading to the prison.

At midday the roads swarm with the non-resident warders going home to their dinner, very smart and spruce in their dark uniform, a mysterious chain hanging in a loop from under the coat, said to hold a whistle tucked into the trouser pocket.

The Heathfield Road, in which the prison stands, is very eerie at night, consisting of the long wall of the prison on one side and for most of the way market gardens with a low quick-set hedge on the other side, an unhealthy combination for women and girls after dark.

One Sunday morning, in the old days when we wore long skirts with braid round the bottom to preserve the edges, a friend of mine was walking along this road on the way to St. Anne's, when a roughly dressed man approached her and opening a business-like clasp-knife remarked,

"There is a piece of braid coming off your skirt, Miss, let me cut it off for you."

Knowing it was untrue and taking an instant dislike

to the speaker, she gathered up the skirt and ran, never pausing till she reached the more salubrious precints of the Earlsfield Road.

In the daytime small bands of prisoners in the care of warders sometimes march down the Heathfield Road from some outer part of the buildings where they have been working. Formerly their clothing was generously embroidered with broad arrows, denoting their present residence, now they are dressed in quiet grey and for the most part look as mild and behaved as a religious procession. But I wouldn't trust them, for I have inherited my Father's belief that the habitual criminal can look as guiltless as when he lay in his Mother's arm, while it is the innocent person accused of breaking the law, who appears flustered, ashamed and beside himself.

I rarely look at the faces in these pathetic processions, though often I remember the words of the Litany, "That it may please thee to show thy pity upon all prisoners and captives," or those other words spoken long ago, "There, but for the mercy of God, goes myself."

Before the trees in our garden spread wide and high, people standing outside our gate could see by the side of our house, right through the garden ~~when the trees~~

~~were lower,~~ to a few of the prison cells in the distance. By some mysterious means, known to prisoners, they were able to find out who was in those actual cells, so that on Sunday afternoons pathetic little groups stood outside our gate waving handkerchiefs, perhaps holding up a baby, in the vain hope that a young father behind one of those far-off barred windows might be able to see his little child. We did not like it, but we never had the heart to send them away.

During the first World War, when for a time it became a Military prison, Mother and I sometimes responded to the handkerchiefs and towels frantically waved to attract our attention as we stood at the top of the garden watching the troop trains, or those sadder ones marked with huge red crosses, where white-veiled nurses moved down the corridors, or leant over the sadly burdened stretchers. Many of these trains discharged their suffering, agonised loads at Clapham Junction, placing them in long lines of waiting ambulances and bringing them to the "Patriotic", a former orphanage for children of soldiers, sailors and airmen, temporarily transformed with its pleasant acres of grounds just beyond the "Four Miles from Charing Cross" limit, into the Third

London General Hospital, where above the central door, the noble figure of St. George, Patron of England, ~~was~~ is carved, the slain dragon at his feet.

One of our maids, daughter of a policeman at Chichester, confessed she had more than once felt her father's belt round her naughty little self, when he had seen her gaily hanging on to the back of a cart. Every afternoon when she went up to change from her pink or blue cotton frock into a black dress with frilly white apron and cap, in which with her rosy face, flushed cheeks and baby blue eyes she looked really charming, she used to wave from her bedroom to a prisoner in one of the top cells. One morning she came to Mother with a terror-stricken face, showing a letter which had just arrived on the door-mat, addressed to "The Maid of the House", in which the writer in loverlike terms announced he was the prisoner to whom she had waved so many times and that he had been released that very day. The letter ended by asking her to meet him outside the gate that evening at 8.30 p.m. Father met him instead! He did not call again.

On a more recent occasion I opened the door myself to an ingratiating individual who informed me he also had just been released from prison and thought it a

Christian act to tell me he and his comrades in neighbouring cells saw me getting up every morning. Knowing my windows are so situated as to make this impossible, I sternly replied, "You are quite mistaken."

To which he answered, "But I am sure of it; you have yellow curtains."

To which I answered truthfully and even more sternly, "We have lived forty years in this house and have never had yellow curtains at the back windows."

His little game of apparent blackmail was spoilt.

On the morning on which our former burglar called to see Father to ask for money Mother and I went to the prison to ask the Governor whether a man of that name had been released that day. We were ushered through the tiny door in the great entrance, through a second huge door of iron like a portcullis and into a waiting room where another visitor was sitting on the end of a bench, peeling lumps of grease off his nether garments with an out-size pocket knife.

In a short time we were ushered into the "Presence", an ideal Governor for such an establishment, courteous, but cold as ice and stern as a whole tribe of judges. Without any expression on his mask-like countenance he

informed us that our man had been released that morning and knowing his record, he would give orders to the police that our house should be watched until my Father came home. A polite, but frigid bow and we were escorted back into the street.

Occasionally a prisoner escapes. Before the railway line between the prison and our gardens was electrified they sometimes came across the line and through our gardens to the Earlsfield Road. Now, happily, like the would-be burglars, they live in wholesome fear of the live rail.

More than once, from gardens more accessible to the deep railway cutting than ours, a child from one of the houses has strayed on to the embankment, seeking wild flowers or a lost ball and reaching the live rail, has lost its precious little life.

One escaped prisoner who crossed the line early one summer morning, climbed into a garden a few doors from us, found the son-of-the-house's sports clothes on the line, changed into them and dropped his own into the dustbin. The side entrance being easier to manipulate than many of our houses, he slipped out into the Earlsfield Road equipped in sports vest and shorts like the young

men, who with shoulders well back, heads up and hearts going pit-a-pat, sprint round the neighbourhood for exercise when most people are still in bed.

Another gentleman provided an interesting melodrama for an hour and a half one Sunday afternoon by escaping from the prison yard and climbing to the top of a chimney stack forty feet from the ground, which he used as a pulpit. Throwing off his prison-grey overalls he appeared in his birthday dress and sitting on the edge of the chimney stack, which to say the least must have been extremely hard, he dangled his legs inside, proceeding to hold forth concerning his grievances to the crowd assembled in the Heathfield Road. The grievances in question appeared simply to consist of the fact that the amenities of the prison did not quite come up to those of the Ritz or the Dorchester, a not altogether surprising state of affairs.

The warders staged an interesting man-hunt with scaling ladders, which the prisoner still seated on his chimney stack, pushed away time after time.

But all good things come to an end and eventually several warders, using two ladders at once, managed to grasp him and politely wrapping him in a blanket fastened

round him like a parcel, removed him from his exalted position and the view of the multitude. Like many interesting stories this one ended ~~thus~~ abruptly, for no one outside the prison knows what happened next.

The last rocket in the second World War to fall in this district, dropped on a corner of the prison grounds, doing extensive damage to property, but happily causing no loss of life. It must have been nearly half a mile from us, on the extreme outskirts of the prison territory, yet clouds of thick black dust came through the closed windows of the room in which Mother and I were sitting, like a dense, gritty fog.

One of our young servers was in St. Anne's Vicarage at the moment - his family were buried in the ruins of their home, but were all rescued alive, practically uninjured, except for shock.

One dreadful night, when Wandsworth had a very good idea of the meaning of Hell, with bombs dropping continuously, planes flying overhead hour after hour, and gunfire exploding without ceasing, the prisoners in their cells went berserk, adding to the general horror by screaming and howling like caged wild beasts. It was awe-inspiring and frightful, like a scene from

Dante's Inferno.

Occasionally we hear them shouting to one another, but this was the only occasion we have ever heard them seized with genuine mass terror. And no wonder!

One of the prison chaplains, a nice old gentleman, a friend of my Father, lived in our road, but I never liked him so much after he announced cats were a necessary evil. He had an elderly housemaid of more than three-score years and twenty who fell downstairs and ended her career in domestic service. I think his must have been one of the last families in this district to dine at night in the full glory of several wine-glasses and elegant finger bowls.

Springfield Mental Hospital, a mile or so away, was for some years served by our clergy from St. Anne's, who had strange experiences during their ministrations, for example, ome woman who jumped up during a sermon in the hospital chapel, asking in no uncertain voice,

"What have you done with my seven children?"

The same priest was also distinctly taken aback on an occasion when he was giving some of the inmates their Communion at the altar rail and found one of them kneeling with a hefty slice of bread in his hand.

One evening I attended Evensong as one of the guests and was accommodated with a seat near the sanctuary, set sideways so that the whole congregation was visible and there was not the eerie feeling that one of them might be playing some unpleasant trick behind. It was a strange congregation, the womens' hats being at every angle, as naturally no hat pins were allowed, and not the slightest notice was taken of one man who every few minutes rose from his seat, throwing his long arms high in the air, then decorously re-seated himself. I fear I must confess I was not sorry when the service ended, as I found it all very harrowing.

Many of the inmates responded well to the Chaplain's efforts - in others the mere sight of him seemed to rouse the devil in them. Father Warren, who was very sensitive to atmosphere, always declared he could sense the evil in some of the cases and in his opinion they were living examples of demoniac possession, such as those recorded in the Bible. One woman threw a heavy plate at him, but he just managed to duck down and avoid it. Another attempted to embrace him, but I believe that time he took to his heels and fled.

Father Warren, to whose friendship, sympathy and

unfailing kindness, my family and I owe much gratitude, abhored a draught above all things and his first glance on entering a room was to see whether there were any floating about. By a strange coincidence his Memorial set up in St. Anne's some years after his sudden death, was a porch inside the south door, of oak, so that the faithful need no longer have their feet frozen with the icy blast in winter, nor feel unpleasant breezes slipping down inside their collars during the sermon. Inside the porch, facing the entrance is a lovely crucifix of the same oak, an arresting Figure, whose youthful head bears no Crown of Thorns, but is regal with the perfection of Divine love.

Father Warren was always full of resource. One Sunday, as he stood at the altar, he put his foot through the hem of his alb with a horrid sound of rending linen. Nothing daunted, he stooped down, tore off what remained, then stepped out of it and proceeded with the service.

From somewhere before his time comes the sad story of the choirman whose teeth fell out as he was singing enthusiastically during the procession round the church. Another circumstance, to which it is wiser not to assign a date, is that of the lady who announced herself the

Spiritual Bride of the Vicar, proceeding to give that reverend gentleman unpleasant frights and generally constitute herself Public Nuisance Number One. Her playfulness in knocking off the Rural Dean's hat in the open street and the unfortunate result of a sermon preached on a text from the Song of Solomon, resulted in the lady being removed to one of His Majesty's institutions where such cases receive careful attention.

Another undated incident was the discovery by the People's Warden of numerous empty tins of fruit on the church roof, carefully "lost" by generations of choirboys, including his own model sons. There was also the little matter of the vestry inkstand, whose roomy drawer housed an interesting collection of extraneous objects found in the almsbags, particularly buttons of high and low degree. The organist who delighted to play unsuitable music, such as "Here comes the bogey man!", should not be forgotten, nor that perfect verger, who with eyes fixed on the hymnbook he held in one hand, while singing with great fervour, "Change and decay in all around I see," shook a small, screaming, wriggling boy by the ear with complete nonchalance and perfect rhythm.

Quite recently I feel I rescued one of our choirboys

from an untimely end, as I caught him in the very act of popping into his mouth one of the tablets I keep for moth prevention in the Vestment chest, under the impression it was a new kind of sweetmeat.

Another adventure in which I figured was at Christmas-tide, on an evening when the Mayor and Corporation attended St. Anne's in all their full glory. A candle on one of the Christmas trees by the chancel wall set light to the dark fir branch on which it was fixed, transforming it into a mass of glittering gold. With praiseworthy zeal the Mayor leapt from his seat, endeavouring to quench the fire with his bare hands. I hurriedly followed him and seizing a flower vase from the lectern, threw the water over the blaze with as much respect to the person of His Worship, the First Citizen of the Borough, as was possible under the circumstances. Meanwhile the calm, musical voice of Father Warren continued without the slightest interruption, ".... and that they may truly please thee, pour upon them the continual dew of thy blessing ...."

The incident was a reminder of the evening when all the lights suddenly went out, leaving the congregation in the same condition as the old riddle informs us Moses

found himself ~~on a similar occasion~~ once. The assistant priest who was reading the prayers manfully continued without a pause, "Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O lord ..."

In the Parochial Hall at an extremely decorous Missionary Meeting, while we sang with enthusiasm,

"Feed the faint and hungry heathen,
With the richness of thy Word,"

the Vicarage dog marched up to the platform with an outsize slice of bread and butter firmly held between his teeth.

Unfortunately on these occasions I suffer agonies with suppressed laughter.

One evening, again in our Parochial Hall, Canon Theodore Wood, the Rural Dean, was presiding over his Ruridecanal Conference and everything was as proper as prunes and prisms, including the Rural Dean himself, who had a grave and dignified presence, six feet high and a good many inches wide.

In the Conference was a certain priest who for many years had been writing an extremely abstruse book on the Most Holy Spirit of God, which judging from the descriptions he generously afforded to the Deanery on

every occasion ad lib and certainly ad nauseam, had not an earthly chance of seeing publication. On this particular evening the poor old dear several times endeavoured to raise the subject, but the Rural Dean, not wishing to see the rest of the Conference slide out of the door with a bow to him and a muttered excuse of urgent business elsewhere, ignored the author. At length, waving a large umbrella in the air, he marched up to the centre of the room and shaking the umbrella in the Rural Dean's face, shouted, "I will talk about my book! I will! I will! I will!"

But he didn't! One look from the Presence and he hurriedly returned to his seat, appearing suddenly to have become several inches shorter and decidedly thinner.

Canon Wood was then Vicar of St. Mary Magdalene, Wandsworth Common. His vicarage had stained glass over the front door with the words in white lettering, "Benedictus Benedicat. Peace be within thy walls." His garden at the back, behind the long wooden fence, was exquisite in the spring with masses of crocuses, purple, gold and white beneath the budding trees. He was a great naturalist and many birds found sanctuary in his garden, although in the house he was reported to have a

cat on every chair and cats and birds when mixed together are apt to end in a minus quantity on the part of the birds.