

Tatworth Village

1890 – 1940

Setting the Scene

My mother's family were from the small rural village of Tatworth not far from its Manor of Chard - on the borders of Somerset, Dorset and Devon, sensible, solid, reliable – in fact, thoroughly decent people with a streak of Celtic eccentricity. My mother had seven sisters, two didn't survive a year and one was adopted, and six brothers, four of whom died within four years. The family lived in a three bedroomed house opposite the village school. It was assumed that the girls would be unlikely to marry, all, who reached working age, did.

Tatworth offered a wealth of expeditions, walks, and places for picnics. My brother and I shared the duty excursions to feed, and collect the eggs of the Rode Island Reds at the bottom of the garden. Nothing can be more beautiful in our old-world villages than the ancient bridges that span the onetime ford, and as we stand and stare over the parapet we love to look upon one of the fairest scenes of England, the tall and graceful trees, and the little path that runs to the gate through which we pass to collect mushroom with our Aunties for our breakfast. This is the stream my brother and I played in, damming and bombing the result - to let out the water held back stream out to continue its path to the waters beyond. For centuries, the stream has been flowing down from driving the mill. However, its time to pass on our pilgrimage and leave the old bridge and its fate... our story unfolds, as the farmers begin milking...

A cottage is at best not the most convenient to be ill in nor fitting for such a large family. It is a marvel that Rosa managed so well. She never stood on ceremony nor suffered fools gladly but spoke directly, never fearing that what she said was not right or questioned. It is as well that her sister Audrey lived next door for the confinements where many and painful. The family never asked for neither help nor charity but stood foursquare relying upon Harry to defend the home. As there were only three bedrooms in times of birth Harry had to bed down on the floor for his wife had to have one room to herself and her attendant sister.

Looking back life was hard for the Collins. Tatworth was a good place to live for its offers of work to weave the net, churn the butter or farm the field. It was a close-knit society, especially for folk who were neighbours for generations and had gone to school together.

The woodland glade and the shaded lane gave shelter, harvest and play to all the inhabitants. The young corn the well-laid hedge and the clear stream along the field were all part of the pastel coloured picture. The showers of the late April rain drenched the drilled ground, the summer sun baked the fields of ripening corn, inviting the reaper to begin its clattering work and the autumn flocks manured the stubble as winter winds cast the icy rain against the folded turf... another year to start the cycle again as each generation finds out for itself the glory that is England.