

CHAPTER IV

Rural homestead - Married life - 'Lying in' – Growing family – Chard Church The coombes – Lace hand - The Poppe Inn – Rural matters – Skittles – Village crime – Increased population – Agricultural advances – Social order .

When Harry and Rosa took up residence in Rosalie Cottage, in 1891, Rosa's widowed sister Audrey Haynes, nee Beviss, moved in at the same time - to the next but one, end cottage. This was a convenient arrangement for she was able to help-out when her sister was confined the following year...and thereafter, as the family grew. Audrey had a daughter Florence Kate, who married my uncle Wilfred Cyril in 1945. He worked as a nurseryman at a smallholding up the road. Wilfred, who preferred to be called by his second name Cyril, was the fifth son of Harry and Rosa - born in 1901.

As the years went by and the family increased Audrey's assistance became vital to the smooth running of the Collins' household. Either the children's clothes could not always be handed down, the next in line was not of the same sex or they were still needed. To meet the problem there was a system of loans of necessary items from the 'lying-in' charity. These essential clothing items, including sheets and pillows, were kept by 'lady-members, of the church for just such an instance, however, you had to apply for them and you had to be of good repute. Having to make this application put people off. Buying what was necessary at 'the white elephant stall' was judged a more acceptable way of coming by the needed item.

Harry Collins had regular features with sloping forehead, fiery eyebrows and military moustache. Thinning grey-black hair swept back gave him the looks of a firm schoolmaster, which his height reinforced. He was always dressed in black... a collar-less, thin striped-shirt under an open waistcoat... held together by his watch chain. His boots, which he was never seen without, were made of highly polished soft black leather. His weather beaten countenance friendly and warm. The wrinkled forehead suggested much thought and his eyes, with their canopy of shaggy-brows, gave a penetrating gaze to us small children. His voice and manner was gruff – a product of many years of smoking strong tobacco using a cob pipe.

Rosa was a good foot shorter than her husband but not lacking in will or authority... her grey hair always tightly twisted onto of her head was tightly pinned. She controlled and led the house and its occupants - never challenge, and played a 'close' hand at whist. I do not remember her without a pinny and her sleeves rolled up. Rosa's voice was high pitched and brittle... using an even stronger local *patois* than her husband's was. Being, one of nine and the daughter of a respected farmer she had an authority which came from a highly respected household. Her father farmed five hundred acres and operated his own granary – both these occupations demanded a good head for organisation and business. Rosa had been raised to follow Christian principles. As a child, she attended Chard Church three times on a Sunday as well as attending the Sunday School.

Rosalie Cottage had been built a few years before Harry rented the house for his new bride. It had been built as an add-on to two original, three story, semi-detached cottages, built at an earlier age. There were two rooms on the ground floor: the larger one being the living room containing the cooking range, and the other, the parlour..., up-stairs, lead to three bedrooms off a landing. Outside, a lean-to extension housed a workshop, kitchen and scullery. The greenhouse used the extension as a back wall.

It was accessed from Perry Street by a bow topped wooden gate set in a flint wall capped by large upright stones... beyond... a brick path leads to the front door. The knapped-flint and brick cottages nestle in their gardens behind the garden wall, which runs round three sides of the plot... To the rear, the ground sloped up the hill...

This rural homestead rests on a spot where the open down falls away to lush meadows that lies in a valley – ‘coombe or combe’, sheltered from the west [a word derived from cumb, *Old English* for ‘a valley on the flank of hill’].

The greater part of Tatworth had thatched roofed, timber-framed houses with lime washed walls over cob, [a mixture of soil, clay, straw and lime]... with tiny inserted windows. A cob wall is built up slowly... packed down, between boards or hurdles... each layer allowed to dry before the next built up before the boards removed – when the cob hardened. This was, in many circumstances, the method by which the enlargements of ancient hovels built- randomly along the track... usually of two bedrooms that had to cater for the large families of the period. Through extension, additional dwelling space built on... windows enlarged and roof spaces developed. None had main services until the water, piped to the village in the late thirties. Farm labourers were paid thirty shillings a week, and a carter with two horses to look after got thirty-eight shillings.

1927 was a year of, it seemed, continual rain. It was unceasing. The hay turned black trying to judge when it could be picked up. Even with hay drier, it was difficult. The farmers waited until October and still there were few days of continual sun. The year before prices had been bad and the farmers account was low. Now the poor harvest compounded to make the position worse. There was a great deal of unemployment and a movement away from the land into the towns and cities.

The pride of the home was the new wireless, with its fretted front panel, glowing valves, waveband squeak and trailing aerial – powered by accumulator charged up at the local garage. The announcers, pedantically announcing The King’s English, and the style of music, that of Edward German or Albert Ketelby. Like the rest of society, the programs were refined, precise and structured. As children we still played with our ‘cat’s whisker’ and headphones, using a saucepan to improve the sound.

The main meetinghouse open to all was the Poppe Inn, before 1927, it was named The County Inn, or Hotel. Initially, in 1564, it was a cottage called Culverhays owned by John Bowdyche..., straw thatched roof with chamfered first floor beams, [a mark of quality], and inglenook fireplace. My grandad and his sons frequented its low beamed interior most nights, for at least a couple of hours. In the clubroom, they played skittles, dominoes or shove-halfpenny whilst drinking cider. Most of the men of the village joined them for at least one night of the week.

The pub, with cider at 2d a pint, provided a venue for the working men to meet – to discuss their jobs, the weather and all those other things which control their lives. The women and children were banned in the taproom and even in the saloon bar; it was very unusual to find a woman. The pub was the preserves of men. Women for the most part met each other whilst passing the gate – to gossip over the garden wall – invite neighbours in for a cup of tea – to read the tealeaves. There was sewing parties and mother’s meetings but in the main women did not meet up in an organized fashion ant a particular venue.

The men were social, using the pub to remove themselves from the sounds of children and the insistent wife, who always needed help. The pub kept them in touch with the latest gossip and created a sense of kindred spirit... where the topic of conversation was the state of their kitchen garden, the troublesome weather and the success or failure of the weekend football or cricket match. It was a matter of great concern how well the village was doing in both these games and even though not everyone played all were most keen to hear that their village was represented successfully. At some point in the evening someone would start singing some well known folk song which would be accompanied by others joining in with comb-and-paper, penny whistle, and on a good night, a piano player. On a dark and windy night, when the fire was blazing well, you could here the jollity going on down the street, as the door opened to let in yet another caroller... bathed in a stream of warm light... to cries of hallo!

1931 was another bad year for rain fell all through the summer. It was wet throughout which was depressing enough without the national economy being under considerable strain. The Lord Chancellor ordered a compulsory wage reduction on all salary and wage earners. For a fifty-hour week, the labourers earned three pounds. Grandma tried to make up the shortfall by selling some eggs.

The police house in the village was not looked on as somewhere out of bounds but one of refuge and help. There was no serious crime only petty poaching, chicken stealing, pub brawls and the occasional robbery. There was just one policeman who walked and rode on his bike to check the roads, shops and houses. It was a matter of long hours of tedious work making sure that each day all of the area covered at least once. He had to check that the public house closed on time and that there was no bad behaviour and noise - created by the last ones to leave. Every year the constable paid a visit to the school to talk to the children about not stealing or harming animals. It was a matter of showing his face and getting to know the children personally. The same applied to the sports field where he always strolled round to show support and interest. It was expected that he should put in an appearance at church at least once on Sundays. The village policeman found it was in his interest to meet as many village people as possible - to see them at work and in their home environment. It made his job easier to be on friendly terms especially with the leaders of the community.

Most of the workers in the village, if not directly associate with the land, had an interest in rural matters. Even those men working at the mill or dairy had relations who were agricultural labourers or knew someone connected with farm animals. It was a rural landscape and that would never change. To a man, they were all poorly paid even those who had authority or a skill had little more than their unskilled counterparts did. There is a certain binding of spirits when the majority were in the same boat - scraping a living. Their houses were mostly badly built, cold, damp and rotting. To keep them clean and dry was an uphill battle fought by the women. Gradually this picture changed until the First World War brought to a sudden end the *status quo*, which had been the position up to and during Victoria's reign. Then workers had rights and demanded a little more consideration. As their wages increased so did their horizons especially those who valued education...

The population increase in the late eighteen hundreds supplied labour for the new industrial society. For towns and villages that had no local factory or business - that required a large staff, the local young adults drifted away... there were only a few who were content to work in large houses or estates, the rest had to look elsewhere. With the technical advances made to agricultural machines, creating a knock-on affect to allied engineering components manufacturers, who devised tools to mass produce small parts... there was a general interest in all matters technical. There was no part of society that did not feel the change and the young wished to take part in the 'new society'.

This disruption to the old order and the mobility of the young, particularly those using the facilities presented by the new railway companies, allowed a migration away from the country. The young factory staff, construction workers, ship builders and domestic servants provided a stimulus to marriage and home building..., which in turn, caused an increase in the birth rate. At the beginning of the nineteenth century there were only fifteen towns with more than twenty thousand inhabitants... by the middle, there were sixty-three. At the turn of the century eighty per-cent of the population lived in urban districts with ten or more thousand in the first quarter of the twentieth century only ten per-cent of the population owned their own home. By the late thirties, it was twenty-five per cent.

These statistics amply demonstrate the energy generated by man producing more food. This began in the middle Ages, the protection of the nation's wheat harvest, and continued intermittently.

The Corn Laws were repealed during 'The Great Irish Hunger'. There was a national need to produce more cheap food to make the country self-sufficient.