

CHAPTER VI

Saint Matthew's Infants – Learning by rote – The harsh winters – Charity Funds - Junior School – Church School – Children's complaints – Industrial society – The laundry – School Board – The Underground System - Boy's Brigade – The Volunteers.

When he was five years old, he went up to the Junior School of St Matthew's Church, which was in another building, also in Queens Road. It was only Class 1 that had a separate room - known as 'The Bottom Standard'. There he was taught the Prayer Book. At the same time, instruction given so that pupils could recite the Ten Commandments: the creed, the Catechism and the Lord's Prayer. This was to prepare them for 'confirmation'.

In subsequent years, the higher standards were taught in a large hall, which seated about five classes. The head teacher was Mr Dexter who had an assistant and three female staff. Boys were separated from Girls, who had their own hall. At this time, education was not compulsory - there was a voluntary charge made throughout the year of two pence per week for lessons. Discipline was vigorously exercised to keep noise levels down so as not to disturb the other classes. Lessons arranged so that singing in one class taught with sewing or drawing in another so that one would not affect the other.

These large rooms, or halls, were very cold in the winter for they had large windows and lofty ceilings. Each large room had a coal heater set in the middle of the floor with the chimney pipe running up to the high roof. The floor, uneven through use, showed raised nails - was of bare wood, which gave off clouds of dust when anyone moved. Colourless flaking lime-washed walls white peppered the surrounding floor, which added to the general dust.

My father spoke of the severe winters and dense fogs, which made going to school something to be dreaded. In the winter of 1894-5, which was particularly severe, hot meals were provided and warm clothing distributed to the needy and boots to those without. It was reported, by a school's medical officer, that at least one third of all children had not had their clothes off for more than six months and that a high percentage of these had their underclothes sewn on them. These children smelt - nobody wanted to sit next to them; others continually itched and could not sit still. Schoolroom was fumigated and teachers wore bags of sulphur sewn into their hems- to ward off vermin. A great many children worked before and after school as messengers, street sellers and errand boys. It was a case of having to, to provide for a single or sickly parent. For twelve-year-old girls leaving school domestic service was the most popular job available.

Many of the children were fed by charitable funds provided by rich neighbours and philanthropic action by societies. It was only at the start of the First World War that the Board of Education compelled all authorities to provide meals. The health of schoolchildren was a matter of concern and provision made for the medical inspection of all schoolchildren. By 1914, just over three-quarters of London's Boroughs made health, eyesight and dental checks. The improved provision of continuous tap water helped children's health. Skin complaints began to disappear and infections from various bugs reduced to the degree that fumigation tailed off.

These were dreary winter days... when the teacher lit the gas mantle held in the wall bracket... to produce a depressing yellow glow. This light could hardly penetrate the gloom, not only because of the lateness of the hour but the denseness of the London fog outside which seeped into the room. It is difficult now to imagine... although understandable when we consider their Mondays' in particular, when all the boilers lit for washing. It was difficult to breathe the sulphurous air: the fumes from candles, oil lamps and various heaters made even the inside of homes smoky. To go out was a trial... continually tripping over milk churns and dustbins, negotiating horse dung and rotting waste, into a world of a pale golden colour with humps and hillocks... ghostly bodies set lurching into each other... all groping to find their way.

The high-hung school bell, set on the roof, rang at nine and one o'clock. The children had to form up outside until let in... to form queues that were led snaking into the classrooms. There was no talking and no running every movement was regimented and orderly. Slates were used to write on which made a squeaky noise when the slate pencils were used. No provision was made for cleaning the slates so children spat on them and rubbed them with their sleeves. Slates, hung from pegs around the wall, were used for minor lessons and practice - to save paper. When writing perfected using slates 'writing books' and 'pen and ink sets' passed out by the monitor.

By the turn of the century, a system of elementary education had been worked out and some two million children attended board school. This was the direct result of the 1870 Education Act coming into fruition. All of England was divided up into school districts where school boards were set up with powers to levy rates and build schools. This was done and the results can be seen today – those schools are still in being although perhaps not as schools any more. The Education Act of 1902 was the basis for all branches of education – from elementary to university, included in this were church schools. County, district and borough councils who formed local education committees [LEAs] replaced School Boards. By the end of 1902, fifty-three secondary schools set up. It took a further ten years to add three hundred more.

The working population of large British cities, particularly London at the turn of the nineteenth century, was described graphically in Dickens's novels. They were people intent upon holding their jobs, maintaining their position in the social order and putting on a brave face - to cover up any differences of order or hardship. Amongst these citizens were the Kearey family - one of many who succeeded. They eventually considered themselves Londoners and were proud of it! In addition, what was different about them, from many such families, was that their paternal great-grandfather Thomas Kearey had been born in Ireland – of ancient Gaelic roots...

My father was very aware that he was fortunate... his father had a skilled job that enabled him to be self-employed. This was at a time when a number of events, in both Britain and the rest of the world, came one after another to create 'the industrial society'. Steam engines were invented to pump out water from the mines - allowing more coal to be extracted. This power source was adapted to drive mills and traction engines. Canals were built to move heavy materials across country. Railways took over the transportation of goods and passengers. This movement of people stripped young people away from the countryside. Houses, factories, railway cutting, tunnels, and docks had to be provided. To clothe, equip, furnish and supply the factories and their workers ancillary businesses blossomed. Once this train of event happened, there was no stopping the development of a new 'industrial' society that had far-reaching social effects. Into the birth of this new world, Thomas galloped to start a new life and eventually generations of Londoners. His son Thomas, took over the reigns to pass them to my grandfather, who benefited by the building boom, allowing him to start up his own business.

My grandmother also ran her own business. The laundry operated from home and provided work for local women. Once again, it was an opportune time to own such an enterprise especially in the middle-class area of Bayswater. It too prospered. This was a loving, secure, home environment, which provided my father with grounding for organization and management.

As there was already, a piano in the house it was not difficult to accord him that desire. It did not take long for him to reach the first grade and his teacher declared that he had a natural bent learning not only the practical side but the theory too. Soon he was able to play the hymns sung at the school assembly – he was often required to accompany singers at Christmas time and within a few years diligent practice proficient enough to play for the local film show, keeping pace with the

black and white films. He continued to play for the rest of his life reaching a high enough standard to play for Masonic meetings.

To have a piano in the house at the turn of the nineteenth century was the popular means of home entertainment. It is estimated that there were between two and four million pianos in Britain - one instrument to ten to twenty people. It was a skill considered to be, 'one of social inclusion', especially for girls. To be able to play well - able to accompany singers entertaining company, a mark of distinction... it was also a guarantee of inclusion, for a skilled player was always wanted for every social gathering. The piano in the parlour was not just a butt for jokes but a matter of fact. Between 1877 and 1902 'The Lost Cord' sold fifty thousand copies of sheet music per year making Parry a very rich man. The family singsong around the piano, singing the songs of the day from popular music hall acts, operettas, national tunes, and hymns looked forward to as a means of social discourse - bringing family and friends together. Even during the Second World War, every weekend, it was my task to gather the music together sort out the tunes to be sung and prepare the piano - making sure the action had been aired - free from damp before the fire. I had to sing my party piece before visiting aunts and uncles: Cherry Ripe, The Tree, The Miner's Dream of Home and The Teddy Bears Picnic; my father with, The Village Pump and Captain Ginger, and a selection from Gilbert and Sullivan.

My father stayed at school until he was seven years old when the family moved to Kensal Green. His next school, Princess Frederika Higher Grade School, had the sexes still separated. He tells us that it was a miserable place staffed by elderly teachers who were always unsmiling, stern and dressed as if in morning. He was glad when he moved yet again to the London School Board at Amberley Road, Paddington. {This school is still there and backs onto the Paddington Branch of the Grand Union Canal. One end of the road is Harrow Road in Westbourne Green}. Whilst my father attended this school Queen Victoria died and Edward VII was crowned King. All children were given the day off to celebrate and street parties were arranged. Later that year my father joined the 6th. London Company Boys Brigade, which was attached to the school's church.

The Boy Scouts were based upon trekking and scouting. The Boy's Brigade linked to a military style of light infantry training. The Boy's Brigade, founded by Sir William Smith in Glasgow at the end of the 19th.century. The object of the Brigade was to produce good citizens. In 1904 throughout the country there was said to be 54,000 boys between the ages of 12-14 in the organization. Baden-Powell became honorary Vice-president and Inspector General that same year. It was thought by many, both in the Army and Government, that here was an organization that could be a source of recruitment for future officers and men of the British Army. 'A strong force behind the Volunteers and the Army - a third line in defending our shores'.

Now at last my father was happy. The Headmaster at the London school Board was Mr Williamson who although strict was kind and fortunately ably assisted by capable teachers in six separate classrooms. He could master the three 'Rs' and was taught elementary algebra, composition, drawing, geometry, French and woodwork. He had great affection for this school and never forgot the headmaster - what he owed him for his many kindnesses. Discipline was looked on as something essentials and necessary and so too punishment for wrongdoing and slackness. There was a punishment book called 'The Board School, cane and Punishment Book'. The children with great awe regarded this and so the threat of entry into this book was sufficient to deter misdoing.

At the start of every day, prayers were said and hymns sung in the main hall. At the end of each day, the same thing happened. Pupils were expected to pay respect to older people - hats should be raised and taken off to masters and mistresses, to say 'Sir' and 'Miss' when spoken to. When leaving school caps were to be worn at all times. Father played the piano for the school assembly and in the evenings for the local picture palace where silent films with sub-titles were shown. This required dexterity and a knowledge of many tunes to follow each part of the story line.

English lessons, which were taught every day, had as their main content the spelling of words and note taking. Writing with a hand in copperplate script was the standard necessary and much practiced. Mental arithmetic was greatly encouraged by giving every class every day a problem to be solved. Teachers taught all subjects and knew their charges intimately, their faults and failings, their successes and strengths.

In 1900, the underground railway system was electrified. For the price of a tuppenny ticket, the passenger could travel as far as he wished. This became so successful that the underground railway was extended which in turn paid its way. The first transatlantic wireless message was sent the following year. The industrialization continued apace each year that passed more inventions and discoveries were made.

My father started work at the age of fifteen in 1904 [the same time the Russo-Japanese War started]. He joined the Great Central Railway Company whose head office was at Paddington Station as a junior clerk. Because there was no vacancy at that post, to start with, he had to serve out his probationary period learning to pack parcels and load wagons in the Goods Yard. A few months later a vacancy for junior clerk occurred on the staff of Thompson McKay and Company, who were Carting Agents for the G.C.R..., which he took. Office work included dealing with street accidents, claims for damage to goods in carriage, stoppages, overtime and bonus payments, accounts, detention charges, correspondence and ordering feed for the horses. In retrospect; if my father had waited for a vacancy with the railway company and not gone to a private cartage company, he would have benefitted enormously both in eventual retirement benefit and rising in the far larger concern.

The Cartage Department then came under the jurisdiction of the District manager who had six hundred horses, a Miles Daimler 5-ton, iron tyred, motor with rack and pinion drive and a 10 ton Yorkshire Steam Wagon. All the horses were young and some had to be trained. Some 'car-men', the term used for drivers, were detailed off as 'young-horse car-men' for breaking in these animals. As 'Agents' Thompson McKay & Co. carried out town cartage work as well as more general work... particularly orders for Lots Road, Electric Generating Station, which was speciality work... some being very heavy. In cases where the cartage of 40-ton boilers was, necessary twenty horses were used at a time pulling a special heavy-duty wagon.

Steam engines were invented to drive pumps and move heavy goods for the mining industry at the turn of the 18th. Century. By 1903, Ford had built his first petrol driven motorcar and the first steam tractors for farm and roadwork designed.

My father enjoyed his work and was interested to learn more outside his normal duties. By this time, his various tasks included visiting local markets and the docks and leaning how to service extra heavy loads. This started his never-ending love for London, its street and all the business, which went on within its boundaries. He did anything, which would help his career and increase his knowledge of the cartage industry. Gradually more and more motors were obtained to deal with the increased workload. Drivers had to service their own motors and for this, parts and lubricants had to be ordered in. Throughout this period, he kept abreast of all the latest methods adopted to transport goods, for a personal interest drove every vehicle, and got to know its working.

It was now just three years after the end of the Boar War. Previously Britain had invested the Empire with a rosy glow, after the war the glow was not quite so warm. Although the period was one of growth – the necessity of putting back what the war had drained away, the change in society, not quite as large as that experienced after The Second World War, was large – the people did have more and there was a definite improvement in the nation's health. Nevertheless, there was a feeling that the 'golden age' of Victorian Britain was over.

Most of the middle and upper classes were quite prepared to tolerate extremes of poverty so that they could indulge themselves in luxury. The working class saw the need for communal action to improve society. Britain's economy and growth had been greater and faster than at any other time. As time has gone by it becomes even clearer how substantial

these changes had been. When an individual, group, or even country produces such wealth it becomes envied – produces a jealous reaction..., the Second World War, in this case, was the result ...