

# COUSIN ADDIE

By

A M B Semple (Aunt Barbara)

Berkhamsted 1948

In the early hours of December 1st, 1947, the spirit of this greatly loving and greatly loved woman left her frail body and the weakness and disabilities which she had been so gallantly bearing troubled her no longer.

She has passed from our knowledge but for us I feel it is well to put down what I know of her life, that her fine qualities and the great influence she exerted on the many people who loved her may be had in remembrance and remain for us an example and an inspiration.

I should like to give a short account of the Semple family and trace it to the ancient Scottish barony of mediaeval times but the remaining documents are too scanty and a good many, I fear, lost.

From an early ancestor who left Scotland for the West Indies and there prospered and inter-married with other families of repute, their wealth and importance grew and John Semple (my great-grandfather) came to Liverpool and there carried on the sugar trade with his colonial possessions. He was much esteemed in Liverpool for his upright dealing and earned the nickname (my father used to tell me) Honest John of Liverpool. His son Robert (my grandfather and Addie's) went back and forth from England and S.Eustatius and married Adriana Moore who could trace her descent to William Moore, younger son of the Earl of Drogheda. He employed 4 ships whom he named after his four daughters (Adriana, Sarah, Anne and Jane, my aunts) and was also wealthy and prosperous. My father used to tell me of their country house at Parkgate, Cheshire and how he used to ride to school on his pony, and they also had a town house of considerable size in Liverpool.

My father, the youngest of the family, was born in Scotland but the others were all born in the West Indies. However, the Emancipation of the slaves brought an end to most of the sugar trade and my grandfather lost a good deal of what he had made or inherited and, his health declining with his fortune, died leaving his affairs in confusion.

The eldest son, Robert, tried to restore the family fortunes with the aid of his uncle but they were neither of them competent businessmen and Uncle Robert died (my father used to say of a "broken heart") at the early age of 28.

The other sons had to give up their prospective careers. Uncle John (Addie's father) who had been destined for the church, set out for New

Zealand to make his way in a new country. My father gave up the bar for which he was preparing and determined to make what he could in London. He undertook the foreign correspondence for a London bank as the first step but gave it up to revive, as he hoped, the carrying trade between England and the West Indies.

The daughters had, according to the will, what money was available divided between them. Aunt Addie married William Henry Hyndman Jones, a West Indian trader, and the other sisters went to live with their "Great Aunt Semple", or "Auntie" in Parliament Street, Liverpool, once a fashionable quarter but not I imagine very cheerful. It is now decayed into a street of lodging houses. The original family house was bought and turned into a Lunatic Asylum and what happened to the house in Parkgate I never heard. "Auntie" was born in 1800 and lived to be 84. As she grew older she became an invalid and was devotedly nursed by Aunt Sarah.

Aunt Anne married the Vicar of St. Bride's Liverpool and went with him when he took the living at Ackworth, Yorkshire, being also made Canon of Chester Cathedral. She was his second wife. My aunts Sarah and Jane stayed on in Parliament Street, living I imagine, rather a retired life, though their albums, adorned with drawings and verses by admirers in their younger days showed that they had some of the pleasures of young ladies in their day and practised the fashionable accomplishment of sketching and painting.

Uncle John, Addie's father, emigrated, as I have said, to New Zealand where he married Miss Snowden by whom he had 4 children, Theodore, Adriana, Herbert and Jane but he had no success in farming and the sudden death of his wife left him with no spirit to struggle on without her.

Her mother's death must have been Addie's earliest and most tragic memory.

When she was just over 4 and Jane a baby unable to walk, her mother took them out one afternoon to meet their father on his return home. Suddenly her mother fell and when Uncle John returned it was to find his wife lying semi-conscious by the gate and poor little Addie terror struck with the baby by her. He tried to revive his wife who was breathing heavily but she was already unconscious; with the help of neighbours he brought her indoors but she never spoke again and died shortly afterwards. Addie never forgot that terrible experience though she seldom referred to it in after life. I never heard the story from her but was given the details by Miss Lucy Troughton to whom she told it. The children were cared for by some neighbours for a time while the distracted husband settled up his affairs and arranged to go home to his family. As soon as he could he took the first boat home and embarked on the long journey with his young family.

The little boys had an adventurous time and ran about the ship and rigging, having to be extricated from dangerous places while Addie admired their exploits. Her adventurous spirit would doubtless have led her to imitate them but I think even at that early age she felt she had to mother her baby sister

and help her father by her sympathy with him. I am sure even at so early an age she could make her sympathy felt and in her intense devotion to her father always through his life she could never do enough to make up to him for his loss.

At last the little family reached Liverpool and were welcomed to the house in Parliament Street. "Auntie", i.e Great Aunt Semple, was 67 but to the children their father's aunt must have seemed very old and even the youngest Aunt, Aunt Jane, was 39. This was the family home for nearly 20 years after John Semple arrived with his children. After their lively time on board ship, it must have seemed very quiet to the children, and to grow quieter with the years as great aunt's health failed and she became a permanent invalid, devotedly nursed by Aunt Sarah but longing for the release which came in 1884.

Little Janie was delicate always, I think and very precious to the loving heart of Aunt Jane whose special care she was. She was a gentle affectionate child and there are many photographs of her remaining and the little pencil notes she wrote in her last illness, serene and cheerful and full of affection for her elder sister and interest in the doings of her brothers. The two boys went to school and in course of time prepared to earn their livings.

Addie herself, ardent and high-spirited and full of zeal to help her beloved family, cannot have found life very easy. She was strong-willed and sometimes passionate I gather. (I heard that on one occasion she threw a book at the Aunt who was trying to instruct her) and I do not suppose the strict evangelical piety of the household appealed to her. She wanted to learn and grow up to be a help to her family and was very anxious to go to school.

For a few years she lived with Aunt Addie whose husband had a sugar business in Barbados. The hot climate did not agree with Aunt Addie and she and her daughter (Cousin Ada) returned home and lived in England for some years while Cousin Ada was being educated. She was 5 years Addie's senior and an intelligent and docile pupil, too often perhaps held up as a model to Addie and perhaps the young child was a problem to her aunt and her governess. Her constant pre-occupation was the best way to earn her own living and help her father.

Little Janie had died in 1878, Great Aunt Ada in 1884. Addie won the 'Derby Prize' at the Liverpool college for girls where she was, I suppose, a day scholar but she now entered Sandwell Hall near Birmingham where she continued to work at her own studies and trained for teaching at the same time. Here she made some of the friendships that were life long. Already that extraordinary capacity for friendship and the power to attract love and admiration from her contemporaries began to show themselves.

The house in Parliament Street had been given up after the death of Great Aunt and Aunt Annie had married Mr Falloon and went to Yorkshire where he was given the living of Ackworth and was made Canon of Chester also. This was in 1875 and after Great Aunt's death the other two aunts moved into

Cheshire - first Rock Ferry and then Higher Bebington where "Craigside" became their home and that of Uncle John. They did not, I think, quite approve of Addie's launching out on a career of her own but her father encouraged her ambitions and she felt that she would in a few years be able to earn her own living and be able to help him, always her chief desire.

In 1887 she was appointed senior mistress at Southport High School under Mr. Ross who was head both of the Girls' High School and the Grammar School for Boys. She was then 24, had passed her examinations (I think it was the Cambridge Higher Local) but though so young and inexperienced for a senior post, she must have impressed Mr. Ross as remarkable for her attainments and still more her personality and she soon made her influence felt. Again she soon had devoted friends among the staff and students, and again these friendships strengthened with the years.

She was very good looking as can be seen from her photographs. She had cut her hair short and curled it, and fine features with a calm resolute expression gave her great dignity. She stayed with us at Amerland Road (the home of my childhood) and won my admiration for the beautiful doll's hat she crocheted for me, I remember, but I was small then, not old enough to appreciate her as much as my sister, 7 years my senior and more the age for hero-worship.

I remember too a visit from Cousin Theodore whom she must have resembled I think. He was tall and dark but what I chiefly remember were his wonderful eyes, dark grey blue and full of enchantment. He and Herbert were both going out to Australia, Theodore as a ship's engineer.

I think Addie's time at Southport must have been very happy. For the first time perhaps she was able fully to express herself in dealing with others and exercising influence over them and in teaching she had found her vocation. Mr. Ross liked and trusted her and she found him a very good headmaster under whom to work.

Then in 1894 the blow fell which changed her life. She received news that her younger brother Herbert, already married and a father, was very ill, struck down by tuberculosis. She realised that the illness might easily be fatal and she might not even have the chance to see him alive. But at a crisis, Addie always knew what she must do and without counting the cost to her career she resigned her post at Southport and took the first available boat to Australia. When she arrived her brother had already died and she returned home with his widow and her son Jack, a little more than a year old.

Again the aunts had a child to look after and Craigside, Higher Bebington, became the home of Flo Semple and Jack as well as Uncle John, with Addie to work for them as best she could.

The first question after her return was to find her bearings and start again. One of her Sandwell friends was ready to join her in starting a private school at Hunstanton but the other friend, Miss Gregory, who was I imagine the one

chiefly responsible for the financial success of the venture decided after a few months that they could not carry on. Addie had no course but to acquiesce. She realised that once a mistake was admitted the only thing was to close the whole affair as soon as possible, but their friendship was not interrupted and continued throughout Miss Gregory's lifetime.

Again Addie was faced by a crisis and resolved this time to rely on her own initiative, this time in the south.

She took over a small day school in Alexandra Grove, North Finchley, from a Mrs. Donald and this time things seemed to prosper so that in three years she felt herself justified in taking over the lease of a big house from Miss Wimbush. It was the Court House where Addie set up "Sandwell School", so called after her training school, Sandwell Hall, and adopted as her motto Browning's words "We fall to rise, are baffled to fight better, sleep to wake", a motto which typified Addie's own indomitable spirit and her attitude to failure. How it struck the children I do not know but children take things for granted from anyone they admire as her pupils were ready to do.

The Court House was a fine old house then almost in the country, surrounded by fields which skirted the lovely old garden with its two lawns, one with a stately old cedar tree, the other backed by a group of immense lime trees. There were other trees which invited climbing and an apple tree in the orchard and other delights.

Tradition said there was a secret passage from its cellars to some church or house but I never heard that it was explored, so perhaps it was a myth. Certainly the house, at least the oldest part of it, dated from Tudor times but a west wing had been added and the whole covered with stucco. There were old outbuildings and ancient red brick paths.

Some years later when the original lease ended Addie was given the choice of turning out or buying the house. By that time she felt she must take the venture and did buy it, but dry rot was found and the repairs turned out to be a considerable expense.

But the children loved the place and the lawns made ideal scenery for open air plays. In the summer many classes were held in the garden and there were fine walks by footpaths to Mill Hill and other country places till the suburbs crept in all round. Addie was forced to sell some of the garden and paddocks for building and North Finchley became a regular London suburb, but this was in later years. The "old originals" look back with great affection on those early days of Sandwell School, the spaniels and the cats, the lessons on the lawn and the graciousness of the house itself, the happy atmosphere was due to first and foremost, Addie herself. She sympathised with youth and though she could be severe she was never intolerant.

In this connection I remember an anecdote of her own childhood. She told me that one of her troubles was the insistence of her elders that she should love

God. She was not at all sure that she did love this God, whom her elders worshipped. He seemed so far away; then one day she came across Leigh Hunt's poem "Abou ben Adhem" and read how in a vision this good man saw an angel writing on a scroll of gold, "the names of those who love the Lord".

"And is mine one?" said Abou, "Nay, not so"  
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,  
But cheerly still and said "I pray thee, then,  
Write me as one that loves his fellow men".  
The angel wrote and vanished. The next night  
It came again with a great awakening light  
And showed the names whom love of God had blessed  
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.

This came as a sort of revelation to the child. If she could not love God she found no difficulty in loving people and putting aside her doubts, she did love people - not only great saints but the people round her. I think that was the key to Addie's great influence; she was always ready to love and help any who needed her - and there were very many who did need her. She was not one to whom belief in dogma came easily but she let it be, although she was always ready to respect others to whom it meant much more and though not by nature a patient person she never turned aside from anyone who needed her, and was always ready to give of her best.

The staff, Miss Aldis and Miss Tanner especially, were devoted to the school and to her, and were themselves splendid people. Monsieur and Madame Allègre, Miss Irvine, the music mistress, and many others in their turn, all did their very best for the school and her relations with them all were happy and in many cases they became personal friends and so continued even after the school came to an end.

During these years Theodore died in Australia, of acute paralysis which attacked him while he was aboard his ship. He was at once removed to a hospital at Freemantle and died that night. His wife had died of tuberculosis in 1904. Of the children the two boys, Frank and Charlie, had been left with her people and the little girl, Kitty, had been adopted at her mother's death by some people who were fond of her. Uncle John tried to get himself appointed guardian, but he had no grounds for appeal apparently. Kitty was brought up as a Roman Catholic and saw little more of her brothers. She corresponded with Addie, married and died quite young. The boys drifted away gradually, though Addie made every effort to keep in touch with them, writing and sending Christmas presents until they grew up and she heard no more from them. If they still live, they are now the only Semples of Addie's immediate kin, except for her cousin Bob's two grandsons who live near Liverpool.

I think Addie was happy in her Court House days, but she had financial difficulties and anxieties. Her instinct was to be lavish and give the very best. Perhaps the parents of her pupils did not always realise how good was the education she was giving their children; she never liked anything that savoured of self-advertisement. Her fees were not those of a fashionable boarding school and yet the Court House and grounds were not easy to

maintain without considerable expense and even the modest fees due were by no means always promptly paid. One parent, I remember, wrote in excuse for tardy payment that their summer holiday had been so expensive. Addie had no summer holiday that year.

As the neighbourhood grew more suburban, the boarding connection gradually fell off and she had to adopt expedients such as having foreign girls to stay in the house, learn English and take trips to London to see the sights. This meant extra work for her as it was she who gave the English lessons and arranged for their days in London. Miss Dowe joined the household and brought her own furniture to two rooms in one wing of the house and later two sisters, Miss Hare and Miss Dorothy Hare came to be inmates of the house. They all fell under Addie's spell but it must have been a strain on her and also meant more work and responsibility, though they were most considerate and Miss Dowe was most anxious to do anything she could for Addie. But it all meant claims on her attention and sympathy and no wonder that she used to get very tired in the evenings and if she had not been physically strong she would have broken down.

She still longed above everything to bring happiness to her father and persuaded him to come to live at the Court House. His last years there were peaceful and he took a kindly interest in her pupils and it was her reward to have him with her and make him happy. In 1909 when he was 83 an illness, painful at first, necessitated an operation from which he had not strength to recover. It was at the end of the summer term and the syringa was out and the acacia very tall and white against a blue sky as she walked in the garden while the operation was going on. He passed away in a thunderstorm in the evening and it seemed to her to be, as she said, "glorious". Such was her mood of exaltation, that relief from suffering had come. So long she had loved him and served him, but there was no thought for herself, only for his release from pain and weakness. But now she was left alone with her memories and the chief purpose of her life seemed to depart.

But she had little time to indulge in grief-fresh difficulties soon pressed on her in the following term. I think it was shortly before Christmas that the five servants who had seemed to be a contented group found the work not to their liking and departed in a body. Elizabeth, her faithful and excellent parlour maid, had left some time previously to nurse her invalid father in Yorkshire.

There were some good daily women available and with these she had to run the house with no-one there in the evening. Addie herself had never had much household experience and though everyone was anxious to help, she now had to manage much of a housemaid's work after a long day in school.

Some of the foreigners now came on the understanding that they should help in the house but it was an uncomfortable period which lasted until, after her father's death, Elizabeth returned, this time as cook. Elizabeth was most capable and a great help in dealing with the younger "dailies" but Addie was anxious that she should not have too much to do and was continually on the watch to help and make things as easy as possible.

Jack's mother had married again and her husband, Mr Ellis and she started market-gardening in Meopham, Kent, an out of the way little place, and though Mr Ellis was himself an excellent gardener and they both worked hard they found there were too many handicaps - want of good train connections for their produce and so on - and the experiment had, after a while, to be given up. While they were in Meopham Jack, now working in London, stayed at the Court House during the working week and went down to his mother for weekends. Jack was in the Territorials but did not at once go out at the outbreak of war in 1914 as he felt his duty to his mother should keep him in England and for a time did defence work in his own country, but as the need grew greater, Jack with the rest of his regiment felt the urgency of Kitchener's call and volunteered for foreign service. Neither his mother nor Addie tried to deter him, but it was a cruelly anxious time for both the women who loved him so dearly, the more so as Jack had never been very strong.

Their fears were all too soon realised. Jack went through, with his platoon, a terrible time as so many boys did in the beginning of the war, fighting against an enemy greatly superior in numbers and equipment. Jack was wounded and sent back to the Base Hospital. The wound itself was not a very serious one but he had not the strength to recover and died in a few days. Letters came from his sergeant, the commanding officer and the nurse, which must have made his mother and Addie very proud. His sergeant says "We had been in trenches and dug-outs, always being shelled for fifteen days on end without relief... When on Sunday May 2<sup>nd</sup> we were ordered to man some support trenches about one mile behind the firing line. This happened quietly enough and we improved the trenches on the Monday and Monday night. During the night the troops in the front line, about a mile in front, had orders to retire and the line we were in became the new firing line. Early Tuesday morning we saw the Germans advancing... our machine guns opened fire and did good work and this gave the Germans the position of our new line of trenches. They brought up a lot of guns and from 8am till about 6pm the same night we were subjected to an awful bombardment by shrapnel and high explosive shells. The men were getting knocked out like ninepins but we just had to hold on, grin and bear it. About 2pm Jack was wounded and I followed at 3pm. We lay in the trench until dusk when I walked back to the dressing station, helping another man, and the last I saw of Jack was him waiting to be removed on a stretcher... He was one of the best of fellows and his quaint humour often used to keep us laughing. His conduct in action was, like all the others, splendid."

There could be no letter from Captain Arbuthnot for he was wounded and died before Jack, but another letter, I imagine from a Lieutenant, spoke of Jack as of a quiet unassuming steadfast nature which he said "reminded me of Captain Arbuthnot and what more can I say of anyone!" The sister who worked in his ward thought he was going to do well, he was bright and cheerful all the time and looked forward to going home. He knew that his leg would probably need another operation but he "did not worry over that" and before he went for this second operation he said "be sure to make it as little as possible (she was writing for him to his mother) or she will worry over me".



The operation was quite successful but he evidently had not sufficient strength to pull round after. "He did not suffer pain" she wrote, "but just seemed to slip away. He gave me the kindest of looks just before he died, as much as to say 'Don't worry, I shall be alright'". His end was in keeping with his life, quiet, gentle and selfless. Addie had always been devoted to him from the time he was a little boy and he to her. Once when she spoke of her being old, "No" he said, "You may be old but you are young-hearted". Addie was delighted with this childish tribute and referred to it sometimes, for she herself never felt her age and was glad that she struck those that she cared for as indeed "young-hearted". Jack's death was a terrible blow to his mother and to Addie but it was his mother she thought of and again devoted herself to making up as far as possible to Flo for the rest of her life.

Later Flo and her husband came to live at the Lodge of the Court House and Addie was their strength and stay. Miss Aldis and Miss Tanner were both gone by now. Miss Aldis had married a man she had known for many years and went to the North to live and Miss Tanner was teaching at St Margaret's, Scarborough when the war broke out and later went with the Headmistress of the school to Grahamstown, South Africa, for I think three years. Addie must have missed them but when the staff was joined by Miss Spanton she found a new friend who was a great comfort to her and stayed with her till the end.

1920 - 1920

I am now coming to a period of trouble for several of our family. My own brother Guy, who had retired as he hoped into the country with his wife and daughter, was over military age but undertook work in London to free someone else for service. He undertook the management of a business in London, while Helen went into the country to look after goats and poultry. Her mother stayed in their Lincolnshire house and kept the home going. It was not a safe area by any means but she lived there alone with a little help from the village and carried on all the years of the war 1914-18.

The first Great War took my sister's eldest boy who was killed in his first charge, leading his men, when he was eighteen. Afterwards the government realised the folly of sending out such young officers, but the loss of life was terrible.

At the outbreak of war the "Inns of Court" had been billeted in Berkhamsted and my sister had her own son and two of his friends billeted on her. She made her house a real home to them and did everything she could for their comfort but it absorbed all her energy and when they had all gone to their final training in London she found she would have to go into hospital for an operation for displacement. The period in hospital was followed by a short spell in a convalescent home and Jock then used to go down to the Court House for short leaves. His sister Mary was then one of Addie's pupils. I took Pat and Jimmy away to Blyborough, Suffolk, supported by my friend Josephine Parver and later by Miss Barton of Coalbrookdale. When I took the

cottage I had not realised that it was in the route of the zeppelins and well remember the first evening when air raid wardens warned us that there must be a strict blackout and the cottage was unprovided with dark curtains. We pinned up dark tablecloths and managed somehow, and when we unpacked the boys' trunk found the contents all sticky with a broken bottle of syrup of figs, or some such compound.

We had two or three zeppelin raids but the little boys were not much perturbed. Jimmy wanted to know what the noise was and when I told him a zeppelin was approaching - trying to make it seem ordinary and unafrightening - he merely remarked "Is that all? At Hatfield (their preparatory school) we always had tea and biscuits when the zeppelins came", I do not remember Pat said anything. Even at that age he was silent in emergencies. When we returned in September it was the very day my sister had heard that Jock was 'missing believed killed'. She sent a friend to the station to tell me the news but I was not to tell the boys. I remember those awful hours when she tried to keep things going at teatime with enquiries about the holiday and I, who knew, had to help her carry on normally. Then came the agonising days when we tried to find out details, and at last realised, from letters, that he had been seen leading a charge and then that he had been seen to fall.

During the First World War I was teaching in the High School of Coalbrookdale. In a way it seemed strangely out of the war except for some disagreeable food - horrid margarine, bread with maize in it and so on-but I well remember the shock of Kitchener's death and then the rumours that we all heard of his not being really dead, and these we discussed and tried to believe. But on the whole the days seemed peaceful and we continued to have river picnics and take country walks and there was no wireless to disturb us, and at last in 1918 I made up my mind to leave and come to London where I should be nearer the centre of things. So I took the post of Senior Classical Mistress at Fulham County School and exchanged the rural scene for a huge school of over 600 girls, the result of amalgamating Chelsea School with Fulham. The war came to an end with the rejoicing of Armistice Day but we had a period of difficult times at school, put down to "the war". Then came the Influenza Epidemic which struck both staff and girls badly and those of us who did not have influenza had to carry on with diminished and demoralised classes and substitutes on the staff, all of whom seemed to be teachers of French and nothing else.

I very soon approached a breakdown and in 1921 had to seek less strenuous work and took a light post at the delightful school at West Runton near Cromer. But by half term the deferred breakdown occurred and I developed a high temperature and had to retire to bed till the end of the term when, my illness remaining somewhat mysterious, I managed to get back to Berkhamsted where my sister undertook to nurse me and glands developed with a constant high temperature. I will not dwell on the nightmare period with occasional visits to specialists and the constant attention of dear Dr Porter and the nursing of my sister, for whose kindness and efficiency I can never be sufficiently grateful. My brother came down and said gloomily "there can only be one end", but my sister never gave up hope. At last a gland was tested and

pronounced tubercular and the next stage began. I went to St Leonards where Dr Stallard undertook my care and I went to a nursing home for three months, and the next summer ( spent at the Court House. Tubercular glands are not infectious fortunately and my chest was never affected, but I was still an invalid and it was like Addie's goodness to have me in the house and add to her cares by devoting herself to my recovery. After breakfast in bed I spent my day resting in the house or garden harassed with continual asthma and great weakness. Addie of course had to be in school most of the day in term time but she always came to me when she could and in the summer holidays gave herself up to me. To those two people - my sister and Addie -I owe more than I can say.

At last, after more setbacks and experiments than I care to remember,! accepted the post of classical mistress at Hilton Road Diocesan School, Natal, and set out from the Court House on January 1 1924. During my three years at St Annes my brother died of pernicious anaemia. We had said goodbye at his nursing home in London and we knew it was for the last time. He recovered enough to go home where he was devotedly nursed by his wife, but after much weakness he died. He was a good brother to me and a devoted son to his mother.

During those three years Addie's letters were my chief link with home for she wrote regularly and so did I. Addie was always a faithful correspondent and many others besides myself found great comfort in her letters.

After I returned from South Africa in January 1928 my next permanent post was that of classical mistress at Beverley High School, Yorkshire, where I spent five happy years, getting to know the Wolds and Dales and enjoying my teaching until the deafness which had been steadily increasing made teaching very difficult. Miss Rossiter, my headmistress, valued my services in spite of it and I was able to feel of use still, but when she resigned after 25 years, her successor did not continue her policy and I applied for a disability pension on grounds of deafness and left Beverley sadly in 1933.

1930 -1934

In 1930 Addie had given up Sandwell School: Woodside Park was becoming more and more urbanised, the school was dwindling in numbers and was now for younger children only and it seemed best to give up what was now becoming too great a burden to maintain. Mrs Hunter, Miss Spanton, Miss Irvine and others of the staff were ready to retire after years of loyal and devoted work and Addie herself felt the time had come. For the last time the gardens of the Court House were made ready for a garden party, but this one was different from the many garden parties enjoyed in the past, for it was a farewell party given for the old girls and the past and present staff, and there was a presentation gift to the headmistress they had loved and admired so long. It was a great reunion and a cheque for over £100 was presented to

Addie as a token of love and remembrance. Dennis took photographs of the groups in the garden and very charming they were.

The house and school were sold and the purchasers tried to run it as a junior school for another few years, then it was sold as a building site. The Court House itself was pulled down and a block of flats set up and the past seemed wiped out though it still remains in the memories of some who loved it. And what of Addie herself? She and Cousin Ada decided to join forces and took a house in Tunbridge Wells with Elizabeth to run it. I was still at Beverley when the Court House was given up but as my increasing deafness led to my applying for a disability pension I was invited to join the other two cousins where I lived with them until Cousin Ada's death of cerebral haemorrhage. Mrs Ellis (Jack's mother) had died in 1932 and Addie must have felt that she was the only one left of her generation, for I was 15 years younger and could not share the memories of their youth and the events at Parliament Street.

I so often wish now that I had asked Addie more about those early days, but she did not easily talk about the past. Cousin Ada was always the one for reminiscences. She had an excellent memory and had kept her diaries for 50 years without a break. It was a great pleasure to her to dip into them and revive her memories. She had often said that we were at liberty to read her diaries when she had gone but this was against all Addie's instincts. After Cousin Ada's death she read a little of them more, I think, as a tribute to Cousin Ada than because she wished to read what she felt should be private. She told me to read what I liked of them and then they were burnt. Cousin Ada did not live long after the move to Tunbridge Wells. She became ill suddenly and was struck down in the night - alone, her hand on the bell. After that she seemed not to be conscious, though she did not die at once.

It was a horribly sad time - we were assured that she did not suffer and that her convulsive movements were not conscious but I still wondered. Elizabeth, practical and unemotional, was a great standby and when the end came, performed the last rites but she felt very lonely when that part of the house was deserted for Addie chiefly used the drawing room upstairs. It was a relief when a purchaser turned up for the house and we could get away from the painful associations.

Addie was determined not to buy another house and my friend Miss Read with whom I went to stay in Wokingham took me long drives in Berkshire and neighbouring counties prospecting for a house to let. Her old father was fond of motoring and we had many interesting tours. At last we found a house to be let - Church Farm, Chilbolton, Hampshire. The owner worked many farms and was willing to let this with the farm work going on round it and the church next door giving its blessing. It was a square brick house, ancient but modernised to some extent and standing in the village road. We fell in love with it and arranged for Addie to come over and meet the owner - Mr Baylis - and our life there began in the autumn of 1934.

This was the beginning of another phase in Addie's life for the time at Tunbridge Wells may, I think, be regarded as rather a melancholy transition period. After such a long time spent as headmistress, during which she had gained respect and affection from staff and girls, and had exercised great influence over so many children and young people, she had always been busy and too often overworked. Now she was to live in the very different surroundings of a quiet country village occupied by retired gentle people, villagers and the typical institutions of church, women's institute, infant welfare centre and so on. There was the one village shop to which Elizabeth used to make pilgrimages for a little diversion. She disliked country life and the dark evenings without street lamps and craved after what she obscurely felt was civilised life.

I always loved the country and felt at home in it, especially as both Chilbolton and Wherwell, two villages separated by the river Test, were places of great beauty and interest. I loved walking over the downs and rambling through fields and woods to some distant beauty spot from which I would return by our country bus from Andover or Stockbridge.

Addie was not up to more than short walks. She found the hills trying and had never been a walker but she soon got to know the people of the neighbourhood who were kind and friendly. She and I undertook the Infant Welfare Centre when invited by the vicar's wife. Neither of us knew much about babies but she talked to the mothers, superintended the tea and received the visiting nurse.

It was a very different life for her but her great gift for dealing with people and showing interest and sympathy soon made her much loved by the village mothers and popular in the neighbourhood. Anyone who was ill or in trouble knew they could count on her. During our time at Chilbolton I can think of several people who found her a true friend, especially one who a few years after we came developed cancer - a return of the malady she had thought impossible. I did what I could but my deafness was a bar to visiting the sick and it was Addie's gift of consolation and sympathy which really helped. Chilbolton was a very different place to me after Miss Macleod's death for I was very fond of her.

Addie had not the same love for Church Farm that I had, and Elizabeth hated it - rats and blackbeetles were certainly drawbacks though the beetles only appeared in early summer and the rats were briefly in the barns. When a 'semi-bungalow' at the other end of the village was on the market, she bought it and moved in and the life in 'Kitcombe' began. It had a nice long garden and the Downs behind made walks possible until the Americans swooped down to build an aerodrome there. There was much less room at Kitcombe than at Church farm and as I felt - mistakenly perhaps - that my sister needed me at Berkhamsted, in 1937 I came to 14 Greenway, only a few minutes from my sister where I hoped I should be able to help a little. But I often came down to stay with Addie and she also had friends to stay. Our friendship was not

broken and from then began the series of weekly letters from her which meant so much to me, especially when I found my sister was not a very easy person to help and preferred her own ways. Addie was asked to take in some officers from the aerodrome, and the two attics which formed the upper storey of Kitcombe was given up to them. A Mr Gwyn who was attached to the aerodrome, though not a combatant, came with his wife and made a flat up there for some time and I felt she would not be alone, especially as Mrs Gwyn, like so many others, became very attached to Addie.

After so many years of service, Elizabeth was getting tired out and Addie felt she should be with her own people at Blackpool and arranged with good temporary women to come in to help. But the Gwyns were not permanent and when they went, Addie still thought she could live in the house alone with daily help.

Then came the fatal Christmas when she had expected Mrs Gwyn to come. When she wrote to say she could not come down until after, Addie decided it was too late to ask anyone else to stay, accepted an invitation to dinner in Chilbolton and thought all would be well. But on New Year's Day, getting up at her usual early hour, she fell and could not get up. We never knew whether it was a stroke, but she never lost consciousness but just felt incapable of getting up and did not get any help until about an hour later when she was able to attract the attention of the postman who fetched help. Addie was taken at once to Andover hospital and her friends were informed. She did not stay in hospital long for she gradually recovered from the shock and soon became anxious to return home.

The D'Oyleys had come over and were running the house and visiting her at the hospital. It was a terribly cold winter and I was not well, but I came down as soon as I could and she seemed to be making a good recovery. But it was always impossible to keep Addie an invalid and before she was nearly strong enough she was trying to do far too much, not only going through her letters and sorting out her bureau with our help, but also doing household jobs in the early morning. Again she broke down by getting up early and found herself unable to get back to her bedroom. This was I suppose a second stroke for she found it very difficult to move her limbs the few yards from the kitchen to her bedroom and it would have been impossible but for her sheer strength of will to move her dragging steps even when supported by the D'Oyleys. Again the journey to the hospital and the gradual recovery of the use of her feet, a memory of strength in weakness on which it is too painful to dwell.

Then after a few weeks the slow journey in a car to some friends who had offered to take her. She might have recovered there but they grew nervous and a nursing home had to be found at very short notice, at Chandler's Ford where I went with her and stayed a few days till I could safely leave her.

They were very kind and capable, though like all nursing homes, short-handed, and at last she was well enough to be taken to the sister of one of

her friends whom she had made at Chilbolton, Miss Penning with whom she lived till her death two and a half years later.

I wish I could give a faithful picture of those two and a half years which, quiet and uneventful as they seemed, were to my mind the crown of my cousin's life. She was with friends who quickly learnt to love her and take her to their hearts. The Fennings were an affectionate family and she was soon regarded as one of them and they were always glad to take her to any little festivities for which she was fit enough and to understand when she did not feel up to expeditions.

She had many of the trials of old age, which she bore with most stoical patience - failing sight and impaired hearing were gradually increasing disabilities but she made as little of these discomforts as possible and took the most vivid and sympathetic interest in the lives of her friends and their relatives. She delighted too in the visits of old friends to whom the Fennings always gave kindly welcome and wrote to those she could not see, many letters not sparing herself the fatigue it often cost her. It was as if she put self away and thought continuously of others. Her weekly letters to me, and mine to her, drew us closer than the former day by day companionship had done and were my greatest pleasure, though sometimes I could tell by the writing that she was not so well - hands stiff or eyes troubling her.

She never seemed to have any fear of death but during that last period she grew weary of life and even hoped the waiting would not be too long. She desired to slip away quietly and her wish was granted.

One Sunday evening they had all listened to the news; she said she was tired and would get ready for bed and come back in her dressing gown to hear the epilogue. Miss Fenning came in when she was in bed to see that she was comfortable and turned off the light. Next morning she came in to bring Addie early tea and found her lying peacefully on her side apparently asleep. She touched her and realised that she had passed away. The doctor was summoned but there was no doubt that the spirit had fled. The end came as she had always hoped.

So many people grow a little querulous and exacting in their old age, but with Addie it was very different. Any asperities of her earlier vigorous years were softened and she became more and more peaceful and selfless.

Few people make fresh friends in their later years but in Addie's case many people, right up to the end, came to love and prize her and of all the friends of her long life, she lost not one. That is why I should like the younger generation who saw little of her to know how she thought of them and loved them, sending them birthday gifts and wishing to hear anything I could tell her in my letters of their doings.

Remember this, Ann and Catharine and others of your generation, that she loved you as persons and treasured news about you all. When you are old, may your lives grow into beauty as hers did!