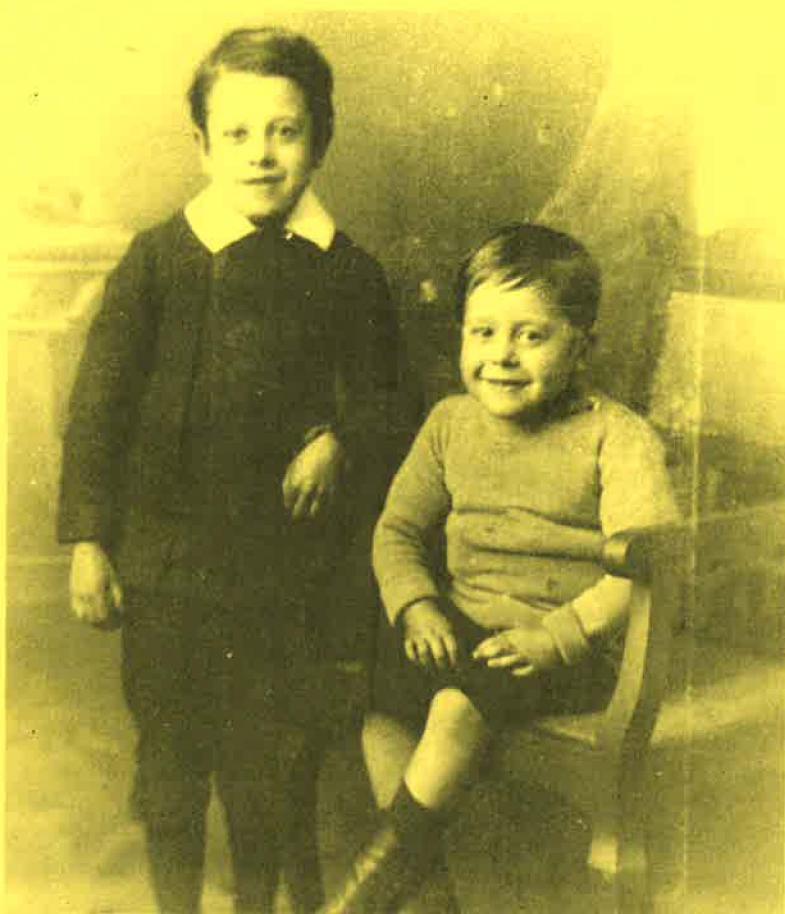
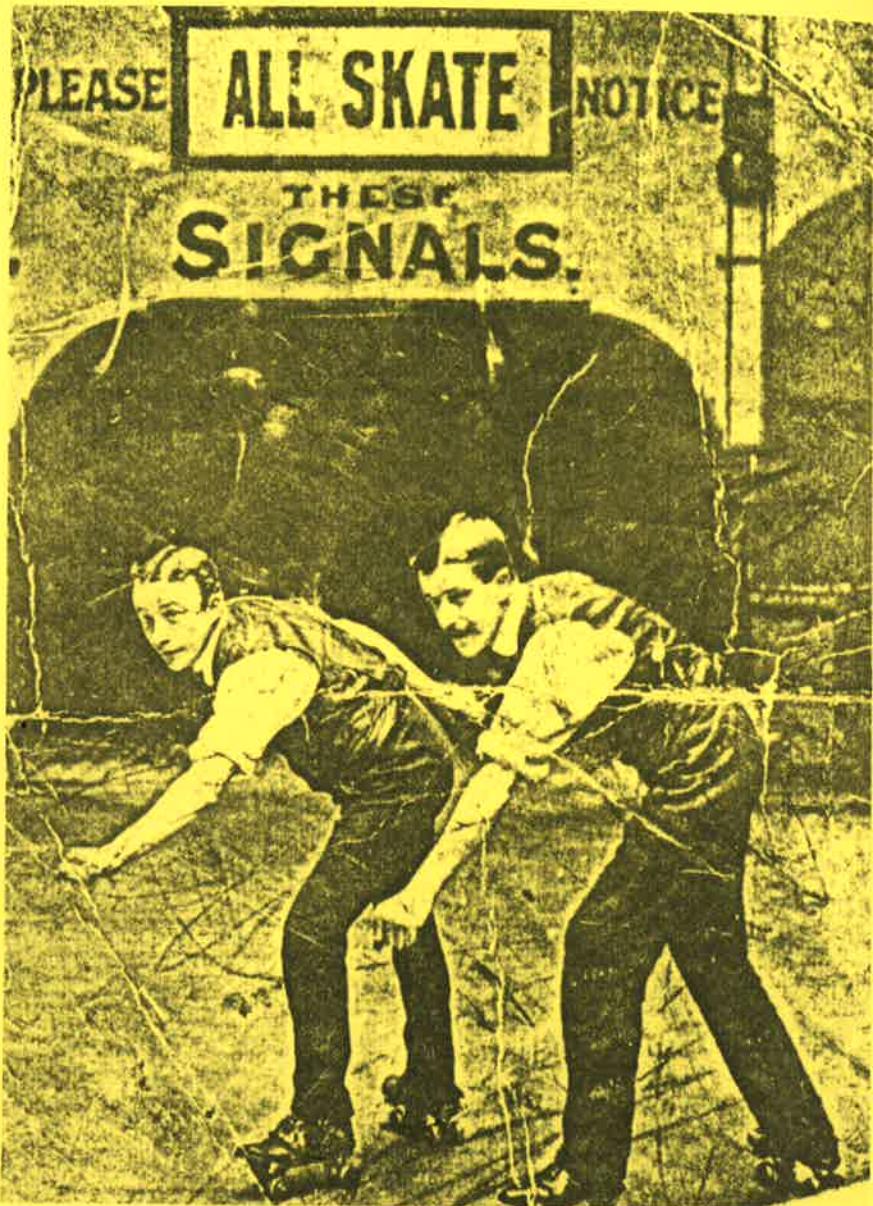


# **FROM HULME ALL BLESSINGS FLOW**



**A Collection of Manchester Memories  
by Harry Watkin**

**£2.25**



My father (left) and colleague at the Wilmslow Road Skating Rink

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# FROM HULME ALL BLESSINGS FLOW

## Foreword

It has taken a long time for these recollections to appear in this form. The idea was born some time in my twenties when I found that I could recall incidents and mental pictures of my childhood, the clarity and detail of which often surprised my friends, who seemed to have retained only a vague impression of their early days. I started to make notes of these memories to ensure that as I got older they would not disappear into oblivion. And why did I bother to do this? Nostalgia, pure and simple.

This noting of memories continued for a long time, over some years in fact. As they occurred to me (and this could happen at any time and in any place) I would scribble down a few relevant words on any available scrap of paper, such as the margin of a newspaper, wrapping paper or a tram ticket. Back at home I simply dropped them in a drawer in my bedroom. As they accumulated, hundreds of them, I made several ineffectual attempts to arrange them in a rough chronological order, packing them into a large empty shoe box.

But eventually I lost interest in this recording and storing and the boxful of scribbled notes lay neglected and untouched. Many years passed by. I married and had two sons.

As the boys were growing up I often wondered if, when they were older, they would be interested in reading how their Dad lived when he was a boy in a time and environment far removed from theirs. So out came the memories and I decided to present them in narrative form. In doing so I realised that many of them would never have been recalled if I hadn't made a record all those years ago.

When I had finished I had some semblance of a story which had brought me to the age of fourteen and my leaving school. But the momentum of the exercise, which I found to be most absorbing, carried me further and eventually I concluded it with my twenty-first birthday. Those extra seven years, being relatively recent, I found easy to recall.

The title? Well we lived in Hulme and that was one of Grannie's sayings.

## Chapter 1

I was born at 102 Booth Street, Hulme (pronounced "Whom" by most of its inhabitants), one of Manchester's poorer districts, and I was the second of my mother's ten bonny babies. Helping me into this world was Gertie Hamer from across the road, the street's midwife, nurse and mentor. She ushered all the Watkin children into the world and was present when four of them left it. A noble lady, though she gave children the impression that if they were not brand new or ill she wished neither to see nor hear them. Very stern, very prim, very clean. As the years went by and I accumulated more sisters and brothers, her visits to our house grew more and more frequent. I sometimes wonder if she was ever paid for her ministrations. I doubt it. Well, not by us.

I was christened at the local Unitarian Mission in Renshaw Street where Dad's family went; well, all except Dad, who was the black sheep of the family. The head of the mission, the Reverend A W Timmis, was my godfather.

Our Jack (names of brothers and sisters were always prefaced by "our"), the firstborn, was vaccinated against smallpox but despite recommendations from Mrs Hamer and Doctor Chapman none of the rest of us was inoculated because Dad didn't believe in it; influenced, no doubt, by his pals in Jimmy Allen's beerhouse. I therefore remained totally unscarred until quite recently.

When I was eleven years old, in a pneumonia crisis, I was "given up". It was the first of many crises through which Mother's children would have to battle.

During my first year Manchester United won the FA Cup and to celebrate it Dad had Mother dress me completely in red, the club's main colour, and he carried me around showing me off in various beerhouses.

What I have recounted so far was beyond my actual memory but was told often enough by Mother to be accepted as second-hand memory. I will continue with what I believe are the earliest incidents to make, for some inexplicable reason, an indelible impression on my memory.

I am in a bed in the front bedroom. Alone. I start to play. The bed-clothes consist of old coats, waistcoats and other garments. I put them on in turn, pretending to be various people, talking out loud all the time. I keep falling down as the mattress wobbles under my feet and also because the coats are big and heavy and awkward to handle. I feel cold between changes and am glad when it is the turn for a warm coat to be put on. I wonder how old I would have been? About three?

Another memory is of a visit to what must have been the Hulme Hippodrome to see - again a guess - a pantomime. Someone carries me along Council Street and Mother is walking with us. Next, we are ascending a long ramp which leads to the gallery, the "gods". The sloping floor frightens me. Up in the gods there are no actual seats, just a series of very large, wooden steps which are wide enough for feet and bottoms of the sitters and legs of the passers-

4 by. Again I am frightened of our falling down into the deep pit, at the bottom of which I can see the heads of a lot of tiny people. Finally for that occasion, I am looking down on to a stage where a lady is walking around as she sings. The people near us, and Mother, join in with her singing "Oh, You Beautiful Doll". Yes, definitely, it was that song.

And my earliest memory of that very important article, the family carriage, which was destined to receive a real bashing as the years went by for it had to outlast all the Watkin kids. Mabel and I are in it outside a big Stretford Road greengrocer's named Stonehouse's. It is dark and we are fascinated by the hissing, spluttering naphthalene flares which illuminate the shop front. Mother and Grannie, wearing black shawls on their heads, are stacking vegetables around us and on our legs, which we think is very funny and exciting. Yes, I am going to see a lot of that carriage for many years to come.

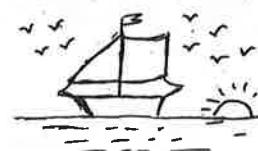
When I was five years old I was enrolled at Vine Street Primary School for Infants, the first one to be opened by the Manchester School Board. On my first day at school, like many other children before and since, I went home during the first playtime. I was reluctant to return but eventually agreed to do so when my mother let me take my dummy, which I had only recently discarded and was still to hand. She pinned it to my shirt, underneath my jersey, and I was thus able to have an occasional quick suck when no-one was looking. I carried it there for a week or two before finally giving it up.

I went to Vine Street School for two years and enjoyed it. We learned the alphabet by chanting "A for Apple, B for Ball, C for Cat, D for Dog, E for Egg, F for Fish", and so on as the teacher pointed to each letter and its object; these were crayoned on a long roll of paper and slung over the blackboard. We wrote with slate pencils on small, framed pieces of slate. A series of flowers drawn on a blackboard was copied time after time, often enough to be imprinted on my memory. Here are the sketches we copied. Of course, the names were not put on the blackboard for we were only beginning to learn to read.



Crocus Pansy Daisy Tulip Buttercup Daffodil Snowdrop Rose

Later came more advanced work. This one was called "Moses in the Bulrushes". I thought the angular things were ducks' heads but later learned they were reeds.



And another sketch:  
"I Saw a Ship a-Sailing". We all filled the sky with birds. They looked so real and were easy to draw.

We made Chinese lanterns from squares of coloured paper. These were made by folding them in half then making a series of cuts from the fold to within half an inch of the opposite edge. They were opened again, rolled to form a cylinder and the meeting edges gummed together. Cotton was looped through holes in the top edge and as they hung and swung from lengths of string around the classroom I thought they were beautiful, like bits of fairyland floating in the air.



A welcome part of each school day was the marching out of the playground into our classrooms at the start of the morning and afternoon sessions, to the accompaniment of the piano played by Miss Rudge or Miss Royal. And even better were the weekly singing sessions held in the main hall when all five classes joined in concerted effort, conducted by the headmistress, Miss Prickle (actually Miss Brickhill), again with the piano playing.

Some of the songs which we learned I would recall years later and sing to my younger brothers and sisters, and many years after that to my own sons. They include one in which we played on imaginary musical instruments whilst singing lines such as "Rig-jig-bum goes the big brass drum", "Root-toot-toot goes the little flute" and so on. Another one, very lovely, which moved me deeply and still does, started with:

*Where the pools are bright and deep,  
Where the grey trout lies asleep,  
Up the river and over the lea,  
That's the way for Billy and me.*

One day we were asked to bring an eggshell from home. At school a little soil and a flower seed would be placed in it, the shell



Vine Street School for Infants. Manchester's first Board School  
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would be painted, put on the classroom window sill and a watch kept on it to observe its growth. I asked Mother for an eggshell and Dad, for a joke, made two small holes in an egg then sucked out the contents. I was presented with a complete but empty eggshell to take to school. Well, I didn't want to take it like that but couldn't disobey my father, who insisted I must hand it to Miss Royal intact. So I carried the silly thing under my jersey, miserable, knowing that Teacher wouldn't understand and would think I was a bit daft.

I got as far as Moran's chip shop on Vine Street and stopped. I was afraid of going to school and I stood in the shop doorway, miserable. Mr Moran must have noticed me and eventually he came out and asked what I was waiting for. When I told him he said I need worry no longer as he was a friend of my father, and so saying he knocked the top off my eggshell. I ran on to school with the sensible-looking thing nestling carefully in my hands. After school, when Dad learned about the incident, he called Mr Moran "an interfering old fool", and he didn't know Dad at all.

Vine Street School occupied a triangular plot, the playground taking up a large part of one angle with its two walls meeting at a long, narrow point. Into that corner the refuse blew and collected and it always seemed dark and gloomy. The lavatories were towards that end but were used as little as possible because it was believed that the walls were slowly closing in and would one day trap someone - for ever.

Now back to home affairs. Every day Mother visited her mother, whom we called Grannie and who lived a few minutes' walk away in Trent Place, which was a cul-de-sac off Booth Street and contained four very small, primitive cottages. Grannie's was in a corner and could be described as a "none-up and two-down" house, for although at one time it had a useable upstairs bedroom, the stairway hole had been boarded over. The "stairs" were still there, though they were nothing more than a board fixed vertically to the wall with holes cut in to facilitate climbing up and down.

Downstairs, first, was the parlour into which one stepped directly from the street. This was Grannie's bedroom. She slept on an ottoman, a low, upholstered sofa concealing a box in which she kept a little bedding and clothing, for there was no other place in the house for storing such things - no drawers, cupboards nor shelves. A chair and a wall gas bracket were the other features of the room.

From there one went into the living-room-cum-kitchen-cum-wash-house-cum-Grandad's bedroom. It was infested with black beetles which, as I played on the floor, I could see scuttling along the corners of the walls and in and out of holes. In one corner was a wash boiler with a fire hole underneath it and by the window was a stone slab, one end of which rested on a slopstone with a small gas ring standing on the other end. There was a table near the window and a rocking chair in which Grandad sat and slept every night. The main thing in the room, however, was Grannie's treadle sewing machine on which she worked six days a week, for Grandad didn't work and her earnings kept them.

The back door of the house which led out of this room opened on to an enclosed square bounded by the back yards of many other

houses. It was used as a playground by the kids, who were a nuisance to Grannie as she had no protecting back yard wall; most of the small panes of glass in her window were broken and she had patched them with brown paper, stuck with condensed milk.

When we were six years of age we had to leave Vine Street School and were given the choice of going to either Upper Jackson Street or Embden Street School, the former being the more popular. A few days before we finished we were told that if we wished to go to Embden Street we must bring a letter from our mothers. I would have liked to have gone to Embden Street but I didn't tell Mother about the letter. How could I ask her to write to my teacher when they didn't know each other? What could she write about? She didn't go anywhere and Teacher wouldn't want to know about family ailments or troubles. So the letter was never mentioned and I moved to Upper Jackson Street Elementary School for Boys.

Round about the age of seven I had not made any regular friend in Booth Street where I lived and I would wander around the streets neighbouring Trent Place, playing with whom I could. With Edgar Jeffries, who lived in a vacant shop, I spent many hours walking up and down the main Stretford Road collecting discarded tram tickets, only to throw them away on returning home.

Two major attractions on Stretford Road were the Funneries and the Penny Bazaar. The former would now be called an amusement arcade. A "chucker-out" was employed here who was skilled at quickly detecting penniless kids, who would be ushered out before they had time to stand and watch anyone at a machine. I once found, just outside the Funneries, a metal disc about the size of a halfpenny and decided to use it on one of the machines. Foolishly I put it into one in which the coin was continuously in view as it tumbled down between the pins. Of course, the chucker-out spotted it, grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and yanked me outside. I was banned from there, for he didn't forget faces.

The Penny Bazaar was an early Marks and Spencer's store. It was simply a long, open shop with counters running the full length of the two walls with a wide passage between them. The assistants stood behind the counters with their backs to the wall. Someone told me that by sneaking along the counter and stooping low, it was quite easy to reach up and take things, unseen by the assistants. I decided to try it. I had no qualms about its being wrong or what the consequences might be if I were caught doing this. I don't recall what particular conditions I regarded as suitable for the deed; a dark or foggy evening perhaps; a busy or a quiet shop. The moment duly arrived when I bent over very low and stealthily shuffled in. I moved along, my hand over the front edge of the long counter but my searching fingers encountering nothing but metal and glass. I happened to turn and glance towards the opposite counter and realised that not only had I been seen but one lady was lifting the flap, obviously making for me. And she caught me and started smacking me about the head. I dodged her and fled, feeling disappointed at leaving empty-handed.

One day I was playing with our Jack on the steps of the Welsh Chapel in Medlock Street. The top landing was about seven feet above street level and we were climbing the steps and then dropping from the landing. Our Jack dared me to jump down. I got

to the top and looked down but it seemed frightfully high. But some boys had stopped to watch me so I had to carry out the dare and I jumped. As I hit the ground a pain shot up my legs, I fell forward on to my face and I started to cry. A crowd gathered round, there was quite a commotion and people were asking what the trouble was. Then something delightful and, to me, almost unbelievable happened. Pushing his way through the crowd came - my father. He asked our Jack what had happened, clouted him, and then picked me up and carried me home. It was wonderful. He spoke kindly to me. I smelt cigarette smoke on his clothes, which was Dad's smell. And I loved him for that never-to-be-forgotten occasion. Two painful ankles were of little consequence.

One of the games I liked best was hide and seek, or "'ide", as we called it. I was a fast runner and had an excellent eye for good hiding places. One evening, as we were playing, I ran from the den in our street and turned into Freeman Street, where I saw a splendid spot to hide; behind three steps leading up to someone's front door. There, I dropped to the ground and lay full length, squeezing into the corner and occasionally peeping round the bottom step. I was lying partially on the cellar grid which had an arched opening at ground level. All of sudden, in easing my position, I rolled through the gap and fell down into the well below the grid. I found myself up against a window which was very dirty and which had obviously not been opened for a very long time. I crouched there feeling perplexed and rather silly and no matter how I tried I just couldn't climb out again.

It grew dark and I became frightened and started calling out but no one came. After a while I saw a glimmer of light from a candle in the dark cellar. I knocked on the window, heard a scream and the light vanished. A moment later the light appeared again and a man's voice demanded, "Who's there?" "I fell down your grid," I shouted. After a lot of banging from the cellar a man prised open the window and I scrambled out on to a table, dirty and frightened. The man bawled at me and told me off for scaring his wife. I ran out and home. I don't recall the reception I got; most likely a clout for staying out late.

I was about seven when I got involved with a boy who must have been struck with wanderlust. His name was Willie Howe and he had recently come to live in our street. He was a strange, quiet, rather surly lad much bigger and older than I. Without friends, he seemed to take a liking to me because I would wander around with him, saying very little, just walking and walking. Sunday, late afternoon, he would call for me or join me in the street. "Coming for a walk?" he would beg and off we would go. First, and always, to the town centre via All Saints. Many main roads led from there and we would choose one of those leading north to north-east, these being long winding ones, finding their way through densely populated, poorer districts.

On and on we would go, stopping now and then to look in a shop window. Then as the light began to fail I would feel frightened and worried and would suggest we turn back and make for home. By this time we were usually hopelessly lost and by alternately walking then running would hope to find our way back as quickly as possible. Short cuts would be tried, these often taking us along canal banks, under dark railway bridges, across bleak

crofts and factory yards, access to which meant squeezing through or climbing over railings and gates. We sometimes asked people to direct us towards home, now and again being given coppers for tram fare. Arriving home I would get the expected clout and telling off, a round of bread and off to bed. This routine was repeated Sunday after Sunday, with no attempt by Mother to question or stop me. With fresh enthusiasm and an appetite for fresh streets to conquer, I would wander off again with Willie. He stopped calling for me. They had flitted, suddenly; a common thing in those days.

Grannie sometimes took me to the local pictures, the Bridgewater Hall in Cambridge Street. It was a rather primitive place, the seating consisting of long wooden forms, and the screen rippled and billowed slightly when side doors were opened. Even at the advanced age of six or seven I would be carried past the paybox so Grannie didn't have to pay for me.

As far as I can recall the programmes consisted solely of short films; "drammers", as Grannie called them, comedies and Cowboys and Indians. Serials had not yet arrived. There was a very fat comedian named John Bunny who was very popular but didn't make me laugh. I preferred Pimple. There was one incident which I must have thought so funny that I couldn't forget it: Pimple eventually discovers the North Pole, which is a frozen post about six feet tall. He saws it down, places it in a wooden box and ships it home, only to find on opening the box that the Pole has melted away.

One film terrified me, the fear and horror lasting a long time. It was most likely a version of Dante's Inferno for there was a large, deep pit with flames and smoke shooting out all over the place and people frantically trying to scramble out but being forked back by devils with horns and tails. Although I kept looking down, it was impossible to resist an occasional peep.

Another one, a drammer, had one incident which horrified me. A man had been kidnapped and taken to a museum by the villains. Rescuers were seen approaching so in order to hide the poor man, the baddies bound him round and round with strips of linen, leaving clear only his nostrils so he could breathe. They then left this apparent mummy leaning against the wall in a corner, so fooling the would-be rescuers. It left me with a feeling of sick horror each time I recalled the scene.

Mother and Grannie regarded the people who lived in the smaller streets leading off Booth Street as being a little lower than us on the social scale. Sheffield Street and Disley Street were very narrow and grimy and had washing lines permanently strung across the street, making the passing of horses and carts most difficult on washdays. Doorstep rows were common. Women - it was always women - cursed and blackguarded each other from the security of their own doorsteps. Barefoot children played around and fought and now and again gangs of older boys battled with each other. To me they were men, although they were only about fourteen or fifteen.

The would arm themselves with broom handles or poles and about a dozen or so would run down a neighbouring street shouting "Ow-ooo! Ow-ooo!" cracking their poles on front doors, lamp-posts, occasionally on windows, and woe betide any unfortunate lad who

happened to be in their path. They would dash along the length of the street then around into their own. After mustering their forces and courage, back they would charge into the enemy camp. By this time some defenders would have assembled and armed themselves and the "pole fights", as we called them, would start. Whacking each other on heads, backs and legs, but not viciously, they were ever eager to break off and run. There was much banter and laughter from the onlookers and policemen were never around, or wanted; a lot of fuss and noise and definitely no broken heads.

Mingling with the war cry of "Ow-ooo!" one heard "Napoo! Napoo!", which Grannie said had been brought over from France by our Tommies. (This was during the middle years of the First World War.) The newspapers were reporting incidents of Napoo gangs roaming the streets at night with the sole purpose of waylaying girls and cutting off their long hair and plaits. So Grannie told me.

Now a little about my mother and father. Mother was small, plump and had long black hair which she sometimes formed into two rolls, one on each side of her head. This was the fashion and she spent a little time doing this only on Saturday nights when she was going to the beerhouse. She did not possess a hat or coat until I was in my teens. When going out she wore a black woollen shawl. I suppose she never went anywhere of sufficient importance to justify more than that. Although her vocabulary was rather limited and full of Hulme expressions, she spoke with a refined accent sometimes mimicked by Dad, which annoyed her intensely.

Dad was a few inches taller than Mother, was of medium build and had thin sandy hair which had been very red when he was a boy. He always wore a navy blue suit and, when outside, a cap. Throughout his life his clothes looked old and well-worn, but he was very tidy and clean and his boots shone, for he wouldn't go out until he had spent a long time polishing them. He went to Embden Street School in Hulme and was a clever but unruly boy, said his mother, Grandma (as distinct from Grannie).

Dad had two jobs during the early years of my life, first as an instructor and repair man at the Wilmslow Road Skating Rink and then as a carter's mate at the Calico Printers' Association in Whitworth Street, Manchester. For the first two years of their married life they lived in Dorrington Street and Jack was born there. From there they moved to Booth Street. Though only round the corner it was a decided improvement on Dorrington Street, the house being bigger and the road wider.

Grannie and Grandad were Mr and Mrs Chinn. She was small and plump and had a perpetually red face. She always wore black clothes which included a shiny blouse and skirt and an apron with a large front pocket. Like mother, she wore a black woollen shawl outdoors.

Grandad was tall and thin and always had a stubby chin for he trimmed his whiskers with scissors. He used to sit on their front doorstep, snipping away, holding a bit of mirror and watching the world go by. He wore faded trousers and a brown cardigan which he called a ganzy. His outdoor wear included a long fawn gaberdine raincoat, a white muffler and a faded pot hat. He didn't work and I think he was consumptive for he reported regularly to a hospital and had a free supply of Scott's Emulsion

and jars of cod liver oil and malt. They also provided small, round, cardboard boxes coated inside with a tar-like substance. We kids never touched them, being a little scared and mystified. They were "Grandad's Boxes".

He was kind, thoughtful and affectionate. Toffees given to him by friends were saved for us and distributed with lots of fuss and fun. Grannie never showed any affection for him nor spoke kindly of him. His first name was Henry but she always referred to him as "Chinnie", and likewise called my dad "Watkin", never Johnnie or Jack as others did. Much later in life I learned that Grandad was not my mother's father. Grannie occasionally spoke about her first husband, vaguely and sometimes contradictorily. He was Spanish then Portuguese; a barrister then a solicitor. I found out that his name was De Fretas and my mother's full name Florence Violet Eugenie De Fretas.

Booth Street was a long, wide, minor thoroughfare, its traffic consisting mainly of horse-drawn lorries and carts, heavy, steam-driven traction engines and bicycles. We would stand and watch the traction engines pass; they were so big and noisy, deafening as they trundled along, their trailers loaded with sacks of grain destined for one of the nearby breweries in either Renshaw Street or Warde Street.

The Swales Brewery in Warde Street kept the neighbourhood bathed in its warm, sweet smell. It was situated at a spot known as the Junction, so named because it was the hub from which six streets



The house in Dorrington Street (left), where our Jack was born  
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radiated. The brewery was surmounted by a tower which had a clock with four faces. The Junction clock was the Big Ben of Hulme for there was no wireless then and Junction time was Hulme time.

As the engine-trailers passed they often left a train of grain which provided tasty pickings for pigeons which swarmed over the streets. Those missed by the birds would lodge between the stone setts and in the spring come up as grass. We would sometimes pick and eat this for we knew it was good for us, coming from grain.

There were sixteen houses on each side of Booth Street, all rented, without any obvious maintenance during the twenty-odd years I lived there except for one exciting, unannounced, and audience-attracting job by two house painters who grained and varnished about a dozen front doors and windows, including ours. A visit by Royalty could hardly have surpassed this as a spectacle. Something actually happening in Booth Street! Workmen to watch and admire, ladders to sneak up whenever possible, paint to sniff and enjoy with great gusto.

I think there was a little conceit shown when kids who lived opposite invited us over to sit on their front door steps. There were two or three high steps on which half a dozen of us could be comfortably seated, whereas our side could boast only one and a flat. Some of those houses on the other side had attics, making wonderful dens, we heard, but I never saw the inside of any.

In our street front doorsteps, the surrounding flags and sometimes the window sills were washed and coloured with Donkey stones, brown, white or cream, each house having its own permutation. Our top step was white, the one below, level with the surrounding flags, was brown and a few nearby flags were cream. It had always been so - I wonder who started it? Some very houseproud women would stone right to the edgings.

The iron cellar and coal grids were blackleaded. Most front doors were kept open all day, weather permitting. Women stood on their front doorsteps watching passers-by and hoping for a neighbourly gossip, sometimes by shouting to each other but generally carried on by groups of two or three at a door with arms folded underneath their turned-up aprons. One saw very little of the men, who sneaked in and out of their homes as though it was indecent to be seen in their own street.

Our house was in the middle of the row and the bit of wall between us and next door was always our games den with cricket stumps permanently chalked on it. When it was dark the lamp-post a little further along was used. We would lounge around it, climb it as we discussed the next game, swing out from the arm and drop as far out as possible. It was our nighttime den.

We welcomed the occasional arrival of the diggin's, watching with interest as the men roped off an area of road, dug up the setts, tossed them into heaps and finally got to the clay. We would help ourselves to this for when rolled into balls and baked in the oven it made splendid alleys. The night-watchmen or nickeys hated kids. They appeared to spend their time either brewing tea or bawling at us for loitering or leaning on their ropes. On cold wintry nights we would gaze enviously at their blazing coke fires, realising that nickeys had the best job in the world.

Though ours was a wide and fairly respectable street we had our share of rows. A few women in the end houses near Duke Street were the chief offenders. They would stand on their own doorsteps shouting and swearing at each other, usually right across the street, while we would stand and listen, aghast at the slanderous remarks they flung at each other. Neighbours would listen from their own lobbies, keeping a discreet distance back from the step to avoid being drawn into the row.

The opponents seemed to enjoy these verbal battles and would prolong them as their audiences gradually increased. There would be intermittent periods of silence whilst they racked their memories for more scandal or epithets, worked themselves up to the right temper again, perhaps wiped away a crocodile tear and even sometimes smiled and quietly greeted a passer-by. Then off they would go again until one of them had had enough, whereupon she would go inside and slam her door. Not quite the finish, though. Now was the moment for the victor to cross the street and hurl a volley of abuse at the closed door. That done she would look around, smile at the onlookers as though to thank them for their interest, go in and shut her door. Off we would go to play, grateful for the entertainment.

Now to a description of our house. It was a two-up and two-down comprising lobby, parlour, living room (which for some reason we called the 'ouse and sometimes the kitchen), scullery, yard and closet. Upstairs were the front and back bedrooms and the landing. Below ground level, the cellar and the coal 'ole.

The front door was never secured because it had neither lock nor latch and was kept closed by the door mat being pushed against it. On the lobby floor was a length of oilcloth, old and cracked, but smooth enough to allow the mat to be kicked from one end of the lobby to the other, for it was never in one place for long. On one wall was a rail with four coathooks, much too high for any of our family to use yet on them hung a few old, dust-laden garments which were never moved and had always been there. The children's carriage and the trolley were parked along that wall at the end of the day.

The first room on the right was the parlour. It was not furnished but for serious illness and births a bed would be brought downstairs and put into the room, almost filling it. At other times it was just a playroom and a dump though in later years it was, for a time, occupied by



Our 'ouse. 102 Booth Street.

lodgers. It was graced by a large, old aspidistra in a pot, perched on an upturned sewing machine cover. The plant, in spite of neglect and ill-treatment, had continued to produce new leaves year after year.

The room had a tiny fireplace which would hold about a shovelful of coal. At the side of the fireplace was a small cupboard which had lost its original shelves, thus leaving an ideal space to conceal oneself during a game of 'ide. The bottom had never been cleaned out and when hiding inside, with the doors closed, the smell from the mouse dirt was overpowering.

The living room was at the end of the lobby and contained most of our furniture. There was a kitchen table, the drawer of which held one or two knives and forks but mostly spoons, which were quite sufficient for our rather plain and limited fare. The table top was made up of three wide boards and there were deep, black grooves at the joining edges which proved irresistible for the balancing of spoons as we rubbed and pressed handles deeper and deeper into the congealed food crumbs which were continually swept into them.

If Dad were to have a meal the top had to be covered with a newspaper which was referred to as the tablecloth. When speaking to him we called him Dad but in his absence he was always "mi father"; Mother had no alternative.

There were two straight-backed wooden chairs although we children always stood for meals. Along one wall was a dresser with a white maple top, a small cupboard and several drawers. Practically all the family's clean clothes were stuffed into the drawers and the cupboard was for boots and shoes. The dresser top was usually covered with articles of all kinds. Tidiness was impossible because we lacked storage facilities.

Mother kept her workbox on the dresser and with it I associate a peculiar aversion to its contents. It was just an old wooden box holding the usual collection of pins, buttons and so on which had been accumulating for years. It had never been cleaned out. When I had occasionally to sort out perhaps a button for Mother, a loathing, a feeling of nausea would come over me and I would have to withdraw my fingers for a moment until I regained sufficient control over myself to handle the contents with deliberation. I have no idea of the origin of the aversion. It was strange because my life and activities then necessitated close contact with conditions which could be referred to as "requiring a strong stomach" but which left me unmoved.

Along the wall facing the window was a black horsehair "sofie" which had two loose, heavy, cylindrical headrests covered with the same material. When Mother was out they were rolled about, tossed around, ridden like horses. Very useful playthings. There was a little chair with a round hole in the seat under which was a po, a chamber pot. Its permanent position was by the drawers at the side of the fireplace. It was a warm spot and whoever was using the chair could play with the drawer knobs, thus encouraging him or her to remain seated and not too impatient to be taken off. Throughout my early life the chair was recognised as being in my care. I had to be aware of the need for it and at a request to "a-a" or "do-do" ensure they were quickly and properly placed on. Afterwards bottoms had to be wiped and the po emptied. The chair

was used at all times, including meal times, and we saw nothing distasteful in this.

There was one disturbing feature about this chair. Its high back was constructed of wooden spindles, one of which was missing. This left a gap just wide enough for a sitting child to lean back, push its head through and be unable to withdraw it. Which happened frequently. There would be a sudden screaming, a struggling, a kicking of legs. If Mother were out I would make frantic efforts to pull or push his head back again. On occasions I ran out looking for Mother, sometimes returning to find the child blue in the face and other times self-freeed, back to normal and wondering what all the fuss was about. It seems strange now to realise how easily this could have been prevented by simply bridging the gap with string or a piece of cloth. But no. These things were accepted as part of life and for years that chair remained a hazard and a threat and a continual worry to me.

This living room had a stone flagged floor which was covered with oilcloth. There was the usual iron fireplace with the customary steel fender and fire-irons. From the age of about eight the polishing of the fire-irons, the blackleading of the firegrate and the blue-moulding of the hearth were my regular Friday jobs. I recall that as I slopped water over the hearth I was interested and puzzled as some water would swirl and vanish down a small round hole in the hearthstone. I wondered where it went and if it finally reached some subterranean cave.

During cold weather Mother allowed us to sit on the fender with our backs to the fire, though she warned us it would melt the marrow in our backbones.

On Saturday mornings I washed the floors in the lobby, the living room and the scullery. I disliked the last one most because of the bare, cold stone flags and also, as I did under the slopstone, the beetles and spiders had to be sloshed out first. The oilcloth covering the living room floor was old and cracked and I often finished with scraped or cut fingers which sometimes turned into "gathers" and had to be bandaged, a regular condition of my hands at that time.

A regular daily job of mine was "siding up" the living room, which had to be done when I got home from school in the afternoon. This meant clearing the table of things left from dinner time and putting a fresh newspaper on it; things were returned to their proper places, the hearth rug shaken and the floor swept. The rug was a homemade pegged one and was supposed to be shaken vigorously in the backyard but if Mother wasn't in I would shake it in the living room, wait until the clouds of dust had settled then sweep the floor. The sweepings went sometimes on to a shovel, other times under the dresser or down the cellar steps. Furniture was never dusted and I don't recall our ever using or even possessing a thing called a duster.

A wooden dado rail ran around the room at about table height and from it projected innumerable large nails which were used as clothes hooks. On the wall above the mantelpiece were two Napoleonic pictures. One showed Bonaparte on the ship Bellerophon, surrounded by British sailors. I found that if you gazed long

enough at them they would begin to fidget and make slight movements with their legs.

Under the mantelpiece was the "line", a length of string which was always full of things drying or airing. The routine, after a wash in the scullery, was to walk with dripping face and hands to the towel which had to be kept on the line, always. Dad would come in for it, as wet as possible, and fling droplets on whoever was there. Two clothes drying lines stretched across the room near the ceiling and even then, when standards of comfort had hardly been established in my mind, I hated the days when sheets, curtains and other things hung there, darkening the room by day and night. However this was not the usual drying location during inclement weather. It was for urgent items or as an overflow from the other lines which were in the backyard, down the cellar, along the lobby and above the upstairs landing. Obviously, Mother took in washing.

The next room was the scullery, about seven feet square, which contained the stove, the water tap and the slopstone. In the slopstone stood an enamel bowl which was used for all washing purposes from crockery to faces and the occasional, hurriedly required, baby's napkin. The kettle on the kitchen fire was the source of all the hot water and pieces of shirt material were used as dishcloths and facecloths, the same piece acting for both purposes. Washing soda was used for the pots and on the adjacent window-ledges were pieces of Perfection soap for faces and hands. This ledge was thick with candle-grease, for innumerable candles had stood there during night-time washing.

The gas stove which stood on legs to bring it to working height had a burner on the top which was used only while the fire was being made. The space below it, with a small door, was supposed to be an oven but it was so ridiculously small it was never used. In the scullery was the door leading down to the cellar. The once whitewashed ceiling above the stone steps was covered with candle-smoke graffiti, traced by our Jack and me as we dawdled our way down for coal. The cellar was used for washing two or three days per week. The scrubbing table was under the window and there was a boiler in a corner with a firehole underneath. The mangle stood in the middle of the cellar over the drain which we called the sough.

I disliked washdays. Mother would be down the cellar most of the day, too busy to bother with us. I often took mornings off school to look after the children. Before I was old enough to be trusted with the bread knife I would keep bawling down the steps, telling her we were clemming and asking for a butty. I was allowed to cut a small corner off the loaf for babies, which when smeared with margarine and dipped in sugar would keep them quiet but make my mouth water. Mother sang and sang as she scrubbed and dollied and mangled the washing. Perhaps she enjoyed the temporary release and freedom from the troubles above her.

We never had a dirty clothes container of any kind. Things requiring washing were either carried down the cellar and put on the table or, more frequently, thrown down the cellar steps. Thus, for a day or two, they littered the bottom steps or the floor and as we went down for coal or to put a penny in the gas meter, we pushed them to one side with our feet or simply walked on them.

Soiled babies' napkins were supposed to be carried and placed under the tap but I would fling them as hard as I could from the top of the steps and I became quite skilled at landing them just under the tap.

Now up and into the back yard which was used as a playground. As I got older I used to climb up the back gate and from there on to the slated scullery roof, there to sit with my back to the wall, gazing across the entry into the living rooms of two Caroline Street houses opposite - often to their annoyance. But I would prolong and enjoy the peace and quietness.

One of our favourite backyard pastimes was to block the sough with floorcloths, then fill it with water. Matchstalks and bits of paper with dead flies on them made passable boats. It never occurred to the boys in our family to go as far as the closet if we wanted to pee. The sough, the grid, was obviously there for that purpose.

Let's go inside again to the stairs leading to the bedrooms. They were bare; no oilcloth nor carpet. A few stair-rods remained, left there by previous tenants and too firmly fixed for us kids to prise out of their corners. We used to play at sliding head first down the stairs, this necessitating a sure and firm grasp of each stair nosing to avoid crashing headlong to the bottom.

The back bedroom had no lighting, fireplace, floor-covering, wallpaper nor curtains. It had a bed and a wash-stand minus, of course, the wash basin and bowl which I suppose had once graced its top. A narrow ledge ran along its back edge and this held many years' accumulation of candlegrease and burns. The bedstead was iron and had iron laths on which rested a straw mattress. The bed clothes consisted of two sheets and an assortment of old coats.



*Our back entry from the Duke Street end*

There were no covers on the striped pillows. We undressed at the bedside and our clothes were hung over the bed rail or left on the floor. We did not wear vests nor underpants but slept in our shirts, a clean one being put on every Sunday morning. On very cold nights we took turns in taking the warm oven shelf to bed. It was placed under the sheet, its hardness acceptable when warm but it could be more than a nuisance the next morning if, on waking, the cold edge or sharp corner was in the middle of one's back.

Burning paper was often used to light our way upstairs, particularly when we had run out of candles. We had no other means of finding our way into the bedrooms, and for the back room which had no gas burner we would carry an extra piece of paper. For years this was how we would light our way up the stairs and down the cellar with little regard for our safety. Yet we never had a fire incident or accident.

The front bedroom was larger than the back and had two beds. It had a gas burner which produced a fishtail flame. There was a wash-stand and the bed coverings were similar to those in the back room. There was, of course, the indispensable po under each bed.

## Chapter 2

When I was six I went to Upper Jackson Street Elementary School for Boys, situated in one half of a large two-storey building, the other part being for girls. The playground was actually the cellar, though a small portion did emerge into the open and was bounded by a very high wall, part of a back entry belonging to a row of houses. The cellar continued under the girls' school, as their playground, a thick wall and a heavy wooden door allowing only the faintest murmur to remind us of their existence. The playground was also used for "drill" and it was here that we assembled before lessons started, though we had to walk through the school to get to it.

Our playtime activities were halted by one loud blast on the headmaster's whistle. On hearing this we froze into our posture of that moment, no matter how uncomfortable or idiotic it was. He would walk amongst us, frowning, whilst we dithered and grimaced and kept our lips tightly together, for he demanded silence too. At the next whistle we hurriedly formed class lines and marched up out of the cellar into the main corridor of the school. Halfway along hung a large Union Jack which every boy had to salute as he passed.

Again at this school I learned everything quickly and easily. In the classrooms the bright boys sat on the front row, the best at the fireplace end, an enviable position in the winter. The walls were devoid of decoration or information of any kind. At the front wall were cupboards with sliding doors which housed all the class requirements, mainly books and pens.

Every lesson was presented simply and without embellishments. No deviation; humourless, impersonal. Teachers were respected by all. They were hardly mortals. I never gave it much thought but I had an idea that when school finished they ceased to exist until the next morning. I was astounded one day to see our teacher, Mr Park, walking along Meadow Street just like an ordinary man.

Each teacher had his or her own classroom and class standard and retained it year after year. They were all strict, emotionless and in complete control. At Jackson Street School I never saw a boy being deliberately disobedient, cheeky or insolent to his teacher. Boys were punished quite often but each incident was made light of and soon forgotten. Physical punishment varied. Miss Morrison of Standard Two, who kept a wooden clicker to demand attention, used it to rap knuckles or palms. Leather straps reposed on the desks of several teachers, ready for instant use. Mr Whittaker had a length of thin cane. Mr Park, perhaps the only one who showed a spark of humour, kept his strap wrapped in a blackboard duster with about two inches of the strap showing. Occasionally he would walk round the classroom with it cradled in his arms like a baby, halting here and there where some boy would have to stroke it while Mr Park quietly reminded him of its presence and purpose. One teacher preferred to approach from behind and grind his knuckles on the boy's head or spine. Boys grunted and grimaced as they were hurt. That was all. No tear. No word. And the reasons for punishment? Inattention. Whispering. Giggling. Silly mistakes.

The few occasions on which Mr Park introduced a little humour were welcomed hungrily and we responded as loudly and as cheerfully as we dared. So the classroom atmosphere was practically always serious and businesslike with very few interruptions of the daily routine. In winter time the occasional apologetic intrusion of the caretaker with a bucket of coke for the fire was a welcome break; short but so pleasant to see a bit of the outside world.

I have few memories of the 1914-18 war. One is of fogs of unusually severe density and duration during which people carried lighted candles in jam jars, flash-lights, as they were then called, being either scarce or too expensive. Food scarcities resulted in rationing and queues, much resented for I did most of the errand-going at that time. The longest and slowest moving queues in which I waited were those at the Medlock Street gasworks to buy coke. It was overall a wearisome task. First a wagon had to be borrowed from Jack Booth's coalyard in Duke Street. I had to beg, looking as humble and as grateful as I could for the loan of one. They were very strong and heavy with iron handles and wheels and made a noisy clatter as they bumped along over the flags and setts. These coke errands meant half a day off school and I would take one of the children with me, riding in the wagon. In the gasworks queue would be many children who should obviously have been at school and more than once some kid from my own class whom I carefully avoided. We moved slowly along with our carriages, trolleys, box carts, coal wagons and bags and sacks of all kinds. Once through the gates the queue would split into three files, each leading to a coke heap where two men shovelled and weighed and tipped it into the customer's container. Going home, my little brother would enjoy sitting on top of the load. After tipping down our coal grid the wagon would be returned to Jack Booth.

Mother endeavoured to provide tasty meals for Dad, though the rest of us seldom had anything but bread and margarine. This didn't worry us for we could always fill up with bread, always there for the asking. As the war continued food, particularly meat, got scarcer and dearer. To ensure Dad got some meat I participated in

a little deception. In Renshaw Street was the Belgian Horse Beef shop. There were many Belgian war refugees in the neighbourhood and it was said they preferred horseflesh. Dad often said it would never pass his lips even if he were starving. He was always very interested in horse-racing. Eventually he had it nearly every day without realising its origin. I sneaked to the shop via as many back entries as possible, peeping before dashing across the next street, terrified of Dad's seeing me. He never did. I am sure he enjoyed his meat.

At home after school one afternoon and possibly inspired by some recent news, I had an urge to write a patriotic poem. On a piece of wrapping paper and using one of Dad's copying ink pencils I produced the following:

*Red, white and blue is the colour of our flag  
And John Bull and his bulldog whose tail he has to wag,  
Thanks to our gallant soldiers  
Who are fighting for us at the front  
Some of their bayonets are broken  
Some of their guns are blunt.*

Underneath I drew a Union Jack.

Mother was very pleased with it and she allowed me to stick it on the living room window with condensed milk, where it stayed for a long time until the copying ink ran so much that the words became illegible.

There was a national effort by schoolchildren to aid refugees in Britain by raising money on the sale of scent cards. They were coloured and strongly perfumed and every boy at school was given about a dozen to take home and sell. Well I didn't even consider asking Mother to buy one and I wouldn't have dreamt of trying to sell any to our neighbours. One never bothered with or spoke to women unless specifically sent by Mother. So I just kept the cards until we were told to return all money and unsold ones. Obviously mine were soiled and creased, for there was no place in our house where they could have lain untouched. In spite of that I was given another batch. The procedure and result were as before.

Most newspapers were sold by boys who ran along calling out the name of the paper or edition - "Last Extra" - though their yells were almost unintelligible. Each had his own call by which he was recognised as he entered the street. But there was one cry which brought people to their doors, usually late at night. It was "Speshul!" We in our house were not directly affected, but most families in the street had someone in the army or navy and I recognised the fear and apprehension as they waited for the newsboy. So often these Specials told of disasters at the front.

One day one of Mother's friends came into our house crying bitterly, and showed Mother a telegram which said that her husband, Harry, was missing following some action in France. Mother cried a little too and I recall being embarrassed, for I had not seen her so upset before. A few days later another telegram arrived saying that Harry was a prisoner of war. It was a relief to learn he was still alive.

I was often sickened by the stories that I overheard Mrs Yarwood telling Mother about the way the Germans treated their prisoners.

For instance, they inoculated them with the blood of mad dogs and then turned them loose unable to talk, only bark. Also they fed them on cabbage water only. When Harry eventually returned he was very very thin. He came into our house once or twice and I was sure he smelt of cabbage. He had fits of trembling and was afraid of walking out without holding on to someone's arm.

Eventually Dad was called up and put into the Royal Welch Fusiliers. I don't recall his leaving us but I do remember his first homecoming, in khaki. It must have been a Friday evening for I was kneeling before the fire, wearing a coarse wrapper apron and cleaning the fireirons when he walked in. I looked round, surprised to see "mi father" in uniform with rifle, puttees and everything. There was no affectionate greeting from Mother, though he had been away a considerable time. I just continued with my job whilst she hurriedly got something for him to eat. He was home for only an hour or so and when it was time for him to go I did not feel upset or sad but I was very surprised when Mother suddenly flung her arms round him, kissed him and as he went down the lobby, leaned on the dresser and started to cry. I continued with my work, embarrassed, for I had never seen them kiss before. I don't think he had even spoken to me.

The Sinn Fein were troublesome so Dad was sent to Ireland. He sent our Jack and me a coloured picture postcard, attached to which was a small packet of shamrock seeds. I got a suitable box from a corner shop, some soil from the park, planted the seeds and placed the box on the outside window sill of the back bedroom where Jack and I slept. Each day we looked hopefully for sprouting shamrocks but though the box stayed there until it eventually fell apart we never saw the faintest sign of anything green. We later thought this might have been our own fault because Jack and I, if the chamber pot were full, would open the window and use the shamrock box instead.

On his furloughs Dad taught us a few songs he had learned in Ireland which included "The Bells are Ringing for Me and My Girl", one, a marching song I suppose, which started "Mary Pushed a Barrow in the Royal Welch Fusiliers" and also a short verse which went:

Ha-ha, ha-ha here comes the squire,  
Let us greet him,  
Fifteen rounds rapid fire.

Some music and songs had a very strong emotional effect on me. I have only to recall a particular wartime song, the chorus of which goes:

He's a Ragtime soldier, Ragtime soldier  
Out every morning on duty  
Standing at the corner with a rifle on his back.  
He's a Ragtime soldier, out in all the showers in May  
Fighting for his King and Country  
All for a shilling a day,

and I am back in Booth Street. I feel small and the street is long and wide and I am approaching Appleton's pawnshop though I don't think I am actually going there. It is raining a little, everything is grey and I am cold and miserable. I know that Mrs Hamer is in our house and is there because someone is very ill. Walking in the middle of the road is a little man wearing a pot hat and a long

overcoat and he is singing "He's a Ragtime Soldier" in a halting fashion. He is begging, of course. He sings a line as he takes a few steps, pauses, turns around, gazes at the empty street, then round and off again with the next line. I see Kay's coalyard behind him. When I am level with him he turns, smiles and salutes me. And I move along almost in tears, with misery. At any time I can close my eyes, concentrate and the whole scene becomes real; for a brief moment I am little Harry Watkin, about eight years old.

Another of my few wartime memories is of the day the Armistice was signed, November 11th 1918. At school the headmaster, Mr Holmes, came into our classroom and told us that the war was over, but if we wished to applaud it must be done quietly. Then came his instructions. The few boys who were wearing stiff Eton collars should tap on them with their finger nails. The rest might tap on the desks with their finger tips. He then solemnly made his announcement and we responded. We had the afternoon off.

Wall-mounted war memorials were eventually erected in every street. They were of standard design consisting of a framed and glazed list of those who had served in the forces. The one in our street was fixed on the wall between our house and Williamson's. It was our games den. The memorials had small shelves to hold flower vases, usually glass jam jars. Because it was our den it was soon damaged. And because it was just below our front bedroom window we couldn't resist tossing small stones down into the jars. No-one really bothered about it and the wind and rain reduced it to such a sorry state that a neighbour took it in to repair it. It wasn't seen again.

Now back to everyday things. On wet, wintry evenings huddling round the fire was the most sensible thing to do in our cold, draughty house. So we sat on the fender, on the steel hearth stool and on our two chairs. And we sang and sang. Mother taught us the current popular songs, the songs of her youth and those that Grannie had taught her. Our Jack was a natural harmonist. I loved those hours.

Those evenings also proved opportune for a communal effort at making hearth rugs out of hessian bags and bits of cloth of all kinds. Mother would provide each of us with a meat skewer and we would all work away on our own little patch, laughing and singing, the rug keeping our legs comfortably warm. Those rugs had short lives for during their daily shaking in the back yard they would soon lose their insecure strips.

Let me recall those first brothers and sisters, the ones whom I tended with almost parental care and love though I wasn't much older than them. Three girls followed me, Florrie then Mabel then Dorothy. Then two boys, Willie and Norman. These were the children who had been born when I had reached the age of ten, but I must have been about seven when minding them became part of my routine. I moved them around by carrying them, sat them on my knees when they were fretful or tired or if they had no place to sit. I sang to them to entertain or get them to sleep. I pushed them round and round the street in the carriage or trolley and took them with me on errands or to the park. I played with them, helped to feed them, taught them poems and songs. I loved them. I also had to hold them over the grid in the back yard to wee wee. I wiped their noses and their bottoms.

The inevitable children's sicknesses worried me. I was always apprehensive for I knew that as soon as one recovered from an illness another would show worrying symptoms and Mrs Hamer would appear, soon to be followed by Doctor Chapman. Mother and Grannie were terrified of him. He was a big heavy man with a square, heavy jowled face, very much like the future Winston Churchill and in fact he did wear a hat that was a cross between a billy-pot and a tall one.

The very word Doctor would put Mother in a flutter. This may have been partially due to the money we owed him, a figure which gradually increased, never lessened. Once a week his collector, Mr Shelmerdine, would stalk up our lobby without knocking, calling out "Doctor's man!" He would just put his head inside the living room door, again saying "Doctor's man". Mother always tried to have some money ready for him but sometimes there wasn't any. He would tut-tut and shake his head in understanding resignation. He never pressed for payment; I don't know whether he had to keep the Doctor informed but he was a kind and sympathetic man.

It was always my job to go to the Doctor's for the medicine, a boring, miserable errand for there was no system of control in the waiting room, so of course when Mr Shelmerdine peeped round the door with a quiet "Next please," I would be elbowed out of the way by some coughing, spluttering adult. I recall that cold, brown-painted, dimly lit room with its bentwood chairs all round. People tried to avoid looking across at each other, this being particularly embarrassing for the last comers, who would either have to occupy a little island of chairs in the middle or stand in the lobby, which made the guessing of one's turn a hopeless task. The only wall decoration was the famous wartime picture of Lord Kitchener with his finger pointing directly at me, the caption stating "Your Country Needs You".

Of all the illnesses that came their way I dreaded whooping cough the most. As the sufferer started to go into a whoop I would freeze with fear and hold, or try to hold, my breath with him until his came back again. This would be followed by a yell and then another whoop and again I would hold my breath until I often felt I would burst. There seemed to be numerous pneumonia crises. I did not appreciate their seriousness but I could tell things were bad because Mother and Grannie would tell us that we must be very quiet when in the house. Yells following falls and bumps were never ending. Heads suffered most and lumps like small eggs were always being rubbed with margarine.

I don't recall Mother or Dad being ill in bed until I was grown up. And after that attack of pneumonia in my first year I was lucky enough to escape serious illness. As a child I suffered continually with toothache, but in spite of the hours, the days of crying I never went to the School Clinic for treatment. Dental examinations held at school were followed by recommendations that I attend, but I would ignore them or sometimes tell Mother but add that I didn't wish to go. That was sufficient. She wouldn't try to persuade me. Perhaps there were enough immediate troubles for her to bother about.

And so I suffered. My usual crying places were the bottom stair in the lobby and the steel stool in the fireplace. I would cry and

moan and cry hour after hour. But there would be very little sympathy; business would be as usual. The pain would go or at bedtime I would be sent up with a hot flannel to my cheek or a clove pushed between the troublesome teeth, or perhaps tincture of myrrh rubbed on to the gum. The first toothbrush to appear in our house was most likely bought by me at the age of 15 or 16.

If one of the children was particularly troublesome at night, I would have to go to Swinn's the Chemist for a bottle of Mother's Friend, a teaspoonful of which would soon quieten the child. It contained laudanum and Mother told me of a fright she had when I was very young. She must have given me an overdose and I slept so long that she took me to the Doctor's but I woke up on the way there.

I suppose there are expressions used in some families which would be unknown or not understood outside their own home. I'd like to recall some of ours. If I asked Mother or Dad the name of someone and they didn't want to tell me, the answer I would get would be "Mickey Trutch".

Ask how much a thing cost and the reply might be "Money and fair words".

"What's in that parcel, Dad?" would sometimes get this answer: "Layoes for meddlers and crutches for lame ducks."

On hearing a knock on the front door they might call out "Come in, it's a shop."

The floor was often referred to as the "dog shelf". If we appeared to be stuffing ourselves with bread we would be told we would die of "fat wrops", (my spelling).

A popular jingle:

*Oh dear Doctor shall I die?  
Yes my dear and so shall I.*

Start trying to make an excuse for something by saying "Well I thought..." and you would most likely be told: "You know what Thought did? Followed a muck cart and thought it was a wedding." "Not tonight, Josephine," from Mother meant emphatically No. A ridiculous remark from us would often get the retort "Aye, we had two. One died, the wheel come off the other."

One of Dad's merry quips:

Dad: "What comes after Thursday?"

Us: "Friday."

Dad: "Keep your nose tidy."

One of Mother's expressions of annoyance: "What the blazes Kate!" An expression often used by Dad when rowing with Mother: "I'll take my dying oath," and at that point he would take off his cap and throw it on the floor.

As Mother jogged a baby on her knee she would sing:

*Sam, Sam the dirty man,  
Washed his face in a frying pan  
Combed his hair with a donkey's tail  
Scratched his belly with his big toe nail,*

at which point she would tickle the baby's belly.

Three instructions I must have heard thousands of times: "Fill the kettle and don't leave it on the 'ob.' "Put the wood in the 'ole." (Close the door.) "And pick your way" (through puddles).

When I was about eight years old Grannie left Trent Place and came to live in our street, occupying one room, the parlour, in the

house directly opposite ours. It was her living room, workroom and bedroom. She worked hard from morning till night hemming handkerchiefs and babies' bibs on her Singer sewing machine. She hardly ever stopped treadling, snipping or folding and as she worked she sang or whistled, a blowing kind of whistle. The room smelt of her work, calico, not unpleasant but a dusty smell. Her working area took up about a quarter of the room.

There was also a table, her ottoman bed and Grandad's rocking chair. No other furniture. To draw water and to use the toilet she had to pass through Mrs Hamer's living room to the back of the house, hurrying, eyes down, excusing herself, trying to make herself as inconspicuous as possible. I liked going across to Grannie's. I used to kneel in front of the fire and let lengths of cotton be drawn up the chimney and I would wonder where they went. She taught me a lot of her Victorian songs and as she treaded away, I on the floor, we would sing together "Sweet Genevieve", "Somewhere the Sun is Shining", "On Your Wedding Day" and others which she loved.

She and Grandad looked forward to Friday, her payday. After their tea she would take a large jug, hidden under her shawl, to Jimmy Allen's on Vine Street for beer. A jugful would last them all evening. They drank from cups, she sitting at her machine reading a woman's weekly paper and Grandad in his rocking chair, using one lens from a pair of spectacles, scrutinising the racing page of a newspaper.

It was Grannie who first helped to provide for my insatiable desire for reading matter. There was nothing in our house beyond the few newspapers that Dad brought. But Grannie had friends who passed on to her each week current copies of "Happy Home", "My Weekly"



Our street - number 102 is about midway on the left  
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and "Red Letter", women's papers with the usual love stories, Kiddies' Corner and Letters to the Editor. I would read and enjoy every word. Occasionally she got hold of some children's comics which she read with as much interest as I. These included "Comic Cuts", "Butterfly and Firefly", "Merry and Bright", "The Jester", "Funny Wonder" and my favourite, "Chips". Tired Tim and Weary Willie were on the front page of this and I loved them. Perhaps it was because Tired Tim was so like Grandad in appearance. By this time there were famous film comedians like Charlie Chaplin but they had not yet managed to get into these comic papers. The inside pages included stories, mainly of detection and adventure. My favourite was an army motorcyclist named Matt who was always foiling the Germans. Though encumbered with a motorbike, he often returned bringing a number of prisoners. Once, I recall, there were several between the shafts of a cart and the illustration showed them dragging it over No-Man's Land whilst Matt stood on the cart, his legs astride his beloved bike, still wearing his goggles, his hat with the peak to the back, of course. He pointed forward to the British lines. The Germans, cowed, were muttering "Donner und Blitzen", which all schoolboys knew was German swearing.

Grandad seemed to be out all day, wandering around. He occasionally earned a copper and sometimes brought back a few vegetables. He once took me to Trafford Park to see the devastation wrought by a huge fire which gutted several timber yards and factories. As we walked through the Park, stepping on the railway sleepers which ran along the side of the road, I little realised that a few years later that route would be my daily journey to and from work.

I would sometimes return Grannie's finished work to the companies who sublet it. I would use the carriage to carry it in with perhaps one or two of the children in as well. I also obliged Mrs Gardener, a friend of Grannie's, though I really disliked the job. She lived alone in a little house in Embden Street and looked so very dirty. Her hair was grey and uncombed and her clothes seemed shiny with grime and dirt. She had a very quiet, cultured voice. At least, that is what I thought it was. I tried to like her because she was Grannie's friend, though I found it hard to accept the coppers she gave me for the job. Even they looked filthy.

Grannie had another friend who really frightened me. Her name was Mrs Delaney. She wore voluminous black clothes which even I thought rather old-fashioned, particularly because of her Victorian-type bonnet. Now this, properly perched on top of her snow-white hair, gave her a stately and dignified appearance. But I often saw her with her bonnet pushed over her forehead or tilted over to one side, giving her the appearance of a comedienne. Grannie told me that Mrs Delaney was the black sheep of a wealthy family, her failing being whisky. I never knew where she lived. Her visits were always unannounced. Sometimes I would call in to find them enjoying small fancy cakes which Mrs Delaney had brought. But I also saw her as I played in the street staggering towards Grannie's, very drunk. Drunken people were to be seen every day but this old, well dressed, shiny black lady puzzled me. Once I stood petrified as she came towards me in the street. She recognised me, though she had never spoken to me. Then, when almost on top of me she closed her eyes, sank to one knee, rolled over into the

gutter and as far as I could see, fell fast asleep. I knew Grannie had just gone out. People came and stood around gazing at her. Then Grannie came and, helped by a neighbour, managed to get her inside. I made a brief effort to help but I didn't know how to get a hold on her without squashing her good clothes. I also used to find her sitting on Grannie's doorstep, drunk, awaiting her return.

I played out in the street as often and as long as possible; there were no indoor attractions. When I was indoors there would be continual calls up our lobby of "Are yer comin' out ter play?" I was fortunate in having a lot of pals in the street about my age and on looking back, recognise myself as an unappointed leader. This was perhaps because I seemed to be out more often than anyone else; also our house was central and our wall was the den for most games. I had more imagination than the others for continuous play and starting fresh games and I was unbeatable at activities like running, cartwheeling, wrestling and climbing. To some extent I was hampered by my everpresent task of minding my brothers and sisters but if they were in the carriage or trolley they could be parked or pushed along as we played.

Our Mabel was a nuisance. A popular outing for our gang was a visit to Whitworth Park, or Whitty as we called it. It was about two miles away and about eight of us would start off looking forward to a good day out. There would be no advising our mothers of our intended destination or duration of absence. The walks to and from the park always took much longer than anticipated. We would meander, play, retrace our steps, take flowers from gardens, climb walls and sometimes get involved in fights with other boys.

Because there were few girls of our Mabel's age in the street I often had to take her with us. She couldn't always do the things we boys did so to some extent she was ignored. She seemed quite satisfied with this arrangement, but many times I returned from Whitty to shout up our lobby, "Our Mabel's lost!" During the journey, and this could be either going to or returning from the park, her absence would be noticed. There would be a half-hearted, brief search for her and if she wasn't found, well, it wouldn't seem important enough to change our routine or hurry home. She would turn up sooner or later, sometimes on her own, other times through the help of kind-hearted people who had found her. She had often been found and brought home by a policeman. I think she may have sometimes deliberately lost herself.

There were three main attractions at the park; the rest of it we seldom visited. We shared our time amongst the "pudding", the "shed" and the "boathouse". The pudding was a small circular hill about eight feet high and fifty feet around the base and because it had steep sides provided excellent climbing and sliding facilities. Here boots and backsides were quickly worn out. The covered shed was a large, draughty shelter without windows. There were iron rods or tie beams right across from side to side. These could be grasped by leaping up from the seat beneath and then one could move along hanging and changing from one hand to the other. The boathouse was situated at the deepest part of the park lake where one could see the biggest jack-sharps. We saw them, but never caught one because we had neither the forethought nor the gumption to bring along rod, net or jam jar. We just watched and envied those lads who had fish in jars.

Eventually someone would suggest we went home, usually because of thirst, hunger or fading light. We would start off, stragglers being told to hurry. If we wished to know whether we were wanted at home a large leaf would be found and carefully torn down the middle. If a reasonably straight tear were achieved we were not wanted. If crooked, a sudden spurt would be made but soon forgotten as some new interest arose. Of course we took flowers from gardens. We would grab, run away like mad, smell and admire, then throw them away. In the summertime thirst was always our main worry. It was useless knocking on doors but if we came across water in any situation it was seldom too dirty to chance, at least a mouthful.

We could also get very hungry as we never took anything to eat; the decisions to go to the park were often made on the spur of the moment during a lull in the street activities when someone would say, "Let's go to Whitty." There was a lot of street litter in those days, long before anti-litter campaigns were thought of. Horse muck filled the gutters; paper of all kinds blew about and apple cores, banana skins, orange peel and even plum and cherry stones, when in season, littered the pavements. We considered all fruit droppings edible, though we were careful. Only the pith of the orange peel was eaten as the outer skin was poisonous. Apple cores were tasty but had to be wiped on the jersey first. The inside of banana skins when scraped off with one's bottom teeth helped to fill. Fruit stones could be cracked open and the kernels chewed. At the park were types of leaves which could be eaten, the large ones with white splotches which we called "bread and butter" leaves being the most popular. I wonder how our stomachs responded to this fare? I don't recall anyone being affected.

We used several routes to and from the park, the most satisfying streets being Carter Street and Lloyd Street. There we found long back gardens, narrow winding back entries, old, gnarled, crooked trees, empty houses and best of all a strange U-shaped passage which went right underneath a row of houses. At the bottom of the U was a grid; smelly and usually blocked thus forming a pool of water - a splendid water jump. There was also an iron bar spanning the passage from which one could hang. The whole place had a fetid smell which added to its attraction, for we generally associated foul smells with good playing places.

### Chapter 3

So far I have referred to play in general but a brief description of some of the many games which we played may be of interest. A few were seasonal, such as kites in windy March and pitch balls in midsummer. Those played most often were the ones which did not necessitate equipment of any kind.

The only bounceable balls seen in our street were old tennis balls, treasured by their owners and brought out only occasionally. A football was usually made of paper or rag tied with string and we sometimes managed to play cricket with one, allowances having to be made for the absence of bounce. In football, however, its deadness and slithering properties necessitated and produced control skills just as satisfying and challenging as those in normal play.

A good, newish tennis ball usually meant a demand for "Penny

"Bounce". A coin is placed about a foot away from a wall and standing about six feet away, the player aims the ball at the coin. The ball hits the coin or the ground only, bounces on to the wall then rebounds back towards the thrower who tries to catch it. Hitting the coin counts ten; if it turns over, twenty. If the ball isn't caught, the player is out.

By far the most popular game was "'ide" (Hide and Seek). To decide who should be "on" first, we "flip-flapped" for it. All stand in a ring chanting together "Flip-flap-floor-bong", swinging our arms in and out at the same time. At "bong" one's hands have to be placed together with one palm up and the other either up or down. Anyone whose hand arrangement is dissimilar from the rest is "on".

'Ide in the street meant much running about. It was best played at dusk when it was easier to sneak close to the den without being seen. Starting off, the "on" boy faces the den wall with eyes closed counting long enough to give the rest sufficient time to scatter and get a long way from the den. They run, looking for hiding places, down entries, round street corners, behind lamp-posts and pillar boxes. The "on" boy then runs around, searching, and on spotting a hider calls out "Whip - (names him)", runs back to the den, kicks the wall and cries "Kick stone!" That is supposed to clinch the finding and securing of that particular boy and off he will go looking for others. Should, however, the "whipped" boy have managed to race the other back to the den he can kickstone himself free and run off again to hide. When all are eventually in the den the first whipped boy becomes "on".

In those kinds of games there were several ways of selecting the "on" boy. One, not so popular as Flip-flap, was called "Icky Picky Lane". Again the players stand in a ring and a counting boy, pointing at each in turn, recites this jingle:

As I was going down Icky Picky Lane  
I saw some Icky Picky people  
What colour were they dressed in?  
(Any boy could name a colour - say red.)  
R-E-D spells RED  
And if you do not want to play  
Take your hook and go away  
AWAY is all one word  
So biff, bang, shot, dead, out.

The boy at whom the last word was directed drops out and the jingle starts again. Silly, time-consuming before the game proper could start, but it was never queried. All part of the play.

There was another jingle which was actually part of the game and it was called "Irley Birley". One boy stands with his back to the wall and he is the counter. Another boy bends forward, head against the first one, whilst the rest stand round, each placing one finger on the boy's back. The counter then starts the jingle and, as before, touches one finger per word. It goes:

Irley Birley Tiddley Irley  
Where has this poor old soul to go to  
This dark and stormy night?

The bending boy would have to name a spot in the street such as  
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"the pillar box" or "Cunliffe's doorstep". The boy whose finger was last touched would have to go there but first the conditions would have to be decided. The counter would continue by asking, "How must he go; eyes shut or open?" The bender would decide. "Laughing or crying?" The reply would come. "Bow legged or straight?" Final reply.

So off he would have to go, eyes not quite shut of course, whilst the rest watched him, laughed at him, but insisted he followed his instructions. Then the jingle would be repeated until all were dispersed to various parts of the street. The two in the den would quietly survey them all then suddenly start bawling at the top of their voices: "Irley Birley! Irley Birley!" continuously while the others hurried back to the den as fast as they could, hampered by but still carrying out the conditions imposed upon them.

What a crazy scene it must have presented to passers-by: perhaps ten lads laughing or crying out loud, most bow-legged, some squinting, all making for the same spot. Yet I suppose in those days people were accustomed to the absurdities of kids' play.

"Hoppy Johnny" could fill in between longer games. One boy, "Johnny", would stand in the middle of the road (no danger from traffic then), and the rest would line the edgings on one side of the street. At the call of "Hoppy Johnny!" all would start to hop across to the other side whilst Johnny, himself hopping, would attempt to unbalance as many as possible. These would then have to assist in subsequent crossings until all were in the road.

There was a game which we called "Three Labours", though I think the word should have been "Labourers". The "on" boy stands against the den wall whilst the rest, across the road, confer and choose a task which they will have to demonstrate by miming. They signal when ready then cross the road to him, chanting:

"There came three labours out o' work  
Please can you 'blige them?'"  
"What can you do?" asks the "on" boy.  
"Anythin' as good as you," they reply  
"Set agate!" he commands.

They mime the job and he has to guess what it is. He calls out his guesses and when he is right they turn and run back across the road, he attempting to catch one who will then be "on" next time. The fun in the game is devising comical tasks, not too easy to guess. For example: "Trying to push the Town Hall into a matchbox," accompanied by grunts and groans and expressions like, "It won't go in."

We sometimes went "cellar griddin'", searching the grids of the wash cellars which all houses possessed, hoping to find things of use or value. I never found anything but that didn't matter; there was hope and expectancy at every grid. A stick and a cap were required. On spotting anything the least bit promising among the paper and muck on the grid bottom, the cap was dropped down. The stick would be used to manoeuvre the article into the cap, then to hook up the cap into someone's grasp.

Each year, for a brief period when cherries were plentiful and cheap, we collected the stones, which were known as cherry ogs, from the gutter. A good day's scavenging could produce a trousers

pocketful. The main reason for our collecting them was to boast of the quantity owned, though we sometimes played with them as marbles. I often noticed when collecting with my pal from next door that as he picked up a stone, if there was any sign of fruit adhering to it, he would suck it before putting it in his pocket. We believed that if you took five thousand cherry ogs to the Infirmary you would be given a pair of skates.

We occasionally managed to get hold of iron bands off beer barrels and bowled them along with our hands. We called them "garfs". One lad in the street had a proper steel one with a driver attached. He sometimes brought it out but it was too good for our street and I think he felt a little embarrassed.

"Suckers" came out, lasted about three seasons then vanished for good. They were extremely popular whilst they lasted, being seen even in the school playground, a fame which even cig cards or alleys seldom achieved. Suckers were home-made, consisting of a disc of thin leather about three inches across with a small hole in the centre through which a length of string was threaded with a knot on the end to prevent its being pulled through. The sucker had to be thoroughly sodden and could be used only on wet days. When used it had to be pressed flat by the foot on to a wet, smooth flagstone or brick and then the string tugged. It would lift just sufficiently to form a little dome, thus creating a vacuum underneath. It could prove to be almost immovable and pals would be challenged to pull it off the flag. The life of a sucker was usually governed by the resistance of the leather against the knot.

A summer pastime was "Photos", very popular, if you could get a penny for a kit which consisted of a glass negative, a cardboard frame with spring clips and a square of "sentisize" paper. When assembled it would be placed on a window sill facing the sun. One then squatted whilst it cooked. There could be several of us sitting on the grid under our window, talking and occasionally getting up to lift a corner of one's own neggie to observe the gradual emergence of the picture. On a cloudy day the cooking could take up to half an hour. This, of course, was part of the pleasure; the supervised processing. The finished print would be dark brown, passing through all shades of red to get there. The pictures were generally of film stars: Eddie Polo, William S Hart, Elmo Lincoln, Charlie Chaplin, Fattie Arbuckle and others.

X Ray cards could be bought for a halfpenny, though they were never very popular. They consisted of a square of cardboard with a small hole in the centre over which a piece of feather had been gummed. If you peeped through the hole at your hand held against a light or the sky, you saw what appeared to be the bones of your hand showing darkly against the rest of it, which would be a hazy grey image.

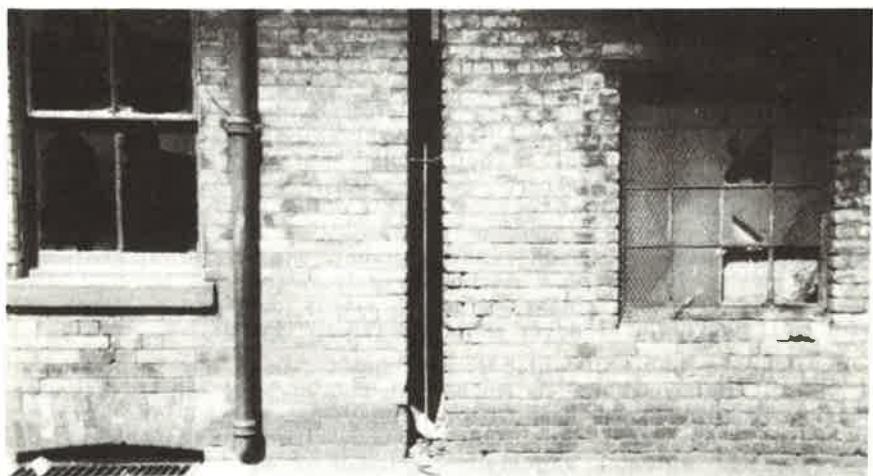
About this time there was a very popular gesture used by schoolboys. It was used to convey or emphasise the fact to another boy that you had foiled him, thwarted him, bested him. It was called "noggin". You pushed your chin forward, stared him in the face then rubbed the underside of your chin as though flicking something off it. At the same time, with a leer and in a suitably mocking voice you just said, "Nog yer," or "Does it nog yer?" If you wished to emphasise it still further and really show your

contempt you said, "Nog yer, two chocolates, bag o' biscuits, chewing gum, that long," and at the word "long" you would fling your nogging hand towards his face. That was almost asking him to fight. Nogging lasted about two years then died out, never to return; at least, to my knowledge.

The only nearby street in which we played was Canning Street, which seemed to have no children of its own but it had two attractions for us. One was Parry's Cabinet Works whose doors, though closed when the day's work was done, were so tumble-down and dilapidated that a small kid could squeeze through the gaps. This provided a good supply of bits of wood suitable for piggies and sticks and cricket bats.

The other attraction was a space between the gable end of Parry's and the neighbouring row of houses. The gap was about six or seven inches wide and it provided a "dare" which was irresistible. One had to squeeze into this gap, sideways of course, penetrating it as far as one dared. It was a tight squeeze, got slightly narrower, was quite dark and the bricks were rough and grimy. Years of accumulating dirt and bird droppings had produced a filth that rose from street level to a height of about two feet. There were stories of boys going so far in that they got stuck and were unable to breathe; and of men entering from the other end and attacking the boys. I particularly mention this spot because throughout my life it has reappeared in my dreams. I dream that I go right through and emerge into Dorrington Street, now transformed with gardens and trellis and little gates. Then Dorrington was one of the most unattractive streets in the neighbourhood.

Our visits to Platt Fields, twice the distance of Whitty Park, were



The gap between the two gable ends, the penetration of which was a regular "dare". (Eventually a bar was fixed to stop this practice.)

for one purpose only. A little brook ran across the fields for about a quarter of a mile, in a U-shaped channel made of shiny, smooth, stock bricks. It flowed along the curved bottom, leaving about a foot of exposed curve on each side, clear of the water, followed by vertical sides about eighteen inches high. If you attempted to stand on the curve it was so steep your feet would slither down into the water. Running swiftly along and jumping from side to side, your momentum would keep you upright. To stop, you had to fling yourself on to the side and grab at the grass verge.

A superb attraction; but too popular. There could be dozens of kids running along it (in the Parkie's absence, of course), and there would be the inevitable collisions resulting in two or more slipping down into the water. Or one could slip on a mossy brick with the same result. The water was only about six inches in its deepest part but usually, because of its shape, one rolled full length on the bottom. As soon as this happened there would be a discussion to decide whether or not to go. If the victim were one of the youngest, sniveling, we made for home, about an hour's journey. On a warm day the urgency would diminish and the activity on the way home would contribute to the incident's being practically forgotten by all but the one in the damp clothes.

## Chapter 4

A photograph taken when I was about eight shows me as being of average height and chubby, with straight hair. Mother always cut my hair, not very neatly, but that didn't bother either of us. It was the standard Hulme style, very short all over except for a little tuft at the front to form a fringe on the forehead.

My clothes usually came via Mrs Hamer, the street's nurse, midwife and troubleshooter. They were cast-offs. I habitually wore a collarless shirt, short trousers with braces, long stockings and boots. I wore out two pairs of clogs. I must have had numerous jerseys, the kind that button on the left shoulder; they had to bear the brunt of the wear and tear of climbing and wrestling and larking about in general. I had jackets but wore them only when absolutely necessary. There were several of Dad's old caps available when I wanted one. I didn't have any underwear until I was in my twenties. The only overcoat I had at that time I disliked intensely. I hadn't had to wear one before and also it was a girl's. It was of a dark grey colour and was covered with little balls of green cotton, which I slowly managed to pinch off with my fingernails. I never welcomed "fresh" things.

I developed a habit of which I was unaware until our Jack pointed it out. It annoyed him so much that one evening whilst we were passing Embden Street Post Office he gave me a push and told me to stop it and shut up. "This is you," he said and gave an impersonation which I vaguely recognised as myself. Hunching his shoulders, he drew his hands up into his coat sleeves as far as he could, slouched along a few paces, gave a shrug of his shoulders and followed it by a large sniff. "That's you," he said. "You get on my nerves." I think that cured me.

At school I moved into Standard Two. The teacher began to point out errors in our speech. When reading aloud in class we were told

that aitches, dropped in our everyday speech, had not only to be included but were to be emphasised. It proved an impossibility for some boys who just couldn't attach an aspirate to the rest of the word.

Our district, spelt "Hulme", was always called "Hoom" by its inhabitants and teachers were the only people we met who pronounced it with a soft U. After many unsuccessful attempts to produce a "Hulme" as she would have liked it, Miss Morrison compromised with a sort of "Kyoom", but with heavy breathings being produced before, after and sometimes halfway through the word, according to the boy's ability to get the aitch in somewhere.

We all liked Mr Park of Standard Three because even our untrained ears detected the fact that he didn't sound all his aitches and gees. What is more we knew he lived in Moss Side, that he was sometimes seen coming out of a newsagent's near school and that in class he wasn't above making a slightly humorous remark now and again. In fact he was more like an ordinary man than a teacher. At the start of a painting lesson Mr Park astonished us by suggesting we could choose our own subject to paint. Unheard of, and too overwhelming for many boys who sat and stared at their paper until he came round and pointed out some classroom object for them to copy. But I was elated. I was good at drawing and painting; I would surprise him with a masterpiece of imagination. A moment's contemplation, then I started: a burglar wearing a blue suit and a brown cap. He had a black mask on, was carrying a lantern and over his shoulder was a large, well-filled sack bearing the word "Swag".

As I was about to fill in the background Mr Park came round. I looked up at him expecting at least a nod suggesting, "Not bad". But he frowned, shook his head and murmured, "Oh no, no, no, no." He picked up my painting and crumpled it as though he didn't wish anyone to see it. He walked to his desk to get a fresh piece of paper for me and I sat puzzled and disappointed. I felt that I had let him down. He placed the paper in front of me, pointed to some article on the cupboard and told me to copy it. No explanation, no word of advice. I just learned that I mustn't draw burglars. And I wouldn't have dreamt of asking him what I had done wrong; that would have been like talking to him and he was a teacher, not an ordinary man.

The poems and songs of those earlier classes were simple and I liked most of them. One of my favourites was:

*First in his class Fred came from school  
As wise as wise could be  
And wished to show to all around  
How smart a boy was he.  
And so at dinner he began,  
"Papa, you think you see  
Two roasted chickens on that dish.  
Now I will prove there's three.  
First there is one and that is two  
As plain as plain can be  
And I was always taught at school  
That one and two make three."  
"Just so," made answer his Papa.*

"If what you say is true,  
I take one, Mama takes one,  
The third we leave for you."

We recited it over and over again. Nice, simple words easy to understand. But was it? It must have been many years later on recalling the poem that I saw the point of it; Fred didn't get any chicken at all. And I was regarded as the brightest boy of the class. Did the teacher think the moral was too obvious to mention? Or was it that he just couldn't be bothered? Was I the only one who failed to see the point? And in retrospect; two roasted chickens for dinner! And "Papa" not "Dad". Victorian era, I suppose.

I loved the songs in Standards One and Two. They included traditional ones such as "The Miller of the Dee", "The Vicar of Bray", "Early One Morning", "A North Country Maid up to London had Strayed" and "Winken, Blinken and Nod". Poetry came a poor second to singing. Favourites were "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" and "The Battle of Waterloo" by Lord Byron. We thought "The Jackdaw of Rheims" rather boring and as for "The Stag at Eve" by, I think, Sir Walter Scott, it was as meaningless to us as Longfellow's "Hiawatha". Still, I liked all the lessons at school, found the work easy and did it well. There had not been any test of ability so far, though individual competence was generally recognised.

Once a week we had handwriting practice. We used copy books with double ruled lines and the whole lesson was spent copying out a phrase or a proverb which the teacher had written on the blackboard in copperplate style. The lesson could last for an hour, yet to some boys it was hardly long enough to set out the phrase a few times. With expressions of fierce concentration, noses close to paper, tip of tongue protruding between lips, they would slowly and laboriously form each letter, continually scanning the slopes and curves on the board. I was one of the good writers and would finish the work in a very short time then sit back, waiting for the teacher's comments or the end of the lesson. A small reward often lay in speedy and satisfactory effort.

One had to fold and rest arms on the desk and with chin chokingly in and back as upright as elbow contact with the desk would allow, sit as immobile as a statue. It was sometimes successful. It was the last lesson of the day. The teacher would position himself directly in line with the fixed gaze of one of us, looking down on to the desks of the front row, slowly lift his head until eyes met, give an almost imperceptible nod, then continue his perambulations. The nodee would rise and silently steal away, lifting the door latch with infinite care to avoid being heard. The other hopefuls would remain, still as statues.

Back to home life. For many years the carriage was constantly with me as I played or went errands (Grannie called them "banerrands"). The carriage was deep, old and battered, devoid of upholstery and straps and with tyres worn down almost to the rims. The hood had two side stays but one was broken and dangled down uselessly, so that when the hood was up it was cock-eyed and if there were children under it the hood would rest on the head of one of them. It had a well for leg space. This was never cleaned out and contained many years' accumulation of coal and coke dust, bread-crumbs, bits of paper and so on; just muck.

There would be one or two children in it as I pushed it around and while I played I would park it against a wall. If there was no-one out to play with, I would stand on our doorstep, rocking the carriage and perhaps singing in order to send them to sleep. Or I would walk round and round the street with it, talking to them. Sometimes I would put my head and arms up through the handles, then start running. A quick, momentary lift of the feet would result in my being carried forward a short distance whilst at the same time my weight would lift the front wheels off the ground. As my feet touched the ground I would spring up and forward, giving a see-sawing motion to the carriage as I sped along. I enjoyed it and so did the kids, despite the occasional mishaps when I fell or missed my foothold and out tumbled the occupants, sometimes on top of me.

The old wooden trolley was a greater hazard. It was pushed from behind with the child looking forward in the direction of travel and he would not be fastened in because there was no strap and no-one thought of devising a substitute. Sometimes he would tumble forward and out as he fell asleep; more often either by careless lowering of the trolley or by meeting the kerb on a run. The wheels would stop at the kerb and the child would go on to crash face forward on the ground. Loud cries, large lumps on forehead, magarine on lumps. It was continually happening.

The carriage was our normal means of transport for goods, but one annual errand was carried out with some misgivings on my part. It was to a strange dungeon-like premises on Boundary Lane known as Cocky Bland's. It was on a corner, was very small and one entered its dark, smelly, awesome shop down three broken steps. I think it was practically always illuminated by an oil lamp. And there one bought limestone, Donkey stones and paraffin oil, which we always called lamp oil. But, and this was the sinister part, it was said that Cocky Bland was also a burglar; and that he had a confederate named Johnny G'Gaw who lived next door.

All the kids in our street knew Johnny. We were terrified of him. He rolled and staggered down Booth Street about once a month, fighting drunk, shouting and cursing, shadow boxing, challenging anybody to come out and fight. And he was Cocky Bland's partner in crime and Cocky's was the only place that we knew where the stuff for making whitewash was sold. Now though I always went down into his shop with fear and trembling I never set eyes on the man. A little old lady served me. Each large lump of limestone was carefully wrapped in newspaper then wedged in the carriage around its occupants.

At home the lime was put into the family's tin bath in the back yard and covered with water in order to slake it. We would stand around it fascinated by the bubbling. Next day, when slaked, a couple of Dolly Blues would be squeezed into it and it was ready for use. Mother usually did the whitewashing. The backyard was the major job, followed by the closet and, not quite so often, the scullery and once, the cellar. As I got older I was allowed to do a little but I was frightened of the coping stones on top of the yard walls. The mortar had perished and the stones were loose, their weight alone keeping them in position. Mother warned me. She had heard of one falling off and breaking a boy's leg. So I wielded the whitewash brush and touched the treacherous stones with the force of a butterfly's wing.

One of my earliest memories of errand going was to Miss Wardrop's, a small grocery shop at the corner of Vine Street and Dorrington Street. There must have been hundreds of small shops in Hulme for they were at practically every street corner. She always kept her doors closed, which was in keeping with Miss Wardrop herself; she was rather quiet, nicely spoken and refined. I must have been very small when we first started dealing with her for I recall there were two rather steep steps up to her doors which opened outwards. I couldn't reach the thumb latch from the bottom step so I had to stand precariously on the top one, partly open the door then step down one.

She was nice, clean, pleasant and wore gold-rimmed glasses and I can picture her now, looking down at me from her side of the counter, a large brown milk container with a ladle hanging over the edge on her right and the shining brass scales to her left. We had started getting our groceries on "tick" and I always handed her our tick-book to record the purchases. It occurred to me one day how easy it would be to get something without Mother's knowledge. I had always looked longingly at her very popular, cream-covered Victoria cake which was on the side counter behind a glass screen. So I took the tick-book and asked for something I had never bought before, "A slice of Victoria cake," which I had heard so many people say. My feelings were of fear rather than guilt. She put a piece of tissue paper round it and I took it, finding it hard to believe that I was going to eat it, alone. We never had cake in our house and at the annual Christmas tea parties at Sunday School it was the cake at the end of the meal that really mattered. I went into Winterbottom's entry, which was only a few yards away and which had a recess behind which one would be shielded from the gaze of passers-by. The cake was delicious, heavenly, but fear made me cram it into my mouth as quickly as possible, which was a pity. But, never again. I was satisfied. I was not questioned about it for I don't suppose Mother ever checked tick-book entries; she didn't do things like that.

We didn't deal at Miss Wardrop's very long; probably she preferred our absence to our debts. So we changed to Hampson's for our groceries. Again a corner shop, just as near but at the corner of Vine Street and Council Street. Daddy Hampson was a large, fat, bald-headed man with a walrus moustache. He wore a white apron. In all the years we dealt there I never saw his legs, for if anything was required from our side of the counter he would call his big daughter, Connie, from out of their living room. She always bustled in with a frown of annoyance and, still holding some girl's novel she had been reading, would carry out his request as quickly as she could then dash back to continue her reading, slamming the door behind her.

Daddy Hampson had a beaming smile but a sharp manner and women were afraid of him. He was very firm with children and would not stand for any playing or rowdiness in his shop. He did well and whenever I went the place would be full of customers. Of course, serving was a very slow business for things had to be lifted from shelves, taken out of containers, possibly cut, weighed, wrapped and noted in tick-books. His movements were deliberate, so errand-going to Hampson's was a time-consuming job. Children on errands were often ignored or their serving interrupted whilst he dealt with

the women. In the shop were the usual bentwood chair and upturned boxes for customers to sit on and they were always occupied.

On one of my earliest visits to the shop I had some fingers bandaged because of "gatherings", caused by catching and scraping them on the broken oilcloth during the weekly floor washing. Daddy Hampson noticed the bandages and asked me what was the matter. I told him and in his usual would-be humorous manner he exclaimed, so that all the customers could hear, "Look, he's got sore toes on his fingers!" Of course everyone had to laugh at his wit and grin at me. But from then onward, whenever I entered I was greeted with, "Hello, here's old Soretoes." People who had not already heard the name would gaze at my boots, then my face, wondering, I suppose, what my poor toes looked like.

Now and again he would collect rind and bits of fat bacon, wrap them up and present the parcel to me, accompanying it always with the same remark, "'Ere, give that to your mother and don't say I never give you nowt." Sometimes he would add, "I'm as good as a bad stepfather to you." The bacon bits, rendered down, helped to make delicious dipped butties. I was rather sturdy at this age and sometimes he would point me out, saying, "Old Soretoes doesn't look so bad on Hampson's fat bacon." I would be grateful, thank him very much and show by my expression how indebted I was to him. Throughout my childhood I always accepted, never refused, gifts and was grateful and profuse in my thanks. I was not taught nor encouraged to be like this; it just arose from the recognition of how little we had and every little something extra I took home would help Mother.

We dealt there for several years although we were rather unsatisfactory bill settlers. Friday night or Saturday morning at the latest the week's bill had to be paid. But often I had to ask if he would wait until Monday or Tuesday or even next Friday. His face always clouded. He would frown and grumble. But he continued to let us have food. I hated those occasions, particularly because I was supposed to ensure that no-one overheard me. And so I was worried and apprehensive and would make all kinds of manoeuvrings to get him alone or in the right position to whisper my plea.

Eventually we had to find another grocer and this time it was around the corner into Duke Street and at the corner of Caroline Street. The grocer was Mr McNeil, a Scotsman whose accent made him incomprehensible to me so I had to make a guess at interpreting everything he said. And I'm sure on his part he thought I was a bit daft but lots of pointing and head nodding would eventually produce the goods and he would wave me off accompanied by some Scottish oath. He was middle aged, balding, had a big walrus moustache, wore a white, starched apron which was so long and big and stiff as it reached from chin to toes that it appeared to be a self-imposed torment. The shop was long and narrow with an unusually high counter so that he had to bend his apron in the middle and lean right over to see and hear me and other small children. The shop had bare floorboards which he sprinkled with clean sawdust every morning. Again we had a tick-book. Mr McNeil seemed to regard me and the book with disdain but I suppose all shopkeepers in our district had to accept a certain proportion of credit customers.

The bane of his life were the kids who were forever sitting on the two window sills outside the end of his shop. Unfortunately for him, the wall there made a splendid den, having a large expanse of smooth, plastered, painted brickwork which lent itself to the chalking of goalposts, wickets, "Follow This Line" beginnings and other graffiti of the period. And the low, wide, smooth sills were irresistible as seats or stands. But from his side I suppose the kids were continually materialising as imps; he hated them and would break off from serving someone to rush to the windows, shouting and brandishing any potential weapon that came to hand, a carving knife or one of the big brass weights off the scales. He would return and glare with unconcealed hatred at any children in the shop. I would try to look as sympathetic and angelic as I could for the sake of our daily bread. I had to keep that lifeline intact.

More about corner shops. At the corner of Vine Street and Rial Street was a haberdashery run by Miss Melling, a tiny, gentle lady who lived there alone. She was murdered one night by an intruder who emptied her till. He was never caught. There was a thriving newsagent's-cum-sweet shop at the corner of Duke Street and Thomas Street, owned by a Mr Lyons. His counters were stacked so high with boxes and jars of toffee that business was conducted high in the air above them, no actual counter being visible. Our occasional newspapers were usually brought in by Dad, though I did sometimes go for one to a shop owned by one of Dad's pals. This friend of Dad's also sold in the streets and I used to feel sorry for him. He was middle-aged, stout and had only one arm. He shuffled along the street, weighed down by a bag of papers over each shoulder, perspiring and calling out, "Chronicle-een-sorn!", whatever that represented, and if change were required he would use his mouth, knee and chin to make up for his missing arm.

In Duke Street was Miss Bettney's toffee shop (we never used the word "sweet") next to Jack Booth's coal yard. She was fiftyish, stiff and stern, with a hard domineering manner and voice. Her shop, down two steps, was small, clean and tidy. Jack Booth was said to be her brother. It never occurred to me at the time that they had different surnames; her half brother perhaps.

He was a grey-haired, lumbering man, slow of speech and always wore a faded old pot hat which matched his face in colour, for the coal dust settled on him so evenly that he could have passed for a nigger minstrel. He lived at the shop and Miss Bettney was continually slipping out into his coal yard to bully him, telling him to get a move on and not keep customers waiting. Whilst he was passing through her shop I often saw her trying to clout him across the face. He would just lift his arm to ward off the blow, mumble something and woe betide any kid who was in Jack's path. He'd get a "lander" for witnessing the incident.

Towards the end of the year we would try to spread our purchases over as many shops as possible, establishing ourselves in readiness for New Year's Day, for all shops were open on that day and all shopkeepers, without fail, would have a good stock of oranges in for young customers. It was a wonderful morning for us, just walking from shop to shop, Happy-New-Year-ing, not buying anything, just stuffing oranges up our jerseys so as to appear empty-handed at each call. Eventually we would return home to count and

gloat over the morning's takings and to eat as many as we could. Happy New Year finished at midday.

A Welsh family named Roberts came to live a few doors away from us. They were a nice, reserved and obviously comfortably-off family and had two daughters, Dylis and Eleanwen, and a son named John who was a little older than me. He and I became good pals, I finding him very informed, interesting and funny. I liked his Welsh accent but I think he was a little ashamed of it and sometimes tried to talk our way, purposely dropping his aitches for instance. They had a little dog and it seemed that Mrs Roberts was forever standing on their doorstep calling out "Tidema Floss" and "Macom bidi nine". Well, that's what it sounded like and I think the phrases meant, "Come here, Floss" and, "Dirty little pig".

John taught me many Welsh words and also how to pronounce their double-ell. And I recall a riddle of his which establishes the period as wartime. "Why does the Kaiser wear iron boots?" and the answer; "To keep De Wet from defeat." Years later I learned that this had been a Boer War conundrum.

Another family arrived in our street named Baldwin. They had a son about my age who had been christened Horatio Nelson, which we thought so daft that we addressed him only as "ey"; this suited him too, for his names embarrassed him. During the twelve months they lived across from us I never saw his parents; they must always have used the back entry. Understandable for his father for men always slunk in and out of their homes; I had a feeling that they regarded homes as unmanly places. But mothers usually occupied their front doorsteps as often and as long as possible, gossiping ("gassing" we called it) or just watching passers-by. However, one day whilst playing with 'Ey at his front door I mistook a remark he made for an invitation to follow him into their house. So I went in, to their living room. There was a small table and a few upturned boxes, obviously used as seats. No other furniture. No floor covering nor fire irons; just a bare room. And they had been living there for many months. Of course I took this in at a glance but when he turned and saw me he almost pushed me out. Yet he was well dressed and had things which we regarded as luxuries. One night they did a "moonlight flit". Quite common. Another empty house.

My most regular street pals were the Williamsons who lived next door. There was Frank, red-haired, "blood-nut" as we called him, and Wilf. They were out almost as often as I. They never set foot in our house and apart from the annual Maypole tea-parties, I went into theirs only once. It happened one day when their parents were away and were not expected back until quite late. And their big sister Ada was out too. So I was invited in and we went wild, running all over the house, chasing and jumping and climbing and hiding and fighting. It was wonderful! Upstairs I noticed a back bedroom door was off and was leaning against the wall. I persuaded Frank to try it out as a toboggan down their stairs. I broke the knob off then down we went, a thrilling, hectic, crashing ride from top to bottom. Up and down we went, gouging chunks out of the plaster, splitting and splintering the stairs, tearing the lobby oilcloth to ribbons. Their Ada came home unexpectedly, just in time to see a downhill flight. She leapt at us, shouting and clouting; and I ran, leaving them to whatever was to follow. They didn't appear in the

street for a few days. But I wasn't bothered. That's how things were.

There was a bossy girl in our street named Florrie Russell who usually looked down her nose at all boys. I think she was a little older than I, was quite attractive and well dressed and knew she was superior to all the kids in the street. Yet she would sometimes stand watching us playing a game, obviously longing to join in. But no girl ever managed to do that. Except perhaps our Mabel, who was allowed to run for the occasional long-distance ball or piggy. At regular intervals Florrie's mother employed me on a special errand. She worked in the main offices of Boot's Cash Chemist's down Medlock Street near the gasworks. Florrie always referred to the place as "my mother's office" and I thought that Mrs Russell was either the manageress or owned it. This did not seem unreasonable to me.

I had to collect a load of scrap wood for Mrs Russell's fire from the Goods Receiving department, which was one tiny part of the huge Boot's Cash Chemist's block. For transport I had to borrow a coal wagon from Jack Booth's coal yard. It had to be as large as possible and Jack's biggest ones were, to me, like huts on wheels. Trying to borrow a wagon was the most distasteful part of the whole errand. I would humbly request one. Jack never gave me a definite answer but would continue to serve his customers, ignoring me, perhaps hoping I would go away. I would move around, avoiding people, trying to catch his eye for some recognition or an answer. Eventually he would grumbly point to one which I would have to manoeuvre out as quickly and as gratefully as I could. Then off to Boot's with Florrie walking a discreet distance away from me, ensuring passers-by did not associate her with me or the wagon. Sometimes I would have one or two of the children in the wagon enjoying the ride.

Nearing the gasworks I was always intrigued by the sight of a number of women in a side street, sitting on the edgings with legs outstretched. All around them would be short ends of wood from the nearby sawmills. Each woman had an axe and a wood block and there they sat, day after day, chopping firewood. They tossed the choppings into the roadway, where a man collected and bundled them. The women were always laughing or singing and often shouted rude remarks at men who were passing.

At the Reception Department my wagon would be loaded with empty boxes and scrap wood, the stack being as high as possible to ensure that Mrs Russell got good value for her money. The return journey was always a trial for Florrie as pieces would be continually falling off, she having to replace them. Crossing Stretford Road with its traffic and tramlines was troublesome and embarrassing too, for tram drivers would slow down and eye me with apprehension or annoyance as I wobbled across their lines with my overloaded wagon. Back to Booth Street and Florrie would supervise as I put the wood down their coal grid. Then she would give me the threepence (a generous payment) which she had been holding since the errand started. This, of course, went straight to my mother.

One day John Roberts, the Welsh boy, asked to accompany us to Whitworth Park, which was unusual for we thought his mother had

forbidden him to go any distance with us. It was a cold, wintry day. We were squatting at the edge of the pond near to the boathouse where the water was deep and swarming with fish when John, who had been sitting on a sloping grass verge behind us, came and pushed in, close to me. On the verge was a carriage with a baby in it, unattended. Unnoticed at first, it started to roll downhill, gathering speed as it moved towards the pond. It finally bounced across the path at the bottom, crashing into John's back and sending him sprawling head first into the water. The carriage followed and stuck at wheel depth.

A girl ran towards it screaming, "My God! The baby!" Several people ran to its rescue but ignored John, who scrambled out, soaked from head to foot. He stood shivering and we wondered what to do for the best. At someone's suggestion we all went to the park shelter, though there was little protection there from the biting wind. John undressed. We wrung some water out of his clothes which he put on again and we made for home, leaving him at their front door. We were not particularly worried as we all had returned home wet at some time.

But we didn't see him again. He developed pneumonia and died within a week. I will never forget that remark of Grannie's. She said, "Mrs Roberts' grief was terrible to see." It hurts even now to think of poor Mr and Mrs Roberts and the sorrow caused by such a foolish, ignorant attempt to help John in his misery.

And there was Hector Leach, who hadn't lived in our street for more than a couple of weeks when he joined us on a visit to Whitworth Park. On the way back we took our usual short cut up the "little entry". We noticed two adjacent back gates were open, the houses apparently unoccupied. We had a great time playing in the two back gardens and climbing over the high wall between them. We started tossing stones at each other over the wall; the bigger the stone the louder the jeers and laughter.

I picked up a half brick and heaved it over. There was an awful yell, frightening, so our side scattered. When we assembled in Carter Street someone said Hector Leach had been hit, had shouted out and wasn't with us at the moment. Well, we didn't know him very well so we just made our way home, and forgot him. A few days later we learned that he had been found lying on the ground in that back garden, apparently unconscious, had been taken to the Royal Infirmary and detained, having a fractured skull. None of us was ever questioned about the incident and Hector didn't play with us again. Strangely enough we regarded him almost as an intruder, a foreigner, simply because he lived across the other side and at the far end of the street. And no boy had come from that particular part before.

Whitty Park was undoubtedly our most popular away-from-home place for playing. Next came Twenty Seven Steps, or Twennyseven as we called it. It was a low-lying field on Mauldeth Road, at the bottom of a flight of rickety old wooden steps from which it got its name. The field was about three miles away and an outing there occupied the best part of a day. We would return home about tea-time, thirsty, clemming and tired, particularly if I had taken one of the children in a trolley. But no questions asked. Plenty of tea, as much bread as we wanted then out to play again until bedtime. A happy life.

Twennyseven was a splendid place for playing: grassy slopes for rolling down, patches of treacherous boggy ground and a little stream emerging from a dark, smelly culvert, the mouth of which was full of weeds and junk. There was a large adjacent field where we sometimes trespassed for it had "Private - Keep Out" signs all round. I believe that during the first year of the war it had been an aerodrome belonging to the Royal Flying Corps and was afterwards used for displays and fetes. I recall gate-crashing one of these by squeezing through the fence, mixing with the crowd and watching the sporting events, side-shows, and of particular interest, a balloon race. In this, each participant was attached to a large balloon which made him almost weightless. And thus, starting with a short run, he could leap into the air and float a good distance before grounding. Not so long ago I saw this "sport" demonstrated in a newsreel where it was claimed as a new venture.

At the far end of Mauldeth Road was a railed-off little woody place where we occasionally played, known to us as Newzen. Well, that was how we pronounced it, though there was no indication of its proper name or spelling. Years later I learned its correct title was Hough End Clough and I deduced that it had first been mistakenly read as Hughes End Clough. "Clough" was dropped and "Hughes End" became "'ughes En'" and finally Newzen. Interesting to me, if not to anyone else.

On our travels we were fascinated by old buildings which we loved to explore, particularly if they were situated in overgrown gardens with thick bushes or trees or accessible only by climbing gates, fences or railings. We revelled in dirty, stagnant, smelly pools. Tunnels, caves, pits, holes in the ground were like magnets to us. And to this day the sudden smell - or should I say, stink - of decaying vegetation and stagnant water immediately transports me back to those schoolday escapades.

## Chapter 5

I was about eight years old when, in spite of there being seven living in our small house, a lodger arrived. He worked with Dad at the Calico Printer's, we were told to call him Uncle Matt and he came to live in our parlour. I never knew his surname and he never spoke to us children nor even looked at us. He was a crusty, unsmiling bachelor. He must have provided his own furniture for we had none in that room. We were forbidden to enter his room or to disturb him in any way. On several occasions when I knew he was out I tried to open his door but though I turned the knob, he had somehow contrived to prevent its being budged even a fraction of an inch. Perhaps he didn't trust us kids.

He was a very quiet man and always wore his cap when passing through our living room to fill his kettle or to go to the lavatory. Every morning he would knock on our door, come in, lean against the dresser and wait patiently for Dad, holding his large, newspaper-wrapped dinner under his arm. He would just stare ahead, ignoring all the noise and confusion of our early morning preparations and whistle tunelessly, obviously controlling his impatience and annoyance at Dad's never being ready. He was with us for a few months, then one day the parlour was ours. He appeared to

have left hurriedly, furniture and all, and his name was never mentioned again.

Shortly afterwards, another lodger appeared; Jim Greenlees, Uncle Jim to us. Thin, dark, with a slight squint and like Matt, never without his cap. Rather strange, this habit of putting on his cap even to pass through our room. I knew he didn't wear it in his own room for I could see him through our parlour window. Perhaps it was a show of good manners, a mark of respect for the official occupiers.

Uncle Jim was a window cleaner. I recall being in Standard Three classroom one day when I noticed the top of a ladder which was being carried along the main corridor. It stopped outside our room, was propped against it and a man's head appeared. A window cleaner and oh - an exciting surprise - yes, it was Uncle Jim! I proudly whispered to all around, "My uncle!" But familiarisation with the job had conditioned him to see no-one in particular. He went on cleaning and moving his ladder and I was getting terribly anxious. Would he never notice me? Would this important occasion pass forever, unmarked and unrecognised? But at long last he saw me and waved his window leather. At ME! I was so proud and I imagined I was envied. A never-to-be-forgotten moment.

Uncle Jim left our house as suddenly and as quietly as Uncle Matt had done, though he continued to live somewhere in the neighbourhood. I always had a tender spot for Uncle Jim, for he was one of the very few grown-ups who would lower themselves to acknowledge kids when they recognised them in the street.

I came downstairs one morning to find two strange men standing by our dresser. Lodgers? I wondered. But Mother and Dad were not speaking to them, which seemed very strange. Then in strode the Landlord, that dreaded man who was always in a hurry, whose very appearance and voice made Mother go ashen with anxiety and fear, who was feared even more than Doctor Chapman. But this was Saturday, not his usual day. Dad left. The landlord started talking very quietly to Mother, who didn't seem to be aware that I was making preparations for my usual Saturday morning job of washing the floor. Grannie came in, looked around, seemed ill-at-ease and quietly walked out again.

As I was carrying my bucket and floorcloth up the lobby towards the front door it was pushed open and who should come in but Grandma Watkin, a most unusual visitor. High drama, I was beginning to feel, though not in those actual words. She, Mother and the landlord went into the parlour and closed the door. All I could hear was the blur of subdued voices and my feelings were of excitement at these unusual and important people actually being in our house. I started washing the lobby floor. After a while Grandma came out and immediately left and the landlord beckoned the two men, who left with him. I soon forgot the incident but one day learned that the men were bailiffs and our possible eviction had been avoided by the combined efforts of Grandma Watkin and Uncle Jim, Dad's brother-in-law, who had sent some money with Grandma. This was not the only time that Uncle Jim had helped Dad with his debt problems.

Monday mornings often meant a pawnshop errand for me, to Appleton's in Booth Street or Wraith's in Vine Street. We always

referred to the place as "Uncle's" or "The Post Office", and the errand was carried out early, hurriedly and furtively. I would leave by our back entry, taking the carriage in which the bundles for Uncle had been covered with newspaper. I was worried during the journey and whilst queueing outside the place (being there before he was open) for there was an unstated understanding that I had to avoid being seen or recognised by anyone who knew us. Mother didn't want people to know our business. I never knew what the bundles consisted of. I wasn't interested and the counter was very high. Mother or Grannie redeemed the good on Saturday morning. I now wonder what was in those bundles. Bedding? We had none to my knowledge. If we had any it was not used for that purpose and where could it have been kept in our house? Nor could they have been clothes, for we wore all that we possessed.

Only once during my schooldays did I see Mother and Dad dressed up and that was on a visit to Grandma Watkin's in Darncombe Street, Moss Side, the house which many years later would be our home. In those days Moss Side was a very respectable neighbourhood and Grandma told me that the landlord, who owned most of the houses in the street, would reprimand anyone whose curtains and doorstep were not clean when he called for the rent. There must have been a celebration of some kind at Grandma's and Mother and Dad, Jack and I had been invited. This was the only time I ever saw them out together and it stands out clearly in my mind because of an incident which hurt and annoyed me.

Our Jack and I had arrived early at Grandma's and we were standing on the doorstep when we saw them coming along, arm in arm. Mother was wearing a dark costume and a hat, an outfit that wasn't her own for she never wore anything but a shawl over her usual things when going out. She looked so strange and Dad was quite different too. Now Mother was quite dumpy and the costume was rather tight-fitting and our Jack, at my side, looked at me, grinned and made movements with his hands, referring to and exaggerating Mother's figure. I felt terribly hurt at his making fun of her and also a little sorry for Mother, for I thought her curves really were a little too much. However, she wasn't aware of our opinions and seemed very pleased to be dressed up for once. I never saw her outfit again.

For many years on August Bank Holiday Grandma took Jack, Mabel and me to Belle Vue Zoological Gardens for a wonderful and exciting day. Even the journey on the number 53 tram was a treat for it would most likely be the last tram ride until next year. She would bring a large shopping bag full of food for us. The first glimpse through the turnstile was a peep at Heaven-to-come. We had to by-pass the first attraction, the boating lake, for Grandma thought it dangerous. But then into Belle Vue proper. The Firework Island, the Zoo, the Ballroom and best of all, the Amusements. She would find a good seat among the Indian Rockery from where the elephant and camel rides started and then dismiss us with instructions to be back for a certain time for dinner.

Each year we followed the same routine. First we climbed, scrambled and hid all over the Indian Rockery, a huge pile of higgledy-piggledy steps, little paths, alcoves, grottoes, many-windowed turrets and towers with onion-shaped roofs. This alone was worth a day's visit. From there we progressed to the immense

Ballroom, thronged not by dancers (they came along with the band in the evening) but by children. Hundreds of them, running and sliding and colliding and falling all over the polished floor while the mothers and grandmothers sat around the sides chatting and resting their weary legs and feet. Finally a mad rush around the zoo trying to visit every cage, pit, den and house without missing any animal, reptile, bird or fish before dinnertime. Any quiet animal, gazing out through its bars, had to be "stared out" until it blinked or looked away.

To me the most interesting place by far was the Monkey House, in one corner of which was an exhibit that most people hardly glanced at, yet which held me spellbound. It was just a small imaginative sketch of a prehistoric man with the question, "Did our ancestors look like this a million years ago?" Even now I can vividly recall his semi-human face, his stooped posture, the huge club in his right hand. I knew nothing at all about evolution. I just gazed at it, and wondered.

About mid-day we would meet Grandma and make our way to the huge dining hall, where it seemed thousands of people were scuttering around, arranging themselves at long tables and sitting on long wooden forms. People took their own food but large jugs of tea could be purchased for a few coppers. Grandma's food was plain but there was plenty of it and that was all that mattered.

After dinner Grandma joined us for Amusements time. She paid and watched us. Again it was always the same routine: first, the Ocean Waves, which was rather tame but pleasant. Large boats rose in the air and fell down into the depths as they went round and round through painted, canvas waves. Then to the Helter-Skelter, which was only a spiral slide lasting a few seconds but because it cost only a halfpenny we had several slides. Perhaps the best value for money was the Hall of Mirrors or Laughter Land, a room in which you could stay as long as you wished. But we would eventually have to leave, knowing that Grandma would be outside getting impatient. By that time, having laughed till we ached, it would be a relief to get away from those dozen or so distorting mirrors. Quite often we would fall and roll on the floor, helpless with laughter. Outside again we would reluctantly have to pass and envy the riders on the thrilling Figure Eight, which Grandma thought very dangerous, though it was very unexciting compared with the Bobs Coaster which replaced it a few years later. Our Mabel was allowed a ride on the elephant but we were too old for that.

By this time the band would be playing for the open-air dancing at which we could only stare, wondering what pleasure people found in such strange antics. The final treat was the Maze, a doubtful pleasure. Our Mabel sometimes cried because we were obviously "lost". From there to the Ballroom for a standing-up tea as Grandma extracted the final sandwiches from the bottom of her bag.

Firework time would be approaching so we would make our way to the lakeside along with hundreds of others. There were forms at the back for grown-ups but kids squatted on the ground and talked and pushed and argued and wished the sun would hurry up and set. In the middle of the lake was an island on which a battle-field had been erected, the background of painted trees and hills sloping

steeply upwards so that everything could be seen from the lakeside. As the daylight faded, figures could be dimly seen moving around on the sets, most likely positioning large, free-standing fireworks and additional props. There would be an eerie silence broken by a terrific "Boom!" which startled everyone, tense as we all were with anticipation. Searchlights and floodlights immediately illuminated the whole island and the preliminaries to the battle commenced. There must have been some theme or story enacted but we were never aware of it. The battles were located around India or Egypt, possibly for two good reasons. First, the baddies were easily recognisable by their black faces and secondly it justified the inclusion of some of the zoo's elephants, camels and horses. There were cavalry charges, hand-to-hand fighting with bayonets and spears accompanied by rifle and cannon fire and much flag waving. As the battle rolled on the flashes of gun and shell fire increased to a continuous, deafening and frightening roar. Men yelled, threw up their arms and fell to the ground but could be discerned through the smoke crawling off to race round the back and reappear as reinforcements. The battle always ended with the hoisting of a large Union Jack followed by the wheeling on of huge portraits of the King and Queen illuminated and outlined by exploding fireworks.

The sudden darkness and quietness came as a shock and as the clouds of smoke and the smell of burnt powder rolled over the lake towards us we would turn and make our way to the waiting trams. Another twelve months to our next tram ride to heaven.

Oh, the wonderful, magical and exciting thrill of Christmas approaching! Though our presents were always few and inexpensive no one could have felt its joy more than we did. Mother would recite to the baby of the family a little poem which made us tingle with excitement and anticipation of the coming of "Santy Claus" (we never called him Father Christmas). The baby would be on her knee and she would slowly say (let's assume it is Norman):

Hang up our Norman's stocking  
Be sure you don't forget  
For our dear little Norman  
Has never seen Christmas yet.  
I told him all about it  
And he opened his big brown eyes  
He seemed to understand me  
He looked so funny and wise.

That was all. We would laugh with happiness and would ask her to say it again and again.

One particular Christmas stands out in my memory. I would be about eight years old for I had just stopped believing there was a real Santy Claus. Mother was in bed in the parlour so there was quite possibly a new baby with her. I was sitting on the steel firestool brought in from the kitchen. It was Christmas Eve, late evening and as there had not been any mention of a toy for me I was resigned to a toyless Christmas morning. Dad came in and Mother asked him for some money but he said he hadn't got any. She started crying, which was rather unusual, and Dad went out again, to the beerhouse, I suppose, the only possible other place for him. I don't think I was very upset at my not having anything to look forward to for I accepted things as they were and was in

no way sorry for myself. When it was quite late Grandad Chinn came in. He had a quiet word with Mother, gave me sixpence and told me to hurry out and get something for myself. Up I jumped, for I knew what I wanted but was afraid the shop would be shut or the article sold.

I ran to Embden Street, to a newsagent's next to Seymour Mead's, in whose window were always a few small toys. The one I wanted was still there, the shop light was still on though the door was locked. But the kind man opened his door and I bought a John Bull Printing Outfit price sixpence. I was happy. The pleasure in the very smell of the new rubber letters and the varnish of the shiny black knob of the stamp! Mine, mine! I don't suppose it lasted more than a few days. Those loose letters would be doomed to a short life and a gay one. No discipline in our house. No respect for things or putting them away after use. Beyond our comprehension. No gumption.

I recall a few other Christmas toys. One was a hopeless wreck of a kid's tricycle that someone had given to Dad. Perhaps at the time he had said he would repair it; but he never looked at it. The front, driving wheel had had two pedals once but one was broken off. The most annoying feature was the fact that the handlebars swivelled round and round without moving the front wheel, all because of a missing screw. It had only a seat pillar, no seat. So it could be moved round helplessly in all directions. For some reason it found its way into the front bedroom and remained there for years. I realised a screw of some kind in the handlebars would convert it into something usable but my knowledge stopped there. I pushed nails, match stalks, bits of metal into that empty screw hole. Gormless.

However, I did occasionally make simple working models from cardboard. In some of Grannie's women's weekly magazines were patterns and instructions. The patterns had to be pasted on to cardboard, cut out and connected at various points with paper fasteners to provide a swivelling action. In fact I made quite a lot and enjoyed doing so but they were never very satisfactory. I made the paste from flour and water and, being impatient, dried them in front of the fire which always distorted the cardboard. The moving parts never worked smoothly for we did not have paper fasteners and the bits of hairpin which I used were poor substitutes.

I was very fond of drawing and spent many hours copying from comics and newspapers. I was particularly fond of reproducing the titles of newspapers in what I think was Gothic type. One day I was copying one when Dad came in with his best pal, Fred Proud. They looked at my work and Fred, with an air of profound wisdom, exclaimed, "Jack. You mark my words. One day that lad will be a signwriter!" I was greatly flattered. This forecast of a brilliant future impressed me so. It was a career that surely demanded the finest of artistic skills and from that day and until leaving school when asked what was to be my profession, with great pride I would reply, "A signwriter". On finally leaving my Central School I was called in to see the headmaster. When I told him of my ambition I don't suppose he was particularly impressed. One was expected to leave Ducie Avenue to become a lawyer, architect, doctor and so on.

Our Jack lived at Grandma Watkin's in Darncombe Street for the

greater part of his schooldays but he sometimes returned to our house for periods ranging from a couple of days to several weeks, perhaps because his bed was required for a visitor - I never asked because it didn't occur to me that there might be a reason for these homecomings. Many years later he told me how he loved them, mainly because of the assurance that Mother still loved him, though of course words or demonstrations of affection were bestowed only on babies. But Grandma was very kind to him, fed and clothed him well.

Having our Jack at home meant sleeping three or four in one bed, which was quite pleasant for it made us warmer in the winter and also led to more laughing and singing before we went to sleep. It was Jack who showed me how to write on the bedroom ceiling with candle smoke, reached by standing on a pillow balanced on the bed rail. We wrote "Our Mabel is Daft" and added insult to injury by tracing a face with a knobby nose which we said was like her.

Mr Stubbs, the headmaster of Jackson Street School, retired and Mr Holmes arrived to take his place. I liked him from the start because of his strong resemblance to a film comedian named Ford Sterling, Chief of the Keystone Cops who were at that time beloved by all the kids. He was very fond of singing and the increased frequency of the subject in the school curriculum strongly influenced my memory of the remaining years there. We learned and rehearsed words and music in our own classrooms but I remember nothing of that. It was the massed singing in the Central Hall that I loved and remember. Mr Holmes conducted whilst standing on a table. He would demonstrate how notes should be slurred into each other gently, softly, "Like this," he would eagerly say. His face would light up with a beaming smile then an "ah" would be formed. Up and down the scale he would go, ah-ing away, his eyes closed as he lost himself in sheer ecstasy. I loved all the songs, some moving me deeply: *Land of Hope and Glory, Lest We Forget, Schubert's Serenade, By Cool Siloam's Shady Rill, O Hush Thee My Baby, O Who Will O'er the Downs So Free?, Drink To Me Only With Thine Eyes, Early One Morning, Clang On The Anvil.*

Mr Holmes allowed an occasional



*My father (left) with his pal Fred Proud on the doorstep of the Swan Inn, Vine Street. It was Fred who predicted a brilliant career for me - as a signwriter*

break from routine. He would ask for boys to come forward and sing their own favourites. The most memorable and oft-repeated was a duet by twin brothers whose parents were on the stage. It was a song I never heard elsewhere. The chorus went:

*We are the Dandies of the New York swells  
Everybody knows.  
We know our manners, how to spend our tanners  
We are respected wherever we may go  
And when we travel on the railway line  
We open the windows wide.  
We know how to use our feet  
I-tiddlyity down the street  
We are the New York swells.*

At "I-tiddlyity" they did a little tap dance. Oh, it was wonderful! Another entertainer, but of a different kind, was Oswald Clode, one of my class pals. He was a shy lad, rather poorly-dressed even according to normal standards, with a slight speech impediment and an arm deformity. One could tell that life had not been kind to him and teachers occasionally spoke gently to him. On the day before each holiday Oswald visited each classroom and recited his poem "Big Steamers" - he had done so as a special treat when we had the afternoon off for the Armistice in 1918.

It was not our cup of tea but we always clapped furiously and Oswald would blush with happiness. I recall only one line of his poem and this was most likely because it was accompanied by his one and only dramatic gesture. "And if anyone hinders our coming you'll starve," he would say, at the same time putting his hand to his stomach and lowering his head with feigned weakness. But after the final applause he would have to return to his usual position on the back row of the class along with the other nonentities; to whom a compliment from the teacher was unknown; who would never leave the class a little early no matter how straight up they sat.

Why can I recall, without hesitation, the class register for Standard Three? John Allsop, Ralph Birley, Oswald Clode, Sam Goodman, John Heron, John Hitchen, Sidney Honey, Sidney Geddes, Leonard Hulme, Edgar Jeffries, Shakfield Jones, Fred Lamb, John Lamb, John Morris, Willie Morris, Alfred Ogden, Willie North, Eric Penter, Norman Patient, Tommy Pimblott, Sidney Purdy, Willie Ritchie, Willie Shelmerdine, Henry Watkin, Leonard Walsh, Alex Worthington, Reg Worthington, Cecil Wood. And I clearly remember all but Hulme and Morris.

There were few boys who missed the Children's Saturday Matinee at the cinema almost opposite the school on Chapman Street. It was the Popular Picture Palace, known to all as the "Pop". The matinee was great entertainment but something of an ordeal. Most of the seating consisted of long wooden forms, the dearer seats at the back being of the tip-up type. Before the pictures started and during the intervals it was Bedlam. Kids fought, stood on, knelt on and fell off the forms; few sat on them. They crawled underneath, seeking things they had dropped. Apple cores, orange peel and paper darts came down from the balcony. During the intervals there would be arguments about the picture just seen and comics would be swapped. Many of us left the show with splitting headaches caused, I think, not by the noise or excitement but through lack of oxygen in the unventilated, door-

sealed Pop. The programme usually consisted of a newsreel, one or two serials and several two-reel comedies; these being shown time and time again with various permutations.

At this time there was a very popular hero named Eddie Polo, the star of many serials including one which provided splendid opportunities to win fantastic prizes. At the very end of each episode Eddie, though he could be in the most hazardous predicament, would look straight at you and with rather exaggerated lip movements, say a few words. The films were, of course, silent. Then on the screen would come the question, "What did Eddie say?" Entries on a postcard to be handed to the Manager. We never heard of winning entries or prizes.

There was a serial called "The Shielding Shadow" in which the hero had developed a dye or paint which was so devoid of colour that as he painted a vase with it it disappeared from view, bit by bit, before your very eyes. He dyed a large piece of cloth with it and when he draped it over himself, he vanished. I loved that pseudo-science. Harry Houdini, then a young man, starred in a couple of serials. One was called "The Handcuff King" and was perhaps the only serial I didn't care for. First, because I found escapology uninteresting and secondly he didn't look like a hero; he was ugly, I thought.

Throughout each film a piano was played without a break, the music changing to suit the mood of the picture. The regular pianist was a lady but when she was absent the Manager took over. This meant reduced supervision, for he spent much of his time walking



The "Pop" Picture Palace, Chapman Street.

up and down the aisles whilst the pictures were showing, ready to quell any disturbance. One could tell from the perpetual scowl on his face that he hated kids. But often, when he was at the piano, the hubbub would grow louder and louder until he could no longer bear it and he would suddenly dash out from behind the low curtain shielding the piano and run around slapping and pushing and bawling at all and sundry.

The great cowboy of those days was William S Hart. None of us knew what the S stood for but Shakespeare and Secret were two possibilities. The only figure on the films to arouse anything akin to hero-worship in me was the man who played the name part in the very first "Tarzan of the Apes", Elmo Lincoln. He was a huge black-haired man who looked as though he really could fight a lion. His apes were man-size, not like the ridiculous little things which chattered round the feet of all the future Tarzans. And when he killed he placed one foot on the body, raised his face to the sky, beat his chest with his fists and gave voice to roar after roar of victory. The silly yodelling cry of later Tarzans I thought contemptible.

Grannie read a weekly magazine, "Picture Show", in which one feature consisted of about a dozen photographs of a film star, each showing a different facial expression and having an explanatory title underneath such as "Anger", "Jealousy", "Dismay" and so on. A different person each week, of course. The strip torn out and shown to my pals helped us to give our own impressions of the various emotions. Howling fun.

I played truant from school on two occasions, not because I really wanted to but through the persuasive powers of a school pal, Walter Latham. He was from another class and joined with our gang at playtimes. About to enter school after dinner one day, he asked me to go for a walk. I was taken aback, for the very thought of anyone purposely wagging school had never entered my mind before. It was a nice day, though I must say that the state of the weather mattered very little then. We started by hanging on the backs of horse-drawn lorries but this soon became boring. Then we wandered around Warwick Street and Embden Street, aimlessly jumping over low garden walls, running up garden paths and scampering over gardens. Mild vandalism. In fact we just didn't know what to do. Eventually I lost sight of Walter and went home. Nothing was said at school about my absence. It had been a bore and yet about a week later I wagged it again. With Walter. Just as uneventful. No willpower.

About this time there was a craze at school for reciting versions of an old poem which started with "The boy stood on the burning deck". There were countless versions, some being rather vulgar. Two typical ones:

*The boy stood on the burning deck  
His neck was full of blisters  
He split his trousers down the back  
And had to wear his sister's.*

*The boy stood on the burning deck  
Selling peas a penny a peck  
Did he wash his dirty neck?  
Did he heck!*

Popular songs of the day were an important feature of life and everybody sang, young and old, from morn till night. Well, almost. I don't know who introduced the songs but I think beerhouses helped, for every one of them had a singing room with a regular pianist who would be responsible for keeping up-to-date with piano copies, which were sixpence each. And on every night except Sunday, for the final hour before closing, the rafters would resound to the voices of the customers singing to their hearts' content. Many people had pianos - I think there were half a dozen even in our street - and accomplished players would publicly demonstrate their ability during the evenings and weekends by running through their repertoire. Pianos were always kept in the parlour (next to the street), often with the window or the front door left a little open. I learned many popular songs this way whilst sitting on the grid under Dolly Hamer's window. She lived almost opposite us.

Of course the music halls played their part in introducing these songs. The local Hulme Hippodrome was very popular and there were seats to suit every pocket. Most weekly magazines for women regularly included words of the current popular numbers which were often cut out and taken to work so everyone there could learn verses and choruses. Children sang in the streets. Out loud. Alone. In groups. Nothing unusual, no self-consciousness. Popular songs and their own. A typical one which no grown-up appeared to know went:

*O mi name is Iky Moses an' mi name is very well known,  
Ah live in the county of Lancashire a'ave a business of mi own  
A feller come inter mi shop one day, a suit 'e wanted t'buy  
Ah got 'im one f'twelve an' six an' 'e 'it me in the eye.  
So there's goin' t' be a murder in this ol' rag shop.*

"I knew dozens. We would sit on the flags, backs to our wall, singing such verses one after the other.

Parodies were popular and odd spaces in comics and boys' papers were filled with them. They were often so infantile that I think the office boys must have composed them. Two that come to my mind are: "The Little Grey Hole in my Vest" for "My Little Grey Home in the West" and "The Thief of Ingoldsby" for "The Sheik of Araby". Another craze was the building up of songs from the titles or first lines of others. A popular one, sung to the tune of "I Want Some Money", went:

*I Want Some Money  
Said Sally to the Sheik of Araby  
O Aint it Funny  
O Pal Why Don't You Answer Me.  
Tippy Canoe, Jealous of You  
Hiawatha's Melody of Love, My Mammy  
Here Comes Old Beaver  
Shufflin' Along My Caravan.*

Street buskers were out from early morning till late afternoon when, I suppose, they went home to their tea and to count their takings. They strolled along main roads, narrow streets and back entries. They were of all ages and of both sexes. Occasionally one saw women with babies in their arms or in trolleys. Some appeared to be simple-minded or distressingly ragged, while others affected peculiar mannerisms and gestures purposely, I suppose, to attract attention, sympathy and money.

One day as a street singer passed our door, our Jack picked up the song from him and walked into our house singing "Ain't We Got Fun". Mother and Grannie were in. One part goes: *There's nothing surer, The rich get rich and the poor get poorer.* Jack must have learned a deviation for he sang: *The rich get rich and the poor get children, when Wham! - a clout off Mother.* "Let's have less of that here," she said. "Shocking!" added Grannie.

When I was about nine years old we were taken by a teacher to Leaf Street swimming baths. It was free. At the turnstile each boy was given a towel which was a square foot of coarse wrapping cloth and a small piece of carbolic soap. Around the plunge were cubicles, each of which was fitted with a board on which to sit, three clothes hooks, a mirror and a footboard. No door. There were three boys to each cubicle. We were all naked. The teacher ensured we all washed in the hot water tubs before entering the plunge. The bottom was rough and dark in colour. I soon learned to swim and developed a craving for it. With every halfpenny I got, off I would go to the baths to stay in the plunge until the attendant called me out. My pal, Frank Williamson, was also very keen and we started going to town, particularly the north-western part where there were several canals, one or two of which cut right through the city. They were filthy and smelly and in parts ran between high walls and office blocks, really far from inviting but to us it meant free swimming. We had a feeling that it would be frowned upon by policemen and other officious people so we sought the quietest spots. Then off with our clothes and into the delightful, smooth, inky, cold, smelly water. On quiet days we would dive off lock gates, swim under low bridges, climb on to old disused barges. We were sometimes bawled at by distant figures and kids threw stones at us from bridges but we ignored such trifles.

Those pleasure spots still exist, but I see them now with horror, as stinking, slimy death-traps. I wonder how we used to dry ourselves. On our jerseys, I suppose. However, Frank's mother eventually learned of our canal exploits and she put a stop to them.

Now a little about our eating. For breakfast and tea we always had bread with margarine, as much as we wanted, accompanied by tea with condensed milk in it; Cow Brand, of course. There was one exception to this routine. On Easter Sunday morning we had a boiled egg each. Dinner, the midday meal, was a cooked one three or four times a week and was usually pea soup or tater 'ash. For hot meals we dined together, standing round the table. There was plenty of bread afterwards if requested and other meals, just slices of bread called butties, could be spread over an indeterminate period as we ran in and out again from play, one round at a time. There was usually something tasty for Dad, a little bacon or an egg or a bit of meat. He would dip his bread in his gravy and let us take a bite. We thought Dad was great.

Sometimes there would be a special treat. A penn'orth of broken biscuits from the corner shop, a delicious finish to a buttie meal. Or bread smeared with Dad's HP sauce. We also received jars of Cod Liver Oil and Malt from Grandad Chinn which he had not quite emptied and this was quite nice on bread. We never had jam, pastry, cakes, puddings or anything sweet like those. We had red

cabbage sandwiches, the cabbage coming from Grandad Watkin. He was very fond of it but sometimes had more than he required. We didn't like them very much but they made a change.

And we had fish. I would go to the fishmonger's on Warde Street taking a bucket, a sheet of newspaper and a penny. For this I received two or three cod's heads which would be dropped into the bucket. They looked rather frightening with their large, open, glassy eyes and gaping mouths. But the newspaper covered them and I was told to return via back entries as Mother didn't want the neighbours to see what we were having.

We used spoons only, always licked our plates and said "Thank God etc." after hot meals. We never had salt, pepper, mustard or vinegar and I have never started to use them. When I started work biscuits and cakes gradually appeared on the dinner table, exclusively for me, a working man. Delicious. I looked forward to those cakes and enjoyed them more than the main meal. To some degree this still applies. I suppose those first fourteen sweetless years contributed to it.

In the basement of the Hulme Library was the Children's Reading Room, the entrance to which was guarded by a lady who inspected the hands and appraised the appearance of each would-be user. I tried several times to gain entrance but failed to reach the required standard and gave up the idea, not knowing where I had failed, just accepting the frown and the shake of her head. But I remained hungry for reading matter and one day came a gift as from heaven. Whilst walking down our entry and peering into the dustbins awaiting emptying by the binmen, I saw on the top of one bin a large, thick, backless book. I grabbed it and ran into our backyard with it. It was Chamber's Journal for nineteen-nought-something. It was dog-eared and pages were missing but never before had I seen and held such a volume of reading matter and it provided months of utmost delight and interest. It was my introduction to life through the written word. The sciences, philosophy, religions, politics, literature, poetry, much of it far beyond my understanding. I kept the Journal in the safest place I could think of - in the lavatory, carefully balanced on the cistern. But inevitably it got thinner as the pages became loose or were torn out for toilet paper.

In later years as we all became readers and reading matter became more plentiful, the lavatory became the coveted, quiet retreat. Each user would take his paper or book with him and after a while a knocking on the kitchen window would indicate his time was up and he would pass the next user in the yard carrying his book.

In addition to the fitting of new gas mantles, there was a job which Dad performed with much fuss, gusto and admiring attention from his audience. It was boot repairing. It would start with a concerted search for the tools and materials; the shoe last, the rusty curved leather knife, the hammer with a broken shaft and a loose head. The leather would have been left soaking, overnight, in a bucket of water. We would squat on the floor round him as he hacked and hammered and bent nails and mildly cursed them. The intense concentration and effort required would be obvious from his grunts and the way his tongue kept peeping out of his mouth, now one side, now the other. He repaired our boots only after much

persuasion from Mother for he hated being confined to the house. As soon as he had finished, off he would hurry to Jimmy Allen's beerhouse to refresh himself.

In fact, when Dad wasn't in our house I always assumed he would be in Allen's. He may have had other places to go but this never occurred to me and I was quite ignorant of his life from his leaving our front doorstep to his return home. Mother always said Allen's was his second home.

Excepting for Dad's years in the army, the only times he went outside Manchester were on charabanc outings from the beerhouse. And as far as I know he never went to a cinema or a theatre. He did not possess a book and never read one, except perhaps the booklets which contain only horseracing information. Now and again he wrote a letter and on those special occasions we all had to be quiet, must not moither him or knock the table. We would admire him as he spread out his notepaper, sharpening his copying ink pencil and, with tip of tongue peeping out of the corner of his mouth, started to write. He kept a stock of enveloped which he must have acquired from his last place of work, the Calico Printers' Association. He used these for his letters but unfortunately the name of the Association was embossed on the envelope flap in the shape of an ellipse. To camouflage this he would first ink in all the letters, forming a bold ellipse, then add more lines which would transform this into the mouth of a pint pot. A little froth would be added and the sketch underlined with the words "A Pint of the Best". Every time we admired his ability and his cunning.

He had also brought with him from that firm quite a lot of copying ink pencils, indelible writers. We must have had a large number,



Jimmy Allen's beerhouse - the Swan Inn, Vine Street. Dad's second home

for in spite of their being regularly broken and lost they seemed to be available for many years. However, they could be a menace. The lead, when wetted, produced a purple, almost indelible ink. If the writing had been done with a dry lead, a smear of water would transform the words into an illegible blot. Little children like to suck things. Ours did, being brought up with dummies. So on many occasions one of them would pick up a piece and suck away, an awfully bitter taste by the way, and soon have his mouth and cheeks covered with bright purple ink. Of course when we saw it there would be panic, for we all knew it was poisonous. There would be frantic washing and much crying but little improvement. It had to wear off. It would happen again and again, no attempt being made to keep these pencils away from the children. I suppose the trouble ended when the stock of pencils did.

## Chapter 6

Mother taught us to say our prayers on getting into bed, allowing us to cover our heads with the bedclothes if it were cold. The Lord's Prayer was followed by "God bless my mother and father, sisters and brothers, grandads and grandmas, aunts and uncles, all our soldiers and sailors, cousins, teachers and all my friends. Make me a good boy, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen." I hope my friends managed to get along in life in spite of their being last on my list.

She sent us to Sunday School, which I disliked intensely and found utterly boring. Its message meant nothing to me but there were two rewards, the Whit Week lorries and the Christmas party. I think the main reason for our being there was that we were out of Mother's way for a couple of hours. I started attending when I was about seven and stopped as soon as I was fourteen because I was then allowed to please myself. No other lad in the street had to go and I envied them all for this. During my first years there I usually took one or two of my brothers with me, minding them, leading them by the hand as we walked around at "offertory" time, sitting one of them on my knees when necessary, ensuring they did not fall off the chairs or forms.

The school, Union Hall, was in the next block of Booth Street and was situated in the basement of T Seymour Mead's offices. The top floor was the Welsh Chapel which had its entrance in Medlock Street. The Principals were Mr Thompson and Miss Parr and I can honestly say I have never seen a more heavenly looking pair. Their faces really glowed with something; cleanliness or fitness or happiness or holiness; I don't know. Miss Parr's teeth and glasses sparkled and Mr Thompson's curly, white hair framed his face like a halo. The ordinary teachers seemed to become very normal and human in their presence.

We sometimes had guest speakers such as missionaries home on leave and one gave me one of those permanent memory shocks by showing us a pair of tiny shoes, worn by a Chinese girl whose feet had been bound from birth. It sickened me. I have always been squeamish about imposed pain and any tampering with the body. Another visitor showed pictures of plate-lipped and giraffe-necked negresses, spoiling my Sunday.

On the wall behind the platform was a large coloured print showing Jesus surrounded by children of many nations, most of them being, I suppose, "heathens". This was a word heard continually at Sunday School and we were told we should pity them. When the talk was over, the offertory was taken, to give to the heathens, I thought. I never gave anything. In fact it never occurred to me to do so. We filed past the platform on which sat the children whose birthdays had fallen during the previous week. One of them, always a nice little girl, would hold the box and just behind her Mr Thompson and Miss Parr giving slight nods and smiles to the givers. We never sat on the platform, possibly because no-one asked when our birthdays were. As we marched round we sang:

*Dropping, dropping, dropping, dropping,  
Hear the pennies fall.*

*Every one for Jesus  
He shall have them all.*

Though our version was:

*Hear the pennies drop.  
Every one for Jesus  
He shall have the lot*

I liked only one teacher, Mr Watkins, who looked quite ordinary and who, it was said, backed horses.

During the summer months the two senior branches of Union Hall held evening meetings in nearby streets. Hymns, prayers and speeches usually attracted reasonable audiences. Mr Thompson would speak, the teachers would call out "Hallelujah!" and all would be very nice and good. I would wheel the trolley to the edge of the crowd so the children could hear the singing. But at one meeting, in Council Street, I was badly shaken. Mr Thompson was speaking, standing on a chair, and as usual his audience was quiet and attentive for he commanded great respect in the neighbourhood. But there was a snake in the grass in the form of a drunk, a notorious one who was ambling and rolling along, making for his home in Council Street. His house just faced the middle of the crowd. I hoped Mr Thompson didn't have to see him for it would be offensive to his eyes.

But the man stopped and swayed and listened. He pushed to the front of the crowd, looked up and interrupting Mr Thompson shouted, "Don't talk such bloody rot. In a few years you'll be under the sod like me. And that'll be the end of you." (Those few words were imprinted on my memory.) Everyone was aghast and I could hardly believe my ears. Mr Thompson stopped speaking for a moment, smiled then attempted to continue. But the man waved his arms about in derision and continued to interrupt. Then he turned to face those nearest to him and just stared at them. I hated the man and wondered why God hadn't struck him down dead. But he had had his say and seemed quite satisfied. With nods and smiles to those around him he went in and closed his door. The meeting continued.

For two short periods I forsook Union Hall and gave other missions the benefit of my presence. To please Grandad Watkin, Mother suggested I try Ruby Street Unitarian Mission to which Grandad and his family had belonged during the early years of their married life. Mr Timmis, the Principal, was my godfather. It was a little better than Union Hall because there were fewer hymns and prayers

and during the separate classes periods the Bible was replaced by the Boys' Own Paper for discussion purposes. But I returned to Union Hall because it was nearer home.

Some time later I decided to change to the Band of Hope Mission Hall, which was situated in Booth Street but a few blocks down towards Oxford Road. I was told that their parties and concerts were quite frequent and very good. I went to one soon after joining. The room seemed immense and the party-goers noisy and undisciplined. The women looking after and serving us were not teachers but the children's mothers and sometimes they had to shout and clout unruly kids. The food was excellent but there was too much grabbing and throwing of buns for my liking. But I stuffed my pockets well, quite openly too because the food was so plentiful. Following the meal was some first-rate entertainment and I was absolutely thrilled because the only live performers I ever saw were street singers. I had a seat on the front row and a wonderful time. I clearly recall a comedian who had all the audience singing with him and twice he pointed at me, making humorous remarks at my expense and though I laughed with him I was really uneasy, afraid that he might ask me to stand up or do something silly. But he didn't. He taught us a new popular song, eventually to become an "evergreen" entitled "Sons of the Sea". The next week I returned to Union Hall, which I disliked the most but there I felt more at home.

Only once did I shine at Sunday School. During many years of attendance neither Mr Thompson nor Miss Parr had ever spoken to me or even appeared to see me. I was scruffy and they smiled at and patted only clean and nice children. But the time came.

I was about ten and Elsie Train, who lived in our street, persuaded me to join a group of older children from Unity Hall who were rehearsing a short sketch which would be presented during a Welcome Home evening. The guest was a missionary, home after many years in Africa, living with the heathens. The sketch had been written by another missionary and its presentation was to be a surprise to our guest. There was a simple story running through it (which I forgot) and there were six boys and six girls in it. There were some songs to be learned and I was given the opening and major part. There were numerous rehearsals but the producer, Miss Shone, was rather absent-minded. She was to sit at a front corner of the stage throughout the sketch and as a kind of compere and interlocutor, a link between players and audience, keep the show going. But during rehearsals she was constantly day-dreaming, forgetting her lines, missing and mistaking her cues; a great worry to us, though at the time we laughed about it.

The opening night drew near and our costumes had not arrived. Miss Shone was confident that the Lord would not let us down. But He did. The night arrived. The Lesser Hall was full. The important people and their Guest were on the front row. The costumes hadn't come but Airy-Fairy Miss Shone wasn't at all worried. "Carry on," she commanded, beaming at everybody. This was her Big Night.

The curtains parted and we twelve stood there, bowed, then joined the audience in singing the opening hymn. Eleven marched off leaving me alone, in my usual attire: jersey, short trousers, boots, stockings pulled up over knees for it was winter time. No-one had

had the gumption to suggest my omitting my opening line which unfortunately was: "I am dressed as an African native schoolboy." Pause. "Though it may appear strange to you, our hot climate..." and so on. Some kids at the back thought it very funny but the teachers were trying to shush them. But when I told them my name was "O-ken-de-la-weela, which means in your language, 'go softly, softly'" well, they nearly fell off their seats, laughing.

Miss Shone was undismayed and unperturbed even though she had to be reminded of every cue, upon which she would give a startled "Oh!", would turn, give Mr Thompson a big smile then deliver her words. I sang a song which started:

*White men come to Congo people's country  
Years ago, years ago,  
Slave ships sailed from Congo people's country  
Many, many times  
Full of slaves, full of slaves.*

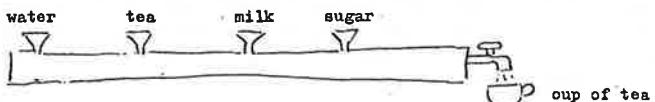
That was typical of the rest of it. The kids didn't laugh at it. Perhaps they wished they could have left themselves. When we had finished we were praised for our efforts and the Guest thanked us. And for a few weeks I received nods and smiles from people whom I didn't recognise but who, because of jersey and trousers, recognised the African schoolboy. Fame.

Back to our house. I wonder to what extent the smoky atmosphere of our living room contributed to the catarrhal and bronchial troubles which affected all of us from Dad down to the youngest. One thing we always managed to maintain was a reasonable fire, a coal fire of course. In cold weather one could hear the never-ending call, "'Arry, bring a shovel o' coal up." I disliked the job at night-time because I was frightened of the dark cellar. I had to light my way with a piece of flaming paper which usually burned out before I got to the coal hole, leaving me to grope and flee from those things that exist in dark places. Our fireplace smoked abominably. Smoke issued from cracks in the ironwork and joints in the brickwork. We would amuse ourselves by stopping various holes with paper and guessing from which other cracks the smoke would spurt with increased volume. Grannie used to say that a brick had been dislodged in the chimney but that was Grannie airing her knowledge, for I don't suppose she knew what that really meant and no-one cared or did anything about it.

During one of our Jack's brief stays he decided to make a garden in our cellar grid. The iron grid itself topped the well outside the cellar window but we called the whole area the "grid". Though a little daylight filtered through the dirty glass, for some reason Mother never opened the window so that on washing days the steam swirled up the cellar steps and into the living room. We forced open the window and cleaned out the well, which was inches deep in muck. The nearest source of soil of which we were aware was Whitworth Park so we took the carriage and dug some up. This covered the well bottom and we planted some carrot tops. We were surprised and delighted to see how quickly the tops sprouted. Our pals were invited to view our garden down the grid and some of them would have liked to beautify their homes in a similar manner but mothers objected to their cleaning out the grid bottoms.

When our Jack was eleven he won a scholarship and went to Ducie

Avenue District Central School. I noticed a change in him. He brought new words and ideas into our house. He spoke French and learned about Chemistry and Physics. He had to do work at home and I recall being so puzzled because I couldn't understand how he was able to learn something without a teacher being present. He was continually writing and drawing and talked about machinery and inventions. He invented what he called a Brewing Machine at which I marvelled. I remember it well. Here it is:



I saw nothing absurd in this. I was about nine but compared with today's nine-year-old I was as ignorant in some things as the African schoolboy. I longed to invent something myself and so often I drew Jack's device then sat, with pencil ready, hoping for the faintest glimmer of inspiration to start me off. But nothing ever came. I continued to draw his machine time and time again, getting a crumb of satisfaction from it.

He told me the longest word in the English language was Philosopidestristsstrichonologist. He professed to know what it meant but was too technical for me to understand.

He was learning about Chemistry and during Mother's absences he would carry out experiments. This entailed his ransacking the house and collecting samples of all substances suitable for his mixing can. He would try various "compounds" such as camphorated oil, sauce, gravy browning, shoe polish and so on and the mixture, placed in a can, would be boiled then allowed to simmer on the top bar of the fire whilst he smelt it and pronounced on the result. The resultant fumes, smoke and stenches were generally dense and nauseating, often making the children cry. Before Mother's return doors would be opened and coats waved furiously to dispel evidence of his experiments. Jack explained that he was applying the basic principles of Chemistry and by boiling mixtures until they were dry he hoped to arrive at the basis of all matter. I followed him, vaguely, and believed him.

There were some nasty spillages and of course, a waste of medicines and other things which had cost money. One experiment put an end to his curiosity. He had brought from Grandma's a jar of yellow powder, sulphur most likely. As he sprinkled tiny amounts of this into his boiling concoction and also on to the red coals of the fire we were fascinated by the pretty blue flashes it produced. I was holding the jar, intending to tip a little more on the coals, when suddenly about half the contents plopped out. There was a blinding flash and clouds of choking gas and smoke billowed out. Everybody yelled, Jack and I staggered back, grabbed the children and ran out of the room. We put them in the parlour, terrified as they were and shut the door. Then back to the soot-blackened room to carry out the usual procedure of furious coat wafting and attempts to clean up the mess. I don't recall Mother's homecoming but it could most likely be summed up in a few words: explanation, condemnation, a clout and the incident over and forgotten by her.

In Embden Street there was a school for mentally deficient children known to us as the Daft School. Many of these children passed

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along our street to and from the school and they were all recognisably different from the normal ones. I was a little afraid of them and gave them a wide berth in case they tried to speak to me. But I pitied them because they were sometimes mocked and jeered at, though not by anyone in our street.

The most widely known and visually abnormal one was Maudie Hewitt, a girl about my height but very fat. As she walked she rocked from side to side to allow her legs to pass each other and it was this roll which sometimes resulted in a line of kids following behind and mocking her. They would shout across "Daft Maudie" and "Fatty Maudie". She seemed to be terrified of other children and as they passed she would walk closer to the wall, cower and hide her face. Sometimes she was accompanied by a lady and once, as they passed me, I overheard them and was surprised not only at Maudie's normal and pleasant voice but that she was discussing something quite ordinary. I had always imagined some strange, unintelligible sounds to be issuing from her pitiful, balloon-like face. I think that from then on I had much more sympathy for those youngsters going to Embden Street. But for many years the name "Emden Street Daft School" was used by us as a derisory reference to someone's mental ability.

## Chapter 7

I was ten years old. Dorothy, Willie and Norman died within a period of four weeks. Illness was a commonplace thing to us. Dorothy had suffered a lot during her lifetime and Grannie often told me she was delicate, though it was not apparent to me. She was perhaps rather small for her age and had a pale complexion but she was round and chubby. She had blue eyes and a mass of curly, golden hair. She looked like a doll and in fact we often called her Dolly.

She had had meningitis and it was probably that which made her a little backward in speaking and walking. Until she was about two years old she moved around the house by shuffling on her bottom and after that her progress in walking was slow. Because of this I carried her around a lot and would go off on my errands with her on my back, giving her a donkey ride as we called it. I loved her so and was miserable when Mother used to say, "Dorothy's not well today. Don't moither her." Dorothy would perhaps be lying on the sofa or a bed in the parlour. I would go and quietly sit by her, waiting for a smile of recognition or just a word. Eventually she would pull round and be with us again, her illness quickly forgotten, and would join in the usual noisy and boisterous activity of the house.

Dorothy was five years old. She had been ill in bed in the parlour for several days and I knew she was very poorly this time for when I went in she was lying there with her eyes closed, very pale, very still. I would stand, look at her for a while then creep out, miserable and apprehensive. I came downstairs one morning and I sensed something had happened. Mrs Hamer, the street's nurse, was in the kitchen but no Mother nor Dad. Mrs Hamer's presence so early in the morning usually meant a new baby. But this time she called me to her, put her hands on my shoulders and told me that Dorothy had died in the night, and that I must not moither Mother,

though I was wondering where she actually was; most likely at Grannie's across the road. I was accustomed to the miseries and worries of childhood ailments but the losing of one of my sisters or brothers had never entered my mind. I do not recall my immediate feelings. I suppose I did not realise nor fully understand how her loss would affect us.

From then onwards Dorothy's name was never mentioned and I knew nothing of the funeral. Our Jack did not come home from Grandma's and without my being told I knew that I must not ask nor talk about Dorothy.

But a couple of weeks later both Willie and Norman were ill in bed. This had been brought into our living room, which we called the kitchen or the 'ouse. It was a big, double bed with Willie at one end and Norman at the other. With the table and the dresser in the room there was little space left to move around. It was winter time and a blazing fire was kept going all day. I did not know what was the matter with them.

Willie was nearly four. Round face, blue eyes, fair hair. He was always laughing and I talked to him more than anyone else as we seemed to understand each other, particularly in seeing the funny side of things. I had taken him regularly to Sunday School where he quickly learned and joined in the singing of some of the hymns, though during the class lessons he was a nuisance because he couldn't understand them and would get restless. Mr Watkins would give him a few text cards which he liked to chew.

Willie was a strong, well-made boy though the usual ailments such as whooping cough had downed him at times. Later I learned that he and Norman, as they shared this bed, had double pneumonia. And again I came downstairs one morning to find Mrs Hamer and Mother sitting by the fireguard, both looking very sad. I got ready for school, had my usual breakfast of bread and a cup of tea and was ready to leave when there was a knock on the front door. I went and found a man with an oxygen cylinder which Mrs Hamer was expecting. He brought it in and leaned it against the bed near Willie. Mrs Hamer connected a tube to it and placed the funnel-shaped end over Willie's mouth for a while. She then turned and asked me if I would like a whiff of oxygen. I took several deep breaths of it but with no noticeable effect.

I was about to leave for school and I went to Willie because I wanted to talk to him first but Mother said, "Don't, he's very poorly." I turned away and as I did so Willie spoke very quietly. I leaned over, very close, to hear what he was saying. "Will you sing me that song we learned at Sunday School?" he asked. I knew the one he meant, our favourite. So I started singing, very softly, "Dare to do right, Dare to be true," just two or three lines. Then I heard a strange rattling sound in his throat and I knew instinctively what it was. I ran out of the kitchen, up the stairs and into the front bedroom. I stood at the window. It was a dark and gloomy morning. And I cried and cried.

Norman, the baby, was almost two. Strong, sturdy, with dark hair and brown eyes. Another Jack. I loved to wrestle with him, rolling over and over on the kitchen rug. He lay at the foot of the bed as Willie died. I recall no more until a few days later when I was in Willie Scott's house at the end of the street. We were playing with

his Meccano. I seldom went into other lads' homes until years later when perhaps we were more acceptable to parents, a little less boisterous. In that instance perhaps Mrs Scott was being sympathetically helpful. As I was kneeling on the rug in front of the fire, so cosy, for they had a nice house, Willie's mother came in. She stopped at the living room door, stared down at me as though surprised to see me and then said, "Don't you know? Your Norman has died."

I went home. The front door was pulled-to with the mat behind it signifying no-one-in. I went in and sat on the stairs for a while, crying and wondering where Mother could be. I went across the road to Grannie's one-room accommodation. Mother and Grannie were sitting there, grief-stricken. Though Grannie was sobbing, Mother was silent. She couldn't cry any more. She had used up all her tears for Willie, who was lying in our house, unburied. I sat on the floor but didn't speak. I wondered where our Mabel was.

Neither Mother nor Grannie ever uttered the names of Dorothy, Willie or Norman from then on. Willie and Norman were buried at the same time. I was again in Willie Scott's house and I recall going to their front door and seeing the funeral pass. I saw two small, white coffins. For a long while, in bed at night, I cried myself to sleep. I missed them particularly then, for it had been my job every night to sing them to sleep.

I only once caught sight of Mother's anguish. It was perhaps about a year later. I was getting ready for school and Mother was searching through one of the over-stuffed dresser drawers looking for a pair of stockings for me. Lying at the bottom of the drawer was a large photograph of Norman which she unintentionally uncovered. She picked it up and broke into uncontrollable crying as she pressed it to her breast.

We now lived in a strangely quiet and relatively tidy home. For the first time in her married life Mother went out to work. She had a job as a machinist at a small firm at the far end of Booth Street near Oxford Road. I think they made ladies' aprons, for Mother brought several home. It was strange to see new things in our house.

But her spell of work didn't last long. The morning came when, as soon as I opened our bedroom door, I recognised the smells and sounds associated with the arrival of another baby. I was never aware of Mother's pregnancies. Even the last two arrivals, Roy and Ken, were surprises to me. I was not wise to those sort of things, though as the youngest would start to toddle around and utter a few words I would occasionally wonder if and when a new one would appear. So downstairs I went to the familiar situation of Mrs Hamer mothering us and hearing that awful howl of a new baby. Alan had arrived, in the parlour. I wonder why the bringing down of the bed didn't warn me? Perhaps done whilst I was asleep.

## Chapter 8

Once, when my toothache was very severe, Mother thought it might be caused by an abscess on the gum and if this were so no doctor or dentist would touch it. And with this cheerful remark she recommended the Dental Hospital as the last resort. Treatment was

free and immediate, they had the most up-to-date equipment and it was painless. I knew there must have been a catch in it somewhere but I was desperate. So I went. Alone. I was about eight. It was a huge, rambling, old place on Oxford Road but I eventually found the right room and the right man. I think it was free because it afforded practical experience for students of Dentistry. I was in the dental chair for a long time, opening my mouth and answering questions for individuals and groups who peered and probed and discussed the offending tooth. Several just got hold of it with their forceps but eventually one man extracted it. It was a painful experience and I was asked to return the next day for final treatment but I didn't go. Mother said it looked as though they had not removed all of it. It was painful for about a week then I forgot it.

I had an eye infection and would wake each morning with painful, watering eyes which I just accepted and did not mention to Mother. It got worse and some mornings I could not open my eyes because the lashes were stuck together with pus. I would grope my way downstairs, trying to force at least one eye open and in doing so pull out some lashes. In the scullery I would wash and rub at my eyes using the piece of shirting which served for both faces and pots. It would then be put on the wet slopstone for the next user. Hygiene? Never heard of the word. My eyes were troublesome for a long time then they got better. No treatment, no comments. They just got better.

I was now in Standard Four at school and prior to the midsummer holidays we had our first examination in basic subjects which would help to grade us when moving into Standard Five, which consisted of three classes, A, B and C. Boys were transferred from other schools in the area, Mulberry Street, Bangor Street and Duke Street. After the holidays I went into Standard 5A. I was aware of a striking difference in appearance and behaviour in boys from the other schools.

The majority in our class came from Mulberry Street, which was then a slightly better class district than Hulme. Many of them wore suits, low shoes, Eton collars, neckties and even bows. They put money in the school bank every Monday morning and did not withdraw it until holiday time. Just once in my life I owned a school bank book and it was towards the end of my term in 5A. It must have been soon after the loss of my sister and brothers when, for reasons unknown to me, Mother gave me a penny to put in the bank. For eleven Monday mornings I proudly took my turn in going to the teacher's desk with the penny and had it recorded in my book. How strangely affluent I felt! However, that was enough. Mother must have felt she needed the money so I had to withdraw it. The teacher made some comment, but I forgot what it was.

These Mulberry Street boys bought pots of geraniums at the annual sale and brought toffee and cakes to school. Some had fancy first names such as Lionel and Geoffrey. Our desk positions were determined by our examination results, mine being near the fireplace and the teacher's desk. My first desk partner was Albert Lesser: suit, Eton collar with bow, hair brushed and parted every morning. I had not met boys of this type before and did not mix nor make friends with any of them. I learned that some of them met regularly at weekends to play cricket and football on the local

recreation grounds. This was beyond my comprehension. To me, when you went home school vanished, ceased to exist and you entered the real, wider, more realistic and enjoyable world centred on your own street.

The Duke Street boys were just the opposite. Their school was near City Road, which even I regarded as a poor area. There were seven from there in our class including Moran, Walsh and an inappropriately named Bradbury - at that time bank notes bore the signature "R Bradbury", a slang term for them being "Brads", and this boy, like the others from City Road, wore a rather ragged coat with trousers and holey jersey to match.

In fact as the 5A class consisted mostly of the better-off Mulberry Street boys, so 5C were nearly all from Duke Street. Four of them joined our gang in the playground and with this fresh intake we fought and wrestled and laughed as never before. I felt a great warmth for them and still recall their grinning faces and holey jerseys with affection.

At that time very smart attire for boys was the Norfolk suit, the jacket being loose, pleated and belted. Our Jack wore one. Knickerbockers were popular, a loose trouser fastened below the knee. Eton collars were usually reserved for Sunday wear. They were deep, slanting, stiff chokers worn outside the jacket and resting on the shoulders. Very uncomfortable. I and all the other Booth Street boys wore jerseys, plus a jacket in cold weather. There were two types of jersey, the neatest having a turn-down collar with which a tie could be worn. I wore the other kind, with a round, close-fitting neck which fastened with buttons on the left shoulder. Most boys wore boots, tied with laces which crossed and caught on little metal hooks before tying. The other type of foot-wear was "low shoes", which Grannie called "low quarters".

Some Duke Street boys wore clogs which made a loud clatter as they walked down the corridors. They were a hazard during wrestling as the clog irons wore to a very sharp edge. I had two pairs, given to us I suppose, but I had a feeling that Mother was not sorry when they were finally beyond repair; she thought them rather "common". However, they were good for sliding in and in the dark a good, quick heel kick could produce a bright spark. They proved a hindrance when running, though.

We wore long stockings which were pulled up over the knees in cold weather. String or rubber bands kept them up but left deep ridges in the legs. Slovenly boys allowed their stockings to slide down to their boots and let them stay there.

I was eleven years old when I spent my first period away from home. Our Sunday School teacher, Mr Watkins, was a member of a society which organised holidays for boys from poor families. Mother decided that she could afford the five shillings necessary for Jack and me, then got Doctor Chapman to sign the application form as sponsor, confirming that we were both poor and honest. We each had an obligatory haircut and following a cursory medical examination along with about a hundred other boys at the nearby Band of Hope Hall, our applications were approved and we returned home keenly awaiting the coming Saturday morning.

It was my first train journey and I kept well clear of the carriage

doors, which Mother said could take a boy's hand right off. But I thought the compartments very luxurious with their upholstered seats, ash trays and even wall mirrors. It was a special train full of fellow campers who were very noisy at first but quieter as it dawned on some that they wouldn't be seeing their homes again for a week. Their ages ranged from eight to fourteen and for many it was to be seven days of fear, unhappiness and homesickness.

Our destination was the Summer Camp for Poor Boys at Birkdale near Southport. It was a large walled-in compound somewhere among the sandhills and consisted of offices, dining halls, dormitories, tents, toilets and large sandy areas in which we were to play, for we were not allowed to leave the camp. A doctor made a quick check and each boy handed in his jersey or jacket and was issued with a thick, navy blue jersey on which the letters B.S.C were embroidered in red across the chest. We were also given stiff, pillbox hats, again bearing the letters B.S.C, and were told we must wear them and look after them. These proved to be an additional source of worry, for they were continually being snatched off heads and thrown over camp walls or down the lavatories or just kicked around.

There were about two hundred boys there just for the week. Our immediate supervisors on the staff were youths of about sixteen or seventeen who, we were told, were orphans. To me playing conditions were wonderful. I had never before been on sand and sandhills and I revelled in the jumping, tumbling and wrestling of which I never seemed to tire. It was a hot and sunny week which must have added to the pleasure, though I don't recall ever noticing the weather as a boy.

The dining halls were furnished with long tables and benches and the meals put before us were delicious. The dinners were always basically mashed potatoes and corned beef with a variation in vegetables. Puddings which followed were scrumptiously large and sweet. Jack and I always left the table gluttonously full. I slept in a dormitory but Jack, being older, was put in a large bell tent. Each boy was provided with a long, thick nightshirt. In charge of each dorm was one of the staff youths. On the first night, soon after lights out, I pulled the bedclothes over my head and had a brief, quiet cry. Homesick. Soon, however, from all over the dorm came loud wailings and cries of, "I wanna go 'ome!" The staff boy went round to several who wouldn't shut up, pulled them out of bed and pushed them outside clad only in their nightshirts. He let them in only when they were quiet and had promised not to moan again.

On Monday the whole camp went to the beach, marching along the main street in ranks of four, all wearing jerseys and pillbox hats. Our Jack and some of the older boys walked on the pavement, presenting collecting boxes to passers-by and requesting donations for the Poor Boys' Summer Camp. We got to the beach but the sea was right out and we were not allowed to make for it. We halted on the sands and were told to retain the rough group formation in which we found ourselves so we just larked about or sat in our limited areas. An hour later we marched back to camp. This was my first sight of the sea and though we made two more visits to the beach, the sea seemed just as far away.

In the camp the staff boys walked round continually keeping an eye on us. Troublesome boys were taken to the office, though the only

disciplinary action I saw was a group of boys being made to fill in the deep cess pits dug in the sand within the lavatory area.

On the day before our return Jack and I entered the camp races, each of us winning a first prize. I chose a cream jug and sugar bowl, thick glazed, dark green. It was wonderful to hold and possess something new. Our Jack chose a mouth organ. It was quite a coincidence that one of the most popular songs of the day was "Oh Dear I Wanna Go Home" and on the train returning to Manchester it was sung with great feeling.

Back at school I found that about a dozen boys in our class, including myself, were to be coached for a coming scholarship examination. A very strange experience. A week in a small room with a teacher who spoke to us as individuals and would stand at our side to help and explain. Three of us passed; Peter Stoddart and I stated that we wished to go to Dicke Avenue District Central School. Our Jack was already going there.

I was put in Junior F form, the master being "Sappy" Sill, a middle aged, quietly spoken little man. There were thirty-five in the class, mostly scholarship winners, a few paying a fee. The school was in a pleasant area and some of the boys came from well-off families; this was evident from their clothes, manner, speech, school bags, paint boxes, sports outfits and so on. We were seated in class in alphabetical order, so I was on the back row.

Our first homework was the drawing of a map of England and Wales divided into regions as in the Anglo-Saxon period. The work was handed in and during the afternoon as we were quietly working Sappy, who was examining the work, called out, "Who's Watkin?" I held up my hand expecting a mild rebuke, recalling how I had accidentally smudged and blobbed the ink on my map. "Very good work," he said, holding it up and pointing out its merits. This was an early assessment of my relative ability in my new school. I still have the homework book containing the map. I notice that my handwriting and printing has hardly changed throughout the years, though you can see that a steel pen nib was used.

For the first few weeks playtime was not welcomed. New boys were liable to be ragged - this could be anything from one's cap being thrown down the lavatory to a rather severe manhandling and bumping. Like all other first-formers I slunk around trying to be inconspicuous. But they got me, once. About half a dozen grabbed me and ran around the playground holding me by the arms and legs, face downwards. They made for the lavatories in the adjoining playground and as we turned the corner I looked up, into the eyes of our Jack, who was just passing. He looked down at me and I know we were both embarrassed. I wasn't frightened, just ashamed of being seen like this. Jack, of course, didn't interfere. On into the lavatories where tap water was splashed on to my head, this being followed by a mild bumping on the wet floor where I was left sitting. An almost apologetic ragging.

A head boy visited each classroom and said that every boy was expected to have a round school cap bearing the Dicke Avenue emblem which was a Busy Bee, this being available either in metal or as an embroidered patch. Following my usual attitude towards situations like this I simply disregarded it and didn't even consider mentioning it to Mother. We had no money to waste.

I didn't have a school bag but carried books under my arm or wrapped in newspaper when it was raining.

There was quite a fuss about the cap and the bee. On Monday mornings boys came round selling the emblems. The caps could be bought from a nearby corner shop on Denmark Road. There came the time when I stood out as the only one in the class without a cap and a badge, particularly noticeable when we stood in ranks in the schoolyard. Mr Sill quietly suggested I ask Mother to get a cap for me. I didn't mention it at home. A head boy called and asked if there was anyone without a cap or badge. He took my name. The next morning he called and spoke to Mr Sill, who then called me out and told me to stand in a corner, facing the wall. And so for the first time in my school life I stood where I had seen hundreds of boys stand before, punishment corner. I don't recall feeling ashamed or sorry for myself. It just happened that way. When he sent me back to my place he was quite friendly and nothing more was said about headgear. Some time later I possessed a cap. It was our Jack's. Grandma had bought him a new one.

Though I found the classwork fairly easy, the homework worried me because conditions were not conducive to concentration or neatness. I had only the kitchen table to work on. This was never tidy and I worked while the food and crockery were on it and all going about their usual business. I had not been brought up to prepare a place to work, to be tidy, to clean things first. The resulting homework was often smudged, blotted, grease-stained and generally mucky. From some place I forgot came a school bag. An old, canvas one but very useful and welcome, for not only would it protect my books but I could more readily join in the fun with my pals on the way home from school.

John Hitchen, Ernie Dale, Albert Percival and Willie Hufton were, in turn, picked up on the way to school. Of course, limited time allowed for only fun on the run, but how we enjoyed the afternoon's return home! All had a great sense of humour and once in the mood everything was hilariously funny. We tumbled about, ragged each other and our school bags were swung around so much that mine soon became a shapeless rag-bag. Ernie Dale was often so overcome by laughing that he would fall on the ground, rolling about, holding his sides and we would move on, leaving him to recover. I recall something that brought howls of laughter and floored Ernie more than once. In the side window of a small shop in Webster Street was an advertisement. It showed a tramp looking sadly at a large, wayside poster which read: "Brasso - Makes Your Brass Last A Lifetime" and the tramp, with tears in his eyes, was saying, "Had I but known." I think it was his facial expression which made it so funny.

Once again, the class register of the Junior F year is indelibly stamped on my mind: Bagshaw, Ball, Brader, Chappell, Cowburn, Cummings, Cusworth, Coates, Cooper, Dagnall, Dale, Davies, Ellison, Gilders, Hampson, Honey, Hufton, Hulme, Luckraft, Mathers, Percival, Potts, Preston, Richardson, Ringland, Sellors, Sewell, Sides, Spence, Smith, Taylor, Thompson, Warburton, Watkin, Woosley, Worsnip, Longstaff, Mitchell.

Willie Hufton, one of my class pals, lived in Boundary Lane. He was a quiet, well-spoken boy, an only child. He would occasionally

wander down our street to play with us and if Mother were out I would ask him in the house. He said that the freedom that we enjoyed at home was almost unbelievable and our disregard for the furniture, our careless, carefree antics in running around the house and up and down the stairs amazed him. I had been in his house. Clean, tidy, well-furnished. The only play-noise heard would be a call of "Snap" or the click of dominoes. He said his mother and father seldom went out and the perpetual absence of my dad puzzled him.

When Willie did visit our house we played all kinds of tricks on him, including the balancing of a heavy horsehair sofa headrest on top of the kitchen door so that it crashed down on his head as he came in. And it was heavy. He was often hurt, sometimes cried a little, but he still called and played. He would return home bruised or with water, flour or soot on his clothes. It never occurred to me that his mother might be concerned about these things until one day she returned with Willie, saying it would be the last time he would come to our house. This is what caused it.

We had sent Willie into our lobby and told him that at the command "Come in" he must rush in and stir some magic liquid that would be in a cup on the table with a spoon already in it. The cup contained water. What Willie didn't know was that the spoon handle had been in the fire and was very hot. Well, he ran in, grabbed the spoon and yelled with pain. He went home, fingers blistered, crying bitterly. His mother came back with him and told me what she thought of me. Luckily for me Mother was still out.

At school the headmaster and the teachers referred to games and sports with reverence. There were continual reminders of inter-school matches to be played and the need for supporters. There was something called the China Cup which was to Mr Entwistle what the Holy Grail was to King Arthur but I didn't know whether it came from China or was made of the stuff. But I knew that our boys were always striving to win it. I couldn't have cared less. To me school and games didn't go together. I went home to play my cricket and football in our street with a rag ball. But in the class were those boys from a different way of life. They had their own equipment and togs to wear and they met at weekends for games. I had no feelings about them except recognising their great importance and the respect paid to them. I never spoke to any of them and they ignored me and my pals. During playtime teachers would be seen in the playground very often engaged in conversation with several of these games-players. We ordinaries were addressed only when told to stop doing something. Well once, I was almost promoted. It was like this.

I was playing near the doorway of the school when out came Mr Woods, who had been my form master in the previous year. As it happened I had been top in the mid-term examination and as he spotted me at the bottom of the steps he called out, "Hello Wattie. I see you were top..." Just then Ringland came towards him. He was captain of our class soccer team. "Ah Dingi old man..." as he placed his hand on Ringland's shoulder and walked off. My moment of fame was very brief - but never forgotten.

## Chapter 9

Dad was unemployed so he got permission for Jack to leave school at the age of fourteen instead of sixteen. I was told it was granted rather reluctantly, for Jack was an excellent scholar and also played football for the school and was a member of the tug-of-war team. Jack had lived at Grandma Watkin's most of his school life, but now he left there and returned home. He started work as a delivery boy for the Corporation Parcels Department, the office being at Brookes's Bar, Moss Side, at that time a very select area. It was a well paid job but he earned every penny. He reported to the Brookes's Bar office, his delivery areas being mainly Whalley Range, Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Withington and Old Trafford, all very high class districts. Many of the houses had servants, tradesmen's entrances and guard dogs. Until then I thought servants existed only on the films or in books about "society", the upper classes. The clerk in charge of the office was a heartless, unsympathetic man whom Jack hated and feared but dared not offend, for jobs with the Corporation were highly prized because they were regarded as permanent and secure; there would be hundreds willing to take over his job immediately.

Well, the man would load Jack with parcels and laugh and ridicule him as he hung more and more parcels around Jack's back and shoulders. He wore straps and a belt specially provided for suspension of parcels and he often found it difficult to walk naturally until some of the parcels had been delivered. But in addition to these he had to push a large box truck which would be filled, then have more parcels piled high on top. The clerk would laugh as Jack started off, regarding the overloading as a credit to himself, for using his staff and vehicles so effectively. He would draw the attention of Tramways staff in the next office to Jack's overburdened figure.

I sometimes helped Jack, awaiting his arrival round a corner, for I had to avoid the Clerk's seeing me in case he objected. I have seen Jack approach with tears in his eyes and his face red with anger and embarrassment but he never complained.

On his Christmas time deliveries he would hand in a card along with the parcel on which was printed:

Christmas comes but once a year  
And when it comes it brings good cheer  
You will have no cheer nor joy  
If you forget the Parcel Boy

He got many tips and gave half to Mother. This money gave the start to the purchase of musical instruments which was his lifelong passion. The first ones were an expensive mouth organ then a good, brass whistle followed by a gramophone.

When Jack started work, arrangements were made for me to go daily from school to Grandma's for my dinner, which would relieve Mother of the cost of my meal and would also enable me to go a few errands and do a few odd jobs for Grandma. This was soon extended to my calling again after school in the afternoon. I also ran errands for a crippled lady who lived next door to Grandma and about twice a week as I called to see her I had to take an

old strawberry basket filled with potato peelings and bread crusts for the various tradesmen's horses which came down the back passage. These men always stopped at this lady's door, which was always open, for there was bound to be some business, and their horses would be reluctant to pass until they had had their little titbit. And the edge crusts among the peelings were delicious. They had best butter on. (It was always called best butter. I don't know if there was any other kind.) As I walked down the yard I would go as slowly as I dared, searching quickly among the peelings and pocketing the crusts to be furtively eaten in the passage or the lavatory. This was my only taste of butter and it was delicious; the bread thin and dry and the butter slightly salty.

Ducie Avenue Central School must have been sowing the seeds of pride and snobbery in me. On my way to school one afternoon with two Moss Side pals, who should I see walking towards me but Grandad Chinn? He must have been just wandering around and was wearing his one and only very long, old coat, his faded black pot hat, a muffler and his well-worn oversize boots. He looked so poor that as I drew near I suddenly felt ashamed and embarrassed. And I let him walk past me. My poor old grandad who many times had given us kids his last penny. I regretted my shameful act but of course it had happened and I just hoped that I would soon forget it. Obviously I never did.

My errand-going earned me sixpence a week, which of course I gave to Mother and this may have helped towards her buying me the most expensive Christmas present I ever had. It was "Chums Annual", costing twelve and sixpence. I was already elated with a pre-Christmas gift from a neighbour - an old magic lantern plus one coloured slide. I think it had been made for illumination by means of an oil lamp, for there was a circular well-hole behind the lens and directly above it was a curved chimney for the smoke and heat. We had to make do with a short length of candle producing a poor, flickering image but still a great source of interest as the slide contained six different pictures. It was wonderful to possess something. My "Chums", my treasured present, I looked after for a while, keeping it on the top shelf of the kitchen cupboard along with the family treasures, the boot-box of club books, rent book and other documents, Dad's pot hat and his unused truss, Dad's writing paper and envelopes and some comic postcards.

During my second year at Ducie I started going to the woodwork class known as Manjie, short for Manual Instruction. I was not very good at woodwork but I think I excelled in the preliminary drawing and in the originality of design of the various articles we made. As each new joint or exercise was introduced it had to be incorporated in the model we would make. Of course it had first to be drawn and the teacher, Mr Taylor, would show us the usual or traditional object but would then almost plead with us to try and devise something different, something original. The usual models were a garden dibber, followed by a Maltese cross, a teapot stand, a pipe rack, a pen and ink stand and so on. I never knew what a garden dibber was used for but one could see about twenty of them being made, of all sizes.

For that exercise I designed and made a base on which was mounted a cardboard disc with numbered sectors. On top was a

pointer which swivelled around a nail and I called my model a roulette wheel. Mr Taylor was delighted and I had to take it to the nearby Physics and Chemistry labs to show the masters. It afterwards had a place of honour in the Manjie showcase. I got on very well with Mr Taylor and I managed to produce an original design for each exercise. I loved that class.

In my second year I won a bursary of, I think, five pounds which would help towards books and other items which would be required in my third and fourth years. But Dad said I had to leave school as soon as I was fourteen and after several visits to the Education Offices in Deansgate managed to extract from the authorities there a sum of two pounds in lieu of the books I would not be requiring. A nice sum in those days, a week's wages for many. He asked what I would like as a share of the two pounds and I knew where to look to answer that.

In the window of a tool shop on Stretford Road next to the Barracks. I looked longingly at all the woodworking tools, finally coming down to earth at those costing round about a shilling. My eventual choice was a half-inch paring chisel, price elevenpence. With it I spent many happy hours down our cellar, chipping away at the legs and rails of Mother's scrubbing table, this being the only spare wood available on which to practise simple geometrical wood-carving which had just been shown at Manjie. I still have and use that chisel, now worn down from its original length of six inches to about one.

At the end of our street where Vine Street crossed it was a shop with its window whitewashed and living in the house part at the rear, the Winterbottom family. I knew Walter, the son, who was in our Jack's class and sometimes joined us on the way to Dacie Avenue. I made a suggestion to him regarding his making use of the shop and after getting his mother's approval, we cleaned the window, swept out the shop and washed the counter. We put a notice in the window, "Comics and Books Sold and Exchanged". Not "bought", of course. One could bring in two comics, could look through the stock and take one away in exchange. We started with about a dozen of Walter's Nelson Lees weeklies and business flourished. Kids flocked in whilst Walter and I sat and selected and read until we were satiated. It was splendid whilst it lasted but his mother eventually objected to the noise and she stopped the business and re-whitened the window.

One year there was to be an exhibition of paintings from schools in Manchester and Salford to be held in the Manchester Art Gallery in Mosley Street. Dacie Avenue and three other schools were asked to produce all the required titles and I was chosen to do our quota. So I missed some normal classwork and instead happily painted away in the Art master's office, which was adjacent to the main room, using his paints for I had none of my own. My being without a paint box presented a regular problem at the weekly art lesson and as we stood around the room listening to instruction prior to painting, I would manoeuvre for position to ensure being next to someone who, as we were paired off, would allow me to share the use of his paint box. I didn't possess even a brush and it never occurred to me to ask Mother for school equipment. I disassociated school with its commitments and requirements from home. However, I greatly enjoyed those quiet, solitary sessions

producing these titles, each coloured differently though the letter shapes and sizes were identical. Tracing was forbidden. Some of my earlier classwork was already in frames around the walls and these were eventually included in the exhibition.

The Lord Mayor opened it and for many weeks school groups visited the Art Gallery. I went on several Saturdays, taking pals from Booth Street to see my work. Though I would have liked Mother and Dad to go, I didn't tell them about the exhibition because in fact it seemed a preposterous idea. Mother had never been to town in my lifetime. Would she have gone on the tram? She couldn't walk there and I couldn't imagine her trying to get on a tram. Could she have found her way there? And wearing what? A shawl? And Dad. A ridiculous thought. His leaving Jimmy Allen's to go to town? So they never knew about their son's work being shown in the Art Gallery.

A new picture house called the College Cinema opened in Coupland Street near Owens College. My pal, Willie Hufton, victim of our japes, lived close by. His mother asked me to accompany Willie to the Saturday afternoon children's matinee as a bodyguard as there were fights and scuffles in spite of the continuous perambulations of the attendant. One week there was a film about wild animals in Africa and the management offered prizes for the best essays submitted on Kindness to Animals. From memory I repeated one that had won me a certificate on the subject many years before at Jackson Street School and it won the first prize of five shillings, which of course I gave to Mother. Actually I shared the first prize with a girl and I recall quite clearly that as the lights came on and the manager called us on to the stage to receive the award, a spotlight was trained on us and though it was the first time I had ever faced an audience, I felt quite at ease and enjoyed the experience.

At the cinema, between films, lantern slides were shown advertising local shops and commodities. One was a riddle and the answer was on the following slide. The question was: "If the ace of clubs beats the king of clubs which club will beat the ace of clubs?" and before the next slide had time to appear with the answer, as one voice we roared: "Gee's Knick-Knack club!" Gee's was a large, very popular clothing store on Medlock Street, the majority of the customers getting their goods as members of knick-knack clubs. Mother was occasionally in one. One paid the agent, usually a neighbour who had organised the club, in twelve weekly instalments. Each week one member could obtain goods for the full amount, the sequence being determined in the beginning by the drawing of numbered tickets in the presence of several members.

Another slide advertisement, a poem, which we read together at the tops of our voices, went:

Master's Masterly Manchester tea  
In qualities two, A and B  
This is the tea for you and me  
Master's Masterly Manchester tea.

I recall a very disturbing moment in a cowboy film which featured Jack Hobart as the leader of a gang of outlaws. They were seen riding towards a line of covered wagons, intending to hold up and rob the travellers. Jack rode to the rear of the last wagon. He looked inside and his face registered deep emotion; facial

expressions were very important in silent films. He lowered his gaze and one could sense from his obvious embarrassment and shock that the hold-up was cancelled. The picture faded and on the screen came the words: "The miracle of the ages is being performed before their very eyes." Then we saw Jack again, who turned, scowled at his gang and they rode off.

I was puzzled but had a hunch what it was all about. I told Willie. A baby was being born. This was an unmentionable subject and I felt as though I was saying something vulgar. A few moments later one saw inside the wagon and rightly enough, there was a woman and at her side a bundle, obviously a baby.

There was a serial running called "The Radio King", an American science fiction film, an early version of the theme which still dominates our television stories, the mad scientist who attempts to rule the earth. I did not connect the word "radio" with "wireless", its English equivalent which was appearing more and more often in the newspapers. Public wireless broadcasting was a couple of years in the future. The Radio King walked around with all kinds of equipment slung conveniently to his front; this he used to vanish and reappear, levitate himself and listen in to any conversation he wished. He could project death rays from the fingers of his outstretched hands, this being depicted on the film by superimposed streams of power shooting out towards his victim. We had our own method of depicting this power as we played in the street. Radio Kings were easily identified by their long, loping strides, hunched shoulders and by the rays which occasionally shot from their hands. In their fists were lengths of string, loosely bundled, with one end tied to the thumb and the other end weighted with a bit of plasticine. Thus, on flinging out the hands, the string followed the weight as it sped towards the victim.

One of my last memories of Ducie Avenue days was the interest aroused by the draining of the lake in Whitworth Park, opposite the school. People came from far and near to see the bottom exposed as the water level receded ever so slowly. It was fascinating to see the large areas of mud and slime, vegetation and pond life and innumerable objects that had been thrown in over the years. It had not been drained before and the nauseating smell added to its attraction for me. There were large numbers of shellfish like mussels and oysters and I saw people picking these out. I wondered if they were to be eaten. I shuddered at the thought.

About this time, 1922 or 23, there was an almost total eclipse of the sun, about eleven o'clock one morning, and the whole school assembled in the playground to view it through pieces of smoked glass.

For the last Physics lesson before the Easter holidays, the form master had arranged for a visitor to give a talk on the manufacture of electrical equipment. It was a pleasant change, though I recall little except lantern slides showing various parts of the factory from which the man came. Finally Mr Howard thanked the speaker, Mr Makemson, then asked if there were any questions. Without considering the relevance or implications I put up my hand. "Yes, Watkin?" I then posed one of the most momentous questions of my life.

"Could Mr Makemson find me a job at his works?"

I didn't know who or what he was or where he worked. Actually he was the Superintendent of the Foundry departments at Metropolitan Vickers in Trafford Park. I was fourteen that week and Dad had got permission for me to leave school as he was unemployed. Mr Makemson said he would inquire and a few days later Dad received a letter asking me to report at the M.V Employment Office as soon as possible. Dad said he hoped I would get a job that paid well.

## Chapter 10

I left school at Easter and four days later found my way to Metropolitan Vickers. The factory was about four miles away, the second half of the journey going through Trafford Park and this developed into an obstacle course, for railway lines ran along one side of the road. My classmate, Peter Stoddart, and I couldn't resist climbing into and over the stationary wagons which were loaded with timber and other interesting materials. At the main factory gates a watchman directed us to the nearby Employment Office, a small wooden hut, in which, twenty years later, I would start my first staff job.

About a dozen of us underwent a brief medical check followed by written and oral tests in English and Arithmetic. A few days later Peter and I received letters asking us to report at eight-thirty on the following Tuesday morning. From then onwards the starting time would be seven-thirty.

On my first morning I was taken by Mr Crookes of the Education department to the Gauge Room. And thus started a period of my life to which I look back with the utmost nostalgia. It was not the happiest, the gayest, the most romantic, but I think one factor was that I was suddenly recognised, appreciated and accepted by the adult world. They helped and even respected me. They presented and opened their world to me with its innumerable wonderful and interesting things. I was no longer an insignificant kid.

The Gauge Room was in the middle of one of the large engineering shops, said to be a fifth of a mile long and consisting of bays, those on the ground floor being lettered from A to E and the three upstairs ones, G, H and K. As I walked with Mr Crookes up to and along H aisle I felt as though I was on the gangway of some huge airship, a sensation possibly generated by the height, by the immense areas of skylights and the maze of criss-crossed steel stanchions and roof trusses.

H Gauge was responsible for the manufacture of gauges and the maintenance of these and other measuring and checking devices. I had been fortunate and favoured in being placed in a department employing the highest grade of craft engineer in the factory. There were about a dozen tradesmen, two apprentices aged about twenty and a probation apprentice whom I was to replace. I worked with him for a week whilst he showed me my responsibilities. The foreman, Frank Cowell, was, I learned, a very talented and eccentric man.

I was given a workbench and some tools and my duties were going errands, brewing the men's tea at dinnertime, some clerical work, some actual production work. The workmen's canteen was rather overwhelming, with hundreds of men milling around, collecting their

meals then hurrying to their regular places at the dining tables. These had bare wooden tops, scrubbed clean each day, each table seating about sixteen diners on long, backless, wooden forms. Peter and I found places to sit but realised we had omitted to pick up cutlery as we came in so we managed with two small, steel rules which Peter had in his overall pocket. The meals were splendid, particularly the Tuesday one which consisted of a basinful of thick soup, a thick slice of bread and two large, thick, greasy scallops. I never had a pudding as fourpence halfpenny for the main course was enough to spend on a meal.

My work included stamping and etching figures and symbols on gauges, drilling, riveting, hardening and tempering and rough-sizing gauges of all types. This was remarkably responsible work for a boy of fourteen straight from school and I was told that I had surprised the foreman with my obvious aptitude. "The best boy I ever had," was his comment about me in later years. But I think he once came very near to striking me when I accidentally knocked two steel vee blocks out of my vice, one for each of his feet as they fell.

I was also the innocent cause of a situation which, in the end, he thought very funny. One of my jobs was the making out of various documents such as shipping and stores requisitions which, on completion, he would check and sign. After a while he must have felt satisfied for he said, "Harry, from now on, you sign them off for me," meaning, of course, to put his name and add my initials. I knew little of clerical procedures and I thought he was involving me in a slightly illegal act of forgery. So I took home a specimen of his signature and spent a long time copying it until I became skilled at producing perfect copies not only of his name but of important words and phrases such as "Urgent" and "Exhibition finish" (referring to the imminent British Empire Exhibition at Wembley.)

So documents of all kinds began to circulate, only he and I sharing our guilty secret, so I thought. Until one day a worried and perplexed Mr Cowell asked me to trace work and items which he had obviously seen and signed for but couldn't recall. It slowly dawned on me that he was totally unaware of my copying his handwriting and so I explained or confessed. When he realised how I had innocently conspired to help him, he called his deputy Stan Wilson to listen to my story then he laughed and laughed! It was a standing joke for a long time.

Once a week a concert was held in the workmen's canteen during the dinner hour. There was a stage and a piano and departments vied with each other in providing entertainers from their own staff. I enjoyed these concerts immensely for there was very little entertainment available in those days unless one paid for it. A rather dignified inspector from C Engine department, wearing his brown dustcoat back to front, capered round and round the stage holding a very large micrometer as though it was a harp and sang a song of the moment, "Touch the Harp Gently My Pretty Louise". An occasional highlight was the engagement of two professional entertainers called the Reid Brothers who sang in the new jazz style.

There were two main gates to the factory. The north gate, which

I used, was in Trafford Park and through this about ten thousand people left each evening. They were mainly shop floor men who wore overalls, these often being kept on for the rest of the day. The south gate led into Stretford, a different world from the Trafford Park end and used mostly by staff employees who started an hour later than the workmen. On the few occasions I left by this gate I felt awkward, embarrassed, as though people were looking at me and wondering why I was using their gate.

On leaving school I continued to wear short trousers as long ones were not regarded as necessary until one was sixteen. So my bib-and-brace overalls, which Mother bought for me as an absolute necessity, were worn over my short trousers and were kept on from getting up until going to bed. When my short trousers were eventually beyond repair I wore the overalls only, until I was about seventeen when I had my first pair of long ones.

Although I could not claim to be accustomed to nice, hygienic conditions the workmen's lavatories shocked me at first. The ceilings were low and the lighting was poor. Along each side were about thirty cubicles formed by partitions projecting about a foot from the wall and in each cubicle was a water closet. There was no privacy. You saw, heard and could speak to the man next to you for his head would be only three feet away. People walking through could just manage to squeeze between the two rows of heads, facing each other. Smoking was prohibited, though this rule was ignored unless a watchman walked through. Toilet paper was not provided but there was always plenty of old newspaper behind the pipes or on the floor.

My initiation into and education about politics, trades unions and the Labour Party was from Len Vickers of the Tool Room, whose visits to the lavatory coincided with mine. He was a cultured, well-spoken and kindly man and regarded the spreading of the Socialist gospel as a sacred duty.

I made a new mate for my journeys to and from work. Reg Dean, a year older than I, lived on London Road and worked at Courtauld's Sulphur Works where coins in your pocket turned black in a few hours and no-one stayed more than two years. Wages were double the usual rate. I liked and pitied Reg. A real slum kid, a ragamuffin, all his clothes much too big for him, a round pink face and twinkling blue eyes, a voice already hoarse through sulphur fumes; I found out his home life was devoid of affection. I have never liked a friend more. And for about two years we laughed and larked our way to and from Trafford Park. He stopped calling for me and I never saw him again. A man whom I recognised as a Sulphur Works employee from his mustard-coloured clothes said he thought Reg was very poorly. A Sulphur Works victim?

Walking through Trafford Park everyone was aware of a queer little man, generally known as the Parkwalker. He wore a big flat cap, a long overcoat and big, flapping boots. Though one of the last to leave the factory he would stride along, weaving through the crowds, overtaking everyone. He would bend his knees slightly to lengthen his stride and swing his arms high for helpful momentum. Sweat discoloured the back of his cap and coat collar. A pitiful figure and generally thought to be a bit simple. He spoke to no-

one, looked neither to left nor right and his face would be set with determination and grey with strain.

Many years later I was visiting the Brass Foundry when I spotted him at a workbench. His foreman said the man was an excellent worker, unmarried and without friends. I gathered that in those earlier years the walk home was the highlight of his day. He lived for that quarter of an hour of glory as he drew the admiring attention of the hundreds of normal pedestrians as he sped by. But he must have strained himself for he collapsed one day and he was ordered to take things quietly. He returned to work a sad, little man, went even quieter, said his foreman, just a nobody but with memories to keep him going.

A new gear testing machine was being built in the Gauge Room and was to be one of the MetroVick exhibits at the coming British Empire Exhibition. One of the men, Vincent Georgeson, a recently demobilised naval officer, had been given the job of mottling all the flat working surfaces, a skilled operation which, I believe, few engineers had mastered. It produced a beautiful, decorative effect. Vincent's work, his little anecdotes about the navy and his quiet yet dominant manner impressed me greatly. His remarks were often preceded by a peculiar little stutter and foolishly I adopted the same mannerism, thinking it quite cute. I eventually had some difficulty in ridding myself of it.

There was George Annis who lived opposite the factory in Westinghouse Road and was interested in astronomy. Occasionally on the way home after work I would go with him to their house and he would fix up a telescope in the front porch and I would spend a wonderful half hour learning about the heavens. George Chambers used to bring flasks of pond water to work and point out and describe the living things we could see through his powerful magnifying glass. I had never imagined such wonderful people lived in ordinary houses and that I would get to know some of them.

A toughening experience was the brewing of tea for the men's dinners. Brew houses were located on the main roads around the factory and it was at these that can washing and the brewing took place. For an hour each day every brew house became a Bedlam as about twenty boys, each with about sixteen cans, cleaned, put in brews, filled the cans with boiling water and staggered back to their departments with hot tea spilling down their legs. During the preliminary washing they larked about, fought, smoked, threw water over each other, lost and mixed up their men's brews which were usually screwed-up pieces of paper containing tea or cocoa together with sugar and condensed milk. Lost, spilt or mixed brews were no worry to the lads for they made up shortages from the rest. If a man's brew had stuck to its paper the whole lot would be dropped in the can, and the paper, usually a bit of newspaper, flicked out of the tea afterwards.

Some years later, at the instigation of the Works Committee, shop labourers took over the brewing job from the boys, who strongly resented it because they lost their weekly brew money. This payment was not compulsory but woe betide any man who was reluctant about paying. He would find the most distasteful concoctions in his brew can.

About this time another brother was born. Again no warning, no indication of the happy event. I just came downstairs one morning to the conditions and smells associated with "another one". But now I was less affected and involved than before. I was working. Our Mabel was growing up. A little more money was coming into the house and Mother had fewer commitments.

Leonard Thomas, whose family had moved in opposite us, and I started wandering round the city markets on Saturday afternoons. We were fascinated by the salesmen's patter and the wonderful bargains they offered. There was a negro who sold only Gibbs Dentifrice. I think he was the first black man I had heard speaking for one saw very few coloured people around. He would show his beautiful white teeth to his audience, adding that in his native Africa, after eating, people picked their teeth with bits of wood but here in Britain we were blessed in having Gibbs Dentifrice which both cleaned and preserved them. One day he asked for a volunteer on whom he would demonstrate its efficacy. He stepped forward, grabbed me by the arm and pulled me to his stall facing the crowd. Then he held my head back, dipped a bit of wet rag in some powder and furiously rubbed my teeth with it. He told me to spit out, then putting his fingers in my mouth he forced my lips apart to let everyone see the new whiteness. I let him do it without a murmur but I kept clear of his stall after that.

On another occasion and at another stall I underwent a similar experience except that the back of my neck was shaved in demonstrating the effectiveness of a particular type of razor; not the safety kind, by the way. Our last call was usually to the fruit and vegetable market where we could pick up fruit which had been thrown away and had been missed during the sweeping-up. With careful biting it provided many a tasty mouthful.

Our Jack was now living at home and he and his friend George Thomas from across the road became very interested in wireless construction. I helped Jack and George by bringing home from work wood for bases and ends, bakelite tubing for coils, copper and brass strip for tuning arms and in fact any bits of material which might prove useful. In those days all around the factory were heaps of scrap from nearby departments and employees were allowed to help themselves to small amounts. During the dinner hour people swarmed over them like ants over an ant heap.

It was this searching which first took me to the back of the Cabinet Shop. The sight and smell of the wood off-cuts aroused an overwhelming desire to handle and work with wood. Mr Swindells, the Education Manager, was very disappointed at my request for a transfer, pointing out that opportunities for high wages, work satisfaction and promotion were infinitely greater in Engineering than in Woodworking. Also that I did not seem to appreciate the fact that I had been specially favoured in being placed as a probationary apprentice in one of the best departments in the whole factory and as soon as I was fifteen full indentures would be offered me. But I couldn't overcome the longing to be a woodworker and I was quite devoid of ambition, knew nothing about the importance of the choice of a career, of status, of promotion. Those words had never entered into the vocabulary or thoughts of my associates.

## Chapter 11

Just before I was fifteen I was transferred to the Cabinet Shop, starting in the office, my place being a stool at the end of the foreman's desk. He was Herbert Morgan, a kindly, delicate, fumbling man, too gentle for the job I thought. I was the departmental errand boy, most of my journeys being for drawings or blueprints, as they were called, to drawing stores situated all over the factory, the most distant ones taking over half an hour for the return journey.

I soon noticed a difference in attitudes, manners and temperament of many of the workmen compared with the Gauge Room engineers. They were sometimes surly, ill-mannered, ungrateful, not bothering to acknowledge or thank me for my efforts to please as I hurried with their drawings.

It was a very easy-going shop. The general foreman, Jimmy Marples, spent most of the day sitting in his arm chair in the office, chewing toffees and answering occasional queries. He was a member of Stretford Council and also a Justice of the Peace, both offices necessitating frequent absences from work. These were carefully noted by the workmen and the office staff. The latter would slow down, tea would be made and visits into the workshop kept to a minimum. But out there the tempo often increased, for from under the benches would come their own personal jobs such as small wireless cases, wooden attache cases, picture frames and toys for home. Old Bill House, an eighty-year-old Cockney cabinet maker, would put an old arm chair behind the glue-pot stand, settle down and fall asleep.

Teddy Jermyn, beltman (the machines were still driven by belts from a main line shaft), would saunter out of the department holding his oilcan before him but deceiving no-one and make for the Cabinet Shop cellar. There he had a permanent bed formed of sawdust bags and located on a large shelf close to the ceiling, affording him an immediate view of anyone entering the cellar, a doubtful advantage for he would be fast asleep within moments of bedding down.

There were two girls in the office, Annie Derbyshire and Dot Whitehead, both aged about twenty. I was shy in their company for I had not worked with girls before. There was Bill Buglass, a chargehand, a typical ex-sergeant major, tall, upright, very clean-looking, sandy hair, waxed moustache. Sitting on the other side of the office was Ernie Philipson, also a chargehand and responsible for all timber buying. He was a lay preacher and would later prove a benefactor to me, always having some little scheme in mind to help me boost my wages. He did this for several years and it was not until I had left the department that it dawned on me that he had been almost like a father and had gone to great trouble to help me. I liked all the office staff tremendously. I couldn't do enough to express my appreciation of belonging to such a grand group of people.

During my errand-going I became an innocent participant in a pilfering scheme. At the time our firm was making Cosmos crystal

and valve wireless sets. We were pioneers in the industry and the first public wireless broadcasting station in the Manchester area was our Research Department, using a hastily constructed, sound-proofed studio. A part of the Meter Department had been sectioned off for the manufacture of Cosmos wireless sets and a few of our cabinet makers were employed there repairing and touching up oak cabinets which housed valve sets. I remember the trumpet-shaped loudspeakers were made from thin plywood and I was greatly interested in watching the men soak the pieces in hot water to facilitate bending them to the required shape.

The construction of a working crystal set was almost unbelievably simple and there was a terrific sale in the local wireless shops of the few basic components such as terminals, coils, crystal holders, condensers and so on. There were huge stocks of these in the Wireless Department so in order to discourage pilfering, a watchman was stationed at each doorway to check the identity of people entering and leaving and to examine parcels taken out. I was soon recognised as an authorised errand boy and just nodded as I passed them. I plied several times each day between a small group in the Cabinet Shop and those in the Wireless Department and always carrying a large bundle of blueprints.

Innocent and ignorant at first, it eventually dawned on me that neither party used nor needed drawings, and so did the fact that I was instructed in the careful handling of the bundles. Back in the Cabinet Shop they would be taken from me and casually placed on a bench but no doubt hurriedly opened as soon as I had gone. However, our suspicious-minded time clerk, I believe, informed one of the men that he was aware of the racket and my visits ceased.

One of my most regular trips was to the Transformer Drawing Stores, which was itself of interest because it was actually an old two up and two down house, very similar to ours in Booth Street. It was there long before the factory was planned but for some reason it had been left standing whilst the huge Transformer building had been erected around it, dwarfing it, with large machines hiding part of it; yet from some angles one could still see the complete little cottage. The stores serving hatch would have been the original parlour window. A few years later it was demolished and replaced with a new two-storey stores-cum-production office affording much better use of the central floor space.

The day came when I was promoted from office boy to apprentice cabinet maker and joiner. My first job was working on a drilling machine, where for about four months I did nothing but drill inch and seven sixteenths holes in tens of thousands of small maple blocks. They were for holding valves in wireless sets and the foreman would occasionally remind me that my work would find its way into homes all over Britain. This encouraging remark and a daily nod and smile from Mr Marples as the wood drillings piled up around my stool helped me put up with the monotony. Another consolation was that Ernie Butterworth, the new office boy, was allowed to sit at my side when he wasn't going on an errand and there we talked and talked. We became lifelong friends and still keep in touch with each other.

From drilling I progressed to bench work. A few basic tools were

required, some of which I made, such as a mallet and a marking gauge. I brought my half-inch chisel from home and Bill Buglass gave me an oilstone, a small saw and a rule. I still have the sketch of the first job; a partitioned box for holding time cards. I was very happy.

Shrove Tuesday was Apprentices' Rag Day. We would have tea in the canteen then be taken by a fleet of special trams to a theatre in Manchester. There would be about two hundred apprentices or, some would say, hooligans. On the trams we ran up and down the stairs, fought each other and threw out every light bulb available. I recall our going once to the Palace Theatre and twice to Hulme Hippodrome. Eventually every theatre in Manchester and Salford closed its doors to us.

About this time I registered for the Carpentry and Joinery class at my old school, Ducie Avenue, attending two evenings per week. For the practical work the students made whatever they wished but of course had to provide their own wood. I started on a tall, free-standing gramophone cabinet, the preliminary drawing of which I still have. I smuggled the necessary timber from work, the long pieces proving particularly difficult as I walked past the watchmen at the factory gates. On four consecutive days I had a stiff leg due to a piece of wood inside my overalls and reaching from hip to ankle!

Ginger Carroll, Harry Church and Hiram Cowell joined me at the evening class, and Harry made a large kitchen shelf unit for his mother. At the end of the session he had to bring a handcart to carry it home to Stretford. My gramophone cabinet went on the cart too, and I recall our walking along Stretford Road in the dark, an oil lamp swinging in front and being joined by a third member of the class who was a regular dance hall patron and knew all the latest songs. We sang all the way, for about five miles, and the songs included "Dream Daddy", "Riviera Rose" and "Somewhere in Sahara".

There were now so many apprentices in the Cabinet Shop that Ginger Carroll and I asked the Education Manager to provide education within working hours similar to that which engineering apprentices enjoyed. He agreed and a class was held on one afternoon per week on Building Construction. It was held in the works school, at that time only



Some of the Cabinet Shop apprentices. I am on the right, middle row, with "Jowett" Gibbons and Bill "Etch": Hiram Cowell and "Fud-Fud" Brown: "Tender" Scott and "Ginger" Carroll

a small two-classroomed, wooden building on the Main Avenue, later converted to the Staff Sales Department. The teacher was Bill Coward, a joiner from our shop.

## Chapter 12

The lack of reasonable clothes still disheartened me, particularly when my pals at work were recounting their evening and weekend pleasures. I loved my work, enjoying every moment I was there, but I was lonely and miserable when away from Trafford Park. My clothes were old, shabby and ill-fitting but it didn't occur to me to ask Mother to get something better for me. I was seventeen and longed for sociable company, for girls, for romance; yet too ashamed of my appearance to do anything about it. For a long time the Hulme Library was my hideaway, my haven, my retreat, my only outing in the evenings and at weekends where I was isolated from people and the outside world. It was a silent world for there were notices all round the place which said "Quiet Please", to which the staff would point if anyone dared to indulge in more than a whisper.

Of course I read and read. At first, fiction, my favourite authors being H G Wells, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Conan Doyle and Rider Haggard. Then I delved into the non-fiction section, fascinated with every subject there.

At home conditions were not improving. Our Jack was now living with us, which meant a total of eight sharing two bedrooms and three beds. We were sleeping three in a bed and I often fell out on to the floor when I had an outside position.

Mr Swindells, the Education Manager, persuaded me to enrol for the second year Technical Course at the Manchester College of Technology. He told me that my entrance fee would be paid and to see him regarding books and other requirements. Many years later I learned that he had personally paid for me. But at the time I was unaware of this so that when I left before the year was completed I didn't report nor give any reason to him. He must have thought me ungrateful and weak-willed but he still continued to help me, unobtrusively.

I left the Tech because I was embarrassed by my shabby appearance. As I walked up the magnificent steps in the large hall I always kept close to the sides so as to be as inconspicuous as possible among the throng of smartly-dressed young people with their leather cases and rolled drawings. Grandad Watkin sent a pair of his trousers to Mother to see if they could be altered to fit me. They were new and of good material, sand colour and so thick and stiff that they would almost have stood up on their own. However, I hoped they would improve my appearance. They were too long in the leg for me and unfortunately Mother cut too much off. Well, I put them on, noticing how wide the legs were but Mother said they looked quite smart. To me they bore some resemblance to those that clowns wear. But I wore them.

In class at Tech one evening and wearing my new trousers I had to go from my seat at the back of the room to the lecturer's desk. As I approached he stared at me as though he couldn't believe his eyes. He burst out laughing and asked, "What are those things you're wearing? Your grandfather's cut-downs?" He didn't realise

how right was his guess. But that was enough for me. I didn't go to the Tech again but shortly afterwards rejoined the Woodworking Class at Ducie Avenue where overalls were accepted.

About this time Morgan Griffiths, a joiner, gave me an almost new gaberdine raincoat which transformed me outwardly and inwardly and I often went strolling up and down Stretford Road, feeling so pleased and proud.

I got involved in some work which took up many months of my spare time. One of my Gauge Room friends had left MetroVicks and with his father-in-law as a partner planned to start a knitwear business in Weaste, Salford, where they would eventually employ about fifteen girls. They had leased an empty two-storey building and working from roughly described requirements I had agreed to carry out all the necessary joinery, they being responsible for the electrical and mechanical installations, to convert it into a small factory complete with office and stores.

The work provided splendid experience for me, starting with repairs and modifications to the roof and the fitting of a "made on the spot" staircase. These were followed by new floors, partitions, offices and storerooms, benches, shelves and numerous small fitments. I would first list the material requirements and they dealt with the supply. At work I would inquire from joiners about the building and constructional problems which would confront me during that evening or the coming weekend.

On finally assembling the staircase on the ground floor we found it was too heavy to lift into position. I went outside and enlisted the aid of several passers-by and then paid them off with a shilling each. The firm was to be Georgeson and Wood, the second name being that of my friend's father-in-law. They lived nearby and George, my partner, and I were occasionally invited to Mr Wood's home for a proper meal. I welcomed these visits not so much for the food but for the gramophone music which always accompanied the meals. His daughter was very fond of popular music and was continually buying new records. Three of her favourites have retained a special place in my heart throughout the years. The songs were "So Blue", "Always" and "All Alone".

The final item for Georgeson and Wood was the making of a large wooden signboard which we fixed on the wall above the entrance. A signwriter was required to do the lettering and George said he knew one who would be glad of a few days' work. The man lived in Whalley Range and I accompanied George because I was more familiar with the district. We found the house and called unannounced to give him the good news. I was impressed with the size and appearance of the house from the outside and was totally ignorant of the fast-growing conversion of such houses into flats.

We went upstairs, knocked on a door and a man greeted us and invited us in. There was a table and a few odd chairs. No floor covering, pictures, ornaments; just a very bare room. We were aware that he had been without work for a long time and his wife and two children seemed quite ill at ease. As George started to tell him about the job the man lowered his head and started to cry. He could hardly speak as he thanked George and I felt a little embarrassed so I made an excuse and quickly left, leaving George with them. Some time later he explained that the man was overcome

at the thought of working again, the monetary reward being small but his involvement in real work would do wonders for his self-respect and confidence. Vincent Georgeson said the sign was an excellent job and some more work was found for him.

George helped to widen my interests and social activities. For instance, he was a member of a concert party, a very popular type of entertainment in those days. There were about eight performers, he being the comedian, and three or four committee members. I started going to rehearsals and shows with him, helping where I could.

I was elated by a gift from George of a collar and a shirt front in white material with blue stripes. They were separate articles, an ordinary soft collar which fastened on to a stud and the front, which was scalloped out to fit round the neck, under the collar. It had three button holes so it could be attached to the front of one's shirt underneath. As the sides were tucked inside the waist-coat no-one could tell but that it was a complete shirt. This was long before the introduction of collar-attached shirts.

For a birthday present George bought tickets for a variety show at Manchester Hippodrome. It was my first visit to a city theatre and I wore my splendid collar and front. Top of the bill were two coloured singers named Layton and Johnstone, who at the time were the rage of Britain and America. I recall that for their last encore, as the audience yelled for more and more, they appeared in front of the curtain and sang:

We ain't gonna sing no more, no more  
We ain't gonna sing no more  
The manager's taken the piano away  
So we can't really sing no more.

I thought they were marvellous. It was a never-to-be-forgotten night. The song, new then, became an evergreen.

## Chapter 13

When I was about seventeen I joined the appropriate section of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers and for a time attended the branch meetings, held in a room above the Alexandra Hotel on Princess Road. I listened to the repetitive phrases and jargon and the "brotherly" addresses and felt it unreal and insincere and also felt out of place because I was the only apprentice there. I began to fear that I might be asked to stand up and say something so I stopped at the door and began handing in my contributions and making fatuous excuses for not attending the meeting, then almost falling downstairs to flee the place before they called out for "Brother Watkin".

About this time our Mabel got a short-lived job at MetroVicks as an assistant storekeeper. She stayed only a couple of months after rather abruptly giving in her notice. She later told me that the chief storekeeper, a young married man, very often smacked the faces of the three girls who worked for him in the large store. They were often in tears but didn't complain as they thought it was an accepted situation at MetroVicks.

At home, now that Jack and Mabel were working, small improvements began to appear. One was the installation of a wall-mounted switch

for the gaslight in the living room, similar to an electric light switch but for the knob which had to be turned to left or right to operate it. No more standing on chairs with a lighted match, afraid on a dark morning of breaking the gas mantle. Curtains were put to the bedroom windows. We had our first load of coal delivered, putting an end to our buying it in half hundredweights from Jack Booth's yard. I think the load was a ton and was brought in a horse-drawn two-wheeled cart and tipped on to and around the coal grid outside our front door. Of course it covered our and next door's doorsteps and pavements and spilled on to the roadway. These deliveries were big, communal events and were an indication that the Watkins were coming on in the world.

Neighbours came to help, bringing their own little shovels. The children who were allowed to help would carry large lumps from the perimeter of the huge mound and deposit them near the ladies who were skilfully encouraging the coal down the small circular hole into the cellar below. And there, as it came down, would be one or two of the family, armed with shovels, spreading it evenly over the small coal-hole. Getting a ton down that small hole was a slow, tedious, but enjoyable job, finalised by much sweeping by the ladies (never men) of flags, road, steps and window-sills. Then out would come Mother with teapot, milk and sugar to serve all helpers, whose cups would be lined up on our window-sill and all would engage in a good chinwag.

I still envied my workmates their smart clothes, their dancing exploits, their girls. I was shabbily dressed; a new suit which I had had for a short time had been pawned and was now regarded by me as irretrievable. But I did achieve a little fashion and style which was not costly, but gave me an immense uplift, confidence and pride and even led to my purposely going out for a stroll to display my new image. And it was simply a new haircut style. Called the "Boston", and coming from that city in the USA, it gave the impression of the wearing of a skull-cap, for the hair was cropped as short as possible up to a line just above the ears, above which it was trimmed to normal length. That is all; but it did look rather peculiar, it was new and it appeared that relatively few had the courage to adopt it, awaiting its becoming more popular and widespread. But I had chanced it and felt rather proud as passers-by gave it a sly glance and children made remarks about the man's "funny haircut". It helped to compensate for my permanent overalls attire.

Another fashion note. Willie Scott, a Booth Street pal, and I occasionally went swimming at the nearby Leaf Street baths. We wore the customary black swimming costume which buttoned on the shoulder. Then into the shops came the new "Continental" type; made as one piece as the regular ones but the top half was coloured, the trunks still being black but with, quite revolutionary, the addition of a white, fabric belt. Willie chose a red-topped one and I a yellow one. We decided to sport them at a mixed-bathing evening at the Leaf Street baths. We emerged from our cubicles prepared for admiring and envious glances as we walked boldly towards the diving board. But running towards us came the baths attendant, a big, burly, red-faced man who bawled out, "Hey - yer can't wear them things in 'ere!" He was very annoyed and adamant. He hadn't seen anything like them before and felt sure

the regulations would include the banning of such outrageous swimwear, particularly when ladies were present. So we had to leave.

Slowly I emerged from my drab, workworn attire. Stan Scott sold me a pair of his "shales", which were Oxford bags of that particular colour, a pair which he had discarded. The legs were twenty-six inches at the bottom, almost my waist size. I bought a jazzy-coloured, sleeveless slipover to go with it - very stylish. I recall, very vividly, my first stroll thus attired. It was a sunny Sunday morning and topped with my Boston haircut, I walked for miles along the main roads of Hulme, Greenheys, Fallowfield and Levens-hulme, my slip-over dazzling, my bags flapping, my eyes straight ahead as I basked in the warm satisfaction of being "in the fashion".

Now back to MetroVicks. In order to broaden my trade experience I was transferred from the Cabinet Shop to the Maintenance Building Joiners' Shop. The jobs were now located all over the factory with occasional periods in the workshop itself. I was now doing proper building work, quite different from the Cabinet Shop jobs, which were often of hardwood, completed on the bench with a suitable finish for French polishing. Now I had to climb, to work above and below ground level. The men and the supervisors were of a rougher type generally and because of the stricter supervision,

<b>A.S.W.</b>		Entrance Fee, Nos. 1 and 2 Sections, 10/-;	
		Readmission, 10/- minimum.	
<b>AMALGAMATED SOCIETY OF WOODWORKERS</b>			
131, WILMSLOW ROAD, WITHTINGTON, MANCHESTER.			
<b>ENTRANCE CARD</b>			
This is to Certify that			
<i>Henry Watkins</i>			
was admitted a Member of No. 3			
Section in the <i>Greater Manchester</i> Branch			
on the <i>21 June</i> 1926, day of			
age of <i>17</i> years and <i>4</i> months.			
In witness whereof we have			
subscribed our names.			
<i>H. J. Lamb</i> Branch President.			
<i>J. G. Smith</i> Branch Secretary.			
PRICE ONE PENNY.			
NOTE. A sum of 5/- is required when proposed, and the remainder on the night of admission.			
<b>SECTION 3 (JUNIORS).</b>			
No Entrance Fee or Medical Examination re- quired until he is transferred to No. 1 or 2 Section, when he shall pay 2/6; this provision must take effect on attaining the age of 21 years.			

less easy going. The general foreman paid regular visits from his centrally-located office to the workshop and all the outside jobs. In the workshop he would walk silently round, stopping at each line of benches and gazing, grim faced, at the work and at each man. Everyone was afraid of him, for there was so much unemployment and there were many who would have liked a relatively steady job at MetroVicks. One day I was quietly whistling as I worked and as he stopped at my bench I didn't look up but I felt his eyes on me and my whistling seemed to become unnecessarily loud. "That's enough," he barked out. "I'll engage a band if I want music." I felt I was only one step from getting my cards.

There happened to be some jobs which could be done only when the works was closed for the annual holiday. One year - I was about eighteen - I courageously approached the foreman and asked if I might be considered for a job when the next shut-down arrived. I was told that a promise could not be given but that I would not be forgotten. Meanwhile I began suffering from athlete's foot and walking became extremely painful, so bad that I had to go to work on the tram. Shutdown came and I was told to report for work. I was very pleased with the good news but dismayed to learn that there would not be a tram service to the factory. So I had to walk there and back.

Mrs Hamer gave me a very large pair of white tennis shoes which allowed my poor toes a little freedom as I shuffled along. After a day or two even these hurt so I cut out the toe-caps to relieve the pressure. People looked pityingly at me as I went along Stretford Road. One morning a policeman got off his bicycle to inquire and help if possible and I was given a lift on a cart by a driver who felt sorry for me. Boys giggled at me and even the men at work couldn't help laughing and making jokes about my shoes and feet. But not for one moment did I consider staying away from work. I wasn't ill and it would have meant not only loss of pay but lack of appreciation of the foreman's consideration for me.

At the end of the week I hobbled home with some good news from the general foreman. Though an apprentice, I would most likely be paid for the week at a rate above the normal as the workmen were; "Holiday Rate", which I think was double time. There had been some doubt about my entitlement as this was the first time an apprentice had done other than flee from the place on the last buzzer before shutdown.

One day the Education Manager sent for me. I was to be transferred to a drawing office in the Turbo Coils Department. It was regarded as an excellent opportunity to bid goodbye to the shop floor and to look forward to a more satisfying, interesting and financially rewarding career.

At the time I had a regular Saturday afternoon job, selling bags of cough-drops at the Manchester City football ground at Maine Road. I think the commission was a shilling in the pound and I usually sold between two and three poundsworth of cough-drops. I still have a small notebook in which I recorded my weekly figures and picking one at random I read: Bolton ... 2-0 ... 2/9d. (The visiting team, the score, my earnings.) I must have sold six hundred and sixty bags. One afternoon as I stood on the terrace bawling "Football tablets! Penny a bag!" I turned round in

response to a call. With dismay I recognised my departmental superintendent. He looked surprised, his face reddened and as he took the bag he said in a quiet voice, "See me on Monday morning, Watkin."

I did. He said he was shattered to see one of his junior draughtsmen doing a job like that. Wasn't it rather degrading? Had I no consideration for the dignity of his office - and the profession? Couldn't I find a more respectable way to supplement my wages? I continued with my sales job, for I earned more during the afternoon than my mother gave me from my week's wages. But I was always ill-at-ease and felt a little ashamed of it.

My drawing office responsibilities necessitated my visiting other offices and workshops all over the factory and I was continually aware of the workshop image I presented rather than that of the office staff to which I now belonged, a distinction which in those days was quite sharp and upheld as important. I felt it so much that I asked Mother if I could use my best suit for work. It was quite new. But it was pawned. Most weeks it came out on Friday night and back again to Uncle's on Monday morning. She said, yes, to take it, she would see if she could manage for a week or two. And I wore it for a fortnight, though not without some worry and resentment. The suit had been bought via the "Scotchman", who was a salesman-agent and dealt in household goods, shoes, clothes, furniture and so on. He had taken my measurements and I had described the suit I wanted. Well, it wasn't too bad when it came. Brown, double-breasted waistcoat, short jacket, bell-bottomed trousers (a kind of Oxford bags). It was stylish but the legs were not long enough and I thought the armholes were badly formed, producing "leg o'mutton" sleeves. "Do be careful," said Mother, hinting that any damage would reduce its potential pawning value.

So I was afraid of leaning on anything, of bulging the pockets, of getting it wet. And I was quite unaware that during the hours I had been spending in G Mica Department, minute flakes had been settling on my suit and becoming embedded. Mother had to have it back she said. And Mr Wraith, the pawnbroker, frowned, shook his head as he looked at the hundreds of shining particles and reduced the loan by about five shillings. I don't recall seeing that suit again. I didn't mind, though, because I preferred to be plainly shabby again than feel slightly ridiculous in old-fashioned shoulders and short-legged trousers.

Talking pictures arrived in Manchester. George, his relations and I stood for hours in a queue outside the Oxford Cinema to see the first "talkie" to be shown in the North of England, "The Singing Fool" featuring Al Jolson. I had seen earlier attempts to add sound to silent films. There had been one at the local Crescent Cinema, a short musical consisting of extracts from several operas. The film was silent, the screen singers just mouthing their words. On the stage just below the screen were a man and a woman, the actual singers, who had large conical megaphones to amplify their voices. To help them synchronise with the film, in the bottom corner of the picture one could see the tiny image of a conductor with a baton, beating time. There was also a live pianist who also had to keep his eye on that little figure. Well, it was a novelty, but that was all.

The arrival of the first genuine talkie followed weeks of publicity and everyone was talking about it, for everyone went to the pictures in those days. Well, there were very few who didn't. "Take your handkerchief, you'll need it," was the advice of those who had seen it. As we waited we saw what they meant. Many of the women who were leaving after the performance were unashamedly still wiping their tear-filled eyes. At last we went in. The first part of the film was silent. Then there was a loud click, a hiss and ... I was hearing my first talkie.

A grey-haired man spoke. His voice was clear and loud, filling the cinema with a strange, and to me exciting, American-English language. But how peculiarly nasal. And the letter 'r' which, to me, seemed to dominate and affect his speech, as though his tongue were perpetually ready to curl up and cuddle every possible "r" and in fact any others which could be influenced by it. I noticed the continual use of the expression "OK" which soon caught on here and became part of our everyday speech. Another was "right now" where we would say "now" or "right away". That song "Sonny Boy" swept through the country. And being overdone, people grew tired of hearing it, then began to loathe it and it eventually became something to laugh at. But in its heyday it was beloved by all street buskers, in those days numerous.

Increasing unemployment began to affect some of us. George Thomas, my pal, a skilled pattern card maker, lost his job and never worked again. He became more and more depressed, seemed to age and shrink, broke the engagement to his fiancee as his future seemed hopeless and died about a year later of consumption, at that time a widespread and terrible scourge. It was regarded as incurable.

I began to be concerned about my future. Dismissals were increasing and departments were working one week in three. I asked the draughtsmen in the office for their advice and their opinion was that staff jobs were even less secure than those of the hourly paid workers. I decided to request a transfer back to the Joiners' Shop, which would be a step down the ladder but if at some future date I had to leave MetroVicks there would perhaps be a better chance of finding work as a joiner than as a draughtsman.

Jack's wedding day arrived. I think the children had been placed with some neighbours. That morning Mother bought some scented soap from a salesman at the door, thinking the wedding justified that small improvement on the usual Perfection soap. We used it liberally, intending to feel and smell pleasantly refreshed afterwards. But almost immediately our faces and hands began to smart and large red blotches appeared. We were rather concerned because it was only a few hours off the wedding and in addition to what was becoming sharp, burning pain our faces presented an embarrassingly comical appearance. In desperation we went across to the Thomas's and the girls there did their best with Icilma face cream and dabs of powder. It soothed the smarting and we walked off to the church.

The wedding ceremony went off smoothly. There was a laugh from the onlookers outside the church as four of us posed for the photographer. Some joker, holding our bowler hats, had changed

them round and as we simultaneously put them on, Jack's just nestled on top of his head whilst mine slipped down almost to my ears. That laugh was a good start to the rest of the day. The reception was held at the Co-op rooms in Jackson Street and Mrs Bamber was in charge of the catering; for about sixty guests. Dad called during the afternoon. Just put his head round the door, nodded to Annie and Jack and hurriedly left. He would not come in; I suppose he would have felt ill at ease among so many strangers. So back to Jimmy Allen's. Jack didn't mind, nor did Mother or I. He was all right and so were we.

About this time I was working in the Meter Department making wooden fittings for a Miss Anne Shaw, who was organising and installing some entirely novel and revolutionary methods for the manufacture of electricity meters. The work in progress was moved continuously around and through the department on small, hand-pushed trolleys which ran on rails along the work-benches. There were chutes, turntables and all kinds of ingenious gadgets for holding and moving the numerous parts which go to make a meter.

There was some opposition from the workpeople, who were suspicious of the management's intentions for there was an obvious reduction in the manufacturing times compared with the previous traditional methods. Though I enjoyed making the peculiarly-shaped work containers, the amusing turntables and the toy-like chutes and tool-holders, at the time I was unable to appreciate the underlying principles of her ideas and along with my workmates secretly ridiculed these "doll's eyes jobs", as we termed them. In fact, Anne Shaw was introducing a new approach to manufacturing called "Motion Study", new not only to MetroVicks but to Britain. She had recently returned from the United States where she had been instructed in the principles by the wife of the originator, Frank Gilbreth. I little knew that the time would come when I, as a Motion Study Investigator, would be involved not only in applying the techniques in the factory but also organising and teaching on Motion Study courses.

As my fellow apprentices reached the age of twenty-one they were being dismissed; and I was approaching that fateful anniversary. Work was just trickling into the Joiners' Shop. We stood at our benches, quiet, for one was not supposed to indulge in unnecessary conversation, and went through the motions of sharpening our tools, over and over again. One had to be seen to be doing something. As the occasional work requisition was brought in the chargehand would retain it as long as he could, most likely in order to provide himself with some normal activity when the general foreman paid us his daily visit.

Then came March the first and I was twenty-one. Through the works mail I received a certificate stating that I had served the requisite number of years and completed my apprenticeship. Previously this had justified a little ceremony as one was called to the Education Department and presented with the document along with the good wishes of the Manager. But now it was an omen of the ending of security.

At home Mother decided that there should be a tea-party to celebrate the occasion, the only one ever held at our house. She,

Mabel and I cleaned and tidied all ground floor places. No-one would need to go upstairs so those rooms were not touched. In any case it would have been beyond our capability to make those presentable. And though eventually no guest did need to go up there, it was a continual worry to me whilst they were in the house. We borrowed crockery, cutlery, furniture and other items from neighbours. I papered the parlour and put extra nails in the lobby walls for people's clothes. The yard, scullery and lavatory were whitewashed and I repaired the lavatory seat which had been broken for at least twenty years. Other defects and eyesores were dealt with and for the first time I looked upon my home as a place which people could see without my feeling ashamed and embarrassed. Most of the guests were from the Thomas family and their friends from across the street. Mother was excited yet apprehensive as she prepared the food. She had help but it was the first time she had been involved in a tea party. I had never seen her looking so cheerful as she laughed and joked and ensured everyone had plenty to eat.

The party was a great success and Mother often remarked about the beautiful house we now had. As for myself, now twenty-one, the future wasn't very promising. I would now be entitled to the full rate of pay, about three pounds ten per week, which was more than twice the amount I had been receiving. But how long would my job last? Well, I was there for almost twelve months before the chargehand came to me one Friday morning and said, "Sorry, Harry."

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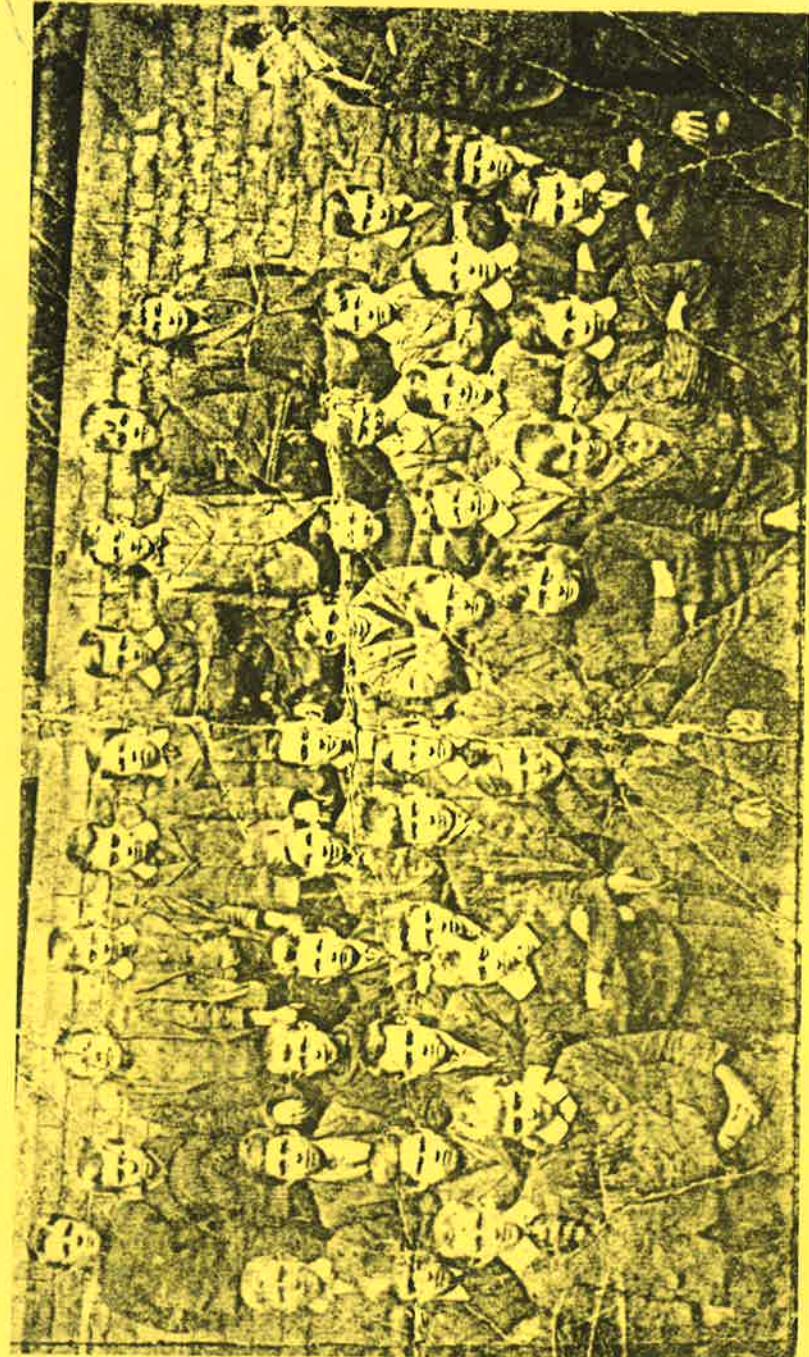


Aged 20. Snapped by a street photographer in Piccadilly, Manchester. A gloomy day during the Depression. I am carrying a small gluepot which I had just bought from Lewis's store in preparation for unemployment and doing work at home

Camping at Rhyl with Hiram and Harry Church. I am the one with the bare knees



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For a current list of local history publications, please send a stamped addressed envelope to Neil Richardson, 88 Ringley Road, Stoneclough, Radcliffe, Manchester M26 9ET.  
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Upper Jackson Street School. Mr Whittingham's class - Standard 5A. The author is third from the left on the back row