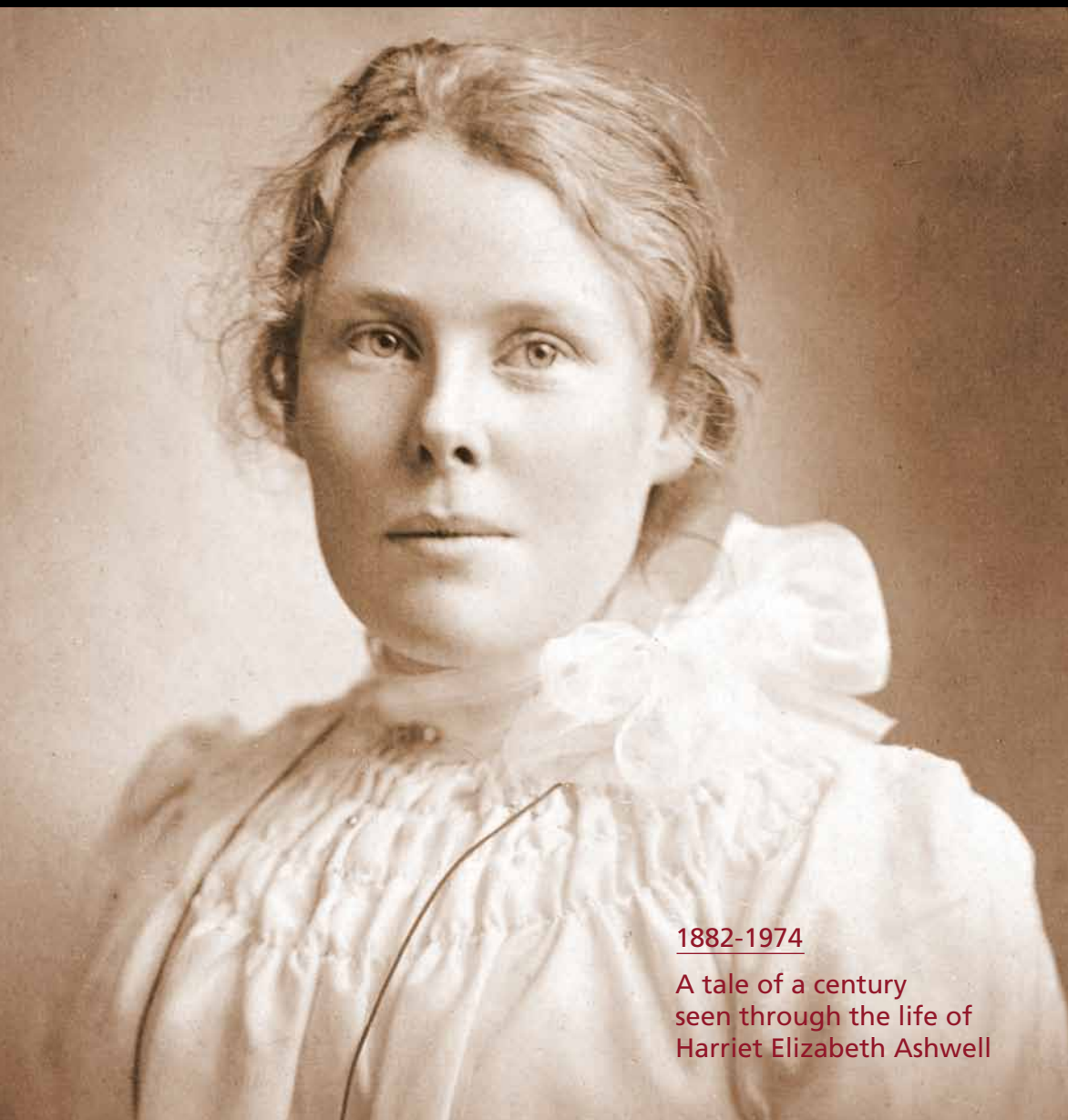
My Life

Harriet Ashwell



1882-1974

A tale of a century
seen through the life of
Harriet Elizabeth Ashwell

My Life

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My Life Harriet Ashwell 1882-1974 Written around 1961

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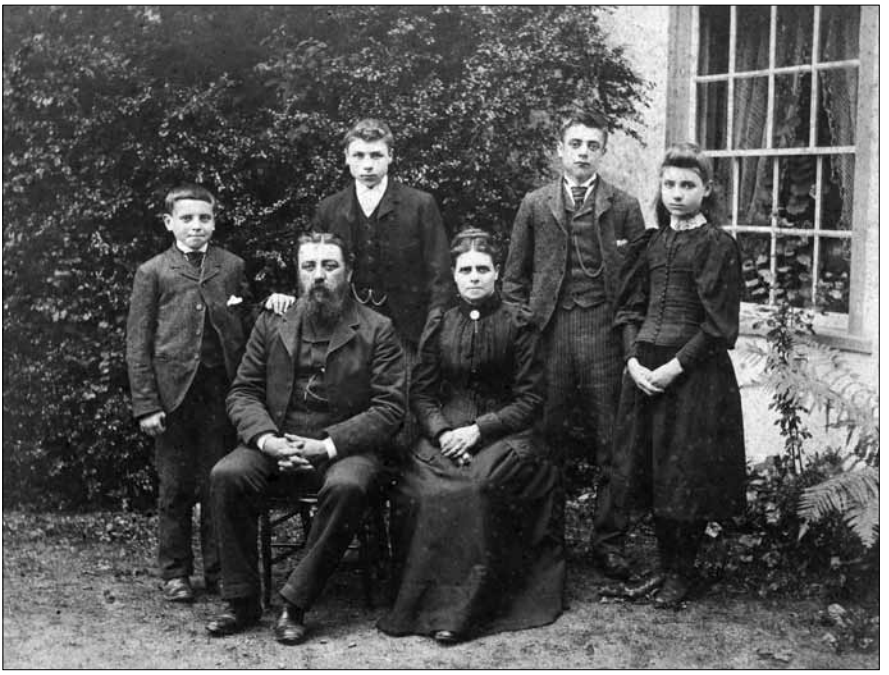

Walter's family in England
back row: Ernie, Walter, Fred, Nell
front row: Alfred, Ellen

Harriet

Bill Mahony (Harriet's brother) about to go to World War I. The chairs were made by his father.

Harriet with her father Willsford Hamilton Mahony

Ashwell family

back row: Walter, Nell, Uncle Fred, Alfred, Minister, Mr Mabbott, Alf Parkes
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Ashwell farm, Ameku Road, Raetihi 1912

Ernie Ashwell and Flo

Flo

left to right: Ruth, Bill, Flo, Dorothy

back row: Harriet, Dorothy, Flo, Walter
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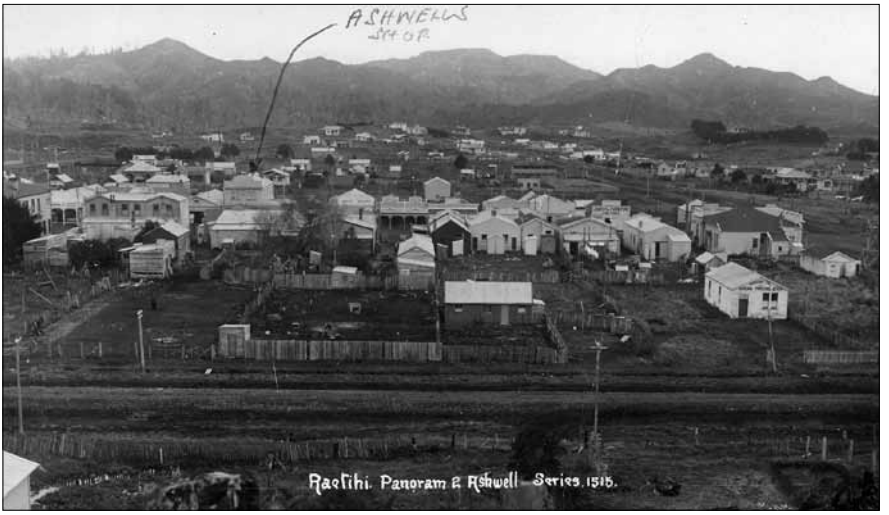
Roy Ashwell



Raetihi – Early 1900s

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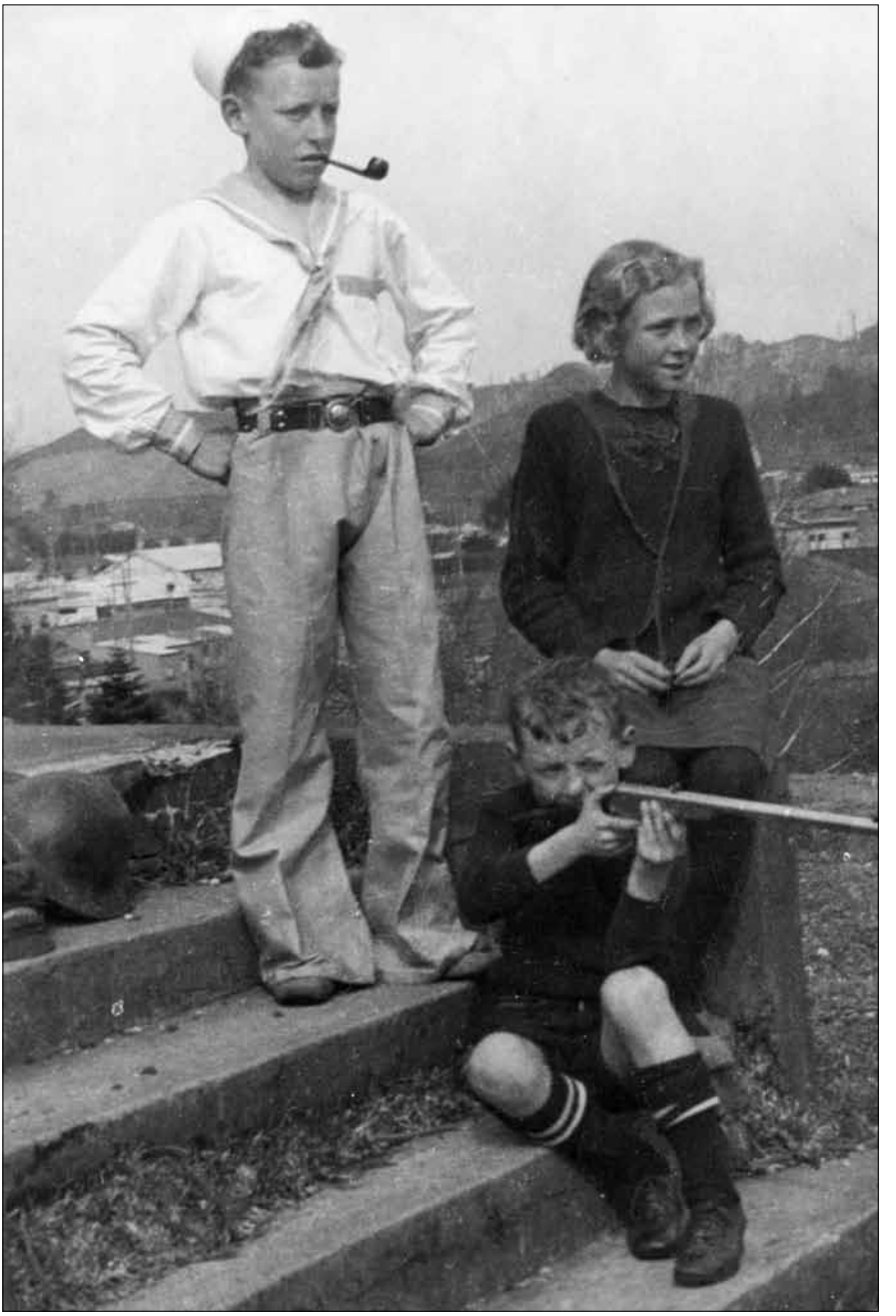

clock-wise: Roy, Hope, Laurie

Dorothy and Flo in Wanganui Girls College uniform

Laurie Nation

Laurie and Flo Nation

left to right: Hugh Knowles, George Skuse, Dorothy, Hope, Betty Nation

Bill and Alma Ashwell

Hope and Geoff on honeymoon in Palmerston North

Xmas at Ohakune 1941

back row: Sarah Waring (Laurie's mother), Flo Nation, Mrs Taylor, Betty Nation, Noel Woodruffe, Bill Taylor, Bill Waring,

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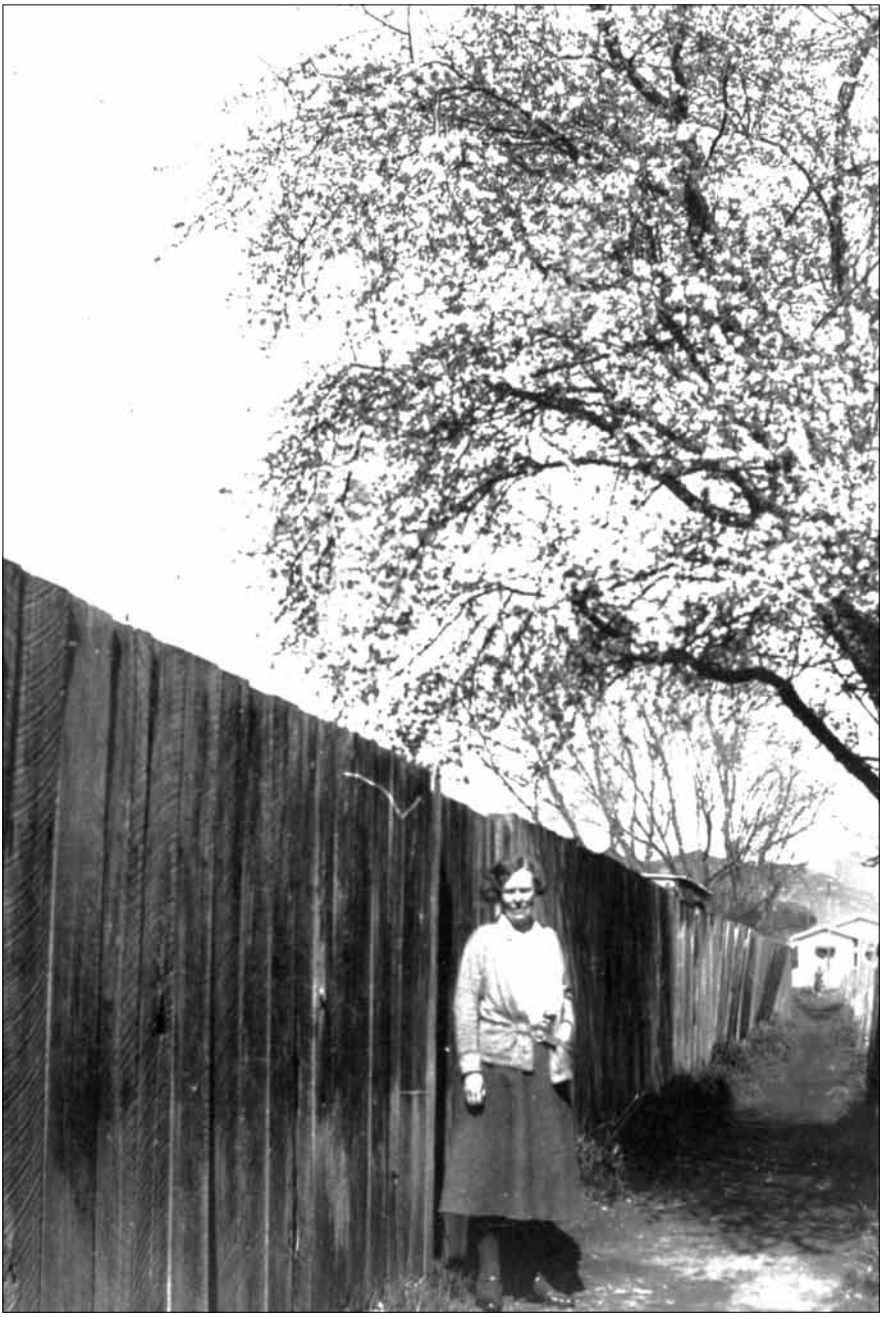
Five of the Mahony family at Hope and Geoff's wedding 1942

back row: Lily, Florrie, Molly

front row: Harriet, Bill



Harriet in the alleyway by the shop in Raetihi

left to right: Bill Mahony (Harriet's brother), Dorothy, George

Bernice and Laurie Ashwell

Hope and Harriet

left to right: Bill, Hope, Walt, Harriet, Dorothy, Laurie John (1957)

Harriet and Walt's 50th Wedding anniversary in Gisborne (1957)

back row: Rex Bryers (Grant Bryers), Geoff Smith, Bill Ashwell, Laurie Ashwell, Alma Ashwell, George Skuse, Bernice Ashwell, Bert Parkes

front row: Molly (Annie May) Parkes (Bill and Harriet's sister), Bill Mahony, Walt, Harriet, Dorothy Skuse, Hope Smith, Betty Bryers

Chapter 1 Birth and early life in Auckland

"There came to port, one Thursday night,
The queerest little craft
Without an inch of rigging on
I looked, and looked, and laughed!

It seemed so curious that she
Should cross the unknown water
And moor herself within my room –
My daughter, O my daughter."

Maybe these lines had not been written by 23rd September 1882. Had they been, how aptly they would have expressed the re-action of relatives to the new arrival! I have it on the most reliable authority that it was a matter of some surprise that so good looking a couple as my parents could produce so plain a child.

The two most concerned, however, would doubtless have gone on to say:

"Yet by these presents witness all
She's welcome fifty times
And comes consigned to Hope and Love
And common-metre rhymes"

Even so! For there is still extant I think in my sister Lily's possession a scrapbook containing some of Dad's attempts at verse.

It is a good thing babes arrive mostly "Consigned to Hope and Love." To the outspokenness of relatives I am indebted for the knowledge, early accepted, that looks were not my strong point.

With the ability of youth to shrug things off, my ego was not unduly deflated. After all, looks, as such some bright spark has written:

"It's the person in front gets the jar."

The place of my birth was a street off College Road called "Elizabeth". This accompanied by the emphatic declaration of my father that he was not going to have any "Marys" in his family, might be held accountable for my second name. Mary was the name of my grandmother Nightingale, between my father and whom existed the mutual antipathy which has given so much fuel to comic writers, and may be compared to that of Brer Fox and Mr. Dog, of Uncle Remus fame.

My first name "Harriet" was always a trial to me. With so many pretty and dignified names to choose from, why pick on Harriet? In my opinion it was a harsh, unlovely name. On my father's Irish tongue it was not so bad, for he slurred the Rs, and in his pronunciation it became "Hahyet". I was told it was the name of Dad's only sister.

Of that Harriet Mahony, I learned that her married name was Shanks, and that her husband's people were cordial manufacturers in Dublin, and that she had seven children–all boys.

When she was left a widow, on my father's persuasion, she decided to make New Zealand a future home, as Dad was now the only surviving relative. Arrangements were made for the passage but before the sailing date, she had a heart seizure and died. The Shanks family then took charge of the boys.

Years later, I was told by a Dublin immigrant who took land in Raetihi, that one of the Shanks family became mayor of Dublin.

I had only his word for this, yet strangely, on leave after the First World War, my brother visiting Dublin found the Shanks Cordial Factory, and learned that one of those Shanks had indeed held that position.

When I asked him why he did not make himself known to the family, my independent brother's answer as a disabled soldier, was "Not me! They might have thought I wanted something from them."

Those who knew him best would have smiled in full understanding.

Some years later my father spent the last two years of his life in my care. On his death, my daughter Hope and I went through his few private papers. We found in the inside pocket of his dress suit a crumpled folded letter, worn at the folds – his sister Harriet's last letter to him. Judging by the date he had treasured it for more than 40 years.

It was then I realised he had given me the name that was dear to him above all others. His was the day of family names. His own names Willsford Hamilton had been the maiden names of his mother and grandmother.

Men do not so readily talk of their relatives as do women, so it falls out that children usually get to know more of their mother's people than of their father's. This would be especially so, I think, of the children of immigrants. We learned that Dad's father had died leaving three sons and one daughter. Of these boys, David died in early manhood, unmarried. The eldest brother, Robert, emigrated to Australia. Dad, who did not get on with his stepfather followed his brother's example and set out for New Zealand. The stepfather's name was Bury, pronounced to rhyme with fury, not "Berry" as I have since

heard it spoken in one instance. Having lived with my irritable highly strung father, I could never put the entire blame on Mr. Bury! As the Scots say Dad was "Gey ill to live wi."

Doubtless, the discovery of new lands proved the call to intriguing adventure. Dad's brother chose Australia and after a few letters, all trace of him was lost. His fate remains an unsolved mystery. Later in life Dad tried to contact him through the agony columns of the press, without result.

Of my Mother's people, the Nightingale's, we know much.

My grandfather, Frederick Nightingale was an Englishman, born I think, in Newcastle. He was something of an inventive genius. He owned a paper bag factory, somewhere in the north of Ireland, Newry or Drogheda. He had lived in all three places. The challenge of new lands brought him to the colonies, first Australia, Tasmania, then New Zealand. Tasmania he liked best, but New Zealand presented more opportunity. The building trade was booming, so he, with his three eldest sons, settled in Auckland and built houses.

They worked mostly in the region of the old "Three Lamps" in Ponsonby. Until comparatively recent years, some of the old cottages built by the Nightingale's were still in use after 50 years. My brother, who worked in Auckland took me to see them. One forgets the passage of time, that could be almost 50 years ago.

Perhaps itchy feet, or maybe the passing of the building boom sent some of the family back to Tasmania and some to Australia. Three sons, Frederick, Richard and Harry, married Australian wives. The two youngest, Alfred and Charles, stayed in Tasmania with their parents.

I can remember a visit from my grandparents to our home in Clarence Street. It must have been before they left for Tasmania. In my childish recollection I can still see my grandparents walking up to our house. I remember thinking how nice Grandfather looked. He had fine dark hair and silky beard. I liked him on sight. They may have then been on a visit from Tasmania, as I remember seeing them only this once. My grandmother was the dominating personality. With a wider education than women got in her day, she could have been brilliant. But it was my nice kind-looking quiet grandfather that took my fancy. They settled in Tasmania, and though twice at least, my grandmother visited New Zealand, grandpa stayed in Tasmania for the rest of his life. Uncle Alfie also made Tasmania his home, married rather later than his brothers and died childless. He came over to us for one visit, with grandmother, and was a great favourite with us children, but that is years ahead. The only Nightingales who did not live to a good old age, died of tuberculosis, which was also the cause of my mother's death.

Working out the average life of Mum's family, leaving out the two whose untimely deaths were due to tuberculosis, I found it to be 87+. I write this in my 79th year, wondering if my native strength will take me to the family norm.

My mother's only sister Lily (Letitia) was in Auckland till 1886. That is a year I always remember for two things, first, the Tarawera eruption, and the shocked consternation at the destruction of the Pink and White terraces. My father had trekked, on his coming to New Zealand, with a party, to see them. I have even, in his portfolio, found some attempts to picture them, as he had seen them. He admitted he could not recapture anything of their wonder and charm. The other memory that is recalled by 1886, was that it was the year mother's only sister, then married with three or four children left New Zealand for California.

Recollections of Auckland:

My recollections of early Auckland are mainly Ponsonby, and Queen Street, the former because we lived there, and Queen Street, because it was a place of business and there Dad worked.

People living in the vicinity of the "Three Lamps" had larger sections, kept a few cows and sold milk. Some kept fowls. There were rope-works near our place.

I went to the school known as "Bailey's", the name of the headmaster. I could read before I went to school, though I knew little, if anything, of arithmetic. I was in my seventh year. Mum, who was taught by a governess, a drawing master in Ireland, had a poor opinion of "public schools". In Ireland free schools were new and only for the working classes. She hoped for something a bit more like what she had been used to, for the children, but in the end bowed to the inevitable, and sent Bill and me to "Bailey's".

I became a dinkum New Zealander, and my speech gave her much concern, for it was the language of the proletariat. Our everyday talk was "slang" to her.

I used to try to amend my speech and talk as she would have us, but the ideal of my mother could not sway me as much as the talk of my fellow New Zealanders.

One thing I gained, however, that I had not to learn correct speech from schoolbooks. It was the current in our home.

When we lived in St John Street, Bill and I used to go each evening to a small shop round the corner to bring home the "Evening Star", parent of the present large daily.

One day my sister Lily, then about three, started to follow us. Bill and I took her

back and went on our way, engrossed in our own affairs. When we returned with a paper we were met with a query "Where's Lily?".

She had apparently followed us without our knowledge, reaching Ponsonby Road, and not seeing us, turned in the wrong direction. Dad got up, from his tea and set out to find her, without success. So the police were informed, and took over the search.

She was brought back about 2 a.m. asleep in the arms of a policeman.

It turned out she had walked quite a distance, and was picked up at Arch Hill by a lady, who realising the child was lost took her home and cared for her, informing the Police of her whereabouts.

That quality of steady determination marked her future years.

I have treasured memories of picnics in Grafton Gulley, harbour trips in the old paddle steamers to Devonport and Rangitoto.

The first steamer trip I remember was to Devonport. I did not want to go, in fact, was much alarmed at going on the sea. My fear was that the ship might be wrecked and we drown, which shows how far my reading was ahead of my experience. I had been reading about Robinson Crusoe.

I remember, the old Grafton Gulley as a sort of fairyland, and now in my advanced years tried to remember it as it was, but with little success.

Dad worked at a store in Queen Street, kept by a Mr. Hewens. I think it was on the corner of Queen and Wellesley Street. On Saturdays Bill and I used to push an old pram to bring back the family groceries. The trouble on the way down was to keep the pram from running away with us. The return journey was heavy work, necessitating many pauses.

Between Wellesley and Victoria Street, there was a great attraction. In a jeweller's window there was a cuckoo clock. Bill and I always lingered there till we had seen the bird come out and do his stuff. Shops were open six days a week then. Time did not mean much to us.

Among our Auckland friends were a family named Forrest, who were related to the original Geo. Fowlds, then a well-known businessman in the city. All three men belonged to the same Church and Lodge.

Mr. Forrest was a contractor and had taken on the building of a section in the construction of the Main Trunk Line which was to connect Auckland and Wellington, the section between Hunterville and Mangaonoho.

He wrote to Dad of the good prospects in the newly opened land, and in fact,

recommended him to Messrs Ellis and Valder as a reliable and able man for a position with this Hunterville firm, and one who would be able to take charge of a branch in Ohingaiti.

I was then eight years, Bill six, and Lily nearly school age. Mr. Forrest found a house in the Hunterville, and Dad made the move. Quite an undertaking with a family of four, not to mention the expense.

I remember it still, the misery of the sea trip on a wallowing beast of a tub from Onehunga to New Plymouth. Florrie was just a toddler, Lily not quite school age, Bill six, and I, eight. All of us were sick, but were only one night on the boat and then boarded the train for Wanganui, where we spent another night at a boarding house, and next day journeyed on to Hunterville, from where we were taken a further stage to the home of a farmer named Stevens, friends of Mr. Forrest, who welcomed us, and made room for us till Dad could put a small cottage in order.

The Stevens family were wonderful. The youngest daughter Amy was in my age group. As soon as we got together she said "Let's go into the bush." I went, being careful to ask before taking the risk if there were "any lions and tigers in it ". The ignorance of a city child was most surprising to my new friend. She had heard however that there were wild pigs "way back" but thought it might be just one of those silly tales grown-ups tell. She was the youngest of a grown-up family.

Dad soon fixed things up in our humble home, which was on the outskirts of the village and wonder of wonders had virgin bush just across the road. What a wealth of fun it gave us, especially swinging out over hollows clinging to rata vines. We soon learned to fix a stirrup of rope to the end in which to put our feet and swing out in comfort. Lily (always the same, and a nuisance to Bill and I) insisted on going with us. Our fun ended when she insisted on having a ride and fell off. She lay so still we thought she must be dead. It was awful, but she was only stunned and soon came round.

We decided that if Lily must come we wouldn't go.

Chapter 2 Ohingaiti

We lived in Ohingaiti for about three years; lean years indeed!

Before the development of New Zealand's wool and meat trade, there was much poverty. Our best exports were gold and kauri gum. With our rich virgin soil we were certainly able to produce the goods. The difficulty was to get them to the European markets in good shape.

The Earth, as Scripture has it, "Brought forth by handfuls." No one need go hungry. Still the money for development came slowly. Wages were low.

Dad had taken up a section on the outskirts of the township, and had built his own home. No trade unions, nor town councils to prevent him doing all the work himself. For any job requiring the work of more than one man, as raising the framework of the walls, he had the help of a fellow employee, Mr. Jack Armstrong. A neighbour, Mr. Fleming, a bricklayer, helped him build the double chimney.

The house consisted of a living room 20' x 16', plus one large, and two smaller bedrooms, also kitchen, scullery, and front porch. Bathrooms were not a feature of workingmen's homes, nor sinks. Zinc baths or wooden tubs sufficed, baths being taken where and when convenience dictated.

Where stoves were installed, hot water for domestic use came from the fountain which was built into them.

On Saturday, the great day for family bathing, an outside fire was lit, and kerosene tins of water supported on iron bars gave a plentiful supply of hot water. The job of handling these heavy tins of boiling water was not without its dangers; first, the risk of scalding, and secondly the even greater danger of clothes catching fire, as the woman of the house lifted the heavy tins by their none too secure wire handles. I can remember, even in my childhood, one death from this cause in our vicinity, and such accidents were not infrequent.

Across the road from our place was a tract of bush then being milled. A wooden track for the engine which transported logs to mill had been put in by the sawmillers. This gave us kiddies access into the cool green depths, with its wealth of ferns and abundant bird life. It is not hard for me, in later years to recapture the breath-taking loveliness of this "Cathedral straight from the hands of God." One felt a beauty beyond our ability to express it, yet childish wonder somehow absorbed it, and its memory lingers.

After two years, Dad left the employ of Messrs Ellis and Valder, to go into a

business partnership with a butcher. For this man, call it childish intuition if you like, I formed an instinctive dislike.

The undertaking was a promising one. The business prospered. The end came when the partner skipped off to Australia with the cash from all the assets he had been able to liquidate. Accounts the defaulter had taken money to pay were found to be unpaid. There was a large deficit.

There was only one course for an honourable man to take – full responsibility for all debts – this my father did. He sold our home to Dr Davenport, Ohingaiti's first medico.

By this time I had passed Std III and was 12 years, so to help out, I left school and took a job as domestic help, cum nursemaid, to the doctor's household of three, himself, wife, and small girl.

The same experience of trust betrayed through a dishonest partner, came in later years, to my brother-in-law, in business in an Auckland provincial town. He, too, accepted the indebtedness, not only business, but personal also, of the errant partner. Newly married, he and my sister lived very sparsely until the last shilling was paid.

When I expressed surprise at his taking responsibility for the scoundrel's private debts, he replied quietly, "He was trusted through my recommendation."

As to my brother-in-law, after this episode, he never looked back. For many years, until his retirement to Auckland he held the position of first citizen of the town.

There is a stone in the Kaimai Park rating one of his many services to the community. Indeed, the park itself is that.

I was taken to see the memorial, whereupon he remarked; "It will not be very long till people, visiting this park will ask, 'Who is this fellow Gordon, and what did he do? '".

That time may be, even as I write, so short is public memory, and so soon does there arise a new generation which 'knows not Joseph '.

In retrospect, the monetary loss, though considerable, seems small, placed against the unchanging confidence of his fellows 'his peers and equals '.

While we were still in our first Ohingaiti home, our grandmother came on a visit, accompanied by her fourth son, our beloved "Uncle Alfie".

I have written of my grandmother as a woman of remarkable ability, who could have made her mark in many fields.

In her advocacy of what she called "Children's rights" Gran was ahead of her time. She contended that any ruffian could stand over a child, and by force compel obedience. Her view was that the parents' job was to guide and help you to make the best use of the opportunities. It needs scarcely be said that my brother Bill and I, the only young folk old enough to follow these adult conversations, were most heartily in agreement with her sentiments!

We discussed them – of course out of earshot of our elders – and gave our only grandmother our love and confidence.

Naturally, so strong-minded a woman and our Dad were in opposite camps. I remember only fragments of these family debates, in which my mother took little part, quite content to listen to these two able opponents have their say.

Uncle Alfie stole our hearts. Still young enough in heart to be a child among children, he seemed quite one of us, our pal.

I wish the joy of parenthood had been his. It was never to be. He married a Tasmanian girl, but died in his 30s, of tuberculosis, number one scourge of his generation, leaving no children.

The other major event which occurred while in our home was the birth of twins.

It came as a surprise to me, when in later years, a friend told me she was to have twins. It was my first introduction to x-ray foreknowledge. In 1894, of which time I am writing, such knowledge was still in the lap of the future. When I asked my friend if she knew the sex, she replied, "They haven't got that far yet!"

Mum was attended by a midwife, who shouted excitedly "Mr. Mahony, it's twins!"

This, in our small house, of course woke my brother and me and brought us on the scene.

There was Dad sitting on the long stool which was the kids' seat at meal time. He was holding No. 1, wrapped in a towel, while she was taken to be washed he held No. 2.

Then No. 1 was given back to him. We thought her a funny little thing all legs and arms.

As Dad held her, Bill and I looking on, suddenly he sighed a long sigh, falling back against the table. As the small bundle began to move Bill (not I!) sprang forward and grasped her before Dad rolled off the seat in a dead faint.

Be it noted it was Bill's quick wit which saved the baby from injury.

So a family of four, overnight had become six, as Annie May and Dorothy Eleanor were added to it [Dorothy Eleanor died when young].

When we sold our home, we rented a rough unpainted place which must have been the first house built in the settlement. We squeezed into it, and Dad built a lean-to on the back. This became our home for the rest of our Ohingaiti sojourn.

Dad was a good mixer, could sing and had considerable histrionic talent. This brought him into touch with the schoolmaster, Mr. Rivers, who was musical, playing both piano and violin.

In these new, out-of-the-way places, the settlers had perforce to provide their own amusement. The schoolmaster got together the local talent, and produced some really well-got-up musical plays.

The only one I remember, because I was allowed to go to the performances, was entitled "No Song, No Supper".

They also amused themselves with Gilbert and Sullivan's "Pinafore", surely an ambitious project, but I cannot remember if it were ever produced. I know quite a bit of the music, through hearing Dad and Mum and others going through their parts.

Dad's association with the schoolmaster brought our families together, ages and sex corresponding. We enjoyed many good times together. There was one marked difference in our upbringing. In that family boys and girls were kept separate. They thought it strange that we Mahonys should play together.

I was under the head for only a short time, a good thing, as our dislike was mutual.

Possibly this to me may have been because I was always ahead of his daughter at schoolwork. It was only there, however, that I excelled. She was a gifted reciter and could impersonate to perfection the peculiarities of the folk around. In housecraft she left me standing.

Addiction to drink makes some folk urbane, with Mr. Rivers it had the opposite effects.

His wife was a wonderful manager, but it must have extended all her gifts to keep the household going on what was left of a low salary.

Twice he went 'through the court' as bankruptcy was euphemistically termed.

The separation of the sexes did not seem to work very well, as of three sons, only one had an unblemished record.

My mother had imbibed, from the 'free-thinking' Nightingales, the belief that a loving God would not have created a hell. In this belief I grew up, until it was disturbed by a problem "If indeed there was no Hell, then where did people like Mr. Rivers go when they died?" Whereupon the matter became an open question with me.

Mr. Rivers was later relieved of his position with the Education Board, the grounds for the action as stated by the Board being "That the board could not continue to keep in its employ uncertificated teachers."

After this he taught music throughout the district. In his advanced years he was jailed for two years for interference with two of his pupils.

Chapter 3 Ohingaiti School and local families

Among the memories of Ohingaiti school days, one will suffice, the annual exam when I was in Std III.

The school building was an unlined structure of corrugated iron; very cold in winter and almost unbearably hot in summer.

The staff were Head, and lady assistant in charge of the primers. The assistant was a quiet gentle girl. Under summer conditions she sometimes fainted, and often the older girl pupils had to be allowed out for a breath of fresh air.

Old-fashioned clumsy heavy desks held 4 to 6 pupils. Passing seatmates, when one had to get out was a skill acquired only by practice.

In this part of the Education district the Annual Exam was held in August, when the weather was often showery and cold. This one occasion is etched on my mind.

Pouring rain hammered on the iron roof, making it hard for children to hear what the inspectors said, and, conversely, even harder for him to catch the replies of nervous children.

Fortunately, much of the work was written. For some subjects, such as mental arithmetic (an awful ordeal for most) the class, would be lined up behind the rows of desks. Then, the inspector would pose his conundrum – wait a few seconds, then his pointing finger would make its way down the class.

Some children with steady nerves and some modicum of mathematical genius, would come out with the right answer. Just as well, for me, it was a "class" subject, not recorded by individual marking, but by the inspector's "Good", "Satisfactory", "Fair" and the not unlikely "Poor". By the way, mental arithmetic was never taught in any school I was in. No shortcuts were tolerated. Each step of our sums must be written out in full detail. Our mental arithmetic was supposed to grow, Topsy-like, of itself.

For reading, also, pupils were lined up behind the desks–not so bad, as the book was between us and the fearsome blighter in front.

One never-to-be-forgotten day. For some unknown reason, we had an inspector quite unknown to us. His name was Spencer. As I learned later, he was a loan to us, from Taranaki.

A not very large Std VI was seated in one of the long desks. A boy was seen to speak to his neighbour. He was, it turned out, requesting the return of his ruler.

"Boy" thundered the inspector "You were talking". "Bring out your paper and go home".

"Please Sir, I was just …." was as far as the boy got.

So a well-behaved boy of good character was failed, having neither justice nor right of appeal.

All through that miserable day the storm raged–and so did the inspector. So easily, be it noted, could a year's work both of teacher and pupil result in failure, depending on such unpredictable matters as the weather, the personality of an inspector or the state of his liver.

The inspector's report, in this instance was not good. Writing as I have done seems rather mean. I received special mention as the "bright spot" in the class.

The report went on to say, in case any credit should go to the Ohingaiti School, it should be said that I was a recent arrival from Hunterville.

I know personally of one even worse case, which occurred in a neighbouring school to the one where I was at the time assistant.

The two inspectors in this case, were wont to ease the tedium of their work especially at weekends, by strong waters. My friend's school was examined on a Friday. There was a great rushing round on Saturday. These were pre-telephone days, but somehow the school was rounded up. The inspectors had lost the papers, and the children had to sit again. This was in the dairy industry, where many pupils came from a distance.

My informant was the master, a man of the highest integrity.

I, up in arms at this rank injustice asked "And did you not complain to the Board at such unfair treatment?"

"No" he replied. "It wouldn't have got me anywhere. Had I complained I would never again have got a good report. The very best I could hope for would have been to be 'Damned with faint praise'. By keeping quiet about it, I will probably get a good report next year".

I wonder if he did!

The Head overcame his dislike of me so far as to congratulate my father and me personally, promising he would see I was given a prize at the annual prize-giving, which function was usually held at the conclusion of the school's gala day–the annual picnic.

That great day eventually came. I woke with a splitting headache, and felt really ill.

Mum wanted me to stay in bed, but I was so keen to go, she relented. Had I not been promised a prize? I belong to that unfortunate class–migraine sufferers. Mum thought my headache might be merely a more severe attack than usual, so I went with the family.

It was a terrible day, hot, and little if any, shade available. My head ached, my eyes felt like balls of fire, but I was determined to stick it out.

Prize-giving time came. I was not mentioned.

Mum had tried to prepare me for it, saying that Mr. Rivers had probably forgotten the promise, and that I should not build too much on it.

One of my Dad's rules of life was that promises should always be honoured. So he had taught us.

As soon as the prize-giving was over Mum took us home. I was in bed for a fortnight, very ill with measles.

When, after this particular examination day, Mr. Rivers congratulated Dad, he did indeed give honour where it was due. I believe the greatest factor in my success at school was the good reading he provided the family with, that and his keen interest in our progress.

Both as pupil and teacher I had many recollections of inspectors.

They usually hunted in pairs. I use the word advisedly. Their theme song could have been "A hunting we will go".

To the sufferers, teachers and scholars, they appeared to be nosing behind good work to detect a weakness they could bring out in their report.

The first I contacted was in Hunterville. He was a real tailor's model. No one could find a fault in his attire, even in those days of transport and mud. He carried a resplendent gold repeater, a large one. How it dazzled our eyes. We children hardly noted his associate, of duller plumage. His attire was matched by his hyphenated name – Vereker-Bindon. Of his successors I have little recollection till my late school teacher years.

But the associate inspector, who remained No. 2 in all his service, became an institution and greatly loved. He was a Scot and never lost his burr. He was patient, painstaking, and fair.

I met him after my marriage, in our shop, and hailed him with joy. He told me that as he went round the country districts men on farms he passed would drop their implements and hail him by name. They never forgot him.

I look back on Ohingaiti days with mixed feelings. Some things were bad, but there was much that was fine, and shaped our young lives for good.

Almost opposite the school lived an elderly childless couple, Mr. and Mrs Strudwick. Fond of children, they started in their home, the first Sunday School, to which Bill, Lily and I went. It was there we learned the Bible truths which became the foundation of our Faith.

She held, too, a weekly "Band of Hope" meeting, where we learnt that indulgence and drink would be the enemy of the good life. We read, for ourselves, such Bible truths as "No drunkard shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

Among the treasures one accumulates, I carry around with me on my teaching days, a brightly coloured card about 5" x 4", my pledge of total abstinence, with my signature in childish scrawl.

When my eldest grand-daughter set up her home, I passed it on to her.

I was nine years old when I wrote that signature. At 79 years, I can place on record that it has been kept, yes, even at our wedding, though my father had provided wine, neither my husband, nor myself, nor any connected with the bridal parties' families touched it.

Into my life at this time, came the gift of an older and more educated friend, Annie Carver.

The Carver story could fill many pages. English folk, they had lived for some years on Sunday Island, in the Kermadec group.

Though Annie must have been around 16 years, she enrolled in Std VI, attending school in order to get a Std VI New Zealand Certificate.

In many ways she was ahead of me and became a much loved friend. Just after I met her, I had my twelfth birthday, and my first birthday cake. Annie made a lovely one, decorated with pink and white icing. I felt like Royalty. The Carver bookshelves were my library. Many of the books were covered with goatskin, because of the ravages of vermin on Sunday Island.

We were very poor at this period. I was never really well dressed. Mum did her best. She fed us as full a vitamin diet, a term unknown then, as was possible, guided by her own strong common sense.

I recall one Christmas when we hopefully hung up our stockings.

Mum must have shed tears, for all she could put in them were penny 'lucky bags'.

These were a wonderful pennyworth. Wrapped in a coloured tissue packet, could be a ring set with a gorgeous stone, or a brooch, or for boys a small whistle or a pencil sharpener, and about ½ oz of small lollies. The packet was finished off with a very gaudy picture gummed to one side of the packet.

What sweated labour must have gone into the making.

Mrs Carver remains in my memory as a woman of wide sympathies and great understanding. She had a good word for everybody, with one exception and that with good reason.

That exception was Mr. Rivers. Mrs Carver's son John was Secretary of the School committee. There came a time when the correctness of his figures was challenged at the School committee meeting.

Mr. Rivers declared he had handed to the Secretary a sum of money in payment of a small account. This the secretary denied, whereupon the master produced the receipt. The Secretary repudiated the signature. I do not know how the matter ended, though it must, for a time, have left the name of an honourable man under a question mark. The sum involved was little over £2.

All I ever heard Mrs Carver say of Mr. Rivers was, "He is a bad man".

Before we left Ohingaiti I had passed Std III. I have mentioned I was working in the doctor's household. From there I went to work for a music teacher, Mrs McAlley. I was able to do the housework and look after the family of small children. My wages were really good for those days, 5/- [shillings] a week.

From this job I was ousted by a young woman of about 17 who was willing to work for 2/6 weekly and music lessons.

Just at this time my people were to leave for Mangaweka. A farmer's wife in Mangaonoho, 4 miles off, at the railhead, hearing over the grapevine that I was losing my job, sought my people out and I went, not home but to her farm.

The lady was newly married, but not young, may even had reached the (to me) near-old-age of 30. Looking back, I could see how well she treated me, after her own lights. There was nothing wrong with my table manners (I had been brought up too well for that) but as servant I had my meals in the kitchen. Snobbery died hard, even in young New Zealand.

In my previous jobs, I had been able to go home on my not too frequent holidays; now home was 11 miles away.

My employers were very kind. While my folk were in Ohingaiti, they took me into Ohingaiti on Sunday, leaving me at home while they went to Church, and

picking me up in the afternoon as they went home for the evening milking.

There were many good aspects of this job, the housework was sometimes put aside and Farmer Horton would commandeer me to help in mustering sheep. I could ride well enough to be quite a help. He was a cheerful, jolly man, grand to work with. The days spent in this work were red letter indeed. Mrs Horton had none of his easy camaraderie.

Thirty or so years after, meeting one of his sisters, we enjoyed a talk of those old-times. I had not met her until then. By this time the two children of this marriage had grown up. One was on his own farm, the daughter had set up her Doctor's plate. The aunty told me her advice to the new medico was "Be sure you take your bedside manner from your Dad and not your Mother."

Chapter 4 Ohingaiti and the railway

This is a continuation of the life of the Mahony family in Ohingaiti.

One of my friends once made the remark that we were pioneers. It struck strangely on my ear. It is true we lived the life of pioneers, but nowhere were we among the first-comers. Before we arrived, it could be said that "camp had been set up".

Business does not precede but follows settlement.

When Messrs Ellis Bros and Valder opened up in Ohingaiti the construction of the Main Trunk Line had been completed as far as Mangaonoho from the south.

This remained the railhead for quite a long time, held up by two major projects, the Makohine Viaduct, and the tunnel which leads onto it.

About a mile straight north was a high steep bush clad hill through which the tunnel had been planned.

The tunnel led straight out to a deep gully through which the Makohine Stream flowed on its way to join the big Rangitikei River.

The Makohine Viaduct was for many years the highest in New Zealand. This distinction, I hear, has now passed to the South.

When our family arrived in Ohingaiti where Dad opened the store for the firm, work on the tunnel was proceeding from the Ohingaiti end, employing a considerable number of men.

These workmen were housed with their families, below the hill. Their rough dwellings were scattered about on the side near the road below, conveniently near to the job.

After a week of heavy rain, Saturday morning dawned bright and sunny. The bush around the camp rang with the merry voices of children, swinging on the rata vines, some gathering wood for the home supply. They may have been too absorbed in their work or play to have noticed ominous rumblings and creakings.

Frenzied mothers rushed to the rescue of their children as the whole hillside, weighted by the mass of spoil from the tunnel, slipped down, tearing away the trees and rocks, wrecking homes, and engulfing the playing children. A mother rushing out to rescue her children was swept away. Of one large family only two, brother and sister, were left.

The victims were women and children, as the fathers would be at work.

A shocked community went to the rescue. I can still remember the grief. Grown-ups wept unashamedly, even men.

The brightness of the day seemed a terrible mockery. I remember that the two remaining children of the worst hit family did not return to school. They were Catholics, and were taken to a convent school, probably at Wanganui.

I still remember their names, though I did not see them again.

There may be some memorial to the victims in the small cemetery on the banks of the Rangitikei. I do not remember. There were eleven killed.

This terrible happening early in our residence, now an "old, unhappy far-off thing – forgotten long ago".

But who could forget the distraught mother's vain attempt to save her children? I am sure that to die with them was infinitely more merciful than to have lived under so crashing a load of sorrow.

This, and the wreck of the S. S. Elingamite are the tragic events most deeply engraved on my memory.

In due course the viaduct was completed. The tunnel was, I suppose, a short half-mile from the farm where I worked.

On the occasions when there was no transport on my "off" days, other than Shank's pony [walking], the distance to the main road from the farm made the journey about 5 miles.

I do not remember how it came about, but it most probably was through my chats with Mrs O'Sullivan, a neighbour that the thought registered that if I could go in the other direction, through the tunnel, the journey would be shortened by more than 2 miles. So, one day, I quietly set out by the tunnel, now completed and across the viaduct.

There were no side rails, only 12 x 2 planks placed along the sleepers for convenience of workmen.

I got through the tunnel without trouble, took a glance below, and wondered if my nerve would be sufficient to carry me over the viaduct, on a narrow walkway of 12 inches.

It did. I got over in good order but never attempted it again. This may have been because of an undertaking given my people not to repeat the performance, but more likely because it took place near the conclusion of my servitude. The

distance between Mangaonoho Station and Ohingaiti was 4 miles by road, thence to Mangaweka 7 miles. So to cut more than two miles off the distance (to be walked) would be a strong temptation.

Weighing the pros and cons before undertaking my trek across, I remember thinking "If I lose my nerve, I will just get down on hands and knees and crawl over!" However my nerve stood the strain.

I was never one of those who left home to make their fortunes. With me it was the reverse – home left me.

While I was at this farm, Dad bought a section at Mangaweka with a rough shack on it that had served as a cook-house when the township was laid out and opened up.

It had indeed been the home where the Methodist minister lodged. At one end of the structure a small slab built room was lined with a tent, the minister's bedroom, study and what not, our much loved Rev. Arthur Hopper. He was still on the job when my folk acquired the property, but lived in the school house with the school master, and one of the Public Works officers, bachelors three.

Dad never liked living "on the street" as he put it. He built about 40 yards back on a long section of about 3 to 4 acres, acquired under the 999 year lease.

Having now a family of 5, self (eldest) 14, Bill 12, Lily 10, Florrie 7, and Molly 2, Dad started his second family home. Though the labour was his own and timber very cheap, money was scarce, so Dad hit on an ingenious idea. He put up the framework, carefully planing the studs, and building the place not so much inside out as inside first.

He carefully boarded the house on the inside, leaving the studs outside. By building in this unorthodox manner he could quickly and with less expenditure, house us all. So our home was known locally as the house that was built inside out.

We all had a hand in the finished job, helping according to our ability. A fowl house was run up and a good garden put in.

With fowls and plenty of vegetables we were able to live well and cheaply.

We did not purchase the section but held it under a "Lease in Perpetuity" title, well named for it was ours on a small annual payment for 999 years.

Of course there were conditions. It could not be sold until three years residence had been completed, and then only provided fencing, some building and clearing had been done. These clauses were put in to prevent speculators cashing in on the opportunity.

Should a lessee just "squat" on it, dodging improvements, the land went back to the state.

Hats off to the NZer who worked that one out!

It enabled many a toiler to "own his own".

To do that now a man has to mortgage about all he has except his immortal soul, and the terms are 'Life '!

I believe Dad would later probably have put on the outer skin, but about this time Mr Forrest invited him to go to Paeroa, where he had opened a timber yard, and take over the clerical work. Dad and Mum agreed he should go, and prepare a home there for the family. Bill and I were in whole-hearted agreement. A great toiler himself, Dad kept our noses to the grindstone, was as the Scots say "gey ill to live wi". So, one day he was to leave about five p.m. per coach for Mangaonoho to start on the journey, first to New Plymouth then by sea to Auckland and across the Hauraki Gulf and up the Thames River to Paeroa.

At this time we were school caretakers – a big job for it was a five teacher school and three rooms. This day Bill and I were on the job while Mum saw Dad off. We could have hurried and been in time to see him off, but we deliberately loitered. As Bill said "I wasn't going to give the blighter any goodbye kiss." We certainly got our own back for he was hurt we hadn't hurried to be in time.

Chapter 5 Mangaweka

Now began between two and three years of happy harmonious family life. We worked as a team, sharing the school cleaning and work at home. At the age when many boys are apt to be a problem, Bill was Mum's "Man of the House".

The love that Dad might have shared was given to his mother. Dad's treatment brought to the fore all the deep resentment of strong character. Where Dad was concerned Bill just dug in his toes.

In my younger days I had about as much time for my father as Bill had. As I grew in understanding, I knew him as an exceptionally gifted man. His irritability and short temper was understandable in a man who never fumbled a job. He made little allowance for the lack of knowledge in others. The exercise of a little more patience, a little more tolerance of clumsy or unaccustomed fingers would have given him a team of willing helpers.

The result was that while Bill and I would tackle difficult jobs willingly for Mum we hated working with him.

He might call out "Harriet, bring me my adze."

"Where is it, Dad?"

"In my toolbox. Where do you think it would be?"

So I would go to Mum, "Mum, what's an adze? Dad wants it."

(Mum) "I don't know either. Here! Take the toolbox."

(Dad) "You silly ass, it's not in the toolbox. Look on the carpenters bench."

If I then brought the right article, it would be a process of eliminating the tools I knew from those I didn't, and bringing the likeliest looking for the job he was doing.

If the messenger were Bill, after the first "you fat-headed ass", he would bring every tool he knew would not be right, caring nothing for the consequences, if he could "get one back on Dad".

That's how Dad came to look on the boy with gifted hands as a "fat-headed fool".

If the term could be applied to either, it certainly was not Bill! He could always out-manoeuvre his opponent.

Our father was a clever and most versatile man. He seemed to do well anything he tackled, even at the first go.

Two things he never accomplished. He could neither make money nor keep the affection of his children. He was too impatient to teach others. Even Lily, who had his gift for drawing and painting and wished to learn, he hadn't the patience to teach.

He was a gifted reader and much in demand as a reciter. He loved babies, but couldn't be bothered with young children. One lasting and very pleasant memory is the hours he spent reading to us or reciting Horatius, Tam O'Shanter and much contemporary poetry. He had a pleasing singing voice. When he was in Paeroa, Mum said she missed him coming into the house singing parts of the Messiah, or bits from Gilbert and Sullivan operas. Aunt Lily (Mills) who married a waster used to say "Willsford was always a good provider". She went out to work in the mornings, and taught music afternoons or evenings to keep her large family. Thanks to the larger opportunities in USA and to her toil, all her family were well educated and did well. Harry was high up in a large insurance company. One was a jeweller, and Fred became Professor of Economics in New York University. Of her two daughters, Ethel married a rancher in Arizona, Mary never married and lived with Aunt Lily till her death. Laurie met her when his Air Force trained in Canada, then a white haired old lady crippled in a wheelchair.

Those happy years with Mum! Even now they appear an oasis in a somewhat arid childhood. She had no favourites except the family one, everybody's love – little Molly.

When we quarrelled, as children do, Mum would say, "Hush children, don't quarrel, you only have one another for a very short time, then each goes on his own way. Think of my only sister and me, with the world between us."

I am sure those were the days we grew most in love and understanding and team spirit. We used to have good times round the fire on winter nights, reading, or talking. Mum had lots to tell us about Ireland, and life in the older lands.

No one could beat my mother in making money go a long way. The part of his wages Dad sent her (and he was never too ungenerous to himself) was used so carefully that we were well fed, happy and satisfied. More, and this is a story worth telling.

It began on a winter's evening, all but Molly (in bed) sitting round in comfort beside a roaring fire. The family talk developed after someone had asked. "If you were given a wish, what would you ask for?"

I was first, being eldest. No time intervened between question and answer. Mine was ready "a piano".

I had long wanted to learn music, not because I was gifted that way, but because I envied other girls who could play.

Bill was next, equally quick, "a pony".

Lily was the quietest, but gave hers as "paints and drawing paper".

Now my wish, basically, could be analysed as "keeping up with the Joneses". Other girls could play, I wanted to.

Bill's was a love of horses from the days he had gained the friendship of the horses in the next paddock, as a small boy in Auckland.

Well, as we sat there we doubtless enjoyed our wishful thinking. Of our mother, silent listener, we probably did not think.

Then, coming home from the school cleaning, one day, there seemed an atmosphere of excitement. Molly was dancing round with a shining face.

We went into the kitchen and greeted Mum, who said, "Look in the sitting room". We did. Then in all its lovely walnut splendour was a piano! Questions and answers poured out. Then Molly said "play it Haddie" (my family name bestowed by Molly).

How glad I was, and if any of the family years were assailed by scales and exercises no one minded. No more treks to a neighbour's for limited practice. I could practice as much as I liked.

This marvellous instrument was an old one, of French make, with a beautifully mellow tone. Number one wish granted – cost £10.

It is sometimes strange when in our more sophisticated cities to remember how young a country ours was, and I write of 50, 60, near 70 years ago.

There were still stretches of land scattered over New Zealand where few white men, and even some where few Maoris had more than passed. Over the plains around Taupo and Karioi and other parts of the King country roamed the droves of wild horses, offspring of those who had gone bush in early days.

The Maoris were clever in corralling these, much as elephants were caught in India. They were also wonderful horsemen, who could go in a party, skilfully separate a group of mountain ponies, and head them in the direction of the corral. Should the leader attempt to go in any other direction, he would be intercepted by the most expert horsemanship, until the whole group was hemmed in, with nowhere to go but into the wide-mouthed enclosure.

Then, a short time for taming the group, it must be confessed I fear that one weapon was hunger.

When sufficiently manageable, they would be driven by a picked team to the nearest (or desired) stock market for auction. There was one at Mangaweka.

There was one beautiful stallion that always evaded capture. He took on the nature of a mythical horse. It was only in his declining years that he was captured, more for the challenge of the job than anything else. I hope he was given a generous measure of freedom.

As I had come home to find a piano, Bill came home to find a job, (a wonderful one, after his own heart) awaiting him.

Next allotment to ours was owned by the carrier Mr. Noble. Mum conferred with him about Bill's wish. Mr Noble offered to buy one for him. Bill and Fred Noble were told to go up to the sale yards with a long rope, where Mr. Noble wanted their help. Mr. Noble left the boys to bring to his place the wild pony. So Mangaweka went to its doors to enjoy the spectacle of two boys hanging on to the end of a long rope, while a bewildered frightened pony tried desperately to regain its liberty.

So Bill had his pony. Bill loved him, and had a few years of great fun with him before they left for Paeroa, and he was sold to Fred Noble. Number two wish granted.

Lily's wish was fulfilled by Mum getting Dad to buy sketching blocks, decent paints, and brushes and post them down.

Florrie had her doll, but I really think its value in books would have given her more real pleasure.

What cannot Mothers do?

My piano cost £10. Bill's pony £2. Much sacrifice, perhaps even self-denied food, had made these wishes materialise.

I often think what a pity her toil-filled life, as home-helper and then mother of a large family, left her little time to develop her gift of drawing and painting. I would hope it will come out strongly in some of her descendants.

This time of Mum's life, which she made so happy for us, must have been a lonely time for her.

One thing we could not have understood was that she would miss Dad. We would have thought him a jolly good miss!

Then she missed Mrs Carver, so kind and motherly, whose fine qualities thrived on a pioneering life, making of rough surroundings places where beauty belonged. Mother missed the motherly sympathy and understanding

so much, that she thought a seven mile walk each way was worthwhile, to enjoy a visit to her.

From these treks she came home more refreshed than tired, with new spirit for her own pilgrimage.

Mrs Carver belonged to the Church of England, as it was in the time of Frances Ridley Havergal. Love and worship were the mainsprings of her life. The lives of many folk, drab in themselves, were enriched by her life among them. Children sent there with a message never left without some little gift, a cake, a sweet, or even a few flowers. Not given to honeyed words (such as my mother designated "too sweet to be wholesome") her love and interest in other folk's affairs were visible in her life, and her faith in her attitude to life's ups and downs.

Of my brother, it is true that those Mangaweka days were a golden time for him, as for us all.

His spare time was spent with the Nobles, father and son. Mr. Noble was a widower.

In the times when work was well-up-to-date, Mum would let Bill go on Saturday, with the Nobles to the rail-head. There he and Fred took a hand in loading the brake, ate their cut lunch, and returned in time for the evening meal.

Before we left Ohingaiti, and while I was at the Horton's, Bill lived and worked with a family called Sigglecow, German settlers, who ultimately settled in the Hawke's Bay. He would be twelve then. He was once given a difficult job for a boy. From Ohingaiti he was to ride to Halcombe, through unfamiliar country after he had passed the railhead first to Hunterville (11 miles) then Marton, and last lap from thence to Halcombe. From here he had to bring back a draught horse. All went well, but Mum was very angry when she heard of it, which astonished Bill, who felt himself quite able for the job.

He lived a bit before the introduction into the school curriculum of organised sport. Rugby as a school game was a new venture. We know now that 40, 50, 60, 70 years later, rugby has become not only our No. 1 sport, but almost a religion.

Country schools took to it avidly. I remember it first at Mangaweka. The only organised "sport" in Ohingaiti was that run by the redoubtable Mr. Rivers, whose occupation (or profession, as you please) was that of army sergeant-major.

While we girls relaxed and enjoyed an afternoon's sewing, the unfortunate boys spend it in drill under the sergeant-major. Poor unfortunate kids!

So it can be imagined how popular rugby was.

Always a good sport, an unselfish player, Bill was popular in school sport.

So he developed in all manly qualities. Of how many could the tribute be paid that I pay to my brother.

In a long life I have never known him to do a mean or ungenerous act. Everywhere he has lived, the same tribute would be paid to him.

So life went on happily till the family left for Paeroa, and for the second time the family left me.

In our Mangaweka schoolmaster, Bill was unfortunate to encounter one with whom his relations were as unfortunate as with his father. He told me recently of an incident unknown to me. On a journey to the railhead probably the teacher was using Mr. Noble's outfit to get to the railhead, and Dad and he were talking on the box seat, Bill and Fred being seated on the floor of the truck behind.

He was the subject of discussion. The master said, "I'll tame young William yet". Incidentally "William" was not his name. Imagine, that, on one of Bill's high spirits, not to mention his Irish background. I put it on record. With the aid of wicked supplejacks and every other device open then to schoolmasters, he did his best. Tame Bill? Not he! Why, a man who had not even got the name correctly, what would he know of his disposition?

Bill still had two years of school after the family went to Paeroa.

School with a difference indeed! Here the head was a gifted man, with a sympathetic understanding of boys. Under this wise and able man his last two years at school were happy and profitable.

This was before the establishment of High Schools.

I saw in the press this week, a tribute to a man of the same name as this master, for his outstanding gifts to education. Could this Mr. Murphy be a descendant?

Whether or not, I'd gladly pay tribute to the memory of the teacher who made school days a happy time for my brother, and the acquisition of knowledge not a penance but a pleasant adventure.

Of this Mangaweka master, I find it in my heart to write.

Frankly, he was not cut out for the work.

Recently I was privileged to be guest at the school's Diamond Jubilee, the first to be celebrated.

The Silver Jubilee could not be held because it occurred during the First World War, the golden for the same reason, this time the Second World War.

So Mangaweka spread itself over the Diamond Jubilee, and put on a wonderful show.

Planned over the course of two years, everything went on oiled wheels.

A great effort in which nothing seemed to have been overlooked.

It was there I met Mr. Tompkin's son. I had last seen him as a tiny baby.

As the oldest surviving teacher who had also been a pupil, I was guest of honour. In an interval I sought Mr. Tompkins out for a chat. He sighed and said "I suppose you'll be telling me what an awful man my father was. I have been hearing it on all sides". "Well" I returned "I am glad to say that is not my story. From the time he came to the school he gave me encouragement and understated help. Had it not been for him I am sure I would not have realised my life's ambition to be a teacher. I have no pull, no influential friends. He loaned me books I could not buy, helped me to gain experience in the work of various classes. His attitude toward me was always encouraging. To him I am indebted for a worthwhile, happy career, and the fact that in three years I was a pupil teacher, I was successfully second and top in the succeeding years of my pupil teacher training exams".

Chapter 6 Teaching at Mangaweka

So we lived a happy, busy life till the family left for Paeroa. Our lease-in-perpetuity terms prevented sale under three years. We had a purchaser waiting, Mr. Meyer, whose (now obsolete) business was livery-stable-keeper.

The Meyers moved in as the family departed, boarding me in lieu of rent, till they could legally acquire the property.

I had stayed on at school after passing Std. VI [standard 6 -- the end of primary school], for more than a year, my status being Std. VII, through which I passed with a special certificate containing the inspector's simple assessment "excellent all through".

Is it any wonder that in these days when the Education authorities find it so hard to attract staff that, remembering the skinflint policy of old days, I feel something akin to grim satisfaction? For two years or more of one's pupil-teachership the tiny pittance barely paid for food. Girls could not possibly clothe themselves on it. Good-natured people took us in. They certainly did not make any profit. Girls who could live at home were not so bad. Others like I was, did all we could to help either with household jobs or by coaching the children of those who gave us a home.

I was never well dressed. How could I be? There were enough at home to keep without adding my needs to theirs. Board, books, and the annual trek home took all I had.

So, overnight, I ceased to be Harriet and became "Miss Mahony" to the schoolchildren. Hard on the poor kids to accept so sudden a change, and perhaps be penalised (but never by me) if they made a slip.

The Meyer family were kind, and I was happy enough with them in spite of the home-sickness.

Mrs Meyer was kind, happy, and generous, but if ever the words "stranger to the truth" fitted anyone, they could have been coined for her!

She was an inveterate romancer. It took me some while to get used to this. We Mahonys were straight-forward, speaking the truth as we saw it.

With Mrs Meyer truth was never permitted to be any deterrent to a good story.

As a rule, in general conversation, one allows for a bit of extra colour in a narrative, all to the good where the aim is to interest and amuse.

There is generally a firm basis of truth, and one remembers the pinch of salt!

Not so the born romancer, which Mrs Meyer was. She would let her fancy run riot, much as a small child comes in with a fairy tale, evolved in the web of his thoughts and fancies in a world of things still very new. He is not engaged in lying, but is, I think, sorting out fancy and reality.

Not with malice, but purely romancing, my friend would tell me the most astounding happenings in her own life, and about people she knew.

Being an unsophisticated country girl, I swallowed much. Then one of her sisters came from holiday, and she very bluntly told me "Don't believe a word of what she says!"

Thereafter I was suspicious, but though much against the Mahony ethics, I was entertained.

It was a minor weakness in a fine generous woman who won my affection by her kindness.

There were three children, Irene (8), Rolly (3), and baby Vera.

I liked them all, and the home atmosphere of childish talk. After the first acute homesickness I settled down to my full and interesting life.

My work, never easy, was a joy to me. I liked teaching and enjoyed study. I had plenty of friends. If the Meyers were going places, such as to a circus at Hunterville they would take me if it were possible.

Mr. Tompkins treated me well, and we got on well together. I suppose that would be natural following on a teacher-pupil relationship he took me through my studies for an hour before school. I have written of the school residence with its "Bachelors Three". This was ended by his marriage while I was still a pupil.

The pupils gathered money and Nelly Gower and I and a Len Dalzell were deputed to buy a wedding gift.

A little bird had whispered that the so-called "Silver" really E.P., was usually overdone. He would prefer something useful. So we greenhorns went to the keeper of the general store. His wife said she heard that Mrs Tompkins had a tea set. She thought something useful would give satisfaction. You would never guess what we ended up with! Never was such a strange gift! Persuaded by the shopkeeper's wife, who told us that the recipient had been looking one over with the idea of purchase, we bought ….. A GRINDSTONE.

I wish our mothers had gone along and told the shopkeeper's wife what they

thought of her, and insisted on something at least a little more suitable.

But there it was, displayed on the school table, looking most incongruous.

Mr. Tompkins was very nice about it, said it was just what he needed but never got round to buying!!

We senior pupils never heard the end of it. Mrs Tompkins thought she would have preferred something that could have been engraved, and so have been a showpiece in her best room, reminding them of the givers.

What we did really give him, and which I am sure pleased them at least as much as inscribed silver, was a good laugh, and the story, which "lasted the whole of his life".

What I have written of my Mangaweka school days has been mostly concerned with teacher-pupil relationship, and home affairs. These are the records of our surroundings and work.

There is another deeper full experience which is our jealously guarded friendships. Apart from my relationship with Annie Carver, in which was a large element of hero-worship, I made no close friends until at Mangaweka my class-mate Nellie Gower and I palled up.

The Gowers were newcomers from Patea. Mr. Gower opened our first Chemist's shop. Before the coming of a resident doctor chemists are forced to take on much of the role of doctor. They can be simply money grabbers, or real friendly counsellors to the doctorless community. I have known both sorts. Mr. Gower, cheerful helper, put his not inconsiderable knowledge at the service of the community, and filled a real need.

What intrigued me was Nellie's relationship with her father. They were real friends, verbal sparring partners, by which my friend's requests were usually successful.

Nellie had so much that I lacked - a musical background training and fine home piano, and if I envied her those positions more, very much more, did I envy her the possession of such a father. If Nellie had a request it was to Dad she went first, and I have rarely known her to be unsuccessful.

Mr. Gower was choirmaster in his church, Nell organist. So it came to pass that I got my initial and perhaps most thorough training in the Church of England choir. Being free to go where I liked, I was at this time "Anglican" and got familiar with the church ritual, learning by heart many of its loveliest prayers.

Nell and I were the product of such different environments, perhaps that

accounted for a richly rewarding friendship, and a widening of my rather narrow outlook.

Her father's semi-professional standing made him the confidant of many of his clientele. Through him Nell had a knowledge of anatomy that was a closed book to me. I was rather shocked one day when she took me to see the family cow, which was due to calve shortly. She persuaded me to put a reluctant hand on the cow's body to feel the heart-beat of the calf. Then she ran her hand along the cow's body showing the outlines of the calf. It was just an interesting study to her.

To me she confided her wish that she had been a boy, for then she would have been a doctor.

Really, she was only a few years before her time, and the entry of the first woman medico into the profession.

The Gower household included a younger, very pretty daughter and an only son, then pre-school age. There was also a cousin, who helped Mrs Gower, Winnie George.

As the Mangaweka school grew, we had a second lady assistant, Miss Ethel George, who also lived with the Gowers. She was very good at needlework, and under her tuition I found that my fingers were not "all thumbs" as Mum used to think. In fact, her teaching enabled me to score excellent marks at my Pupil Teacher exams.

Between Winnie George and Mr. Hopper there developed a friendship which led to their engagement. She undertook the work of organist in the Methodist, Mr. Hopper's church.

In those late Victorian days, a very decorous attitude was considered correct for lovers. To me, a chance onlooker, their love, their quiet acceptance of the matter, their irreproachable attitude to one another, made their love a beautiful thing.

Another case of true love's rough course. Her family did not consider the career of Methodist minister's wife as suitable for their relative, and in the end the engagement was broken. Nell's people left Mangaweka for Wanganui.

The minister later married, as his profession demanded. A manse, more than any other home, is not fully furnished without a lady in charge, but though Winnie George must have had many chances, she did not marry.

Chapter 7 Paeroa

Time had crawled during the last months of the school year, as I waited so eagerly for the holidays and home.

Now I had arrived. Though less than a year since our parting, already we saw a difference in each other.

The first Paeroa home was, of course, a rented one, and rather shabby. I remember we had neighbours of Mum's old name Nightingale. No relation, however.

I can remember only one holiday in this home, and not much detail concerning it comes to mind.

Dad had already bought a section adjacent to the Thames railway line, and with the proceeds from the sale of his Mangaweka property was preparing to build.

I found it exciting to meet again friends of my early childhood, our old Auckland friends the Forrests. It was Mr. Forrest who had induced Dad to come to Paeroa. It was in Mr. Forrest's office that he worked at this time.

Susie, the eldest, was about my age, and very clever. She had had some secondary education in Auckland.

The ages of the family matched ours. The eldest son John, worked in his father's business. I cannot remember whether Susie was a teacher or was in her father's office.

Like our Lily, the second daughter Jessie, was Mother's mainstay at home. They were a brainy family.

Susie and I were kindred spirits, and managed to see a good deal of each other. I used to marvel at the speed at which she could master a page of history or geography. I had not considered myself slow, but must have felt some self-questionings as to my I.Q. (Well it was for me, perhaps, those two imponderable letters had not then been placed in such important relationship.)

There was no lack of brains in the Forrest family.

I have, of recent years, seen the name Forrest in connection with contract work in South Auckland and Bay of Plenty districts, and wondered if they were descendants of our old friends.

In spite of their intellectual ability and superior advantages, I do not think, that as a family, they were as happy as the Mahonys. Only my idea perhaps.

The Mahony family had joined the Presbyterian church, which the Forrests attended and I went with them at holiday time.

The first Manse family I remember were the Rules, especially the sweet natured gentle lady of the Manse. How she retained her poise was a continual marvel, for she had seven boys, all steps and stairs, and as lively as they come.

My sister Florrie while still at school, was in great request on Saturdays, to read or tell stories to the Rule boys, in order to keep them, not quiet, that would have been frankly impossible, but entertained and a little less noisy while Father put the polish on his Sunday sermons.

My sister had real histrionic ability and skill in weaving yarns, and must have been a godsend to Mrs Rule, especially on a wet Saturday afternoon.

On my arrival, Mum took a look through my luggage, and found her first and most urgent job was to make me presentable before meeting family friends.

Coming from the back-blocks, and not being very clothes conscious, I must have appeared shabby indeed. I was hurried off to the family dressmaker's and soon was declared passable to the family's eyes, and was really smart in my own.

New Zealand clothing factories were infant industries then. One relied on the professional dressmaker, for at least their Sunday best.

Many families, probably most, wore home-mades. Mothers were clever and resourceful. Sewing machines could be obtained on easy terms, and most could turn out pretty frocks, especially for children, quite cheaply. Paper patterns, with instructions were available at very low price. Coming from a colder climate, I felt the heat of Paeroa during the height of summer.

The holidays passed all too quickly. I got to know the new friends of the family. Simple friendly parties, picnics, and occasional socials and concerts enlivened the time. For the family, and certainly for me, the mere joy of being together was enough.

When we were able to talk in private, Mum and I got into confidences about my thoughts, hopes, and life as I was finding it.

One piece of advice she gave me I have found invaluable. If anyone should tell you a nasty story, give them the "Baby Stare!", which being interpreted is simply the non-understanding look.

One should simply let the remark pass by without apparently taking it in. The effort to shock or annoy has quite missed out. Your companion will most likely think you are too stupid to understand. This is all to the good. Nothing

falls so flat as a joke that does not go over.

I grew up in a simpler time than this, but I feel sure my mother's method would still be effective.

I wish to put it on record that though I was out on my own so early with home far away, I can recall only one occasion when I was treated anything but politely. I had some hours to wait on the Marton Station for my train, and was walking up and down the platform. There was only a porter on duty. He began a conversation.

After asking him where the station-master was to be found, I walked a little way off on the road, leaving a rather perturbed sickly-faced young man to think out my intentions.

I had to board with people whose talk might be on the coarse side, but that was the only direct offensive attack I encountered in the eight years of my life as teacher.

At home we naturally talked good "Queen's English". I was amused and a little surprised to find that my talk was supposed to be an acquired "Teachers talk" – the result of education.

My mother, however, used to object to my acquired "slang" and at home I was rather more careful in my speech so as not to offend her sensitive ears. When talking quite naturally, as a child, I was more than once told I had "swallowed the dictionary!"

Throughout the year, a weekly exchange of letters had kept us posted on most happenings. Much of our inner life, however, was not thus transferable.

This year we seemed to have a lot to catch up with, and found a few weeks a short time in which to re-appraise each other.

Even the baby had grown up, and from being family pet and plaything, had become a personality with a mind and qualities of her own, and of course, even dearer than before.

It was between our sisters, a scrapping of some old inhibitions, and a new awareness of fine qualities and personal abilities.

As regards myself and my brother a tightening of already strong bonds of trust and affection.

It seems to take separation to make one realise the depth and strength of a mother's love, its pure selflessness; second only to Divine love.

My mother came from cultured folk. The change to the crude life of a pioneer must have been hard for her. Given a congenial partner, she could have been happy even under her load of hardship and unaccustomed toil.

Her unfortunate lot was to be pushed into an uncongenial marriage with a hot-tempered Irishman. Her family admired my very clever father, and could not understand her reluctance to marry him, and she eventually did.

I was eight years old when we left Auckland. She had then had six children, four survivors.

Even her fine physique could not stand up to the combined strain of poverty, too frequent childbirth, the sorrow of bereavement, and – Dad.

Nowadays doctors would diagnose her breakdown as primarily physical. The medical profession in the late 19th century were a haphazard lot. There were some fine men, whose love of adventure and the opportunities of a new land had lured hither; there was also a sprinkling of army surgeons out of a job in peacetime; and others who had left the homeland for the homeland's good. It followed that medical attention could cover a wide range of trustworthiness. It might account too for the high rate of mother and infant mortality.

What my poor mother needed at this time was simply a period of rest and generous feeding. Very little of this medicine came her way.

We children were too young to help in any appreciable way, if we did absorb into our consciousness something of her quality, and loved her with a love never given to our father.

The holiday association kept alive a strong family spirit. As a family we did not drift apart, each seeking his or her own selfish ends, as I have seen in some families. We always kept in helpful touch.

Only in later years did I realise how keenly my mother felt the separation. I was her eldest.

When at Lily's wedding, a year or two after my own, I tried to cheer her up, saying "I am jealous! You did not cry at my wedding! Her reply was "our separation did not come then. I shed many tears for you long before that."

So after the holiday at home, we faced another year apart. In the bustle of departure, one does not realise the full cost to those involved.

If the pain of motherhood ended with the birth pangs, how happy a mother's lot. Does it ever end? How could it with so many hostages given to fortune.

I have often mourned inwardly that we understand so little of what she (our

mother) went through. It has been wisely ordained that children understand so little, or they would grow old in sorrow before their time.

Usually I would board the little "Waimarie" on the evening of departure, retire, and wake up to see the familiar Auckland Harbour. Then the journey would go on, in reverse this time, usually I would be tired enough to sleep most of the sea trip, to wake up to the hateful rick-rock of the boat at New Plymouth.

How good the train seemed, as we sped through Taranaki, to a good meal at Wanganui, a stroll up the avenue and to bed with the latest Chronicle.

The return, rather to my surprise, was not the unhappy experience I had feared. There were compensations, no sea for another year; the looking forward to the year's work; speculation as to where the Head might allot me my work, meeting again the family friends.

My only fear was that I might oversleep and miss the train, a groundless fear. I never did that at any time. I never wholly relied on being called, but always woke in good time.

One met friends and acquaintances also last-minute returnees, and talked "shop" in which school teachers are hardened offenders.

Greeting the familiar coach drivers we mostly, I think, enjoyed the drive through the cool night air. Perhaps school teachers are favoured people, for there was always a welcome and supper at journey's end. Surprisingly, it was quite like a home-coming to receive Mrs Meyer's genuine welcome, and see the sleeping children before turning in oneself.

Chapter 8 Mangaweka and Hurleyville schools

The Mangaweka school continued to grow and gained a male assistant, Ernest Jarvis. He was good at games and highly popular with the boys.

I missed my friend, Miss George, when she left. The Gowers had gone, and I seemed to be saying goodbye to so many I cared for.

How different would my feelings have been had I been able to take a peek into the future, and see, in her successor, a life-long friend.

The position of infant mistress was taken by Miss Jessie McIntyre. To me, homesick and lonely she became as an older sister, taking me under her wing, and helping me in every possible way. I had not finished growing, and my skirts were decided on the short side. With infinite pains she matched the surge in the weave and shade, then helped me lengthen each section of a seven gore skirt. A few rows of braid near the hem of those ankle length skirts gave the finishing touch, while binding the joins.

She had the same concern for the children's welfare.

One very cold day, a little fellow came to school in a thin cotton shirt and inadequate shorts. Next day he went home wearing a warm shirt and strides which my friend had begged from Mrs Berthelsen; ones her small son had outgrown.

I have known her make down old clothes for this family of steps and stairs, whose father was a drunkard.

She was an excellent teacher. I gained much of my teacher-craft through working with her. When she left our school it was to take the highest post open to women under the Wanganui Board.

In my last pupil teacher year, Mrs Meyer was unable, owing to the needs of her growing family to board me. I took the only place offering, where later Jessie joined me.

In those days of big families it was hard for a teacher to find board at once suitable and conveniently near the school. This was not a happy move, but a case of Hobson's choice.

The man of the house was a respected trades man, running his own business, a quite gentlemanly fellow. There were two girls and two boys. The eldest girl was a nice-looking attractive child, the second, mother's pet, a real little sneak. The two small boys, I afterwards taught in the primers. They were nice little lads.

The mother would have been a gift to a Dickens! She was the person on a vocation of that happily now obsolete word "genteel". Mean sort of person, full of pretence. Even her speech was affected. I remember her showing us a pot plant and flower. It was nothing at all remarkable, yet I can still hear her burst of gush "His it not gorjus? Just like whax."

We two teachers were certainly not happy in that place, but it was easier for two than one.

Later, in another town I met her father who had been described to me as a sanctimonious old hypocrite.

"Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"

Happily, my friend was not long in this home.

The senior girl at school was born of Danish parents, who were Lutherans, worshipping with the Presbyterian. There Jessie met them. Mr. Berthelsen worked on the survey, in the Public Works Department then engaged on main trunk line construction. This necessitated his living mostly at the advance camps, and his wife was often lonely. So, as their daughter Karen (Carrie) was fond of Miss McIntyre, she persuaded her mother to ask her to board with them and share her room. So it was not long before Jessie left for the happy comfort of the Berthelsen home, leaving me with the "pain in the neck".

Although I am describing events as they occurred, it seems a bit mean to be writing them down. After all, the lady did give us a roof to dwell under. This experience, and perhaps some others, made me resolve that when I had a home of my own I would never see a school teacher stuck.

All I was ever called upon to do in that line, with one exception which comes later in the Chronicle, was to put up back-country teachers making their connection with bus or train services, and grateful for a night's hospitality.

By the time Mrs Berthelsen opened her home to me, Karen had finished school, and was leaving the Wanganui Girls College.

Though a year or two my junior, our friendship prospered. It came to pass that the seam of our lives was to run together for many years, all three of us. I stayed a little longer where I was. Then, at my friend's earnest request I was offered a small corner in the Berthelsen home, not having a room I was offered the roomy landing between two upstairs bedrooms occupied by herself and Karen and Miss McIntyre. How glad I was to be one of that merry friendly household.

Then came an interlude. Jessie left for her home town Wanganui, and I was

appointed to Hurleyville School, inland from Patea, and the centre of the dairying district. Though it broke into my year's work, the change was to my advantage.

At the cost of a long walk about 7 miles, to catch a 7 a.m. train, I could travel on a free pass to Wanganui on Saturdays for lessons at the Technical School.

A long, tiring day, seven hours spent on the slow train, but well worthwhile.

Hurleyville was well named. The post office was a cubby-hole in the residence of one of the three Hurley brothers who had taken up the land there. Two were farmers, the third, who boarded the teachers, was storekeeper. All were as Irish as Paddy's pigs. I learned it was not my record that got me that appointment. With a name as Irish as Mahony, and a school called Hurleyville – well! It was the only time I got an appointment through "pull". What's in a name?

Getting the appointment as I had did not make me popular with the Hurley's – quite the reverse. One of the order, by the name of "Mick" told me plainly my ancestors must have been renegades, who betrayed their country to the hated English. When he said it, he looked as if he would like to spit on me.

There are at least as many Protestants among my pupils, the head also. I made many good friends there. The head was a fine and even-tempered man. I enjoyed the school work, and was even able to get occasional music lessons from a visiting teacher. I had brought the piano Mum bought, and was able to keep it in the Hall which was near the store.

Among the farming folk was a family named Morrison. Their eldest girl was about two years my junior. How I enjoyed their friendship.

At Hurleys I shared a room with three lovely girls. It must have been disconcerting for them to go through their rosaries with a heretic reading her Protestant Bible, in full view. They appeared to look upon their religious exercise as a job to be done, to be followed by friendly play, so both parties managed well enough.

They were a nice family with a give and take of family life much like my own youth.

There were church services once a fortnight, alternately Protestant and Catholic. I cannot even remember what denomination held the Protestant service, though I must have attended.

Mrs Morrison's door was always on the latch for me, Ethel and I became friends, but it was Mrs Morrison that I loved most. She must have been beautiful

as a young woman. Her husband took life fairly easily and was much in public work. They milked about 100 cows and employed one young man.

Mr. Morrison may have been off on some public occasion Road Board or what not, but there were still 100 cows to be milked night and morning. All the children were in the shed. Even the pre-schoolchild could turn a cow out and drive another in, if only he were tall enough to keep head and shoulders out of the mud.

I met the Morrisons first at a dance in the little hall, and, after being introduced, asked my companion if Mr. Morrison were her son! So careworn was her face, appearing even more so because of her beautiful head of curly golden hair. As we got acquainted, I found her a lovely character, fond of fun, taking hardships and perpetual overwork, with courage and without complaint.

Farmers prospered, but at what price! When I was with them the Morrison family were Ethel 16, Jim 14, Connie 12. Soon after I moved on a little son John was born.

In due course the family retired and made Wanganui their home. When the epidemic struck New Zealand, I read in a Wanganui paper, the death notice of the son born in my time.

In reply to my letter of condolence, my dear old friend wrote not only of John's but also Ethel and Connie's deaths, the last named leaving motherless a family of six young children. I wondered if the childhood slavery of mother and children had been in part responsible. There was talk of child slavery at the time. I lived with it.

One of my jobs when I spent a night at Morrison's was to wake Ethel in the morning. Often my best efforts were unavailing, and the mother would come upstairs and pull her out of bed. My job then was to see that the still dopey girl did not crawl back into bed and go asleep.

At this school the children, except the smallest, did not play. The older ones propped up the school or shed walls and talked. In the summer they would stretch out on the grass. They did muster, in the months when the cows were out, enough playing spirit to kick a football round or get up a game of rounders. In the long drowsy days of summer, it was not at all unusual to see older children with heads pillowed on arms, sound asleep on their desks.

The head would say to me "A pity to waken them isn't it?" Then, rather bitterly "How can teachers get good results in schools like this?"

Statistics of Taranaki's death rate in the epidemic might be illuminating could such be obtained, which would be impossible. The three deaths I have

mentioned occurred when the family had moved to Wanganui-Rangitikei districts, and would be lost to the indictment against Taranaki.

Another valued friend of those days was a young married woman whose husband farmed land some three miles nearer the railway. He was a sheep farmer.

She gave me a standing invitation to week-end with her, which I frequently did, going to her home from the train on Saturday.

I met her through the teacher of the next school, near Manutuke station, Mr. Harold Bowater.

She seemed disappointed when I missed this visit, so it became habitual to spend the weekend there. On a quiet Sunday afternoon Mrs Scown and I would sit out on the grassy back lawn, a piece of grass about 12 x 12.

She told me how she had lost her really valuable diamond engagement ring in that patch of grass. These were days when plumbing as we have it, rarely reached the country.

Early in her married life she had thrown out the water in which she had washed her hands on this lawn, the ring with it. Every inch of the lawn had been searched without result. As we sat out there I also inched very carefully over it a number of times. It became a real treasure hunt, but without result.

Time passed, and the Scowns sold out and retired to new Plymouth. Yes, the newcomers found the ring and wrote asking if it had belonged to the previous owners. My friend was delighted to recover so prized a possession.

Strange but true! But truth is stranger than fiction.

I have written about my Mangaweka friend who was given to romancing, the husband of this friend had the same habit also, of making a convenience of the truth. I was so used to using salt in Mrs Meyer's case that it had become second nature to seek to isolate the truth from a yarn.

But Hurleyville's champion, who it would surely be hard to beat anywhere, was Mr. Morrison. With the grave air of a professor lecturing a class he would tell the tallest stories never in the least malicious, just leg-pulling.

I suppose a greenhorn such as I, did present the temptation of a likely subject. In that district no one need give offence by calling another a liar. One listened with a smile, and said "That's a Morrison!"

Chapter 9 Back to Mangaweka to teach

Then I was sent back to Mangaweka. I was nothing loath to return to my old home town. The only changes seemed to be at the school. The staff was almost entirely new.

Mr. Tompkins had left the profession for the much more congenial life of a farmer. His successor was no such colourful personality. I found working under him most happy. The staff worked in comfortable harmony.

One's schedule once approved, the new head left its outworking to the teacher. His policy was, once he was satisfied the teacher was really 'on the job ', to stand behind one with his authority. When he made a suggestion it was always, I found, constructive and helpful.

On one occasion, looking around, he remarked that a few new pictures would brighten the room, adding "I will put it up to the committee". Another time "you have a desk or two to spare. Standard one are overcrowded and could do with them".

I had finished my P.T.[pupil teacher]ship under Mr. Tompkins, and got my grading exam under Mr. Jackson.

My second long holiday at Paeroa had been even happier than the first. They say "Happy is the country that has no history". I have little recollection of this happy time, but quite a vivid one of my return, for I missed my boat, and was stranded in Auckland.

Getting off the "Waimarie" I went to the Northern Company's shipping office to pick up my ticket for the New Plymouth run to find them just closing. My boat had left hours before. Queen Victoria had died and important business connected had necessitated the steamer leaving some hours earlier for New Plymouth.

I explained I had no money to pay for accommodation till the steamer's next trip, nor any friends in Auckland. It was very upsetting, but no trouble to the Shipping company. They gave me a return ticket to Paeroa, and booked me in for the steamer's next run. I was, of course, late for work, and had a "Please explain" from the Education Board, who informed me that in the circumstances I should have gone with the rival line.

It had not occurred to me that rival lines would be so accommodating.

Fortunately, I had found a much more congenial home with Mrs Berthelsen where Jessie McIntyre had preceded me.

Mrs Berthelsen was a big-hearted Dane, who never really mastered the English language. At best her speech was a mingling of both tongues. Even so, she did better than I, who could've learnt a little Danish and didn't!

Her daughter had been given the lovely names Karen Bertine, which had been Anglicised for school use to "Carrie", not nearly so good as Karen.

The only accommodation she had for me was a bed on the curtained-off landing between the bedroom Mr. and Mrs Berthelsen occupied, and the opposite room which Jessie and Karen shared.

How greatly I appreciated the offer.

Mr. Berthelsen's work kept him away from home for a week or two at a time.

At this time the railway terminus was still at Mangaweka, from the Wellington end. It was nearing Taumarunui from the Auckland side, that difficult stretch of mountain and gorge country, including the first (only?) curved viaduct in New Zealand.

The formation of a Christian Endeavour group attracted a number of young folk of both sexes and included a few a bit more mature, say in their late twenties.

It was then, through the challenge of the Christian Endeavour that most of us made our decision to become Christians, or should I say, committed our lives to the leadership of Christ.

Not long after this we separated, going our various ways. I am glad to record that I do not know of any who went back on that commitment.

The young lady at whose invitation I had joined the group, married a sawmiller, and we lived nearly the whole of our lives in the same district.

So successful was her husband that on his death within recent years he ranked among New Zealand's richest men and it was reported he was gazetted a millionaire. He had amassed large property interests in the big cities owning streets of houses of his own building. My friend's home for the greater part of her life was not much more than ten miles from mine.

On the death of her husband, she with her family moved to the more congenial climate of Auckland, and Northland.

Here, quite recently, my brother met her. They had lived within a mile of each other for between 30 and 40 years.

To him she confided her longing to be back in her old home, under the shadow of old Ruapehu.

Though well supplied with all she could desire of this world's goods, inwardly her plaint was

"My heart's in the highlands My heart is not here"

Another of our group, C. le Fevre Honorè, (Fred to his intimates) had thrown in his lot with these friends, being in charge of the clerical department of the company's manifest of interests.

Through the passing years our old Mangaweka group were never far apart.

Mr. Honorè married a Mangaweka girl, daughter of the chairman of the School Committee.

Another member was John Enright, a few years older than most of us. He came to our meeting from quite a distance, across the Rangitikei then unbridged, except by a very rickety swing bridge for which could be used by pedestrians only.

Years later, for some time we lived less than a mile apart, and it was not till after his death I learnt of his identity.

I believe though an old man, he would have remembered, and it seemed a pity that he should miss the pleasure old people have of recalling the past.

Having mentioned, in passing, the Berthelsen family, I would give much to have the ability to leave a living picture of that home. Perhaps it was the lack of affectionate fatherly understanding in my own life that made me so conscious of the qualities of my friends' fathers. I admired Nellie Gower's dad, but fell in love with Karen's, a most lovable man with a sunny nature and the gift of spontaneous humour. Karen adored him and they romped like children, nor did she have that on her own. He and his wife were like two children, and his weekly or fortnightly home-comings were hilarious occasions. That his job kept them so much away from home was a real trial to his family and even more so to himself. In fact they were more like lovers than staid old married folk.

This chronicle has now brought me up to the turn of the century, and to my 19th year, as yet, heart whole and fancy free.

I admired men like Rev Arthur Hopper and Mr. Bowater, but they were ahead of my age group. It may have been their quality that sparked me for others not so mature.

I continued to attend the Methodist Church of which Rev Hopper was minister. He left about this time, a man greatly loved by his congregation. Looking back,

it seems a little strange that one so quiet and reserved should come to mean so much to so many. His parish extended up to the Moawhango country, and across the Rangitikei to the little settlement of Rangiwahia.

His farewell, held under the most unpropitious weather conditions – snow about two inches deep outside, in an unheated church yet drew a crowd which was accommodated with difficulty. There were few dry eyes when he rose to speak, and all were deeply moved. He had for years given them his best without stint, winning their affectionate esteem.

One case particularly I remember. It was an accident on the railway construction.

Explosives were used in blasting the hard papa rock, and accidents were not infrequent. One such happened when a fuse had been lit, and the workmen had withdrawn to a safe place. Nothing happened so a workman went up to examine and re-set to fuse. As he bent over the delayed explosion occurred, badly injuring the man.

With no resident doctor and the nearest hospital at Wanganui, Mr. Hopper shared the nursing and anxiety with the wife, sitting with the patient except when relieved by the wife for an hour or two's sleep, in doubt if the man's sight would be saved.

Of this story I can tell the end. The victim retained the sight of one eye. This is only one of many stories that could be told of Reverend Hopper's devoted service throughout his large parish.

I may have mentioned meeting Rev Hopper once again, when I visited him at the Parsonage. Strangely enough, he had not forgotten the girl who was Harriet Mahony.

Mrs Berthelsen's home became a favourite weekend hostel for country schoolteachers. A few rooms were added, and were seldom occupied for long.

One very welcome visitor whose school was across the Rangitikei, access by only a swing bridge, was Miss Elenor Wilson, a gifted Christian young lady. She had the one-teacher school at "McGregor's Mill", over the Rangitikei near Ohingaiti.

There she gathered and taught a large Sunday School, also conducted Sunday services for the mill-men. The owner himself was one of her converts, one among a number. It was reported that she had converted the entire staff. She had a special place and welcome at the Berthelsen home, and in all our hearts.

She later became Mrs Guy Thornton. Her husband had served a notable time

with the troops in our Egyptian Campaign in World War I. After their marriage they joined forces in evangelical work.

Mrs Thornton loved the women's side of the work, and had a special appeal with the younger women and girls. Mr. Thornton was every much a man's man.

While I was marking time at Mangaweka School, waiting for my first appointment as fully qualified teacher, the school acquired a new teacher, who naturally gravitated to Berthelsen's.

She was short, a bit stout; and one did not long wonder how it was she was so attractive. She was bubbling over with fun and good humour. She had come from a real back blocks place; about as isolated as could be found in our Education district.

Night after night she would entertain us with her tales of her last school, from the village idiot to the Head, she had so recently left. I found later that the inhabitants had a tale or two about her! Fun was never lacking where Annie was. Her folk were farmers near the next town to the north of us.

She shared Karen's room, and after we should have been asleep I would be in their room wrapped in a blanket while sounds of hilarity burst out at intervals. In the end, Mrs Berthelsen would come in pretended wrath and order silence.

While I waited for my appointment, and the crowd would enquire "Any news yet?"

Answered in the negative, there would be a unanimous "They are saving Raetihi for you – Anne's old place!"

I would retort. "Then they can put my name at the bottom of the list" – which was what happened when teachers (without pull) declined a proffered job.

Sure enough. Came a telegram "Will you accept position assistant Raetihi?"

Poor as a church mouse and fed up with waiting, I did.

Chapter 10 Going to Raetihi

So it came to pass that, on a day, I left dear old Mangaweka for Wanganui on the first lap of my journey. Destination, the McIntyre home Keith St, Wanganui.

So warm was their welcome that henceforth, any journey to the outside world included a night spent there, and a time of fellowship with its most popular member, Kate, about my own age. Even after the lapse of half a century, the memory of these occasions warms my heart.

At that time the family comprised four daughters and a son. Two older men were married and away. Next visit, the gentle silver-head father was missing, then the mother. Subsequently Jessie, now Mrs Burgess, and the youngest son settled in Poverty Bay.

The sisters remained in the old home for the rest of their lives.

Next morning I boarded the river steamer at Hatrick's wharf, on the second lap of my journey.

This river service was, for most up-river settlers, the only link with the outside world. The journey was full of interest, and was considered a "must" for overseas tourists. The river trip was always restful and enjoyable. Coming or going, it never palled, though I must have made it a score of times.

No beauty-loving eye could fail to be enchanted by the scenery. The journey, except for a few short breaks, wound through virgin bush land, alive with native pigeons, kaka and tui, and the air was vocal with their songs and chatter.

The sun might blaze down upon us, but the heat was tempered by the flow of cool air as the steamer charted its way up river. We passed many Maori settlements, the first about 5 miles up, Upokongaro. Higher up, the settlements bore classical names, or their native equivalent. There were Jerusalem (Hipurirama), Athens (Atene), Corinth (Koriniti) and London (Ranana). At these places there was always a crowd to meet the steamer. Stores and mail would be unloaded, accompanied by much friendly banter and exchange of news.

In the passage of time and through the felling of the bush, the river journey lost a little of its beauty and interest, but for virgin bush scenery one had to go on the Pipiriki-Taumarunui stretch.

The monopoly of the river trade had been secured by one firm, whose name

was the most execrated in the Waimarino of that early time. All groceries and other supplies had to reach them via the river. The exorbitant charges made the commonest needs cost like luxuries.

There was a classic story of a man who sent for a pick-handle and never tired of showing to all and sundry the documents showing the cost of that yard long piece of wood.

The settlers, (and all were poor and struggling) banded together and bought their own boat.

The exploiter tried to buy it, but even the most adroit approaches failed to induce the owners to sell. He was, however, one of those commercial geniuses. Failing to buy the boat, he bought the crew. Expenses piled up, and in the end the settlers pocketed their losses and sold. For a short time only he had things all his own way, then the railways, having reached Taihape, supplies came via the main trunk or the Parapara [road]. Pipiriki then became merely a stage in the tourist service.

My first trip fell in the summer, at which time, the river being low, there was difficulty in surmounting the rapids and shallows.

Had this scribe been of the other sex, a detailed description of the technique of the job would have been forthcoming. As it is, my lesser effort must suffice.

Steel hawsers were fastened to an anchorage on the bush-clad river bank, by which the steamer was pulled up into deeper water.

I always enjoyed the river journey, both coming and going. The down trip was usually just too late for me to make rail connection for my long home journeys. I do remember one, however, which must have broken all records. The river was in heavy flood. We just raced down. I wonder if the engineer had trouble in bringing her to a standstill at Wanganui! A most enjoyable experience.

Watches were frequently consulted and guesses made as to the time of landing.

To resume my journey. About 6 p.m. we reached Pipiriki, where passengers disembarked and were led to a fine building "the Pipiriki house" run on hotel lines.

For overseas tourists there was a special table where a full menu was served and tourist prices charged. The settlers were served at another table, a plain but good meal and charged accordingly. We were received by the management. No account would be complete without mention of "Them".

Years later, I heard my husband describe his visits to the homes of the great in his English town of "Bishop's Stortford". He worked with his uncle, whose business was that of watchmaker and jeweller. As apprentice watchmaker, one of his duties was to visit these homes to wind up and set numerous clocks. When he encountered the owner or his lady, they would greet him with a smile and kindly word. Not so the butler! His unapproachable hauteur could be devastating. Likewise the housekeeper, if not rude.

A fair description of the management here. The lady, always elegantly frocked, at least at riverboat time, the husband in dress rig, had their welcomes adjusted to a nicety to the supposed status of their guests. Smiles and suavity for the tourists, for the rest, very butlerish! There were of course blunt settlers who were not impressed, and who reacted in a humorous appreciation of "The Show".

From here, after a satisfying meal and a night's sleep, the sleeping quarters being like the welcome, also adjusted; we were picked up by a coach and four for the seventeen mile journey to Raetihi. The road was rough but the scenery gave the finest glimpses of the New Zealand bush I had ever seen, full of variety. One felt one was truly looking on the handiwork of God.

"Thinking God's thoughts after Him."

The road followed a tributary of the Wanganui, cut out of steep high bluffs, every now and then slipping down to cross a narrow bridge over the stream at the foot, to mount up again at a steep grade.

Where the road followed the curving river, the banks were festooned with creepers with glimpses of tall tree ferns and native shrubs, trees crowned with a wreath of starry clematis, and merry with the songs of birds. Tuis abounded, their unmistakeable liquid notes seemed to be the distillation of pure joy.

From such glimpses one came upon a farm-stead, or a solitary work-man's hut perched on the roadside rise.

Nearing our destination we came upon acres of felled bush where a home and out-building had been built.

The nearer Raetihi the more clear and open were the farms, and better the farm buildings.

Suddenly, almost at journey's end rounding a bend on the last hill, Ruapehu, majestic, snow-topped and pure, came as a crowning vista.

Another corner rounded and we were in the little village which was to be my home.

So all the chaffing I had endured about my back-blocks post, my counter had

been “I will stay a year. One can stand anything for a year.”

But somehow that little township set in the heart of nowhere seemed very homely to me.

The coach stopped in front of the “Tourist Hotel”, a courtesy title, for the region between Wanganui and Taihape known as the King Country was a dry area.

It had been a Maori stronghold where drink was prohibited. The natives allowed the land to be opened for settlement and under the honourable guarantee of Sir Robert Stout that drink was to be kept out. How honourably our trusted legislators kept that agreement is history written in Hansard -- to our eternal dishonour as our court records also bear abundant witness.

I would here place on record to the honour of a chief of the tribe that when our parliamentarians, by recent legislation, flood the Maori Pahs with liquor, he made a strong dignified protest.

The entry to his pa is by way of a small bridge crossing the boundary river. He decided that no foot should cross that bridge to bring strong drink into his pa. Futile? Perhaps! But he had put on record his faith in the will of God, and no honourable action is ever performed without its due reward.

After all though men may scoff and profess to doubt it, the last word still remains with God – The Almighty.

I had arrived, to learn that I was wanted by the police. Thanks to a perfectly clear conscience, I was not perturbed. Who would be, greeted by such a good-natured and smiling face as Constable Duddy’s in whose household the school committee had arranged for me temporary board.

On the way home, he explained that he was newly married. His duties often calling him away from home, I was very welcome to stay with them. It would be congenial company for Mrs Duddy.

I accepted the offer with thanks, thinking what fun it would be to write home and tell the family I was being taken care of by the police.

It seemed that my name had betrayed me again!

Mrs Duddy was surprised when I enquired the whereabouts of the churches. But they accepted me, heretic though I was, and I remained till the birth of their little one was imminent.

Policemen are supposed to have a special attraction for cooks, or vice versa. The Duddys had run true to tradition, and he was always a good advert for his wife’s culinary skill.

They say it takes all sorts to make a world. Single teachers would endorse this. From Duddy's, I went to live with a queer couple, the only place then available. The man was strange and perhaps a bit mental, certainly eccentric. I often wondered about his background. He had none of the qualities of one brought up in ordinary family surroundings.

He liked to talk, and I must have been a good listener. I think I was a good mixer, which implies at least an effort to understand folk. He seemed odd in my experience, as if untoward circumstances had forced them into an unusual evaluation of the life around. His wife had periods of mental illness, and had not been very kind to the family. There was only a girl of 17 at home then, and she soon departed.

Hearing of another place, I was glad to do likewise. The new home was not much more than exchanging the frying pan for the fire, if that simile could be used of such a cold loveless place.

The head of this home was, like Mr. Berthelsen, engaged on work which kept him much away. In those days, when a man won by ballot, a section, rural or urban, he had to go out to work to keep it! Often, as here, the work offering was road construction, probably some distance away. My landlady was both mean and a very poor cook. She made her own bread which was almost uneatable. I carried my lunch, as did her small boy of five or six years. Mine was poor, but the boy's was but a hunk of her bad bread spread with golden syrup, no butter. By lunch hour the syrup had dried into the bread. Only keen hunger made it eatable. Swearing the child to secrecy, I kept a tin of biscuits in the school cupboard, and we topped off with these. Being a lad of some sense he kept our secret, and we shared the clandestine butter and occasional supplies. The family moved to Hawkes Bay, her earlier home. The boy died without reaching middle age, though the two girls, I heard, survived.

While I was still there, she had the loveliest little son with beautiful large blue eyes. Her feeding of him was a crime. She would prepare a cup of some thin oatmeal (à la Oliver Twist's orphanage gruel), place the cup to his mouth and literally pour the contents down his neck, pausing only to let him take breath. He lived about a year.

From this place I was rescued by the wife of the school committee member, which is another story.

The member in question, knowing about my predicament, had broadly hinted that his home was open to me. The hint was broad enough, but an experience at Mrs Berthelsen's had made me shy off. One day Mrs Berthelsen called me aside and advised me to take no notice of a relation who was Karen's cousin, and often in and out of the Berthelsen's home. The reason, his wife was jealous

of me. Karen laughed and joked with him in a cousinly way. I treated him quite casually, as one would a relative of the lady of the house. Her warnings made me very wary of married men, so it was not till the committee man's wife herself, asked me, and I knew the invitation to be genuine, that I gladly accepted it.

That was how there came to me, one of the great friendships of my life and one which I look forward to resuming on that "Other Side" whither my friend has preceded me.

Chapter 11 Raetihi School

From the Duddy home, my first outing was to the morning service at the little Methodist Church, then the only non-conformist body in the Waimarino district, though Church of England and Roman Catholic had established causes.

Greeted at the door by the Superintendent, Mr. Joseph Gibson, I was introduced and warmly welcomed by all and sundry including the minister, whose status was, I learned, Home Missionary.

Service over, an invitation to lunch was given by the Gibson family, but declined in favour of one to tea, as Mrs Duddy would be expecting me back for dinner.

So passed my first Sunday at the church which was to be my spiritual home for thirty years – so much for my 'one year'!

Next morning, turning up in good time for school I found the Head already there, expecting me.

A word about the situation at the school.

Raetihi was set in undulating country, well drained by the Makutuku River.

There was just one swampy piece. Yes, no doubt you've guessed! It was there the school had been built, with the master's residence on the hill-slope behind.

The school was damp and cold and in winter, (which the inhabitants said lasted nine months of the year,) unhealthy and unsuitable. There were 'reserve' sections in plenty but nothing quite suitable labelled "Education". It cost Raetihi years of importunity, as committee after committee did its best to have the school moved to a more suitable site.

When I came on the staff, the building consisted of one room, with entry porch and cloakroom and a small open shed outside.

I mention the shed, as it served as a second school room, convenient for reading lessons, multiplication tables or recitations.

With this we two teachers managed, till in my second year, another room was built.

As the classes lined up on that first day, I looked closely at the boys and girls, pleased with what I saw. They looked good to me, natural, fresh, open-faced country children.

My younger sister, Florence, who was beginning her teaching career with Onehunga's young toughs of 60 years ago, envied me my much more pleasant assignment.

Looking over my classes as they took their seats, I recognised one brightly beaming face. It belonged to small Jack Bergman, who had begun school with me at Mangaweka.

We exchanged happy greetings, which must have re-assured many nervous children, making a good start for the first day.

I was Raetihi's third lady assistant. Ada Hare, of Waverley, and Anne McColl (already introduced) had preceded me.

Roughly half of my pupils were Maori, knowing little English. They learned to read correctly, though certainly not with full understanding, much as we might commit to memory a page of Latin.

Though I have no gift for drawing, I used it freely to help class comprehension.

I once heard of a mother who read aloud to her family, pausing to explain each difficult word. Irritated by these hold-ups, the children impatiently broke in with "Go on reading, Mum. We can understand the reading better than your "explains".

That criticism may have been true of my drawing!

Once, wanting the word 'fish ', I carefully drew one on the blackboard; then asked what it was.

One very excited little Maori lad had his hand up like a shot.

"Well, Charlie, what is it?"

"A trouts, Miss ", was the unexpected reply.

Raetihi is, of course, noted as trout-fishing country.

However, by trial and error, we made progress, and grew in mutual understanding.

The headmaster had been long enough in Raetihi to have become an institution.

Introducing him, I must concede that he was largely the product of his environment, plus his French extraction.

Put a young man in his late teens in a position of authority, where he is treated

as a little tin God, and it is only to be expected that he will think along those lines himself!

There were times when I found him insufferable. Probably he had dubious thoughts about me. I was, though, up to date in my methods, while his methods were quite out-moded.

Working out his own career as a young lad in the depths of isolation, he like A.A. Milne's King John, undoubtedly had his little ways.

Reading, set by the Education Board syllabus was a standard reader in use in Britain. This was the sole reading matter for the year. Long before the year's end, most knew it by heart. The head then made the classes read it backward.

I was told to follow this plan. I could not refuse, but just didn't; preparing instead blackboard readings of similar difficulty, usually on the same subject.

As class readings were taken in the shed, I was able to work on these lines more or less unnoticed.

By comparison with Mr. Tompkins, who, though never intended by nature for the teaching profession did keep abreast of the times in his methods, my new Head seemed much out of date.

The children were interesting and lovable, and I soon became acquainted with most of the parents.

I was deeply interested, in later years, to read a draft of a treatise on "Education Past and Present", written for his M.A. Degree by a pupil who started school on that opening day, my first admission.

His appraisement of the modern "teacher-pupil" relationship interested me more than what he wrote on modern methods.

I, who was his first teacher, could sympathise, and almost shiver in the chill of the "frosty blue eyes" of his memory.

With these memories, it was deeply moving to read Mr. Hird's contribution to the diamond jubilee booklet of our old school, where he begged the forgiveness of his former pupils for his lack of understanding.

Never a rigid disciplinarian, I was usually on happy terms with my pupils. Yet I found, in recent years, that one of my old pupils, son of a cherished friend, had a life-long grievance against me. He said I had strapped him on his first day at school.

My indignant report was "I never did such a thing in my life". But he insisted

it was ever so. Realising that his memory on that matter would be more likely to be accurate than mine, I concede the point.

Most of my Sundays I was in his parents' home taking a Sunday School Class, so I may have presumed too much on our previous acquaintance.

Like the head, I beg his forgiveness and that of any other with like memories.

My Raetihi head commanded the respect but never won the friendship or warm regard of any of his pupils.

My friend's manuscript pictured his own school experience. I read it with deep appreciation of its truth. The comparison between "then" and "now" reminded me of a King Country frosty morning, contrasted with the genial warmth of sunny afternoon, till I almost shivered in the chill of those "frosty blue eyes" he remembered.

It took me many years of close touch with the public, plus the understanding which wifehood and motherhood bring, to realise how lonely Mr. Hird must have been.

Raetihi, deep in the heart of nowhere, meant he was in infrequent touch with fellow teachers. His French ancestry might have been also a contributory cause. Neither his outlook nor his attitude invited friendship.

I had served my apprenticeship under one, who, if not the Wanganui Board's most difficult man to work with, was undoubtedly its most notorious scrapper!

I can recall hectic times, not infrequent, in my Mangaweka experience. Under Mr. Hird there were none such. We got on reasonably well during my four years.

I still think my friend's atmospheric simile was not inapt, the impressions of a sensitive boy.

As the school roll mounted, I had three primer and two standard classes to teach, totalling around 70 children. Both Head and assistant were overburdened. On the Inspectors' recommendation, a girl in Std VI, who was looking forward to teacher-training, was allowed to assist me. This was a great relief. She took backward pupils for extra reading and helped in many ways.

The unequal division was largely the result of local conditions.

The newly opened land was taken up by young men. The work of breaking in heavily timbered country needed youthful strength; the long cold winters physical stamina. It followed that the majority of pupils were the children of young marrieds, and in the lower school.

The head had four classes, each with a detailed programme of work to be got through, and could not add to it. The unequal division was unavoidable.

However, our young helper was soon appointed as pupil-teacher, and the work was lightened.

Once we had the frightening experience of a heavy earthquake. My little ones sat still, though some grew pale. The older ones in the Head's room rushed out, some of them screaming.

When the shock passed I praised the children for their bravery, sending them out for ten minutes play to take their minds off the experience.

When the terrible Napier disaster occurred, I was a married woman with children away at college in Wanganui and little ones at home.

One of our windows held a display of plates, crystal and fine China. The damage was surprisingly small confined to a few articles shaken off the plate-glass shelves.

One mother with children away at school in Hawke's Bay spent days of the most cruel anxiety and suspense before re-assuring news could get through. Telephone and Telegraph connections were broken at many points, and it was a long time before a round-about connection gave the often grave, but mostly re-assuring tidings of loved ones in the affected area.

The news came through the newly established radio before telegraph connection was restored.

In spite of the Head's limitations of opportunity and education, I learned much from him.

Once he strolled in during a period set aside for drawing. After watching for a while he remarked. "You don't like teaching drawing, do you?"

I admitted as much. It seemed a hopeless subject. Little unaccustomed fingers struggled to draw straight lines and matching curves. Believe it or not this was what the syllabus set for Stds I & II.

The remark led on to a chat on difficult subjects. Mr. H remarked that in his experience the only successful way with such subjects was to devise new methods of approach, in an endeavour to arouse interest.

A new approach to drawing a straight line? The novelty of the idea was in itself a challenge. I found it could be done. Make the job a race. The straightest line was shortest, and would win.

Before my teaching days were over this subject was revolutionised, chiefly through the exposition of visiting educationalists from abroad whose methods were being adopted in Australia.

I can write about the co-education of Maori and European with the knowledge of one who saw it in its beginnings.

To learn together and play together brought the races into close relationship and understanding. At school they were on equal footing. In later years the Maori love of sport became a continual challenge to the Pakeha.

I thought it a pity we teachers had not the chance of learning Maori instead of French. Maori children would have benefited from teachers who were bilingual. Nor would it have hurt the Europeans to acquire a little Maori, in the natural way by talking with Maoris in Maori.

I wished to learn, and tried to get help from a S. V (standard five) Maori boy to read the New Testament. His English was not up to the teaching standard, and the job of teaching the teacher took a larger vocabulary and more nerve than he had.

Had I known it, there was a resident who spoke Maori fluently, acting when required as interpreter for the government officials or police. I got to know of him toward the end of my term.

Looking back on my teaching days with the enlightenment that age and experience bring, I have asked myself the question; did I encounter difficult heads, or was there sufficient "Irish" in me to constitute at least a contributory cause?

The fact is, after having made that allowance, that I have never had difficulty in making friends at any stage of life, or in any locality.

Those who could have taken up the argument are now not here to do so! Therefore the matter rests.

My youthful experience of a difficult Irish father and a bad schoolmaster may have made me wary and somewhat suspicious. I recall that with two out of four heads, the relations were most satisfactory on both sides.

Occasionally, our bright and breezy M.P. looked us up.

He was always a welcome visitor especially to the children, for it could mean a half-holiday.

To return to the Head. He married, and found fresh stimulus to ambition.

In our remote and uninspiring township he studied for B.A. and later added M.A. to his attainments. His erstwhile assistant rejoiced at his well-earned success.

We had one visit from Inspector T.B. Strong. Personally, I liked him. He was as quick to notice good work as to detect weaknesses. Not much escaped his penetrating gaze.

I was surprised, on one visit to a later school. He was drawing out a primer class. Pointing to one happy faced tiny he remarked "that one is sub-normal". I must have looked doubtful. "Yes," he said "That is so. Let her tag along with the class, but don't expect her to keep up with the others."

Some years later on a train journey I met her father. The child was with him. What I had not seen was only too apparent.

One of those happenings that leave question marks in the mind. The father told me, that both the child's mother, and a clever, but not-nearly so nice sister, much more able to cope with life had passed away.

Chapter 12 Early Raetihi

What was loosely termed "The Waimarino" comprised all the land around three mountains, Ruapehu, Tongariro, and Ngauruhoe, or from National Park to Waiouru.

The land, excepting the Waimarino and Karioi plain, was heavily timbered. Farsighted men, banking on the rapid increase in New Zealand's population, secured options on adjoining fertile land from the Maori owners, some on the timber, others inclusive of the land. Today some, at least, are gazetted millionaires.

Once, in my teaching days, visiting friends whose farm held only about enough flat (albeit sloping) land on which to build a house, we climbed the highest hill thereabouts.

From this outlook the view was of hundreds of miles of heavy bush, as far as the eye could reach. The few clearings were hardly noticeable, lost in vast stretches of virgin bush. The friends with whom I climbed were of the opinion that it would take about 100 years to clear the land. Forty years saw most of the land denuded.

Nothing that can be grown on its present farm and gardens is worth a fraction of its wonderful timber, so much of which went up in smoke.

One is sad today to see plantations of inferior pinus replacing the lost natural growth. We were like rich men's sons squandering Dad's hard-won fortune.

Nor were there lacking warning voices. I can still remember those who wrote of what had been the consequences of such a policy in other lands, notably in India, but their warnings went unheeded. Large tracts in India had become almost desert.

Raetihi was a tiny settlement, 40 miles from an infant Taihape and a very small Taumarunui as yet unsung and with little prospect of becoming " Taumarunui on the main trunk line". There was a Maori school at Karioi, most likely a Church of England venture, and run by two British women, the Misses Grant, cultured and well educated. A strange find in such a way back spot. These ladies were highly esteemed by the Maoris, and the generation they taught were a credit to their missionary hearted teachers.

Recalling Raetihi as I found it, brings to mind many pioneering families. Some early settlers, even thus early, had moved to the newly opened Ohura block, beyond Taumarunui. Entering Raetihi via the Pipiriki Road I had passed

Alloway's, Risk's, Avery's and Milligan's farms, together with some heavily timbered lands around Mangaturoa held for sawmilling by absent owners. Most of the Risk family were then at the homestead. One daughter had married, and was living in Ohura, where shortly after, the eldest son acquired a farm.

Mrs Risk had been a great toiler working side by side with her husband. When he died, she carried on with the help of the younger son, William. When he joined the forces on the outbreak of the War (1914) the family carried on, helped at busy times by friendly neighbours, notably Mr. Peter Brass.

William was one of the many who failed to return, so the farm was sold and the family went to Ohura.

Adjoining Risk's farm, was that of George Avery, from Nelson. The Averys were Methodists, the only non-conformist church in those early years. The congregation were a mixed lot, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, and the predominant Methodists. Next to Avery's were the Alloway's. Mrs Alloway was a midwife, voluntary medical aid to the community, everybody's friend in need.

In these days of hospitalization, midwifery has been reduced to a subject in the curriculum of nurses' training. The race that were its practitioners have died out. Yet they were wonderful people. Summoned when a birth was imminent, they were ready to leave their home on short notice and undertake the care of mother and child. For two weeks they carried on, taking also the direction and most of the care of the household.

Sometimes the father stayed at home or an older child was available as Nurse's aide. Mostly she managed alone. A gallant race, they were paid only a fraction of their worth in hard cash. They managed with meagre equipment, were clean and capable. For many years there was no doctor nearer than Wanganui, two days journey, yet casualties were few. Some midwives were able to take the patients into their own homes for the fortnight. My own children were born in the differing circumstances of hospital, midwife's home, and in my home, with nurse in charge. The last I found the happiest. The surroundings may not have been altogether quiet and relaxing. There was a certain amount of noise as the household carried on. The patient, in my experience was content and happy. One could well believe that those early Waimarino mothers risked their lives with every baby they bore, but complications were rare.

I can remember but one case. Both mother and baby died. Whereupon the mother's sister stepped in and mothered that small family, eventually becoming their stepmother-aunt.

My acquaintance with Raetihi began when it was a small business centre in a developing farming area.

There was one small sawmill owned by Bennett and Punch, situated south of the main road, on the corner of Ballance Street. Very shortly after my advent, it was moved right back to the frontage of John Punch's farm then the southern boundary of the township. As I have told, our outlet was via Pipiriki. The Parapara became a through road about 1905. And a thankful goodbye was said to the Wanganui River-King Country traffic.

The inhabitants of the King Country were a healthy lot. The pure cool air from the mountain flowed round us, and gave noxious germs a poor chance. There was, however some T.B. almost wholly confined to Maoris, and accounted for by poor housing and overcrowding. One or two European sufferers I knew had settled there seeking healing in the mountain air. Some, alas, came too late.

The township was built around the main through road, Pipiriki to Taihape. The business area took up two blocks, and never exceeded four. That part of the road was named Seddon Street, the principal cross road Ward Street, which effectually dated it to the Seddon-Ward regime. There were two accommodation houses, known as Pike's and Punch's, the names of the owners. As our territory was a dry area, the designation 'hotel' was a courtesy term. Punch's hotel was believed to cater for thirst as well as hunger, and Pike's to conform to the law. The law, however, did not forbid boarders to bring in refreshment for private consumption.

In the course of time there were found sufficient members to form a Masonic Lodge, which was inaugurated, by Wanganui and other visiting brethren, with appropriate ritual followed by a banquet, held in Pike's dining room. The post-ritual celebrations aroused the envy of non-lodge folk, who, not to be out-done, got in abundance of the necessary, and staged a 'Brick-layers' lodge opening a few nights later.

More than laws and by-laws are needed, it seems, to keep thirsty people on the water-wagon. There were sly grog sellers to supply the need, and make a fat thing out of it. These were not numerous. The police knew them, but as one remarked "It is one thing to know, and another to get proof and witnesses." So, these merchants were allowed some rope. Every now and then, the Police would find an opening, make a swoop, and get a conviction. Often the victim was a 'stooge' or an unwary newcomer. The old hands knew all the dodges.

Our first post office was a small hut of two rooms, one with a tiny cubbyhole used for the distribution of mail, and situated at the corner of Ward Street. The first postmistress was Miss Mary McCarthy, who came from Westland.

Efficient, courteous and obliging, she soon became popular, indeed quite one of the family. Nor did she have to put up long with cramped quarters. The rapid growth of the district made a permanent post office a matter of urgency. In a short time, a well-equipped building, suited to the district's growing needs, was provided, including residential quarters.

In less than two years, Raetihi welcomed its first postmaster, Mr. W.J. Gibbs. That was in 1907, the year of my marriage.

The Gibbs family, with their small daughter had become settled Raetihians, when near the end of the same year, I too became a permanent resident. The Gibbs family were a gift to our little settlement, their whole-hearted support being given to every worthwhile public enterprise. They were still with us in the disastrous 1919 fire, and for some while after, when they returned to their native Otago.

Much more could be written of them, but it belongs to a later part of my story. As close personal friends we missed them.

Chapter 13 I meet the Ashwells

The citizens of Raetihi, and Waimarino settlers, were of mixed nationality as the names show. There were the German Meyer, Voelkerling, Jurgens; French, Dauphin and Soufflot; Danish or Norse, Pedersen, Hansen, Berthelsen. The predominant British included Bowater, Berry, Ford, Harris, Parkes, Parker, Spence, Sanders, Smith, Saunders, not forgetting Ashwell. Along with pure Maori names as Winiata, Tuatini, were found Maori renderings of European names, as Hohepa (Joseph) and Ruke (Luke).

After Church on my second Sunday I was invited by Nellie Ashwell, one of the younger members, to spend the day with them at the farm which was about two miles in, off the main road. That Sunday was, in our lives, one of those days of destiny which shape the lives and determine futures. A friendship was begun which was momentous for both. Because of the family emigration from England when she was twelve, Nell had missed secondary education.

Having an educated mother the family were well read in the classics. Dickens, Scott, Jules Verne, with lesser lights and enjoying as sauce Mark Twain, Artemus Ward and Punch. Thackeray, whose works I enjoyed, did not appeal to them.

As our friendship developed, and we shared our reading, Nell's critical insight was a help to me, still a student. In winter, when the greasy narrow papa road, little more than a track was not safe for driving, the seniors rode. Mrs Ashwell's mount was Topsy, a quiet grey mare. Topsy lived to a great age. The family refused to part with her, the older grandchildren had their first solo rides on her venerable back.

My new friends, the Ashwells, kept open house on Sunday for wayback farmers, some of whom lived as far as seven or more miles away. Other residents did the same. I met many fine folk there. Among them was Peter Brass whose farm adjoined Ashwells.

He was the best type of settler, a hard worker, public spirited and generous. Naturally, he was one of the district's foremost men. Had he represented the town (later, borough) as he did the county, he would probably have been first choice for Mayor. He was chairman of the county council though he worked tirelessly for the town also. Between Peter and the Ashwell family was the warmest friendship continued later after his marriage with Miss Fletcher.

These neighbours had only one grievance. Whatever help or service either party gave the other was sure to be repaid! So many kindnesses passed between them, each felt the one could not get even with the other.

As Nell's particular friend, and a frequent visitor to the home, it came about that Fred, Nell, and I were often together. Not being boy-minded, and perhaps more than a little naive, it did not at first occur to me that our particular circle of friends would jump to the conclusion which seemed obvious. A girl far from home, with her own way to make in the world, my life was a full one. At that time my work held most of my interest.

As a child, I have seen my usually placid mother get quite annoyed when small-minded people, seeing a boy and girl playing unconcernedly together would say "Oh Mary is your little sweetheart." She was not easily put out, but this did get on her nerves.

"Cannot two innocent children play together without silly thoughts being put in their heads!" She would exclaim.

Growing up with this outlook, we were healthy-minded, friendly and unembarrassed in the company of the opposite sex, our friends being chosen from our own set where interests were identical. Boys seemed a bit shy of girls, but should the girl be a sister's friend she was accepted with little more than casual notice. At school there was some class rivalry, but by and large the sexes, in my day, lived on terms of friendly acceptance.

Every rule has its exceptions. Any community can contain its odd oversexed member. By these, those of normal outlook would be scornfully labelled "puritans" or its equivalent.

Being on friendly terms with many young men and fellow teachers, Bible Class members, or perhaps fellow boarders, I accepted Fred's friendship as I did the others as part of the pattern of life. To meet a stranger at Ashwell's Sunday dinner table was not at all unusual. One day, however, I was really surprised when an attractive young man in his late twenties was introduced by Mrs Ashwell as "My eldest son, Walter". It was strange I had not heard of him, nor met him previously. He was not fond of outside company, was indeed, almost a recluse by habit. While the family was at church, he would take a cut lunch, and spend the day going round the sheep at the back of the farm. This done, he retired to the shearer's whare, and read till the company should have departed. Then he would return. A stormy day did not keep the family from church; nor me from accompanying them home. The rain kept us all in doors. We chatted round the fire. As, one by one, the company went about their lawful occasions, Walt and I talked on. I will not say that with both of us, it was love at first sight. This, however, can be said when I got to know Walter, to marry any other, would be, for me to have taken second best. Had I not met Fred's brother, it is quite possible our friendship might have ripened into marriage. Fred was a rare soul.

At this time Alf Parkes, first cousin to the family, an owner of a farm nearer town on the same road, was visiting his folk in England. He returned with a wife, not very long after my engagement. Some time after he said to me "You are not a good picker, Harriet. You have passed by the gold for the glitter".

I am sure there can be no cause for misunderstanding in my appreciation of Fred. Those concerned have passed on. The only issue of the Ashwell family of three sons and one daughter, are the descendants of Walt and myself, now totalling 41. Of my age group in the clan, I remain sole survivor. My earnest prayer is, that in these of later generation, the fine qualities of mind and heart, which belonged to Nell and Fred, will be carried on, though they died childless. Fred, to put it in the vulgar tongue, was caught by a widow on the prowl, for whose guile he was no match. A man, whose womenfolk would never descend to a lie, was unfortunate to have been thrown, through his work, into contact with the one whose use of the truth was so dilute, as to convey an entirely wrong impression. Against this, a man of Fred's rectitude and upbringing, had no defensive armour. I hope Dicken's works continue to be read, if only for his immortal advice "Beware of vidders, Samivel!"

By his marriage, Fred, the friendliest of men was separated from many of his own folk, and from most of his friends. He loved the little Methodist Church which his labour and gifts had helped to build and support. Though the church ladies were friendly country folk, Fred's wife complained of their unfriendliness and returned to her own assembly to which, for peace's sake, Fred accompanied her. His relatives and friends were not welcome at his home, with the exception of two male relations.

Is it any wonder that after nearly 40 years residence, Mrs Fred left without having made one personal woman friend?

Shortly after our move to Gisborne, Fred settled in Hastings. Of his death, Walter, then a sick and crippled man, was informed by telegram. After Fred's death his brother Ern was a welcome guest at their Hawke's Bay home. Though we more than once invited him to Gisborne, the journey was too great for him – or so we were told. There was not the bond between Walt and Ern that had bound the two elder men together. Ern, the youngest, had become very deaf after a severe attack of scarlet fever in his early youth. He suffered the very real limitations which deafness entails. Hearing only one side of the story he could be easily misled by a malicious tongue. Ern had married rather late in life, a fine woman of comparable age. The union was a happy one, unfortunately soon broken by the wife's death.

A man of some substance, he left no heirs, the estate being claimed by Mrs Fred. We were Ern's only relatives and could, I dare say, have successfully

claimed. Though our only income was the Old Age Pension, Walt did not put in a claim. The one who had schemed and worked for it down the years had her reward. We were content to let it remain so.

Last year (1960) my daughter had as guest (a church billetee) a lady from Hastings, who told her of Mrs Fred's death some months previously.

As the years pass across memory's screen, one views the pageant with mixed feelings. There appear some of God's choicest men and women. All are not of equal calibre.

A man who could hold, in sincere regard and affection, the one who had been his first love, stepping aside in favour of his brother, yet with no bitterness, is a man of rare quality.

His cousin's comment, that I have passed by the gold for the glitter, I knew to express something of the truth. The summing up could, perhaps, have been more equitably made by my jeweller husband. His assessment would rather have been that I had accepted 9 carat and failed to look for the Lion brand which marks the higher quality. To all of which I would reply. Love does not first examine the quality stamp, but comes unbidden, taking possession.

So it came to Walt and me. We both knew, at that first meeting, that for us any other would have to be accepted as second best. We know that all marriages are not made in heaven. Some, indeed, are manifestly cooked up in the other place!

It does seem, however, that there are in the individual, qualities which attract those of complementary qualities. By such a union is passed on a better balanced inheritance; on the three planes, physical, mental, and spiritual. Between Walt and me was this threefold attraction. A childless marriage would have been for us, a great disappointment. Though the woman Fred married had children by a former husband, none were born to Fred.

It must have been a great disappointment to a man so fond of children. He had been used to spending one evening in the week with us, to which the children looked forward.

This habit stopped with his marriage. The older children, often came home with the remark, "I saw Uncle Fred today and he smiled at me". These encounters were few. When, later, we moved to Gisborne, he passed out of their lives. A pity, and a loss on both sides.

Chapter 14 Raetihi folk, teaching and marriage 1907

The general store was owned by Joseph Fletcher, single, when I came. He was an upright and good businessman, who a year or two after, married Miss Brass, sister to Peter, Ashwell's nearest neighbour.

They were Church of England folk. Mrs Fletcher inveigled me into her team of Sunday School teachers, thus making it a threesome. My previous experience in that church was a help. The Methodist Church being well staffed, I was glad to help where I could, the reward being another worthwhile friend.

Next to Fletcher's store was a hardware business, owned by another "Joe", J.D. Gibson. He was the leading lay man of the Methodist Church, devoted and open handed. He'd loaned the crockery for the church's social occasions, and would 'put down to profit and loss' any breakages. The church, however had a conscience about these matters, or he might have been more of a loser than he was. He married the only child of a manse and had but one child, a girl.

When, some ten years later, he was accidentally killed, the church honoured his services by a memorial plaque.

Before his marriage his household consisted of his aged mother and sister Gertrude, our church organist. Visiting my old haunts recently, I went to the Church, accompanied by a married grand-daughter [Betty]. Pointing to the tablet, she asked "Did you know this man, Joseph Dearlove Gibson?" One of the keenest sorrows in the loss of loved ones, highly esteemed or personally dear, is that they are so soon forgotten. My granddaughter's question made me realise afresh how soon even those who so well served their day and generation pass out of mind. How true to experience is the hymn couplet

"They fly forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day."

To the church Joseph Dearlove Gibson was a generous giver, and of Raetihi, no mean citizen.

Surely the most remarkable of our businessmen was the town shoemaker, Bob Wyche. Though his education went no further than the elementary three Rs, he had insight, vision, and courage.

Leaving an overcrowded England with its restrictions of class and privilege, he obtained a farm section in the Waimarino. As a landowner, the next step was to get work to keep his land. Strange as it sounds, that was what most had to do.

Bob turned to his trade of shoemaker. Nor was he a mere repairer, he really was a shoe maker. His "made to measures" were comfortable and long wearing. A number of farmers preferred Bob's to anything from the store shelves. Grandpa Ashwell never went past Bob for his footwear.

It was not as a tradesman that Bob won public notice, so much as by his essays into poetry. He was indeed the village poet.

He was more fortunate than our famous hymn-writer, Isaac Watt, whose father's only title to mention is that he tried, without success, to flog the poetry out of his gifted son. Bob was free to exercise his gift unchecked. After my engagement he wrote a love poem for his bride-to-be, and offered it to Walter to send to me, of course with the appropriate change of names. Walt destroyed it. A pity! I would have cherished it as Bob's and could now have reproduced it.

Gray's elegy written in a country churchyard, must have had someone like Bob in mind.

One I can reproduce was written above his own extra tall shopfront:

"I'd rather be a peasant
Beneath the Russians Czar
Than be hunted by the Laced Board
Like we little cockies are."

When, later, our business premises faced his, we were amused at seeing tourists stop, produce a camera, and snap Bob's shop. I wonder in how many faraway albums could Bob's shop be seen and his plaint read. When he came to settle in New Zealand, he purposed to take up land. He had first to earn money to improve his holding, and got a little behind with his payments. It was common knowledge that men with 'pull 'were given much leniency if they got in arrears. Bob was no palm greaser, so, on default, his section became forfeit to men wiser than he. He was honest and above board in all his dealings. Diogenes should have met Bob, and his search for an honest man would have been over!

However, his business prospered. He sent for his boyhood sweetheart, and paid her fare to New Zealand. She would have come to New Zealand with them but waited to nurse her frail mother through her last illness. She came out in 1907, the year of my own marriage. Bob met her at Wellington, and they were married, both being well past middle age. Theirs was a very happy union. I saw Bob in his last illness, much changed from the stalwart I had known.

My husband and I were then living in Gisborne. Mrs Wyche lived till she was 90. On my first visit from Gisborne, I found her in hospital, in a large ward, where she was a general favourite. Making the usual enquiry "How are they treating you here?" She replied "They are very good, but", in puzzled tone, "I cannot understand why I am not getting better!"

In a few months the steep ascent had been conquered, and she knew all the answers.

[From Raetihi school I went to Clydesdale School in the Rangitikei district.] Clydesdale school certainly had me extended. It was no easy job. The children ranged from beginners, one of the latter a retarded child if not actually mentally handicapped; to one post primary. This latter boy had passed Std VI and was considered a bit young to leave home for post primary work.

In these circumstances to get a good inspectorial report would have taken a teacher with more class experience than had been mine.

Still it was interesting, and there were no problem children. I even taught the retarded pupil without realising she was more than dull or slow. The inspector noticed her and advised me on the line to take with this pupil. His advice was not to spend too much time on her, but let her work alongside the younger children and settle in her place as easily as possible.

I let her do little things for me, and amuse herself quietly. She was a lovable child. I often wondered how she turned out, poor M, for her mother died a few years later.

When after nearly 2 years at the [Clydesdale] school I returned to Mangaweka as infant mistress, I lost touch with the lower Rangitikei folk.

The Rangitikei was very wide at the mouth. I could see, across, the Flock House buildings where the sons of men who had fallen in World War I were received for training in agriculture.

It was rightly felt that those boys whose fathers had died for New Zealand should be helped to own a piece of the country for which their fathers had given their lives.

The idea was well conceived. I hope the right lads got the chance to own their own piece of land, not just to become employees of the well-to-do squattocracy.

I made few personal friends at Clydesdale, except one lady who gave me hospitality and took me with them to church at Rongotea. I was not near enough to walk to a service and would have fared poorly but for her kindness.

It was only for the last few months of my stay that I got to know these folk, and then it was through my old friend Harold Bowater whose school was a few miles nearer Rongotea than mine. Then, thinking our marriage would be still some years off, I applied for the position of infant mistress at Mangaweka. To get back among so many friends was a temptation, though the salary was smaller. Had I had a peep into the future, and seen my wedding day was only months away; I would not have changed jobs. In any case Mangaweka was the only place that would have tempted me.

I suppose I was lonely at Clydesdale. Even my one friend was a good distance off and the telephone was not found in many homes, in none then at which I boarded.

Single people who take country schools serve in loneliness their day and generation. They miss so much in the intercourse with their own kind. Libraries were so far away that even the solace of reading was not for me.

To live among people who consider a salaried worker to be beneath them is not conducive to a happy life. I left without regret. To live again among people I had grown up with and known and loved was a happy experience.

I went back to my old camping place in the Berthelsen home.

I had not been long settled in before term holidays, when of course I made for Raetihi, and seeing what letters had not prepared me for, Walt overwhelmed with work. To try and do fine work such as watch repairing, subject to constant interruption by customers was indeed to attempt the impossible.

The shop and living room structure was close to the tourist boarding house, so we agreed to take a room there and manage till he could build on his own section on the opposite side of the street.

So it came to pass that the train on which I travelled back to Mangaweka carried also my letter of resignation to the Wanganui Education Board.

I finished up on 31 October 1907.

The last month was not spent at Mrs Berthelsen's.

Our old friends, Mr. and Mrs Carver, of Ohingaiti, had moved to Mangaweka to be nearer in their old age to their married daughter Lucy whose husband's farm was not far off.

Not long after my return Mr. Carver passed away and the family waited on me to ask if I would live with their mother, so that she would not be left alone. Naturally, she clung to her home and memories.

I agreed but pointed out that I would only be able to stay for the few weeks before my wedding.

I wouldn't have missed the experience.

When her husband died she did not seem to suffer bereavement. To me looking on, it seemed as if she were with him in spirit. She seemed to live in such absolute certainty of his wonderful happy state beyond, that she had no thought for herself. To me, as an old friend, she could talk of his heavenly inheritance as if he were just in the next room.

She never needed comfort, but it was good to have a sympathetic listener to talk to and to reminisce of the old days of the pilgrimage. She talked of the hardships and joys of the years on Sunday Island, of their business struggles, joys and sorrows, and the New Zealand experiences, of the eldest son and of son and father now reunited.

She was getting feeble, but one day insisted on walking into the town by herself. I offered to accompany her, but she was quite independent, assuring me that she would enjoy the walk very much.

Soon after her return a parcel was delivered, which she passed over to me, a pair of sheets as a wedding gift.

It was indeed a loved gift, treasured for years, given out of her poverty.

After I left, a small granddaughter came from Northland to keep her company. She refused to leave her own home to live with any of her family.

I managed to see her a few months after my marriage and found her unhappy for the first time. The eldest daughter was packing up to take her away. She lived only six months. I felt sure if left in her own little home she would have lived quite happily for a few more years.

Life in another home would have been without the same interest. Used to taking care of others, being dependent would have taken the zest out of living. So an understanding Father beckoned her Home.

From my knowledge of this dear old saint, I know death would be to her, just a Home call.

Even to know one such person is an enriching experience.

The choice was given to Walt and me of a church marriage, or, one in the family home. As I knew few folk in Paeroa, we decided on the latter.

The ceremony was performed by Reverend Ivo Bertram M.A., minister and

close friend of the family. One family anecdote is too good to miss recording. When Reverend Bertram came to the Paeroa charge, my little sister Molly's comment was "Mr. Bertram is such a pretty man".

The compliment, passed on to the minister, caused much merriment.

"Well, well" he said "I take it as a sincere compliment, if a bit mistaken."

It probably became a family joke with him as with us. Nevertheless, it may with truth be recorded that most people would have endorsed Molly's comment though substituting "good-looking" for "pretty".

A wedding is too important an occasion to be passed over in a few words, and they can wait for a brief while.

The family home, built by Dad and Bill, was a tribute to my gifted father's versatility.

He had planned it, and with Bill's help, both manual and monetary, had built it.

As I looked around the large living room where the wedding breakfast was to be eaten, everything seemed to pay tribute to Dad's skill and industry.

The papering and painting were his handiwork, the elaborate curved overmantel and mirror, the draw-leaf dining table, and chairs with upholstered removable seats, the curtains and pelmet. As far as I could see, the only pieces not of his make were the piano and the floor covering. The pictures on the wall were painted and framed by himself.

Though, after Mum's death, he gave away many of his pictures, most of the family have at least one of them though not many of his best. Mine is a glimpse of New Plymouth's beautiful park [Given to Hope now with Malcolm Smith].

A portrait of myself, at 21, is in Dorothy's possession.

How many New Zealanders could open the door of a 20x16 room and say "All but the piano and lino were made by my own hands"?

Of course, he had in the work of building, my brother's skilled help, also, be it said, much of Bill's money went into the family home.

After Mum's death, Dad sold the house, and started a small stationery business. When Bill returned from overseas, and established his Ohakune business, Dad sold the home.

A little later, he went to live with Florrie and Bill Gordon. He was not happy there. Florrie was too nervy to put up with him, so Bill rescued him and took him to Ohakune.

He was then in his decline, mentally as well as physically. Living with Bill in his two room shack gave him little interest. The doctor told Bill he needed a woman's care. So, though I was a businesswoman with a large family, he came to us. By the chance of Fortune he came to end his days in the home he had designed for us.

It seems to me that the last years of aged men are more pathetic than is the lot of a woman's declining years. Men, who have been doers and leaders now have no occupational interest. They live in homes not their own. There is not even the proprietorial interest in pottering round hoe in hand to remove the weed or two.

Women, in general, have the absorbing interest of grandchildren, can do a piece or two of mending, or keep the knitting needles working.

I tried to get my father back to his palette and brush, but he sighed and said "I am past it."

Until one reaches a stage when age brings weakness to ourselves, we have no conception of the disinterest and inertia that cannot make the effort required.

He kept his interest in the Masonic Lodge to the end. He was in the Lodge before his marriage so was well up in the craft.

Once he was strolling near the Post Office and seeing a bus ready to depart with the mail, climbed on. We had only begun to miss him when the bus returned with him on board. The owner-driver refused the fare I offered and said he would gladly take him on a trip when he desired. He did enjoy one or two more jaunts, but in a few months his strength declined, and increasing weakness confined him to bed.

I was glad that this last period was spent away from his old friends and compeers. He would have hated to think those who knew him in his prime should have seen him then. In the homes of many friends were the products of his hands and brain, carved cabinets and smaller gifts, paintings in oil and sketches in water-colour. In Raetihi he was no more than 'Mrs Ashwell's father' a back number where we mostly all end.

He lived happily enough with us though the children bothered him. Their noise disturbed him. Indeed it was the children that prevented him from living with Lily who would have gladly cared for him. Her family was larger and therefore noisier than even the Ashwells.

My brother Bill had put, in money and work, quite as much or more as my father. At his death there was nothing left but a life policy of £100, not much after funeral [buried in Raetihi cemetery] and other expenses had been paid.

At least half of the money received from the sale of the house, should have been Bill's. It was as well Bill was not grasping. He made enquiries in Paeroa, of his lawyer, in case there was some left, but as the lawyer said "I am afraid Bill your father blew the lot".

Other friends and personalities in the Waimarino

Mrs Meek was a hard toiler. Her husband was neither kind nor thoughtful. Their farm was a way out on the Huikanui Road, right in opposite McConbries, about 9 or 10 miles from town. The first baby was due when he decided to go to town to attend the monthly stock sale, and stayed in town overnight. Their house was within signalling distance of the McConbrie farm, and the women had arranged that when Mrs Meek's time came, Mrs McConbrie should be notified and she would stay with Mrs Meek while Mr. M went for the doctor or nurse.

In the meantime Meek had fallen out with the neighbours, and visits were stopped.

While he was attending the monthly stock sale his baby decided to come and was impatient about it too. In vain Mrs Meek vainly tried to signal Mrs McConbrie, so, alone in winter conditions she got into bed and the baby came. All the poor woman could do was pull the baby close to her and wrap her up.

She lay there, cold and without even a cup of tea, cherishing the baby till the next afternoon the husband returned. She insisted he go to Mrs McConbrie who came at once and sent him off for the doctor and nurse with a flea in his ear.

The dear soul, whose own family were grown up, took over and soon made patient and baby comfortable. I remember how shocked the Ashwells were. Nell went back with Mr. Meek and stayed till the patient was on her feet again. Mr. M came in for some pretty rough criticism when the story got around.

The McConbrie family were three sons and one daughter. Miss McConbrie married a Mr. Stewart who became head of I think the Public Works Department. They lived in Wellington.

One son, Hutton, was drowned taking cattle across a flooded river. His mother never recovered from the shock. She went to live with Mrs Stewart, but mourned her son till her death. She was such a kindly soul. Nell and I rode out on a visit once, a long way, but that was before Hutton's death.

A well-known figure in early local politics was P.G. Smith, who owned a tract of land in from the main road to Taihape. When I went to the district, the road to Waiouru and Taihape wound between tall virgin bush, soon after to be opened for sawmilling. P.G.'s syndicate owned blocks of valuable timber.

They were kindly people with only one child Mrs Proude.

I mentioned a particular friend of my childhood, Fanny Smith, in Hunterville. P.G. was Fanny's uncle. He was a courteous and able man and did his share in getting Raetihi's prosperity off to a good start. His nephew, Fanny's oldest brother lived in Taihape and represented the Waimarino electorate for many years. Proudes of a succeeding generation now farm the old Smith holdings.

Further along this road was the model farm of the district owned by Allen & Gaffey. Mrs Gaffey was a most able woman, whose wisdom and foresight made a big contribution to the partnership.

When I came, the Punch family seemed perhaps the most dominant in the township. They owned a farm and valuable timber land. Prior to my coming, they had established the first sawmill, Bennett and Punch's Mill. It was right beside the main road, but later was moved further back to the outskirts, till the bush was cut out. They had a family of about 8, but which grew to 13. Mrs Punch's 12th child was born within a week of my first, but that is another tale. I taught many of the children from the third down, ranging from primers to Std. II. Pierce, Rose and John were in the higher classes.

Farming on the sawmill road, but nearer Raetihi was Mr. Tuatini of Chieftain rank. He was the best type of educated Maori, and brought up a fine family some of the elder I had the privilege of teaching. The Maori were Methodists and built a church of that denomination, the first minister being Rev. Wm Kirkwood, whose children attended the Raetihi School, one of his sons winning a scholarship.

Associated with the Maori folk were the Wright family, foremost in all sporting activities. Mrs Rumatiki Wright was the first Maori member of the Raetihi School Committee, but that was after my time. She is a very capable woman and well versed in Maori lore. I think she came from Pipiriki, maiden name Kerei (Grey).

Other farming pioneers were the Fords, from [Sanson], who sold out before my marriage.

The Berry family farmed about a mile along the Ohura Road, which was part of a large farming area. They belonged to a very strict sect of Brethren. Their creed may have been small and narrow, but nothing else about them was! They kept open house for all comers. They were dairy farmers and toiled hard on their loggy farm.

Cows were turned out into surrounding tracts of native bush for three months of the winter. As in Taranaki, many were so sick of cows they preferred to use condensed milk for the winter months than keep a home cow.

They toiled all the week, but Sunday was the Mecca ahead. It was open house to all comers, and lavish meals. I remember a visitor once, a small rather dyspeptic man asking for a small helping. When his plate reached him piled up with meat and vegetables, he sorrowfully shook his head as he took it and remarked "This isn't the place for small helpings." He was dead right!!

There was Sunday School attended by the children within miles, held in the afternoon, and then open Gospel service in the evening, to which many stayed.

On my undertaking to teach within their unorthodoxy I was given a Sunday School class. That was in my teaching days, of course. Many were led to Christ, and many stalwarts of other churches had their first teaching at Berry's Sunday School. The foundations, so well and truly laid at that Sunday School stood the test of time.

One of the finest Christians I knew, a man of keen intelligence and deeply thoughtful, comes to my mind.

Had I a spiritual problem, I knew of no one I would sooner consult than him. In later years I asked when he had been converted which I might have anticipated. His reply was "At Berrys' Sunday school, when I was 12." Their own family never departed from the faith, maintaining a steady witness always; respected and beloved. The hard toil they endured probably shortened their lives, the parent George Berry died in the Epidemic, and Mrs Berry did not long survive him. Some of her children and grandchildren are still farming in the vicinity.

Time marches on, and much is forgotten. Two names will, I think be long remembered. "Berry" and "Scarrow". Their contribution to our country was of the best.

Further along the Ohura Road from Berrys two brothers held farms, Walter and John Harris. John had a family, the children coming to Berrys' Sunday School. One son Raynor is on the roll of honour of the First World War.

Walter was a man of keen intellect and he, like Peter Brass, was one of the community leaders. He married late, quite a few years after Walt and I. He was public spirited, and no good cause asked his aid in vain. His own family considered him the brainiest of their large family which numbered Raetihi's own T.A. He, like many another pioneer, had missed the education that would have fitted him for greater things, but the ability was there, and freely given in the County Council and other bodies, and outstanding in the war efforts of his time.

The town blacksmith when I taught was Alec Henderson, also a man whose word was as good as another's guarantee. He was married, but it must have been a matter of regret that he had no sons, only two daughters.

Teaching

I became a certificated teacher when concepts of education were changing.

New ideas of American origin were getting a hearing. Australia was a jump ahead of New Zealand.

There the three Rs attitude was on the way out, in favour of a much more liberal and flexible curriculum.

A two weeks refresher course, called a 'Summer School' was held in Auckland during the long holidays. Speakers and exponents came from Australia to join our own foremost educationalists.

The program included lectures on the teaching of nature study, of our own New Zealand flora and fauna, and included drawing and brush work, modelling in plasticene, and a quite new approach to the teaching of reading.

This last was most easily explained as a combination of "Look and Say" and phonics.

A baby, learning to talk, does not build up a word by adding sound to sound.

Seeing the person who is usually good for a bit of fun, he tries to talk, making the pleasurable sound of da-da. So he gets to greet him as Da-da and this is his first essay at speech communication.

Likewise the person who comes to his aid when his sore gums worry with something called, becomes connected with his fretful murmur m-m-and we have "Mum".

The new method of teaching reading was to recognise words as a whole and when the pupil was familiar with a considerable number of words to recognise them as related sounds. Call it analyses of words. On this method, the new system of teaching reading was built, now, no doubt improved on.

To this first summer school the Wanganui Education Board was given the privilege of sending twenty teachers. As it turned out, I was the only one who took advantage of the opportunity, though it did take two weeks out of my only home association in the year.

The result was well worthwhile. The grading system came late in my career. I have so completely forgotten mine that I have not the foggiest recollection of what it was.

I do know that what I learnt at that summer school so increased my status that I was eligible for any position open to my sex under the Wanganui Education Board, possibly, even in those parochial days, under other boards.

I was "sold" to the new teaching and forthwith put it into practice. The head was dubious, and feared the inspectors would take a dim view of it. However, he gave a hesitant permission for me to try it out.

As I was teaching so many Maoris, in what was not their mother tongue, it seemed the new teaching held great possibilities.

To my joy I found it worked. The Maori pupils benefited greatly. Maori was the language at the pa and by the new method they learnt English more easily.

When the inspector paid his visit, (I had dear old Jimmy Milne) he greeted me with "Well, Miss Meeharney (the closest he ever got to Mahony) did you get anything from the summer school?"

"Yes" I replied "A much better method of teaching reading", and explained the new idea.

After listening with interest, and I suppose not a little patience, his comment was, "Forget it, Ms M. Nothing will supersede the old alphabetical method."

I was, however, bold enough to continue, finding it much the better.

Next year, the inspectors were introducing the new way.

My one, and only, title to fame is that I was the teacher who pioneered the new teaching as outlined and demonstrated in the Auckland Summer School in the Wanganui Education Board. This fact, together with my pupil teacher exam results, 1st year 3rd, 2nd year 2nd, and third year 1st, must rest on my unsupported word, a fire in the Wanganui office having destroyed their earlier records. Such is fame!

I have mentioned a preponderance of Maori pupils in the lower school. Those in our district were very poor. Even the hereditary chiefs were not moneyed men.

Much of their hereditary land had been mortgaged or sold. Now, since the advent of milking and more recent market gardening, the position has changed.

The children were poorly clothed. One rather unwanted little lad, half Negro, was called "Charlie Nigger". He came to school [Incomplete in manuscript].

After I left two not too rosy places of board, I joyfully accepted Mrs McWhirter's invitation to board with them.

The broad hints her husband had thrown out had been wasted, but hers I knew could be accepted without any fears of misunderstanding.

I was almost four years in my Raetihi post, at least two of which were spent in this home. The husband was upright and good-living; but, like my own father, not a happy family head, exacting and short tempered.

If his wife did not grow wings in the outward and physical, she certainly did in the inward and spiritual.

Married young, she put up good-humouredly with a petty tyrant. Only her exquisite tact kept the home a happy one

At his request, I helped him to further his education, especially in maths. He was keen to learn, so I settled in the home very contentedly, glad indeed to help his wonderful wife as far as I could in her difficult position. There were three girls and one boy, the eldest Annie, then George, Isabel Margaret Frances, and Jessie of whom I got very fond, and the friendships continued until the isolation of Gisborne our final home caused us to drift apart.

I treasure the memory of these years of close association, which meant and still mean, so much to me. Two years spent with one of such sanctified common sense and unselfish living were the start of a life-long friendship, which I hope to renew in that Other Land whither my friend has preceded me.

Of the children of that day, most of them now grandparents, I have very fond memories.

I was reluctant to leave for the unknown Rangitikei-Manawatu. But there, too, I found and made friends.

The short break on the birth of another daughter, I spent with the Ashwells, riding to and from school.

Much that made my life happy at this time seems trivial to write of, but made the sum of happiness that belongs to the golden years of youth and young love.

After I left, Lily remained for some time, living in the school residence, and making many friends.

The Christmas following our engagement Walt visited the family at Paeroa, who were all very pleased with my choice. They had half expected a countrified lad. Walt had lived for some years of his late boyhood, in London, so was certainly not a country-bumpkin, though born on a farm in Bishop's Stortford, Herts.

The change from assistant to sole teacher entailing primer and six standard classes meant a new approach to the job. The problems took a bit of working out, mostly accomplished by trial and error, and combining as much classwork as possible, which is not so impossible as one would think. The school roll was about 40. Had the average attendance been 40, the school would have qualified for a second teacher.

One did one's best. I thought it a bit hard on clever children, who could have profited by a bit more individual attention, which had to be given to the slow ones. There was a boy in Std.V who was brilliant in maths, but his reading was about a decent Std. III. He worked in maths with Std. VI and left them standing.

The lower Rangitikei was my introduction to a new class of New Zealanders, the successful farming class which the Australian Bulletin so aptly labelled "The Squattocracy".

The British nobility could command respect but the senior members of the would-be New Zealand counterpart had little education, and even less manners. There were exceptions of course. Before I left that position I became a boarder in one such home. Mrs Squatter had been married at fifteen. Her husband used to claim he was the eldest of twice 12 children. He was, for after the family reached 12, one died and another was born. Families of eight or so were the norm then.

They were kind to me, in their way. I was given the servant's room, a 10x10 back room, without fireplace – good enough for the lower classes! They were well mannered, but in many small ways a nice class distinction was maintained.

I used to smile inwardly as I thought that their class would, in the old country, have been servants of mine, and remember the old saying of "beggars on horse back."

That is a picture of one type only that I met in the lower Rangitikei. There were others where I found warm-hearted friends who gave me hospitality and made me welcome at their churches and assemblies.

Of one thing I was glad. On the school precincts class distinctions do not flourish in New Zealand in our time, any more than they did in the USA of Huckleberry Finn.

My outlook and rule was "Once children entered the school gate, they left class distinctions behind."

I am glad schoolchildren are in a way classless. The only trouble I had was that the squattocracy were not as honourable in paying the school-teacher's outgoings for school stationery as were their workmen.

"Chicken-feed". Nothing for them to worry about.

Yet what these folks spent at one race-meeting, the squatter's prime amusement, would have kept the school in stationery for a year.

After two years at Clydesdale, I answered an advertisement for an infant mistress at Mangaweka. I think it was the only such post that would have attracted me then. Thinking our engagement had still a year or two to run, I applied and went back to my old position as assistant.

Walter and I had been putting by for our home. I had accomplished my object of getting a piano, which I had left in Raetihi. I had a decent trousseau and had set aside money for a stove, of all things.

I enjoyed the change. The head Mr. Jackson ranked A1 with me after my previous experience. I boarded with Mrs Berthelsen, renewed the old friendship, with Carrie and Mr. Bowater, and Mr. and Mrs Carver. It was a really happy time, and in the September holidays I went to Raetihi. Here I found Walt in an impossible position. Business was booming, so that he could not attend to his bench work. After going into matters we found we would be better off if we worked together than what I could save if I continued teaching. It ended that the train I travelled back in carried my resignation to the Wanganui Education Board.

The wedding day was set as November 4th 1907. The Mangaweka Committee were a bit indignant, but the position was unforeseen. Personally, I would have liked a little more time, but Walt needed my help.

I should have finished the year, but it was difficult to refuse.

My home folk were notified, and the wedding set for 4 November. My resignation took effect on the last Friday in October. If I could have had a day off on 31st I could have been in Paeroa for the three days residence. The Committee were annoyed, naturally enough, at my short stay, and refused to allow me the half day necessary to make the rail connection, so Walter had to close shop and journey to Paeroa to fulfil the condition of the marriage license, and I had to get a special one at Mangaweka.

I worked till 31 October, caught the outgoing North train by a whisker. The pound of flesh having duly been paid, I started off for Taihape on the evening train, and next morning went on by a train to Waiouru.

On the station there I met the County Clerk, Mr. Vine, also secretary of the Raetihi School Committee whose daughter was also a teacher.

His greeting to me was "What are you doing gallivanting around. It isn't holiday time!"

I replied that I was going home for my wedding, whereupon he asked me in bewilderment, "But who are you going to marry?" I replied "Walter Ashwell, of course, who else?" "But you can't" he said "He has gone away. There is a notice in his shop window "Gone away for a few days to arrange a partnership!"

Then he saw the point. He thought I was on my way to Raetihi, but the misunderstanding was cleared up when he learnt it was to my own home in Paeroa we were both trekking.

We had a good laugh as I boarded the coach which bridged the gap between Waiouru and Taumarunui. At Taumarunui I was joined by Nell, who with my sister Lily, was to be bridesmaid.

A night at Taumarunui, and the Sunday night Auckland express as far as Frankton, and then we waited at Morrinsville for the Thames train. We reached Paeroa on Saturday evening, and were married on 4 November 1907.

Walt had preceded me to fulfil the three days residence in Paeroa. I brought my own certificate from Mangaweka, issued by the then register of Births, Deaths, and Marriages Mr. Bennett, the Saddler, who had added that office to his other business.

The engagement between Walter Ashwell and myself surprised everybody, including ourselves.

The townsfolk, used to seeing Nell, Fred, and me together, and knowing little, if anything, of the family recluse, found it hard to believe.

Even the Ashwell family, knowing that Fred was fond of me, and, unlike Walt, in a position to marry, were a little dubious about the situation.

Lastly, the overwhelming joy of finding ourselves actually committed to each other, surprised us perhaps most of all!

Even though we knew marriage to be years away – five was our estimate – we were prepared to work and wait, secure in our love.

For me "The birthday of my life had come, My love had come to me".

Just the old, old, story, ever fresh, ever new. Like parenthood, as old as Adam, but as new and fresh as the last baby.

At this time I was a boarder in the McWhirters home [while teaching in Raetihi], very happily situated. While I was with them, their fifth child was born, and given the name of Jessie.

The home had few if any luxuries. It was simply a workman's home. It will always remain a mystery to me, how, with so much against her, the gallant lady who was 'mother' yet made it a place of love and happy living.

One can be happy in poor surroundings but with an increasing family, eldest only 12, a husband who was a petty tyrant, whose temper was moody and unpredictable, how did 'mother' keep the atmosphere calm and serene?

There was order and discipline, yet no harshness.

I suppose it had its beginning in her own self-discipline. Over the years I watched, marvelling at her poise. In any company she remained her own quiet understanding self. Pretence or affectation she had none. In quiet dignity she possessed her soul.

The qualities most Christians take a lifetime to attain, seem to have been her birth gift. Putting the other person first, her manners were irreproachable.

She could not always attend church though it was quite close. She went when possible and, like the prophet of old, lived on the strength of that meat many days.

Her husband was petty and quarrelsome but she was invariably friendly. Certainly she will be among those who will be in her Lord's words of commendation "Good and faithful servant."

Her husband was hard-working, honest and honourable. There is comfort in Robbie Burn's word "An honest man's the noblest work of God". She and R.B. may have seen alike, cherishing the good, and passing over the rest.

The Bible says of such a one "Her family shall call her blessed."

Many women have done virtuously but "Thou excellest" will be the verdict also of her family.

My father had started work in Paeroa in the employ of his old friend, Mr. Forrest. At the time of my marriage he was traveller for the firm of McAndrew. The founder, James McAndrew, had died. Mrs McAndrew was chief executive of the company.

She had a high opinion of my father and gave Mum unstinted help in the preparations for the first Mahony wedding.

She made the bouquets, and arranged all floral decorations with flowers from her own garden. The living room was a picture, with the table extended to its fullest, and aglitter with McAndrew silver and fine china and glassware.

The wedding service was held in the parlour, into which (thanks for Dad's dislike of small rooms) all present managed to find seating room, and leave sufficient space for the participants. It was just a family party. Brother Bill was groomsman, Nell Ashwell and my sister Lily shared the bridesmaid's part.

Strangely, it was not the bridegroom but the bride who was jittery.

As we stood side by side Walt gave my hand a re-assuring squeeze putting my nervousness to flight. I began even to enjoy my own wedding, which must be rather unusual.

I was not asked to promise obedience, only to 'cherish'. It seemed Walt had made that request in his interview with Rev Bertram. When I remarked about it later, he laughed and said "Why ask you to promise what you wouldn't do anyhow?"

I was attended by Nell Ashwell, and my sister Lily, while brother Bill supported the groom.

I regretted that we have no photos, but we had to dispense with expensive extras.

It was a happy occasion. I wondered how Walt would manage his speaking part. I need not have been at all concerned. He was really good, his line being that marriage to reach the best result must be a partnership. Trite, perhaps but really well done and with deft touches of humour and wit.

I was the only one to make a faux pas. I was about to rise to drink a toast to the newlyweds, till my father's shocked glance warned me! My experience of wedding functions had been almost nil. I was truly countrified if not a bumpkin!

I had arrived home late Saturday. The wedding was on Monday, a most inconvenient day for a celebration. Mum said "Never again to Monday weddings".

Rev Bertram chaired the breakfast. He was most happy in the part, and struck just the right note for a happy occasion among Christians. Wine had been provided, but none of the two families except Mum and Dad partook. We were all teetotallers. It was there for each of the guests as enjoyed it.

The spread itself lacked nothing in the way of wedding fare – ham, chicken, fruit salad, trifle. We had an hour or two before the four p.m. train left for Te Aroha, first stop on the journey home.

Walt and I were surprised at the crowd who came to the station to see us off, mostly church people and including the Forrest family who were Dad's oldest New Zealand friends.

My sister Molly had undertaken to sit on our luggage to prevent trickery. She did the job well for the only rice we carried away was on our persons, and soon disposed of. We hoped to pass in Te Aroha as casual old marrieds. I doubt very much that we produced such an impression!

Even the train gave a special toot as it drew out of Paeroa Station.

Next morning we boarded the Paeroa train to Hamilton. Nell was with us from then on. We joined the Main Trunk train and got as far as Taumarunui-on-the-Main-trunk-line that day.

We went by slow train next day being met at Horopito by Walt's father with the trap. Our idea was to slip quietly through Raetihi and out to the farm without being noticed.

Not a hope! We got through quietly not without on my part a surreptitious look at the notice in Walt's window "Gone away (for a few days) to arrange a partnership".

We must have been noticed for as we sat round talking in the evening a most unholy din commenced outside. Horror. Many sorts of instruments contributed to the noise, but made undoubtedly by the powerful kerosene tin. We were being "tin-kettled". Presently our friends arrived at the door, among them many of the town businessmen and of course our church dignitaries.

Being 3 miles away from Raetihi and nearly 2 from the nearest neighbour except Mr. Brass (next door by about 1 mile) the noise was confined to our place.

A hilarious happy evening followed. Each tin kettle was supposed to contribute an item and Walt did his best to see no one was missed. We supplied an impromptu supper though the Ashwells, being English had no knowledge of our barbarous New Zealand customs and had been taken by surprise.

In his speech T.A. assured us all that though it might not bear that appearance we were to take it as an honour.

Indeed we did, though Walt's mother who was very deaf was much puzzled at the proceedings. On any social occasion now Nell would sit at her side and repeat what was said, especially anything humorous, so that she did not feel left out of things.

She felt her deafness a great handicap, for she had an acute mind, and would so much have enjoyed to have been able to feel herself in full accord with the company. She used to say that of the two senses, loss of sight or hearing, she would have preferred the former. Everyone was out to help the sightless, but the deaf are only a nuisance. A very natural outlook in an intelligent educated woman.

I have been glad our first child did not arrive as early as it might have. Some people of the baser sort might have thought the seemingly hurried marriage due to a different cause than business reasons! No such reason had marred our engagement. We had kept unsullied our respect for one another, and the world's respect for us. And how good it is to have nothing to hide from our children. As my sister Molly remarked in a somewhat similar connection "God vindicated me".

When we became engaged, marriage looked like a 5-year plan. I had a piano on time payment; and Walt was just starting out in business. He had worked a bit at his trade, but like myself, had felt his duty to help his people get established on the farm. To Mrs Ashwell (senior) debt in any form was abhorrent because unscriptural. To her God's word was "Owe no man anything" and so the whole family toiled to get the farm free. I also as the eldest gave my family what help I could, especially when they were building the Paeroa home.

So neither Walt nor I had any considerable sum of money saved when we became engaged.

Walt started out in a tiny building, a small 1-windowed shop on a rented section, with a very small workshop containing a single bed. It was next door to Pike's boarding house. If memory serves me, ground rent for our shop was paid to Mrs Pike.

When we married, Walt owned a half acre section on the opposite side of the road, on which he planned to build. With the change in our plans we decided that we would take a room in the boarding house till we could get the building moved across the road and living rooms added at the rear.

As we needed all our resources for this, I refused to rent the boarding house accommodation. We added a foot to the width of the bed – a home-made one, and waited for more.

Think how convenient it was to be able to be in bed and reach our food off the workbench on a Sunday morning!

With the help of the whole Ashwell family, we immediately had blocks put in

on our section, and arranged for the little building, built on skids, to be towed across the road.

Arrangements were made with the owner of a bullock team and the fun began! The job was new to the contractor, and on the half-holiday the work started, we expecting to be settled on the blocks by night. However, it seemed the contractor had bit off more than he could chew on taking our job. The first night the building was little more than halfway across, so we had the unique experience of being camped for the night in the middle of Seddon Street. Next day with the use of sapling logs used as rollers the home was in position and the building commenced.

The original building was enlarged to a two-windowed front, entrance in the centre. Behind the shop; a living room and small kitchen with a bedroom was built.

People nowadays would be surprised how small was the outlay involved. Our bed was made by Fred, framework and wooden slats (no wire woves!). Bits and pieces came from the farm. The furniture was decidedly utilitarian. My stove was installed, with open fire in living room.

Pioneering folk are not critical and are just as proud of their makeshifts as are those who start where their forebears hoped to get in 10-20-30-40 years' time. We loved ours and were wonderfully happy there. Here is something too good to be missed. Before our marriage Walt had been held up to buy a raffle ticket, an R.C. effort. For business reasons he took one – and, of course, as he did not want to, won. The prize was a dinner set, we could have used that contribution to our home, but Walt would not take it, but gave it back and it was drawn again.

Nell's present to us was a tea set, to which she added, to mark her approbation of Walt's renunciation, a dinner set. It was characteristic of her to so quietly set her seal of approval on the refusal of that which might have been ours.

My own policy about raffles as a businesswoman became "Sorry, I don't give to raffles. Would you accept a small donation instead."

In after years, when not in business it was a polite refusal. People who can raise money so easily by that means have no right to my money. Our own church grows by their consecrated oftimes sacrificial gifts of its members.

Here might I add my experience of giving to God's work, or to a worthy or humanitarian cause; God is no man's debtor. Frequently I have been called to give at a sacrifice that I can truly and sincerely say with the great and much loved missionary Miss Amy Carmichael in one of her poems (Goodly my Heritage) "Not a good have I lacked."

We are never poorer when we give to God's work in His way is my unvarying experience.

I remember once a friend (Mrs Marshall) and I were at a missionary's meeting in the Baptist Hall, and were moved by the tale he told and his evident love for the people he worked among.

As we went out she put 10 shillings in the plate placed near the door and said "I had only 2/6 and a 10 shilling note, and wondered which I should give, but after what he has given up, I just could not put in the half crown. That has to do me till next payday."

We passed out of the building and Graham King said "Mrs Marshall, could you do with a sack of pumpkin? Dad is going to plough them in, and you may as well have some."

I remarked "That was a quick return, wasn't it. God is no mean debtor." My friend was a Canadian. I should have asked her if she used pumpkin for dessert as pumpkin pie.

So I have found. We don't always see His hand so quickly or how would we learn lessons in fact? That is how we grow. Amy Carmichael proved it in her Indian work, from girlhood to old age as she wrote in Goodly my Heritage.

"Not a good I have lacked
Lord I admire I adore!"

Times were good. Our business grew and prospered. The first building was soon outgrown. We enlisted the aid of my father in planning a new and larger building.

At his suggestion we laid strong foundations and built the framework and outward shell of a second storey to be finished as funds were available. How good his advice turned out to be!

He drew the plans, made out to specifications, with the quantity of timber to be ordered. The joinery was supplied by his firm, McAndrews of Paeroa and was of heart kauri.

We called tenders for labour only supplying the material ourselves. The successful tenderer was a young married man. His was the lowest tender. He did not complete the job realising his tender was too low so we helped out and the job was completed. I am sorry I cannot remember his name. He was an honourable man and did his best for us.

So the job was done, or at least the first part as planned.

Walter took his part in the progress of Raetihi. He was elected to the Borough Council, and more than once or twice declined to stand for the Mayorality. He thought that the honour should be held by those who had leisure and a home fitted to give hospitality to municipal visitors, preferably a retired man and able to take a greater part in the town's social life than we could. Our growing family and a home which was part of a business premises was not suitable for such entertainment. He held the office of Deputy Mayor, and from long experience was able to take the mayor's place in local politics when necessary.

So began a business career of 37 years. Before our marriage Walt had accepted the S.B. Ins. [South British Insurance] agency for the district, and also the office of the registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages. No wonder he found need of a partner! The Justice department gazetted me as his deputy and so it came to pass that every baby's birth in my district was registered by us, principally by me. Unless he was absent on a business trip I was not called upon to perform a marriage. The first time I did, with the aura of my own still on me, was a momentous occasion. The office got an extra ration of spit and polish, and a few flowers were placed round to give the place a more festive air.

I remember wishing the bride and groom as great happiness as my husband and I enjoyed. Meeting them once years later, I thought they seemed happy and contented. At times, as I registered little boys (and girls) I wondered sometimes if I should be registering the birth and name of some future great man or woman. Quite a number of the world's truly great have been of humble, and often country origin. If that ever was so, in the course of above 50 years I haven't known of it. I have registered future men of wealth, doctors not a few, a clergyman or two, but not as far as I know, any great man. At least he hasn't shown up yet!

A marriage by registrar has no set service. Necessary notice being given, particulars entered in the marriage notice book, the party arrives. They usually bring friends as witnesses sometimes quite a number of relatives and friends arrive; occasionally when secrecy is desired, the registrar may arrange to provide witnesses. I have known a prospective bride to slip quietly in the back door (of our house) while a little later the groom walked into the shop, asking for "the watchmaker" to be shown into the workshop. By regulation, the door must be kept open, so the marriage register having been previously written up, the formal questions were asked and the book signed at the table out of range of anyone in the shop. The groom then departs through the shop, while the bride, watching her opportunity, slips away as quietly as she had come.

In a small place, where most people know one another, to keep the actual date of the marriage secret is not easy. We found that could be done without infringing the law.

We were highly favoured in our later business years, by having in our office, a young lady who would have been an ideal confidential secretary to a cabinet minister. Brainy and discreet, her quick wit could save any situation, and her forethought often helped us. Marjorie was very quiet. She had only one job before coming to us, in the office of the County clerk. Her qualities gave no indication of her alert brain and quick perception. She was with us till her marriage eight years later. New Zealand should be richer because of her sons, if they inherit her brain. She had no daughter, a pity.

Chapter 15 Children and war

So it was, that in November 1907 when Walt and I married, there were many fine folk who became life-long friends. Because of the quality of the settlers and trades and businessmen who followed, the country prospered, and the moral atmosphere was good.

Of course, in the wake of progress there are always some undesirables, looking for easy pickings, but being an isolated community we probably suffered less from them. I remember once, years later, the whole district suffered from petty thieving. People found they could not leave washing out overnight, as they were used to to keep them a good clear white. Anything saleable or second-hand was liable to vanish. No one had a clue to the evildoers, but eventually they were found to be a family living about half a mile up the Valley Road. When the police got there they found the father dead, but whether he had committed suicide (hanged himself) or been murdered was not found out. The family disappeared unlamented. An open verdict was declared.

In 1907, another Raetihi marriage took place. The lady with whom Bob Wyche kept company, having spent so many years helping to bring up her sisters and brothers, found herself free, and Bob made arrangements for her to join him. When the boat arrived in Wellington they were married.

When Walter and I came home from our wedding the town turned out the same evening, came all the way to Ashwell's farm to welcome us in real back-blocks style, by "tin canning". Each one, armed with a noisy instrument usually an empty kerosene tin, arrived as a crowd and made the night hideous.

Whereupon the company was invited in and regaled with the best the house afforded. It took Walt and me by surprise. Two or three miles is a long walk. They explained that only folk in good standing were so honoured.

As you may imagine, our tin-canning was only a circumstance to that tendered to the Wyches, which must have been rather a trial to Mrs Wyche a new English immigrant.

The town now had two new businesses. The founders of each would have been eligible candidates for Rotary, which hadn't been born then, or at least had not come to New Zealand.

One was Dr Owen and small family, our first doctor. What tide of Fortune swept such a man so far from the gracious living of the Home land, one can only guess. Raetihi owes much to him. A keen observer, he was a genius at diagnosis. Once, there was an epidemic of sickness from which the Maoris

around Ohakune were dying like flies. Dr Ireland came by special request, as he belonged to Raetihi, and as he neared the first native home he stopped, sniffed, and said "I know what it is, typhoid!" He took over, and in very short time had the situation in hand. There was no further spread.

I found he made few mistakes. He never spared himself. Perhaps we had a little more inside knowledge than most, being registrars of births and deaths, therefore recording all such certificates.

He left us to join the army in the First World War, but was himself a very sick man when the war ended, and died soon after of cancer of the throat. When Walt or other old friends went to Wellington and visited him, he greeted them cheerfully, and made light of the sufferings. Raetihi folk owed much to him, their first doctor.

The other new business was a legal practice of T.A. Harris, MA, LLB, formerly a teacher, from Motueka, brother of Walter and John. Into the practice came as partner a young man Lionel Tansey, and the firm was known as Harris and Tansey.

When later young Tansey lost his life in the war, T.A. (as he came to be appropriately styled) made it a condition that, whoever later was to acquire the business, should keep in the name of the firm both names.

"T.A." saw the township become a borough, and was elected its first mayor.

The firm of Ashwell was getting well into stride. Besides being district Registrars, we held also the agency for the South British Assurance Company and did land agency work.

The founder continued his trade of watch repairing, which the business of Jeweller, Stationer and Bookseller and Fancy Goods were added, and prospered as the settlement grew.

For the first two years we worked together Walt at his trade, but as manager his time at the bench was much broken.

For the first two years, we worked side by side, getting everything well going. Then, as Conan Doyle put it, the duet became a trio with the advent of the first child. Trying to please both sides of the family, the poor mite was burdened with three names Dorothy Ellen Nightingale. The first I had long planned should be handed down, the name of my beloved and wee sister, Molly's twin, who died at 18 months. The second was Grandma Ashwell's name. My own mother's name was Annie which I did not like, so Nightingale her maiden name was given instead. I have suffered from my daughter's indignation ever since.

These problems must frequently occur to the embarrassment of young marrieds. It's a chancy business this name giving. "Hector" may be given to one who turns out a reserved and nervous child, small of stature, and Leslie or Adrian to some he-man giant who is promptly renamed by his associates as "Bill" or "Dick", or nickname such as "Tiny".

Of the technicalities of childbirth we had everything to learn. I was advised by those who knew not to be upset when pains seemed to begin. There could be many false alarms.

By our reckoning, baby was due about 19th of July, so when pains came about midday on 29 June, we supposed them to be those misleading false alarms. They were persistent, but we went to bed about nine. I could not sleep, so we got up and sat by the fire. Then Dad had a brainwave. To prepare hot water for bathing, we hung a kerosene tin over the fire. So Dad thought it was a good idea for me to have a warm bath, and hung up the kerosene tin. I was preparing for a bath when I knew for certain that this was no false alarm. This must be the real thing and said so. My bag had already been packed, so I quickly dressed. We grabbed the bag and set off to walk the half mile to Mrs Ingram the midwife's home on top of a steep hill. Every so often I had to stop and cling to Dad till the pain eased. How I ever climbed the hill to the house I don't know, but we got to the door. Dad knocked loudly and as soon as Mrs Ingram answered Dad turned and tore back for Dr Owen.

Meantime Mrs I. and her husband got up. The bed was remade, and with great relief I got into it.

Dad had hurried a protesting doctor, "Why man" he said "first babies take many hours sometimes more than a day to come to birth ". On his arrival Mrs Ingram got water in the bedroom basin and as he washed his hands he turned his head and asked "How do you feel" I had just answered "not too good" when there came an indignant wail from under the bed clothes. Doctor did not even wait to dry his hands but made a dive to tear off the bedclothes and rescue the infant.

An exciting half-hour followed, for Doctor whispered to the nurse "There is another coming". There was, but she was stillborn. When it was over Dr Owen said "You are a brave woman. I brought Mrs P's twelfth baby into the world a week ago and she made more fuss than you did with your first".

I have thought since that if I were having a twelfth I might have made a big fuss too!

The Ashwell family had been excited over the prospect of a first grandchild. As Dad had to open the shop at eight, and start the newspaper run, he could

not very well go. Alf Parkes, the nearest relative, had a particular engagement, but Rev Martin, now Methodist minister, who boarded with the Parkes, volunteered.

He strolled into the farm kitchen with his sunny smile and twinkling eyes, and turning to "Mother" said "Well, Mrs Ashwell, I have often heard you are a good mother. Now I hear you are a grandmother."

The family was hoping "it" would be a girl, and so got their wish.

No baby ever received a warmer welcome. Grandpa gave her cot, and Grandpa, Grandma, and Nell had each a particular pet name. Grandpa's Little Lamb, Grandma's little love.

New born babies, certainly fair children, are not pretty at birth. Frankly, I look with surprise at the red wrinkly little mortal, who gave then no indication of future good looks. When Dad came that evening I felt I must prepare them for the shock and apologised for her appearance. "She is not good-looking, but she's ours, and I bet she will be clever." Our comments notwithstanding, she went right ahead. When a fortnight later, on the way home, with her in my arms we met T.A. and Mrs Harris with a smile T.A. said as one teacher to another "I guess you will find her harder to manage than a school full".

My time now was divided between house and shop. We got help in the shop to free Dad from minor interruptions, Olive, eldest of the Geo. Rose family, a fine worker, who was with us till her marriage.

I have mentioned Reverend Martin, a young unmarried minister of the Methodist Church. Our circuit was his second charge since college. We found him a man of the true "shepherd" heart. His parishioners were one large family, whose concerns, doubts and difficulties, joys and sorrows, he would share.

I am sure it gave him pure joy to trudge five miles and back on a muddy clay road to be the bringer of welcome news.

My sister Lily had been like my brother Bill, a strong prop to the family at Paeroa while the home was built and the family grew up. Florence had begun her teaching career; Molly, who loved babies had come to live with me and see if I perhaps could help her get her Proficiency.

Her trouble was Maths. In all else she was far above the average. Education in New Zealand was very slow in getting away from the semi-barbarous set up of English public Schools. There was no teachers training college to set new standards, and encourage higher ideals. The principal instrument of teaching was in many cases, the cane – later suppressed by the more humane strap.

So Molly, born with no aptitude for Maths, indeed quite the reverse, suffered for years an acute form of torture. There being no training for teachers any old dame or aspiring student was considered good enough to teach the Primers. Molly was unlucky to get an infant teacher who should have been sent in to discard long before. Therefore she had very little idea of Arithmetic when she got into standard I. She was most unfortunate to have as teacher of Stds I & II an Asiatic (or half caste) whose method of teaching arithmetic was to show a sum, work it out with the class and set them a number of sums to work out. With well taught infant graduates it could have worked, but only those to whom Maths came easily could learn that way.

So, right through Stds I & II for poor Molly, a sensitive bright little thing, morning school had an invariable pattern. School went in, so, an apprehensive little one struggled with arithmetical hieroglyphics for an hour, knowing that after playtime she, with other similar unfortunates would be caned because she had so few, if any, sums right.

This, too, for an otherwise clever child, whose only fault was a lack of mathematical sense, plus, as I have shown, no background of good primer teaching. The Asiatic teacher was, I believe, a twin. I once travelled in one of the old railway carriages with long seats on each side of the carriage. Opposite was a pretty sweet-faced young woman who I learned was twin sister to Molly's teacher. I remember thinking if she, and not her sister, had been Molly's teacher her schooldays would not have been so grim, for by another mis-chance, the teacher of Stds I & II was given standards III & IV, the following year, and Molly had her for four years.

Changes came, Education was modernised, the cane (a wicked supplejack found in New Zealand bush) gave place to the strap, and slowly a more modern outlook took the place of crude beginnings.

But to return to Molly.

With what thankfulness of mind she must have begun the school year under a new teacher, in standard V.

An incident regarding her previous teacher may be worth recording. A classmate of Molly's became very ill, and did not recover.

Through her delirium she raved in terror of this teacher, so that her distracted father said "Don't let me ever see that woman. I could kill her."

It was told that she did pay a visit to express sympathy and murder was not done. That showed more bravery than it took to ill-treat small children. Whether the person or the system was the more to blame is debatable. Luckily our judgement is not final.

Then Std IV passed and Molly began to enjoy school, excellent in all but one subject, and in drawing, for which she had inherited my father's gift.

To get "Proficiency" a pupil had to pass in every subject. Molly was Excellent all through except Arithmetic so she failed. And this is how she comes into my Raetihi story, for Mum asked me to take her for a year. She would help me with Dorothy and I could help her to master enough to get a pass in Arithmetic.

So, she enrolled in Std VI under Mr. Hird, who, after a week or two came to see me about it. This is what he told me. "In everything but arithmetic she is well above the average in essay writing and English brilliant, but as for arithmetic I can't seem to get back far enough to find a foundation to build on."

He did his best, and perhaps that best was to tell her story to the Inspector, who set her as a test paper a mental arithmetic card to be worked out on paper! On that test she got through.

As some gifted authoress has written "It couldn't happen today."

Molly's story gives one an idea of how much the outlook on education and child training has changed for the better. Some folk think it has gone too far in the other direction of making everything too easy. They may be right.

If children are to become educated any worthwhile result requires discipline of mind. If too many take the easiest way, we as British will lose our world status as has happened to major nations in history. To those some unknown who may read this, I would say work hard at school. It will pay good dividends and is really a patriotic duty.

Our heritage has been hardly won and is worth striving to keep, less people take it from us to the despoiling of the world.

To get back to Raetihi. Molly loved the baby, and enjoyed her school life. She became devotedly attached to Nellie Ashwell, for all the 14 years difference in their ages. Nell had in large measure that gift of selflessness that could enter into the lives of children or aged people with equal facility. And Molly, the Mahony youngest, was very lovable.

A few years after the return of Alf Parkes with his bride, to New Zealand, his brother George came out with his family of four sons and one daughter. Bert the eldest, Alf, Edith, Jeff and Allan, the two youngest being schoolchildren.

Alf Parkes was the eldest of a missionary family; his parents mission service was China under Methodist auspices.

Mrs George Parks was born Abraham and was of Jewish extraction but she showed little of the Hebrew heritage of brains in her make-up. She was pleasant and easy to get on with, but a bit irresponsible and gossipy, though well-meaning enough.

On the day Dorothy was born, Dad asked Alf if he would do him the service of riding up to the Ashwell farm with the news. Because Alf was too busy Rev Martin volunteered and had that honour.

Had Alf put his own interests aside knowing how welcome would be the news he brought, it might have taken an hour or two of his time. He could also have repaid a little of the long series of kindnesses the family had shown him, from invariable Sunday hospitality to countless kindnesses in his bachelor days. Had he done this small service he would have saved himself suffering and probably have added years to his life. Rachel, his wife, would in all probability have lived longer to bless the world. Being agents for outside newspapers, it was necessary for Walt to open the shop to supply runners. Rev. Martin walked up the two miles and Alf set out with horse and dray on his proposed job. He was not far from his own gate making for the Main Street when the horse's blinkers fell off. While Alf was replacing the horse got restless, Alf was knocked down and run over by the dray. His leg was badly broken and infected by the mud. Between him and the nearest hospital (Wanganui) were two days painful journeying to Pipiriki and down the river. Though Dr Owen went with him and alleviated the discomforts to the best of his ability, he had not the appliances to properly set the break. All he could do to alleviate the suffering was done. Infection set in, and the break was long in healing, so long had Alf to lie in bed that the hip of the uninjured leg grew to the socket, resulting in permanent crippling.

The news of the accident was kept from me till I was ready to return home with the infant. Poor Alf was an inmate of that hospital for two years while Rachel with Ashwell help saw to the farm and being so full of details of Alf's illness.

Raetihi continued to grow more settled and the Ashwell business grew with it. Larger premises became an urgent need and tenders were called and work began. In spite of drawbacks including the insolvency of the successful tenderer the building was finished before the birth of the second child named Florence Forde, both family names, the Forde belonging to my mother's ancestors and was given at her request.

As the surviving family know it well, there is no need to describe it in detail. The shop was roomy with double fronted plate glass windows. The stairs gave access to the storey above, but only the lower storey was finished inside. We

called it 'the toy room ', because there we displayed toys at Christmas besides such bulky stock as prams and wooden toys of all sorts. It served also as a bulk store. At Christmas time it was a wonderful place, the abode of Father Christmas and the mecca of the children for many miles round. There was always a great Christmas tree, decorated, bright with tinsel and lit by strings of coloured electric light. Some of this was still future. Raetihi had not as yet its electric system.

Behind the shop was the office and Dad's workshop. The door which led from the shop had the large printed notice "Registrar of Births, Deaths & Marriages".

Behind this again were found living rooms, kitchen, living room and 2 bedrooms which just served present needs. Though we were in the middle of a town block, Walt purchased the section at the back, and left an eight foot alley right through from Seddon Street to Queen Street beyond, thus in effect making his place a corner store.

This short cut was in use for many years, even after the business passed out of our hands. It is now closed. Walt's idea however was good business. {The door post with annual measurements of each child. To 1909.}

Raetihi was well served by most of her business men, as was the countryside by the Waimarino County Council.

Her early destiny was guided by men of integrity and public spirit as Peter Brass, P.G. Smith and the bulk of land owners. When Walt started in business, the township was a 'riding' in the county council.

With the growth of the district, Raetihi graduated from a township and presently elected its own Borough Council.

With men like T.A. Harris MA, LLB and other far-seeing men as their leaders, schemes for road and other improvements were undertaken. The men who had mapped out the township had wisely laid out a wide main street. They have for this the blessings of the generations who have benefitted by their wisdom.

Electricity was making its debut in New Zealand, and the Borough fathers found in the many streams that had their origin in the perpetual snows of Ruapehu the means of establishing their own electrical system. Two brothers, gifted engineers working in the county, planned a scheme which could run with little attendance.

A snow-fed stream was diverted to pour into a deep declivity, and there it was planned to build a power house. At present the names of the originators of the scheme elude me. They were men of real ability.

The scheme was eventually developed, and in the 20s on a never to be forgotten day, electricity was turned on in Raetihi and extended to a limited radius around to supply power to nearby farms.

Many a time I climbed with the children as the sun set, up a hill at the back of the town to see the lights come on at the set time, with always the delighted "Ohs" of the children at seeing the little town aglow with fairy lights.

Our scheme was not an expensive one, and electricity and usually our bills for current were very light.

Ohakune followed with a somewhat more ambitious scheme. Later, pressure was put upon both places to merge with the Government, with the inevitable consequence – high and ever increasing costs for current.

What a pity the first scheme was not adhered to. Much of the pressure came from county settlers whose wants were not served by the original scheme. Such a modest sensible scheme would have served Raetihi for many generations. Her situation prevents her from ever becoming a large town. It is destined to remain, as it started, the centre of a farming district. Its heyday was at the time of the saw-milling industry. When that wealth was used up, her expansion ceased.

Small schools around have been closed, and the country children are carried to Raetihi per bus; but I doubt if the roll is a large as it was when we left in 1938, before it had absorbed so many one-teacher schools.

I have said that the business grew. So did our family. Bill (Willsford Nind, also family names) was born in March 1914.

Walter rejoiced greatly at the birth of the first son. Though others came, none became so near to him. Bill in return, cared more for his Dad than any of the other children except one, Ruth, born a year later.

I suppose 1914 will always be one of the great pivotal years of English history. What changes it brought in world history. It rocked the world even to the centre of the little specks in the South Pacific that comprise the Commonwealth of New Zealand. Were any of its families unaffected? I think not many.

The T.A. Harris's lost their gifted eldest son, Roy Harris M.B., who went straight from medical College, and was killed attending the wounded at the front line. His service was voluntary. The need was so great, he did not wait to get his M.D. by two years hospital service.

His cousin Ray, son of John Harris, was one other who also did not return.

The Risks had little heart to stay in Raetihi when their younger son William was killed and they moved to Ohura.

One I could not mourn as I did for so many who had been my pupils was Gilbert Springer. He was mentally handicapped. For such, life has little prospect. Perhaps few cared for him as much as I did. He was always in danger of exploitation and ill-treatment. I like to think he has gone to a life beyond, which is far better than Earth would have given him. Two others of my pupils I remember who made the supreme sacrifice were Alf Dauphin and Manukura. Their names are on the School Roll of Honour as well as in my affectionate memory.

W.N.A (hereafter termed Bill A) with considerable difficulty, and the aid of a good constitution and an able Doctor, managed to get through infancy. His coming coincided with Dorothy's early school days, and the encounters through school, of most children's complaints.

When he was 9 weeks old and a severe epidemic of whooping cough was brought home, it didn't bypass his cradle. I can never forget that dreadful cough. After battling through a wrecking spasm, he would lie in my arms, as limp as a rag. After a while whose eyes would open and a smile come.

I remember, as I went through it with him, saying with bitter vehemence "God, can you take from us so gallant a spirit?" God heard that prayer, for it was that in the essence, and left us and our son.

Sickness, I learned in later years did not originate, but came through man's disregard of God's laws. But then I had much to learn of God's love and ways.

In 1915, Ruth was given us for a while. She was a tiny slender wee thing, and grew like a little golden haired fairy. She looked like a Sunbeam darting round, and that was what she was, with her sunny loving nature. She was a favourite everywhere, and lavished love on her dollies. When she died at 4½ she could read, and had plans for school, and even what she would have in her lunch when she started school.

The cause of her death was tonsillitis, wrongly treated as diphtheria. It was after Dr Owen's time. Had she the benefit of his gift for diagnosis we would not have lost her.

I suffered much when my sister little Dorothy died; but Ruth's death was the greatest blow.

One thing that helped brace me was being wakened one night, shortly after her death, by the heartbroken sobs of her Dad. He had tried to keep his own sorrow back to help me. From then on we faced our sorrows together, each trying to help the other. I must confess that for a time it rocked my faith in a God of Love. That such a bright little spirit was taken from the world that needed her contribution to its happiness found no adequate answer in my troubled mind.

The kindness and love of friends and loved ones helped plus a life full of ever present and pressing duties. Among comforts of that time we remembered a letter from our beloved "T.A." Circumstances or distance or even estrangement may separate you from your family, but Ruth you will always have, he wrote.

The years ahead never took away from that comfort. It was true.

I am afraid that when their great blow fell upon the T.A.s, I had no similar gem of truth ready for their comfort, though we sorrowed with and for them.

Gradually, our premises were finished and more rooms added.

The phonograph came to New Zealand. We added this department to our business.

The second storey now comprised the large "toy room", behind this a good sized "record and phonograph" room, and three bedrooms, to accommodate our growing family and occasional visitors.

In the privacy of the phonograph room machines were exhibited and sold. Records at first cylindrical, were stored in pigeonholes.

There were now two children at school while Bill continued to catch all that came along. That he survived was a demonstration of the ability of the human frame to meet and combat disease on the resources inbuilt. I believe but for this he would have been a big man. When he started school at 5 years old he had all but one of the complaints outlined on his admission card with rheumatic fever added for good measure.

I have mentioned that my sister Lily took on a sole teacher school, and proved able to manage and teach great lads half as big again as she was.

At Ashwells she met John (Gladstone) Spence whose farm was on the Motiti Road near Horopito and 11 miles from Raetihi.

When our marriage was two years old Lily and John Spence were married at Paeroa so that there were now three representatives of the Mahonys living in the Waimarino.

Gay was born about 1910. Like my own family she was burdened by family names, Lily Willsford Alice. In under two years Alec (Alexander Forde) joined the family, and later in the same year as our Bill (1914) Ian Gladstone.

When Dorothy was about four, my sister (Aunt Florrie) married Will Gordon.

I was privileged to see a lot of them both in the ensuing years. They lived in Matamata, where Bill (W.A. Gordon) had a timber and ironmongery business. He had met Florrie when she taught there, and had had business relations with my father as the travelling representative of McAndrews, Paeroa. Because Walt was always willing that I should go to these family celebrations, I was able to be at both Lily's and Florrie's weddings. At the latter, Dorothy and Gay were tiny flower girls.

We all liked quiet, modest Bill G. He hardly seemed the sort to attract so vivacious and clever a girl as my sister and indeed had to wait long enough for her consent. I always liked him and Florrie and I came to the conclusion that if our circumstances had been reversed, we could have fallen in love with each other's husbands. Walt and Florrie suited each other and I could have loved Bill Gordon. As it was, we all esteemed one another and I mourned Bill's death at a comparatively early age.

Bill Gordon was the salt of the earth. His family came from near Waihi. Mrs Gordon had a considerable young family when her husband died. Bill, the eldest, was her mainstay.

Mrs Gordon ran a store with the Post Office. Quite early in life Bill rode round the district in charge of the mailbags, so small that he was described as a peanut on a pumpkin. Blessed with no mean intellect, he made the most of his meagre schooling, plus his graduation from the school of "Hard Knocks".

Quiet and unassuming, he had only to sit down at company before most of the children were crowded round him, sitting on his knees, climbing on his back, to the indignation of his own children Jean and Doug. What extra sense have little ones that takes them unerring to the side of such quiet big hearted men? Walt and I both enjoyed him, and never tired of drawing him out. As mayor of Matamata for many years, he has more than one monument to his selfless service.

At one time, when vested interest in the sawmilling business, almost acquired a priceless bit of old Kauri Forest, he roused the town people to counteract their moves. The land in question was made a National Park, and I believe a tablet in commemoration of his effort was erected there. Bill himself used to say "It won't be long before newer generations will be saying "Who was this Gordon fellow, and why has he this tablet in his honour?"

Perhaps the heavenly record will be "Good son, good husband, good father and citizen of no mean integrity". What do earthly monuments count?

Looking around the moss grown tablets in the Raetihi Cemetery, I realised how unenduring is man's memory. Many a story could be told from those moss covered stones by one like myself who knew at least part of the stories of such people Grey's immortal elegy touched upon.

People like myself, who knew a good deal of the stories of people laid at rest there, could, given like genius, write comparable elegies of folks known to us. In the heavenly records, we are told the names of such, are recorded. "Their name liveth for evermore."

Chapter 16 Bill Mahony, the Raetihi fire

The 1914-18 war dragged its weary length, and in November 1918, peace was declared.

Very few homes had not suffered loss. Fathers of young families of six or more were exempted from service. There were families who had up to three boys at the war of whom none came back. There were others who sent an only son, and he was spared.

The day Peace was declared was unique in the experience of most New Zealanders.

I was returning from the Post Office where I had posted some early mail, and met Mr. Waldegrave so jubilant he insisted on my accompanying him into Keucke's to celebrate in soft drink. I remember we chose red drink as being the most festive looking.

The fire bell was rung. Everything that could swell the din, motor horns, and such were pressed into use. Staid folk paraded up and down the main street, waving flags or substitutions. Formal celebrations came later but that spontaneous outburst was unforgettable.

With many, like the T.A.s there must have been tears amid the rejoicing.

The Ashwell family were among those who had no personal mourning. The only member who went overseas was Ernie, and war was over as he reached England. After visiting the Ashwell clan in England he returned without having seen anything but the trappings of war.

My brother Bill came out of the war minus his right-hand, and with the loss of the skilled trade of building he had been 16 years acquiring.

The D.C.M. he had earned would not in any way compensate. Because of his disability he did not marry though there was a splendid young woman who would have married him. "He couldn't ask her" he put it. "to take half a man".

I wish he had, for I too, knew and loved her, and with her at his side, life would have opened up in deep and true happiness for them both.

When the soldiers went away the bands played, and crowds cheered the departing troop ships. They came back, met only by their relatives and perhaps a few patriotic folk to make a fresh start embittered by the fact that jobs were filled by younger non-combatants.

Bill went time after time to the Rehab office in Auckland without getting placed. When I visited Auckland on a buying trip, I found him most

despondent, ready as he put it "To make a hole in the harbour".

One of our wholesalers was on the Patriotic Committee. I asked for an interview, and was so disturbed over the situation that I cried. I was asked to come back next day when he would have had time to look into the matter.

True to his word next day he had his report. He admitted that jobs for disabled men were hard to get. His description of Bill's reaction to their questionnaire was illuminating.

Because, having lost his right hand, filling up of the form was hard, the clerk just asked him the questions, filling up the form for his signature.

For the first few details all went well. Name, number, battalion, etc. When it came to "Have you ever served a prison sentence?" Instead of giving the reply "No", with a possible reference to St Stephen's Church, of which he had been an officer, he turned on his heel with a "to hell with the lot of you." That was the end of the interview.

With his record, such a humiliating procedure would naturally be the last straw. Before applying he surely had tried every available avenue of work. His reaction therefore can be no matter for surprise. I am reminded of the Rev L.A. North's reply regarding the Christiansen affair "What else could he do?" [Gisborne Baptist church pastor circa 1958-60]

My intervention however did some good in bringing his case to the fore.

Talking things over with the manager of "Collins" he suggested a small business venture. He was sure he could get backing for that in his case.

The result was that Bill was able to buy a small shop, with two rough living rooms behind. We were then in a position to help him. He made a livelihood. Ohakune got a fine citizen and Borough Councillor. For many years he consistently topped the poll at Borough elections.

Like Walt he could have had the honour of mayoralty, but declined to compete for much the same reasons, inability to extend hospitality.

Interalia, hospitality can take more than one form. In later years when the billiards champion Clark McConachy visited Ohakune, and wanted to climb Ruapehu, he was told Ohakune had no guides, but Mr. Mahony was a keen mountaineer, with very many trips to his credit.

Bill demurred at first, as the climb meant leaving his business for two days, but eventually undertook to guide Mr. McConachy and make the necessary arrangements.

The two men began the climb, and started, Mr-ing each other till Bill said "I am not used to be Mr. Mahony when I climb, call me "Bill", it's easier on the lungs".

His companion agreed, on condition that Bill used his front name "Clark".

Bill remarked on its being an unusual Christian name, and Clark replied "Yes it's a family surname -- the cotton Clarks. My mother was a Miss Clark".

When, some time later Bill told me this, I replied "Well, Bill, the man you piloted would be your cousin." As quite a young girl my mother had told me when I was reading the name on a cotton reel "The Clarks are relations of ours, cousins. His father and our grandmother Mary McGaffin (afterward Nightingale) would be first cousins."

The year 1914 had given us our eldest son, and 1918 saw the birth of our second, Roy Bertram (the name Dad's choice, the second being in remembrance of the Rev. Ivo Bertram who had married us).

Roy was a very beautiful baby. I was not fond of nude photos. He is the only one of my children who had that indignity thrust upon them and that was because the photographer, a woman, begged me to have it done.

I have photos of him at quite a few stages; for which I was afterwards very glad. He had a head of snowy curls, which in his young manhood he despised, but neither oil nor brushing would rid him of his curls, though they darkened as time passed.

By this time our family numbered five, two at school, and already showing themselves good scholars.

When Roy was born, Ruthie (Ruth Frances after Walt's favourite aunt Frances Beard) was not quite 3. This aunt – Fanny -- married, but without change of name, a cousin who had emigrated to Australia. When his wife died, leaving a family of several children, Aunt Fanny went to Australia to take charge of the family, and married the father.

The family was deeply devoted to her and when she was very old, stone blind and deaf, the family in turn cared for her.

One of the daughters kept up a correspondence with Aunty Nell Ashwell but after Nell's death, touch with these relatives was lost.

"Beard" was one family name not passed on to Walt's and my children. I think Nell, whose second name it was, would not have minded missing it. That name together with "Harriet" can be dispensed with without regret.

About this time we had a visit from Walt's cousin, Alf P's sister, Mrs North and her long streak of a son, Alec. They stayed I think, for round about a year.

The Norths had been missionaries in China. I am almost sure they were not C.I.M.

Their son Alec [Aleck] had quite a Chinese cast of features. I am sure because of a life spent among Chinese. Before this I believed folk carry the characteristics of their forebears.

Alec seemed to be an exception, bearing the likeness in features, but not in skin colour, of the race among whom he had grown up.

From England came also a young man, Denis Chapman. Before her marriage to Alf, Rachel had been housekeeper to the Chapmans whose mother had died. She had been the only mother Denis knew, and when he developed T.B., invited him to come to her if in the milder New Zealand climate, he might be cured. After a year or two he grew worse, and wanted to go back to his own home.

Regretfully we saw him leave us. He did not live to reach home and was buried at sea somewhere in the Indian Ocean.

The Norths either went to South Africa or returned home. I cannot be sure which. While with us, they lived in a house on the Ameku Road little further on than Alf's and on the other side. The house was burned in the big fire.

The Norths came out while Gpa and Gma were still on the farm with Nell. Grandpa liked her least of his sisters. I suppose she would be much of a stranger to him, as most of her life had been spent on the mission field.

Once, in my single days, visiting Ashwells on the Sunday, Peter Brass took us to the highest hill on his farm. From there the outlook was on miles and miles of bush. I remember his remark that it would take 100 years to clear the land of bush.

The near outlook was not of grassy hill slopes, but of logs and stumps left after the bush had been chopped down. After the felled bush had been burned, large logs and stumps remained. The fire cleared the lighter growth.

Sawmills, with more modern machinery, cleared the good timber in much less time than Mr. Brass's estimate. But it was a great error to have tackled the bush with the axe and fire to get farms. It seemed then, the only way. Lack of good roads and railway facilities made the marketing of all but the best timber uneconomic. Perhaps we lacked the men of foresight and public spirit and had too many 'get rich quick' despoilers. There were needed more Bill Gordons than we had to save and use economically our valuable inherited wealth.

Some of the wiser Maori leaders must have thought long thoughts without having the power to do much about it.

Thoughtful men, like my uncle Charlie Nightingale did write and talk of this criminal waste, but were so few as to be mere voices crying in the wilderness.

Uncle's idea was "Build your town, and grow outwards, using the timber and other resources for building." He used to argue that, though it would mean isolated settlements, it was the only good way.

Unfortunate that he came a bit late to New Zealand to get an ear to his doctrine. He was an ardent single taxer, maintaining that the land alone was the source of our wealth.

Certainly we New Zealanders wasted very much of our national wealth.

When settlers took up sections, mostly in areas of bush land, the first labour was to fell the bush and clear as much as possible before sowing grass seed. Everything was tinder dry after a severe drought.

So, after felling, came the boom which cleared up most of the light wood, branches and scrub. The ground was wonderfully fertile. Large logs and stumps were left to rot. Much of this was then gradually used.

Great care was taken to burn that felled bush at a time when the wind was in the right direction, and to avoid fire spreading to neighbouring holdings.

In the year 1919, much of the land was partially cleared, but even on the land surrounding the township there was much still covered with stumps and logs. Further in from Raetihi were many places recently taken up and only partially cleared.

In the autumn of that year, when much land in mid-New Zealand was being fired, a heavy gale from Australia struck from the Taranaki coast, fanning these small burns into a terrible conflagration, and sweeping in from the coast with great force that from the hinterland of Taranaki the sky darkened from midday where we were, and anxious watch was kept.

The Raetihi postmaster Mr. W. J. Gibson, spent the night in the exchange, while Raetihi folk prepared for an influx of back country settlers.

Mr. Gibbs kept in contact with country phones, getting reports and as the fire drew nearer advising the folks to leave and come into Raetihi. Then about midnight the fire gale came over the hills, licking up all in its path. Farmers freed their animals allowing them to make the best of their way to safety.

There were many strange stories to be told, where the fire burnt a dog kennel and passed the house.

Or where the house was burned and all out-buildings left standing.

In the township itself Walt and others went up and down the main street with buckets of water and a pannikin to douse burning fragments carried by the gales. Each man took care of his own neighbourhood including the bank manager who put out many incipient fires from burning leaves and fallen sparks and even coals carried on the gale.

The Ashwells' farm had been sold and Nell and Grandpa and Grandma were living in a cottage just below the hills. Grandpa was crippled and helpless, Grandma was very old and deaf. Nell fought the fire with very little help. When the usual time for getting up came Grandma wanted to be dressed but Nell had pulled the blinds down tying heavy shoes to each end of the dark blind, and so persuaded Grandma it was still night, and too early to get up. Grandpa was in his wheelchair near the best exit for Nell to wheel him out.

Their house was saved, but by morning the wind dropped when heavy rain came, Nell was unable to open her eyes which were too inflamed by the smoke and heat.

An elderly lady saved her large house, though quite alone, as Nell and others did, by standing guard with water. When the rain came she had emptied all her tanks.

She saw a neighbour preparing to take shelter, as many had in a deep culvert, and advised him to stay by his much smaller house as he could well save it. "My life's worth more than my house to me" he said as he had made his way to the culvert.

Some had not that choice. Dear friends of mine, living just under the hill, had their windows blown in and the house filled with burning debris. They had to fly and lost everything.

Others were people in like plight. One family lost their grocery and grain store, stables and horses and store rooms at one end of the town, and their homes at the other end. They were unable to leave their homes and young families. Had they been able, the business premises could have been saved.

A relief train was sent from Ohakune, and a number of folk went off in it. Had the gale not dropped when it did, these people would have been trapped, for Ohakune and environs would have given more fuel to the fire than we did at Raetihi.

The majority who fought the fire saved their homes.

Walt had a beat which took in the nearby premises, and as he doused fire in one place continued along his beat, as did the bank manager in his. One man, having used up his water supply told how he had, as a last resort, continued the good work with some dozens of beer! This talk I think was not altogether believed!

In all 40 buildings were lost in Raetihi.

Among those who came to our place was a young married woman with her baby and such treasures as she could gather up; including a pair of pale green dancing pumps!

Her home was burned, and new blankets and urgent necessities they might have saved. But to see the whole countryside blazing is naturally not conducive to self-possessed thinking.

The man who made for the culvert when he could have saved his place was a 'homie' and so had not New Zealand's experience of facing fires and like emergencies.

We were not on the premises that night, as Walt took us to his brother's place in the street behind, where the children were put to sleep without being unduly frightened.

There was tragedy too, and the loss of three lives.

A woman who had a very unhappy married life with a brute of a husband left him, and came to the North Island with a friend. They lived as husband and wife, and she was very happy. She told me her story when she registered the baby, a little girl.

Frightened by the fire, they took refuge in the very worst place, the standing bush, where they were trapped. The man had a weak heart, and must have collapsed. When the bodies were found, her body was sheltering his, while she held the baby in the crook of her arm.

Her story could not be kept secret, because of the inquest, and the correct names had to be used.

When the Lord said "Judge not" we have no right of judgement. A woman like that deserved a good man. She was ready to put her body between him and the harm and would have given her life for his. Greater love hath no man than this.

Public subscription and government aid helped folk to get re-established, but even so, to many it was only the means of making a fresh start. The gains of years had been lost.

Many people next day were like Nell Ashwell, temporarily blind. Walt was. When in late afternoon he woke, I had to help him dress. Business, of course, was at a standstill.

No words of mine can convey anything like the whole story. I read an account later written, for a school magazine, by Mrs Keucke, whose premises were separated from ours by less than half a block. Hers differed from what I would have written and I realise that everyone's experience was individual and personal.

During the height of the visitation one lost sense of distance. Smoke shut out any long view. Through the haze one would see a new red glare, and know another building had gone. We might be wrong in our guess whose it was. The noise was terrific when the gale and fire were at the worst.

In Wellington that afternoon all office and business premises had to light up in order to work.

Mr. Gibbs the postmaster stuck to his job till the rain came! How many lives he may have saved, how many people he had directed to safety, cannot be told. He took it all very lightly. He had just done the job in hand. He also had kept the outside world informed. From him the base facts would be known, unadorned by a professional journalism.

Strange to say, some people were reluctant to desert their homes, and had almost to be forced to leave by their neighbours.

In at least one case where the house had gone and the folk were sheltering in the cowshed, strong men forcibly took the family off in their conveyance, the cowshed blazing up as they left.

The strength of the gale may be judged from what happened to the town hall which presented a good target. Every sheet of iron was ripped from the roof, and deposited in various parts of the Domain a block behind, a mass of crumpled wreckage. Nor was the town hall the only building to have the roof blown off, where there were no surrounding buildings to break the force of the wind. Though almost all the buildings destroyed by fire carried insurance the companies are protected against major disasters by a saving clause in their policies. Hence the need in this case of public subscriptions and government aid. Those who had taken their furniture out before leaving saved some.

There was one block of bush where some acres of trees were laid low as if the strip had been felled for a road. The fire had not caught there. Then, about mid-morning, the gale lost force and down fell the rain. Never was rain more welcome. The hardships which followed the fire are mostly forgotten but were real enough at the time and varied with the individual cases.

One general result was that for quite a time the taste of smoke was in all food which had to be cooked and even tea was smoke flavoured. There was then no town water supply and even where tanks had been emptied to fight the fire, they were refilled from smoke grimed roofs, and it was quite a time before tea tasted like itself again.

Those who had lost homes either went to stay with relatives, or found temporary accommodation. Some did not return.

On the whole there was little panic. Most of us were too busy fighting the fire, looking after invalids and children and aged folk, all making welcome snacks for the fire-fighters – this latter towards the end of the ordeal.

Most men like Walt were glad to drop into bed, utterly exhausted. By and large it was the business section who fought the fire where they found it and saved the town.

During the aftermath, many exciting tales were told. Before Walt took me and the family to his brother's we dug a deep hole and buried the Births, Deaths and Marriages records in a tin trunk, with our own business records. These were recovered without even the taint of smoke on them.

The man who claimed he had put out the fire with beer put in a claim for the dozen or so, which claim was not allowed, but raised a laugh or two.

It did not seem long before, for us it was 'business as usual'.

The school, then in its permanent situation at the lower end of Ward Street, had not suffered. The churches were intact. The centre of the town was intact. Only on the outskirts did business premises suffer. The townspeople could pride themselves on "a good save".

The fire did clean up the logs and stumps on the surrounding hills, giving a much better appearance to the town. After re-sowing, many farms were in better shape, so for those whose houses had been saved, any loss was soon made good by greater productivity.

There were a minority who were real losers, but even they soon got things going again. There was little moaning and much gratitude for fresh starts made.

Date of fire 18/3/18 [Wikipedia says 19-20/3/1918]

Chapter 17 Family life 1919-20

The year of the fire found the family five in number. Dorothy took to school like a duck to water and was then in Std. IV. Florrie starting two years later in Std. II, and Bill, Ruth and Roy pre-school age.

Both girls did well. Miss Day was infant mistress for both girls' primer time. It was interesting to find she considered Florrie's the best brain of the two. She may have been right. God, as regards humanity, never repeats in toto any human. Some are equally gifted but in different ways. Florrie was gifted with a keen ear and love of music, gifts not given to Dorothy, who given the same chance of music for two years, considered it a waste of time when life offered so many more enticing avenues of learning.

They both took high places in their own age-groups. They were unlike in disposition. Florrie seemed to have inherited more of her father's mental quality and ability, and Dorothy was more like my gifted and versatile father. In the school society, though, for one friend Dorothy made, Florrie would have a dozen. She was a general favourite. Dorothy made few friends but kept them.

At home Florrie was generous and helpful, and popular with the younger ones. Dorothy retained first place with the Ashwell grand-parents, so that honours and affection were pretty well divided. The older I grow, the more disinclined I feel to grade folk, especially children as clever, slow, or dull. So often we find the more ordinary child grow to be the wisest and most loved wife and mother, the slow English scholar develop into a mechanical genius, while the child who irritates us most may cause us to develop most in patience and understanding. I am so glad that not on us lies the onus of judging our fellows, at least not finally. That is the prerogative of God alone.

Bill started school in 1919, and after a year in the primers was put into lower Std. I. The primer entry that year was so large, the more forward children were drafted, as Bill was, into Std. I. He kept up the Ashwell school tradition in lessons, if not always in behaviour. After all is it not a truism that 'Boys will be boys'.

I think it was in 1919 Dorothy's school year was broken by illness. Diagnosed as influenza, which was then going the rounds, she made a very slow recovery, did not want to get up when she was told she might, did not even want to read.

Aunt Nellie was not satisfied with the doctor's verdict of 'depression after influenza' and urged us to take her to Dr Sinclair in Taihape.

She was sure that something much more serious was wrong, and so, with every care for her comfort, we took her to Taihape. Dr Sinclair diagnosed kidney trouble, prescribed treatment, and asked for a daily report per phone. This was done for some weeks of continual good progress, then I reported she wanted to get up. "What is she doing now?" He asked me. "Well", I replied, to be exact "she is sitting up in bed writing poetry". "She'll do!" He replied. And that was that.

The year 1919 was a troubled year for us though it gave back to us my beloved brother, returned from the slaughter of 14-18, minus his right hand, and weakened by being in gas-impregnated trenches. His decoration, D.C.M., was some slight recognition of his years of service. Gone were nearly 2 decades of craftsmanship in a trade he could not now pursue.

There were then no good artificial arms, though the "Leggers" were better provided for. He was given a steel contraption weighing many pounds, which would have taken its toll of a strong man's strength to wear.

It hung unused on the wall of his room (like how many others!) a war trophy – a tribute to the lack of imagination of the designers.

Bill was a very welcome addition to our household. I have often been touched to see the many complicated things he can do one-handed and the simple things that are impossible such as taking the top off a boiled egg, or peeling an apple.

He said on one occasion that when he found how much he could do with one hand, he wondered why we had been given two!

All his life he was one of God's "Givers". His stubborn Irish independence would not allow him to degenerate into a talker. His insight, sympathy and helpfulness made him an asset; that and his imperturbable good humour whatever the situation.

To us his presence was a blessing in a time of great need, for at the end of 1919 Walt went down with a serious illness. He seemed to have picked up the germ on a final pre-Christmas buying trip to Auckland.

The nearest diagnosis the doctor could make was "It appears to be first cousin to polio". Perhaps it would be more exact to delete the words 'first cousin'!

We had recently advertised for a watchmaker to do the bench work. With a growing family, I was less able to carry business responsibility so that Walt found he could not get time for his repair work. The reply to our advertisement was in such a precise, neat handwriting that we formed the opinion that this Mr. Mills was probably a small neat, exact, and probably fussy little man. When

a six footer, built to proportion turned up our surprise may be imagined. It turned out that Mrs Mills, an ex-school teacher, had written the letters. Before he came, nevertheless, Dad's workshop had the spring cleaning of its life, so that all was neat and in order on his arrival.

Mr. Mills had been happily established with us, when Walt was stricken. Nell was not at all satisfied with local medical opinion, and begged that we take him to Taihape, to Dr Sinclair, with whom we had previously consulted when Dorothy's illness had baffled local medical opinion.

So, with Mr. Mills and my strong help, we took him to Taihape, returning with an electrical machine for treating the spine. Mr. Mills had been sparring partner to a pro-pugilist, and knew how to give deep massage treatment. So we had all our material for treatment at hand. Bill gave the electrical stimulation, and Mr. Mills the deep massage, and Walt benefited, regaining gradually something of his former vigour.

Bill gave us invaluable aid at this time, and, though he certainly benefited physically, lost a good many chances of getting a start in taking up his new life bereft of his old trade. He might have had chances of overseeing, but these would naturally go to first-comers. Walt regained sufficient strength by the following Christmas for us to take him in January to the beach at Auckland (Northcote). During the busy month preceding Christmas we had the help of my dear friend, Mrs McWhirter's daughter Frances.

She took the children back in time for school, while we remained on in Northcote, where Walt fished from the seat on the wharf, breathing the strong sea air.

Frances was still in her early teens, and accepted the responsibility with the aplomb of a mature woman. Bill and I looked after Walt, who returned much improved as to his spinal trouble.

So, we returned home, and Walt's back broke out in boils, from neck to waist. That was the worst suffering he had to endure. His only relief was to lie in a warm bath, but in the end, this too passed. The scars of those boils never faded. He did regain much of his health but never quite his old vim and strength.

Ruthie was in her fourth year when she fell sick. Her throat was very sore and inflamed, and extremely painful. The doctor diagnosed diphtheria, wrongly, as it proved. Later it appeared she had tonsillitis. Not having the diphtheria virus, the antitoxin administered really caused her death.

She was a little fairy thing, slender and small bone, with large blue eyes and a head of sunny golden curls. She was such a merry, happy loving little

thing, and very active. Like a sunbeam she blessed us with her presence for 4½ years. She was bright mentally and could read. She was looking forward to school life, and had her school bag with book and pencil, and had even planned what she would have for school lunch.

As she grew worse, I seldom left her. Growing more and more alarmed I said to the doctor. "Is there nothing we can do. I am afraid she will slip through our hands. He made no reply to this, but told me not to lift her.

Then one morning, in bright sunlight she called "Mum don't put the light out" and she put up her hands imploringly.

I took into my arms, and for her the darkness turned to light. She was gone. May 24, 1920.

For years 24th May was the black day of the calendar. I hated it. We had borne such trials as came our way with fortitude, but this seemed to negate the love of God, and certainly disturbed my trust for years to come. Folk would say "Time heals all wounds", my mental reply was "Never this one."

When the Guy Thorntons came back after his demobilisation and Mrs Thornton came to see me she asked, as one sure of the answer. "And are you still finding the Lord to be all He promised?" I made a brief reply "He took our Ruthie".

During his illness Walt had been often cheered by her sunny presence.

Once, feeling particularly depressed, beset with fears that his active life was over, she trotted in with her pram full of dollies, and lovingly laying her little golden head on his arms said "You are my lovely Daddy".

She certainly spread sunshine around. Her short life was bright and happy, and her suffering short.

That was some consolation in a bereavement so bitter. I used to wonder if some angel's arms would comfort her as her mothers had or would it be, at best, strange comfort.

At such times to have multitudinous duties crowding me, is a blessing in disguise. There was Roy, not yet two, Bill making a start at school, and business as usual. Time did heal slowly, but did not restore the old personal faith. That came 12 years later, when I was 50.

Mrs Ashwell, who had been losing ground for some years passed away in 1919. She was a woman of the old Wesleyan School, strong in faith, and with fixed religious principles. She never deviated from the path of duty,

was unfailingly kind and hospitable. So, in some ways, she had that narrow outlook of time on moral lapses. To such people her door was certainly not 'on the latch'.

Personally, I loved Grandpa more. Perhaps because Grandma was going downhill when I first met her, and so had not the outlook of her husband, eight years her junior.

Grandpa would arrive with eggs, butter or perhaps a piece of mutton, with the words "Grandma thought you would like these", or "Grandma thought you could do with a piece of mutton" – always giving her the credit. I am sure I loved him better than I ever did my own father. He lived two years after losing his wife, at the end quite helpless and lame from a crippling accident some 10 years previous, later from arthritis.

Nell, though engaged to Harold Lucas a distant cousin who had come to New Zealand, since our marriage, nursed both parents to the end.

The great difficulty then, was to be married quietly with just her family there but in the church. Church property touched her backyard.

The time was set, the family notified under strict secrecy. It was to be at 7:30. However, it became known. We had not told even the children, the minister was above suspicion. The culprit could easily be isolated.

However, Walt found a good solution, to quietly alter the time to 5:30 when most folk would be at tea, notifying the suspect at the last minute.

So it was done, and only the family were there, the Walter Ashwells, Fred and Lydia, Ern, the Alf Parkes and Mr. Mabbott. Nell could not have lived alone, so her marriage followed very closely on Grandpa's death.

Chapter 18 Flu epidemic and churches

The great fire of London did a good work in one respect. Following a terrible visitation of bubonic plague, it cleaned up the unwholesome and infected parts of the city, leaving clean spaces upon which to build.

In Raetihi the position was reversed. When we had outlived the fire, came the epidemic, in much medical opinion recrudesence of the old bubonic.

To me, as to most, it seemed much worse than the fire. The town seemed to carry on under a pall of death. The town hall, and the smaller hall in Ward Street known as "Ashwell's" were used as hospitals for the worst cases. The specific was whiskey, which had no value to those who were habitual drinkers, but was valuable in the case of non-drinkers.

The Ashwell men, Walter and Fred gave their services without stint bringing in the sick and taking their turns in nursing the sick men. They suffered no ill effects. Some shut themselves up, refused to go out of their houses further than to pick up groceries etc left at their gates. Among these was the young minister, who remained in seclusion in the house of one of his flock for the duration.

By contrast, a much older, and not over strong Anglican vicar, Rev. Robinson worked beyond his strength, and although he caught the infection made a good recovery.

Another of God's good men who valued their honour as Christ's ministers, more than their lives. Their name should ever be held in honour. The many however were unselfish and liberal in their service, in marked contrast to the few whose concern was only for themselves.

Among the victims were some we could ill spare, as Mr. George Berry of who I have written earlier. Perhaps the strenuous days of his earlier life had taken toll of his reserves of strength.

It was my task, as Deputy registrar to register these deaths, a sad job, but when calamity strikes, the edge of sorrow can become blunted and the feelings numb.

To Rev Robinson, and the devoted R.C. father fell the harder task of conducting funerals. They who have so faithfully done their duty, would have been acceptable comforters to their members, as well as to those of us of no known church affiliation. (The epidemic left its record in at least one life, one child received the name epidemic – in later usage shortened to Demic)

Though not an Anglican it gives me great pleasure to pay tribute to the high quality of the gentlemen who served in Raetihi. I believe a very early

one, before my time was Rev Devenish, whose Sunday school I attended in Hunterville and who gave me my first Bible.

One, quite a character, and much loved, was Rev O. Stout. He came straight from England, having taken riding lessons before leaving for the wild and woolly back blocks of New Zealand.

Rev Stout was unselfish and generous to a fault. He had a strong vibrant voice of good quality, and used often to sing on his lonely journeys from an evening service taken at some outstation. Returning home one dark evening as he was singing he was overtaken by T.A. Harris, who greeted him with "Good evening, Rev Stout." "Why, Mr. Harris, how did you know it was I" was as surprised rejoinder. I am sure T.A. did not retort "Well, yours is the best-known voice in the district" which would have been no overstatement.

On one occasion, a prominent lady member of his flock on going to Evensong, and looking in saw a layman in the pulpit, promptly returned home.

This came to the Vicar's ears, and meeting next day the lady in the main street he took her to task. "It matters not whether I or a layman am officiating, Mrs X. In either case it is your duty to be in attendance." The conversation which followed could be heard for quite a distance serving to add to the gaiety of the population, with whom the lady was not as popular as the minister.

Rev Stout would make long excursions to the homes of back settlers, calling on all and receiving a warm welcome. He found isolated members of his denomination and also took note of Methodist or Presbyterian settlers, and passing on these particulars to the ministers of their denominations. In this way he brought an acceptable ministry far beyond the confines of his immediate environment, bringing with him a reminder of Holy things pushed into the background by strenuous toil filled days.

For just a little while, God's presence seemed to touch their lives, awaking who knows? What memories of childish Sunday School days. A good and blessed ministry.

Among these worthy settlers who came round about this time, 1918 and onward, were sawmilling families from Hawke's Bay, who had worked in the then well remembered "Forty mile bush".

These brought to our town their own form of church order – the General Booth offset of the Church of England, the Salvation Army. Their contribution to our well-being was all to the good.

Their brass band, performing on the main street, usually on Saturday and Sunday nights, drew a crowd of curious and interested spectators. Saturday was then the New Zealand half holiday in most places, but Raetihi held theirs

on Thursday for a long time, until I think, Saturday was set by statute as the one to be adopted.

Among the crowd would be found Ruthie, holding by the hand a small curly haired brother Roy. They used to take their stand as near as they could to Big Brom who played the largest brass instrument.

The music, uniforms and general air of bustle greatly intrigued the little ones. Except in very cold weather they would be there. Because of their size they came to be an almost accepted part of the performance, especially by their friend Brom.

On Roy's third Christmas, Santa brought him a lovely bugle, and after that Saturday by Saturday, he took his stand beside Brom and made his contribution to the band.

When Brom stood his instrument down, during prayer, or to speak, Roy would plant his diminutive one beside it and faithfully taking his cue from his big cobber, would closely follow all his actions.

Just one of the unforgettable things that tug at a mother's heart-strings as she turns over the pages of her children's youth.

The Methodist Church, like the school some years earlier, was moved to a more central position in [Ward] Street. When I came to Raetihi, the Methodist being the only non-conformist body catered for all but Church of England and Roman Catholic.

Following the arrival of the sawmillers the Salvation Army built their own hall, and we lost some of our most valued members. Later still, the Presbyterians built their church behind the post office in Ward Street and had their own minister.

Most of our children for whom this is written will remember the church only as in its present site.

From the first Minister, Rev Purcell Keal, who was years before my time, the church has been well served by its ministers. I'm afraid I cannot remember the name of the probationary minister who served when I came, though his successor, Rev Martin became a valued friend and we were sorry when his time was up.

Apart from these major happenings of fire and pestilence life in Raetihi went along peacefully and steadily enough.

Its isolation may have caused the development of an individuality all its own. Among its characteristics were friendliness, and readiness to welcome newcomers, making them feel quite one of the family, as it were. A striking contrast this to life in the big city. My Uncle Harry's wife, a friendly woman, who became my favourite aunt, lived in Mt Eden. Neighbours' backyards

touched her on three sides, separated only by low hedges. All would be hanging out their washing on a Monday morning. Years passed, and no one offered to speak, or even to respond to a friendly gesture on her part. After some years Auntie's only daughter died at 21 years of age after a very short illness. Then to Auntie's amazement, one neighbour came to the fence to express her sympathy.

Auntie had grown up in Melbourne, lived for years in Christchurch, but only in this then exclusive – don't you know – suburb of Mt Eden did she meet unfriendliness. They tell me this is a common attitude in city life. Then I am glad my life has been lived mostly in country places.

Raetihi folk had various backgrounds, both of nationality and culture. By and large the quality was good. True, a small minority of misfits did exist. Such usually follow the progress of settlement, seeking easy pickings. Often their means of livelihood was sly grog selling.

By our national 'honourable?' pact with the Maoris who were the inhabitants and landowner of the King Country, Europeans were given the right of entry and settlement, under the condition that strong drink was not to be taken into the King Country for sale, though Europeans could bring in a small quantity for personal use. No licenses for its sale were to be issued.

This pact took in all the lands between Taumarunui on the north to Taihape on the south.

Glib-tongued workshy men found easy pickings in sly grog. For many years, 50 or more, the letter of the pact was kept. No hotels were licensed.

For the dishonourable breaking of the pact, one has only to go to the pages of Hansard.

The two races, Maori and Pakeha, lived in happy relationship. There was then little intermarriage.

In the war, the men of both races fought side by side, and soon brought back an excellent record of valour and behaviour.

As years passed and the King Country nationals became more European in life and outlook, there were a number of inter-racial marriages mostly in the more well-to-do educated classes, which threw them into contact in high schools and colleges.

A little aside which needs no comment. T.A. Harris M.A. LL.B. then Mayor of Raetihi was rung up by a Maori named Makatea and the conversation went:- "that you, Harris. Mr. Makatea speaking."

Chapter 19 Dorothy and Flo, Nell's death

August 1921 gave us our daughter Hope Nind. We had both desired a girl, not in any way to take Ruth's place. Each child has its own place in the family life and affection. Ruth had passed from us, but had her own shrine in our hearts.

I think something of our sorrow had passed into the subconsciousness of this new little life. She was more serious in outlook than the others, more thoughtful and kind.

She has been in her family, what my brother Bill was in the Mahonys. Like Bill she may have in a measure lost out in things material, but was rich in the esteem and affection of others. Though next to youngest, her confidence is sought and her advice valued by the family.

Dorothy finished her primary education at 11 years and four months, with an excellent record. At the beginning of 1919 she entered the Wanganui Girls' College of which Miss Cruickshank was head. Miss Cruickshank was a woman of unusual ability, and Wanganui Girls' College was regarded as in the front rank of girls' educational institutions. Her twin sister, Dr Cruickshank, in the South Island gave her life in service during the epidemic. In order that her name should not be forgotten, a memorial was erected to Miss Cruickshank's memory. So in the Wanganui Girls was a tablet in the memory of Miss Cruickshank for her years of excellent work in Wanganui Girls College.

A remarkable fact that two sisters, serving each in her own way, should have been so honoured.

Dorothy spent five years there. Leaving seemed almost like leaving home. At 12 she won the Jr National Scholarship! For her Miss Cruickshank broke one of her own rigid rules – not to have a prefect under 18 years of age. Dorothy was made prefect on her 16th year, because, as Ms Cruickshank explained to me, "She is such a steady old stager!"

At first she was delighted to be enrolled at a boarding school. That was before she suffered the agonies of homesickness – a stranger among strangers. Then her letters home were pleading to be taken away from this dreadful prison.

A prison it must have seemed to her, with its cold stone walls and large echoing corridors, an alien life with alien people, felt the more, no doubt, from having grown up with a lively family in a country town where there were no strangers.

It was distressing to us and we were thinking of getting private board for her and letting her attend as a day girl. However, wiser counsels prevailed. Wanganui youth of that day had a bad name, probably because of an unsavoury minority and she was safer where she was.

The first misery passed as she made friends and was invited at weekends to the homes of some of the girls. So she grew in favour of staff and pupils. Three years later Florrie joined her. At college Dorothy had again taken music lessons, at her own request, as a requirement to her future teaching.

Florrie had had good teaching from a young German woman, Miss Chellburg, whose father was in business in Raetihi. Florrie was gifted. Practice was not a chore and she never had to be reminded. She loved music and made good progress, under her accomplished teacher.

Miss Betts was then the music mistress at Wanganui Girls College, and to get a pupil like Florrie was pure joy. Speaking of her work to me she said "I can hardly believe she and Dorothy are sisters. She remarked how unusual it was to receive a pupil with no bad habits to unlearn! With Dorothy music is a necessary uncongenial subject; with Florrie it was an integral part of her life.

So now we have Dorothy and Florrie finishing their schooldays, and Bill emulating Dorothy at primary. At not quite seven he entered the standards, with no difficulty in keeping a good place in class. He finished primary at 11 years and eight months.

There was now a very new District High School at Ohakune. A writer in the Raetihi School Jubilee brochure, has written "The rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne is nothing to that between Ohakune and Raetihi".

Something of that attitude caused us to bypass Ohakune, and send Bill to Matamata to live with my sister his aunt Florrie Gordon. Matamata had a splendid Head, a teacher of outstanding ability.

In his one year there Bill put up a fine record, winning a prize for his poem on Ruapehu, which was printed in the school magazine open to all forms – this in Form III! When he came home for the Christmas holidays he was obsessed with one idea; to get a farm job. This in spite of the fact that the Head at Matamata had written us a personal letter telling of his fine progress and natural ability. Nothing would do but that he should seek a farm job. With a good deal of reluctance we at length consented. His pleas were no doubt helped by the fact that business was not good and we were feeling the pinch. A part of my story must now be told which is hard to write, even after the lapse of nearly 40 years.

I have not written much of my beloved sister-in-law. My heart went out to her, and hers to me in an unbreakable friendship before I knew of the existence of the brother I married.

On the Ashwell side of her forebears were people of the land, the kind whose word was their bond, honourable in all their dealings, and with a Methodist tradition from the days of John Wesley. Some of the clan became missionaries, and the name figures also in New Zealand missionary history. Grandma Ashwell's folk were more of the educated and business class. From them Nell inherited a remarkable brain. The mother, Walt and Nell were great readers, and keen debaters. Sunday with them was a time of interesting talks on books and world affairs. "Home" newspapers came regularly so they were well-informed; unusually so for a wayback family.

{scratched out: After her father's death I have told of her marriage. Whether, as the doctor thought, she entered on her new life worn out with the long four years of nursing both mother and crippled father, and the strain affected her mind. No one really knows.}

She came back from her wedding holiday, looking desperately unhappy.

I was still in bed after Hope's birth. When for a moment or two we were alone, she said she wanted a talk with me. Before she could begin Roy toddled in wanting attention. After getting him attended to she changed her mind, and soon after left. I can only suppose she saw how difficult it was to get privacy, with folk coming and going.

A day or two after when I was recovered out of bed the nurse and I took the baby around to pay its first visit to Auntie Nell.

We did not stay long, as she was busy cleaning the stove, and we felt we were interrupting her work.

Strange in her, as ordinarily she would not have cared what she was at.

That afternoon she was not home when Harold Lucas came home from work, and he came to our place expecting to find her with us. When she could not be found the police were informed. Every likely place was searched and her body was found next day in the river below the cemetery. T.A. Harris was foreman of the coroner's jury and saw to it that the verdict was in effect "Death by misadventure".

Nell's death occurred just before Alf and Rachel Parkes went back to England. Nell and I had frequently lamented Rachel's going. How we would miss her! I have thus lost also one who was nearer than my own sisters.

She left a note telling of her intention which Harold found so there could be only one verdict.

Even after so long a lapse it is hard to write her death.

She was the most selfless person I ever knew. Like my brother, one of life's givers. Everyone who knew her loved her, in spite of the fact she was so tied to her home.

I wanted to be the one to prepare her for burial. I knew she would rather I had done so than another. But the district nurse said "Better not. I know how you feel, and will do it as lovingly as you would. I have had the sad duty of doing the last kindness to many soldiers".

What her going meant to her three brothers only God knows. I think Ernie was hit the hardest.

Being deaf, he could not have the full intercourse with his world that normal people do, and Nell had given him an extra share of her love and care. He had long been away on his Ohura farm, and her letters must have meant so much to him. By long association, with Ern and her deaf mother, Nell was able to help them feel one of any gathering, passing on jokes to him so that she was in a way "ears to him".

Dorothy had now finished school, and spent a year at Raetihi School as a pupil teacher before entering the Teachers' Training College at Wellington for the two year course.

She managed to get four units of her B.A. while there, in English and history.

When she was through, she found it hard, even with her qualifications to get a school. When the vacancies were advertised she just kept on sending in applications, and it was not long before she received an appointment.

Florrie helped at home then went to Urwin and Drury's [drapery store], then helped us and then for a while in Wellington, before returning home to prepare for her wedding.

It was while she was working for us that Laurie Nation began working for his Dad at the newspaper office "The County Call" just across the street.

Marjorie Sandford was in our office when Florrie helped in the shop. One day she remarked on the number of times in the day young Nation seemed to have to come to the shop to buy a pencil or magazine, or one of the dailies. "I'm sure Florrie is the attraction" she said.

It seemed she was right, for Florrie was only 18 when they were married and she went to Ohakune to live.

Two years after Hope's birth we had for a few short weeks, a little son whom we named James Leighton. He had water on the brain, and we entered another unhappy period, seeing him die by inches. He was a strong baby, but his strength only lengthened his sufferings. After Jimmy's birth and short life of suffering, I felt I could never face motherhood again, when such things could happen.

When it was over I was persuaded to go to Auckland to Aunt Maggie's for a break. But in Auckland, as at home, his moans rang in my years. I slept on a balcony, but always, after a brief oblivion, would wake to the same sound. Walt would say, in times like these "This, too, will pass." It did but I hoped I would never bring another child into the world. Why give more hostages to fortune is what I felt.

At 16 years of age Bill had spent three years learning farming the hard way. He liked to work, but was now old enough to see as he put it two ways of life ahead; one, to be a farm labourer all my life, or by very hard work and harder saving, to acquire a farm plus mortgage tied round my neck for most of my life. "Could he," he asked, "go back to school?"

We were a bit taken aback, wondering if he would really take kindly to be a schoolboy when he had been for three years a working man. We were only too ready to agree. He promised he would do two years' work in one. He was most fortunate to get as teacher Miss Hind, who was willing to help to the limit. Though he had been three years away from school, and his only reading during that period had been such wild west stuff as a farmer's boy could pick up where he worked, he decided to try for University Entrance (then Matriculation) and passed! To consolidate his gains we got him to stay a further year in Form 6.

As New Zealand was still trying to struggle through the slump, we feared it would be hard to get a suitable job. He took temporary work in a Public Works Department office, then through our Wanganui friend, John Ashwell, he got a start in the firm of Abraham and Williams. The firm was shortly amalgamated with Wright Stephensons, and in that employ he has remained ever since, to begin with, in Palmerston North, then to Wanganui, and subsequently as accountant at Taihape. Of the last he remarked "I don't seem to be able to get far from the King Country".

By the time Bill started work, Florrie and Laurie had a family consisting of Betty and John.

Laurie endeared himself to all the family. He had married only Florrie, but made the whole Ashwell clan his family too. A more generous open-hearted man it would be hard to find.

Shortly after their marriage he was elected mayor of Ohakune and to all mayoral gatherings Florrie accompanied him. Florrie was the youngest mayoress in New Zealand. Laurie, though youthful in appearance was quite a few years her senior. I think it was when they were at a Mayoral gathering in Levin that the reporter wrote of the youngest mayor, Mr. L.W. Nation aged 21 of Ohakune, and the veteran mayor of Levin, the oldest in the gathering. Though Laurie may have been the youngest mayor, Florrie certainly was the youngest wife 18 years.

At such a gathering held at Napier in the summer, when, on the east coast especially one can usually count on fine weather, the Napier 'First Lady' planned delightful open-air entertainment for the visiting wives. The weather was most unkind, and put on quite a winter show. The hostess reported that she had hurriedly to think of entertainment. She said "I don't know what I should have done without the youthful mayoress of Ohakune. She is very musical, and was a tremendous help, and willing to help organise and entertain. She very ably seconded every scheme of mine."

Later on, when she had a young family, and Laurie's business interests increased, she was not available for these junketings.

She was much in demand for local entertainment, and always a willing helper, besides being for a long time church organist.

Chapter 20 Church attendance and Baptism

The early years of the 20th century were certainly not those in which, as Bunyan puts it 'religion went in silver slippers'. Rather we lived in the days spoken of by St Paul where 'science falsely so-called' was tramping in triumph over the Bible. To express belief in the Bible as the "inerrant word of God" was to invite ridicule. There were denominations who never wavered in their stand for God's word as the only rule of faith and practice. They held firm to the faith and were considered by the intelligentsia to be 'no scholars'.

As every effect must have a cause, one cannot escape the thought that a generation of parents, losing faith in the Bible, are responsible for the great upsurge of youthful moral delinquents in our day. To do away with God is to invite chaotic thinking (based on a foundation of sand).

The great strides in technical achievement which had been made in the last two generations have led to a shrunken world, where yesterday's far-away places are now, as it were at our own doorstep. Life has become infinitely more complex. How can the youthful feet in this bewildering world find the right path, deprived of the steadying thought "God is in his heaven" – all will come right in the end?

We see today, helped about thinking by the new science of archaeology, the Bible proved a true record of what is there related. We see its truth vindicated in the study of the ruins of Jericho of old, and in modern discoveries in the east. The Bible is not a history book, but is theology.

The tide has turned. Far from the Bible being unscientific, in its pages are hidden hints of scientific truth only recently discovered. Even that strange story of the shadow on the sundial turning back a number of degrees, astronomers tell us, matches with their study of the regular movements of the heavenly hosts. In the very times such occurrences were recorded, there comes a hiatus in their reckoning, indicating that something out of the normal run happened then. Out-of-the-way places like Raetihi suffered less than say university cities.

The early settlers had sacrificed and worked for their churches. In these the next generations gathered perhaps somewhat as a matter of habit. Attendance was a religious duty, which God enjoined, and from which blessing would come. They did not come with any great expectation but they appreciated the service of worship. Their toil-filled lives did not give much room for speculation or introspection.

One of our well loved hymns was

"Break Thou the bread of life, Dear Lord for me."

The Bread of Life was there, for the scriptures were read. Those whose work it was to 'break' it, were so often probationary ministers, or lay men with little education. Their biblical knowledge would not have been up to the standard of the modern senior Bible class.

So, Sunday by Sunday we saw the miracle of the small boy's lunch re-enacted. God blessed the little we had, and all were fed, in the happy atmosphere of Christian Fellowship. The bread itself was there, in the word, and fed us in spite of perhaps unskilful handling.

Our children in their post-primary years attended church while at college, and were no better fed in the city than we were in the country. A little excitement was added to their "shut-in" lives, with possibly an invitation to a fellow pupil's home for lunch or dinner. To ours anyway it had little or no spiritual significance

{scratched out: when Dorothy and Florrie left Wanganui Girls College (1925) they would be, 16 and 14 respectively. So they started their working lives at 17 and 15. Bill would be in his finishing year at primary and 11 years and eight months. In spite of his age he passed Dux, and next year went to Matamata, and Dorothy to Wellington to Teachers Training College.

Florrie helped us and was asked to give music lessons to the children of various friends.

Roy had kept his baby habit of thumb sucking. We tried hard to break it but always it would go back into his mouth again. Somehow, no one could be very stern with Roy. With his large blue eyes, fair curly hair and cherubic smile, he was a most disarming infant. We were sure that school would be the cure. The teasing he would get would be the cure.}

I have written, how, at 17 years of age, I "registered" my decision to follow the Lord Jesus. Not that this was my first thought on such matters or my first spiritual experience. It was however, the first definite commitment to the Lordship of Christ, and marked a further milestone in my life.

I still recall waking next morning, and realising that this day was not as the other days, that indeed,

"Heaven above is softer blue
Earth around is deeper green
Something lives in every hue
Christless eyes have never seen.
Birds with gladder songs oerflow
Flowers with deeper beauty shine
Since I know, as now I know,
I am his, and he is mine."

Someone, how long before I do not know, had put into these words his own spiritual experience, which was now so accurately to describe mine, and if mine, how many others?

So with the words "I am his and he is mine" singing in my heart, I went off to school and the day's duties.

And life was, from then, a spiritual pilgrimage. John Bunyan had travelled the course, and placed the milestones long before, a guide to all pilgrims.

Some fellow-pilgrims have been mentioned previously, so we walked the way together, gaining knowledge and experience and realising at every turn of the unfamiliar way, the Helper at the side to lead us onward and upward.

I sometimes marvel at the progress we made, with so little of the helpful literature, and none of the modern situations as BTI and the ministry of the Church's great men and women at conventions. Any helpful literature was largely American in origin and much prized. Also the modern B.C. movement was only in its infancy even in the large cities.

So, keeping the faith, we travelled the way, taking what came of life's experiences including love and marriage. We became active in the work of our respective churches, helped in Sunday School work, rejoicing in such helps as came our way.

We were very active in the cause of not merely the tepid watchword of today "temperance" but worked with the ideal of total prohibition of the liquor trade.

How far we would have got towards the goal, had political conditions remained static is difficult to conjecture.

Progress was made at every three years recurring election, and hopes rose. In 1914 the enemy of man's eternal welfare played his masterstroke – world war.

As most of my life and of other fellow Christians mentioned, was spent in the back blocks, we have not the help and inspiration of gifted speakers. Remember, this was before even the now familiar telephone had reached the country places.

Our greatest help was from Christian literature, which was avidly read and passed on to others.

Visiting speakers, such as the Isitt Bros drew capacity houses, but they were few and far between. So, we made the most of such helps as came our way, and valued the fellowship with others which B.C., Christian Endeavour, and church afforded us, and if we did not increase tremendously in stature we kept the faith, and made some progress.

This was the position at the turn of the century, and until I was transferred to Raetihi, and met the Ashwells.

I always consider my sister-in-law the greatest human helper that came my way. Behind her were centuries of strong Christian tradition, Methodism at its best. The Ashwell standards were of the highest, in the daily work, in neighbourly friendship, in church stewardship and service, and in their individual work and conduct. In them, I saw the Lord's teaching lived out in the daily life. Mere friendship with them would have raised my standards considerably, but intimate association did more. It raised not only standards but ideals.

To know God's will must be to do it. This is exemplified in the following experience which led me into in later years the church of which I am now a member.

Here is the story.

In our little church a student filling in a holiday pastorate preached in defence of the Methodist Church's practice of christening (infant baptism).

Walking the 3 mile trek home to the farm for dinner, Nell and I discussed the sermon. We agreed that the student had done his best but we were not convinced that he had the right answer.

We both thought there could be a stronger case made out for adult baptism.

So, we decided that we would read right through to New Testament studying its teaching on baptism, keeping as open a mind as possible, and weighing the pros and cons.

I think we set three months as our time limit.

At the end of the set time we both had come to the same conclusion, that the only baptisms in the New Testament were of adults, and that baptism marked the entry into the Christian life.

Then Nell said in effect "So, what?" We made up our minds to arrange for baptism in Palmerston North in the mid-winter holidays. Nell had friends in Palmerston North where the family lived for a short period before settling in Raetihi.

So, accompanied by her brother Fred as courier, we went to Palmerston and were baptised by the then minister of the Palmerston Baptist Church, Rev Richards, who shortly after left New Zealand for California. I gave him Aunt Lily's Frisco address, and they gave the family every help and were very friendly until Mr. Richards left California for the northern wilds of Canada.

As I was now a Baptist by conviction and not a member of any church, I joined the Palmerston North Church, though Nell said, as there was no chance

of such a church in our back blocks, she would continue in her Methodist membership.

Our friends and people thought our conduct a bit strange, but we knew we had seen the light and followed it.

It was 30 years later that I was able to join in fellowship both with a Baptist community and strangely enough, one of the Gisborne church members had been present and remembered the two back country girls who had come in midwinter to be baptised.

Thinking back over the old days, church-going seemed to have become more or less a habit. Church attendance was regarded as a religious duty willingly performed and enjoyed, perhaps more for the happy neighbourly fellowships than for true worship. To the few more devout souls it meant the gain of daily strength for daily need. In all cases it was a testimony to their faith, performed in obedience to God's command. Theological colleges were few and small and only cities and large towns would have trained men, smaller circuits had laymen who were given probationary ministerial status.

Though not highly trained, they were dedicated men, and gave most acceptable service. The earliest trained minister in my residence was Rev Martin, much loved over a wide area of the Waimarino, for he came to us from a more northerly pastorate in the environs of Ruapehu. He came at any time to our homes, sure of a welcome and in times of trouble or grief would be early there to help. The two who followed, Rev Lawrence and Cooke must have found him a hard man to follow. He had so endeared himself to the congregation.

We had also a rather remarkable man, Moses Ayrton, strong labour politically coming from a highly industrialised part of England, where he had been prominent in the Trades Union movement, he had been attracted to New Zealand because of its political development along those lines. The movement had then advanced quite a bit since my son-in-law George Skuse's father in Wales, a mine foreman, lost his job and was black-listed in all neighbouring mines for his advocacy of trade-unionism.

Rev Ayrton's qualifications for the ministry seemed to be the ability in speaking, and his attachment to the Methodist Church. He was a most likeable and interesting man. As to his ability to give a strong lead spiritually I am not prepared to give an authoritative opinion.

Rev Cumming followed him, about 1921-4. It was he who conducted Auntie Nell's funeral in 1921.

Chapter 21 The slump, the children

Two years after Hope's birth in 1921, another son was born. We had given the other children mostly family names. Roy's second name, Bertram was Walt's choice, and the name of the minister who had married us Rev Ivo Bertram.

When it came to naming this wee son we called him James, which was Ern's second name and Leighton after a town in Hertfordshire near the Ashwell family home. He was not to be with us long and lived only 11 weeks.

During prosperous times we had bought the best business section in town, across the road from the Post Office, and also a section in a back street where we hoped to build our home when we retired. These were good investments when bought, but in the slump times were merely a liability. The only income from them came from "Ashwell's" hall, at the back of the section and facing Ward Street. Rates accumulated and ate into the shop profits. Business was good when the timber was being milled, but even for timber in slump times, there was little market, for no one wanted to build.

Without these outside liabilities the business might have survived. This is by no means certain. Walt's illness and high wages put things back more than was realised at the time. Slumps seemed to come overnight, but recovery in business is slow. Not a few old and highly respected business firms of long-standing went out.

With advice from a lawyer friend, and helped by Uncle Bill [Mahony], we made a fresh start, but it was very uphill work, handicapped by Walt's impaired health.

Friends who had left Raetihi after the fire, and gone to Auckland quickly found their feet, and strongly advised us to sell out and come where prospects were so much better, and where, moreover, the post-primary education which cost us so much was free. The advice was good, but Walt felt we were better where we were known, and besides, our folk needed us then.

The friends in question never looked back and soon had their own home and business.

I wish I could remember more incidents of the children's youth. They were happy times. The future looked rosy.

What Mrs Hermans wrote seems to picture that time.

"They grew in beauty side-by-side
They fill one home with glee".

Each newcomer received a great welcome.

Though two years apart, there was only one day between the two girls' birthdays so they were celebrated together, with a party of what Dad called "their peers and equals". The big toy-room was the scene of many spreads, while the long section stretching through the block to the backstreet, was fine for games. To these do's, before Uncle Jack went to the war, Gay Spence was a delighted guest. She was seven months older than Florrie, and there was always a gift for her from us. Once when she was three, she said to me "Auntie, tell Uncle "Walker" I want a glass doll with blue eyes. Tell him two times." She had often seen our display of lovely "war" beauties, which we imported direct from London. The dolls were lovely, made in Germany, and only the very huge ones were over £1.

Brown-eyed Gay got her glass doll with blue eyes, of course. I am sure she remembers it still. The Spences had moved to Taumarunui before Alec could participate.

There was an occasion, which I think comes in most families, when a little friend invited Florrie to her birthday party. She duly went, with an appropriate gift, but was soon home again. It seemed quite unexpectedly early, so I asked if the party was over and she said "Yes." On being asked what she had to eat she replied "Scone and go home!" The party was wishful thinking on the little friend's part.

There was also the time when Bill had a party. He asked could he choose the menu. He could, and asked for bacon and eggs and jam tarts and a cake. Then they asked if they could be by themselves. Thinking some of them might be shy, this was granted. There seem to be great hilarity as the party went on. They surely had a good time. What they couldn't eat they threw around. Even the wallpaper suffered.

I do not remember another party for Bill so I suppose that was the last.

That episode convinced me that boys should always be under supervision.

Christmas was a great time for the children! They hung up pillowcases, and what with grandparents, aunties and uncles, Father Christmas was a liberal fellow.

But for us – we were too tired to enjoy it. So tired that even when it should have been a thrill, filling the stockings became a chore.

To us, it was the culmination of weeks and weeks of work, unpacking, displaying, selling, and opening the doors, even after 12 o'clock on Xmas Eve to stragglers who had roamed the streets till the shops began to close, before

thinking of their purchases. How we loved the early selectors and how gladly we packed and put aside their goods, which had only to be passed over.

Windows had to be re-dressed or partly so, every day for at least two weeks before Christmas.

By the time we had counted the cash, paid the staff and put it in the safe, we were dead beat.

Bill (A) as a young married man helped us through one of our last Christmas's and had invited us to have Christmas dinner with them. As we sat down after dinner, Bill remarked "Mum, wouldn't a movie picture of our minds at Christmas be a ghastly thing?" Put that way I could merely assent. It would indeed have been nightmarish.

When we had left business behind for ever, I said to Walt. "Let's go into town on Christmas eve and realise what it feels like to be on the other side of the counter. We were strangers in a strange place. We seemed lost in the jostling throng. There was absolutely no interest in it. We were just milling in a throng without purpose.

The toil, the weariness, was gone. So was the thrill, the joy, the interest. We did not wish for the return of former Christmases, but we realised that for us, the thrill was gone forever.

Dorothy was very fond of dolls, so was Ruthie. I spent much time before Christmas making a wardrobe for the prospective newcomer to the doll family. She had, by the time Dorothy changed dolls for books, five, ranging from one or two "glass" ones to smaller ones. Wasn't that the right way with families? She had one, a rag doll, quite an out-size which was "Beggar". They all had names and, to her, personalities.

Ruth, too, loved her 'babies'. She would tuck them into her little pink pram and go for a walk the length of the block. She had a Teddy too of which she was very fond. For some years after she went from us her pram stood on the high wardrobe shelf as she had last wheeled it, untouched. Roy, as a toddler would have liked it, but I couldn't for a long-time let it go to another, though later Hope inherited it. The moths had begun work on the Teddy. It may be true that time heals these wounds. I think though there is always a tender spot, liable to hurt when touched. Florrie's dolls were never so real to her. This has always seemed strange to me, because she was most affectionate. Perhaps the babies who turned up from time to time spoilt her for their imitations. She was not aquisitive, and always had friends around. Dorothy liked best to get away with a book, Florrie to be in company.

In our family, no two were alike nor even had much resemblance. Even the Spence twins were totally different personalities. Until they grew up and took up teaching, they dressed alike, and did everything together. But the resemblance was only outward.

In spite of continual sickness in early childhood, (or could it be because of it) Bill took life at a run.

Before he started school he had had every disease entered on the admission card, but one. Diphtheria had missed him, but to balance that he had the unlisted rheumatic fever. But for this, I think he would have been a big man. Dr Gunn who examined him on his entry into school said he looked like a little old man. I can still hear her snap it out. No wonder, but from every fresh bout with this persistent enemy, he came up victorious and smiling. With all these setbacks it was no mean feat to finish primary school (Std VI) at 11 years and eight months.

With nine years schooling, not consecutive, he bagged matriculation and higher leaving certificates.

Roy entered Raetihi School at 5. To the elder members, school entry was a great event long anticipated. Not so to Roy. He had inherited his father's philosophical outlook on life, and took the change very quietly, continuing his thumb-sucking as a part of his life he was not yet ready to relinquish. He took everything with quiet acceptance, allowing it to cause only the faintest ripple in his life. It was quite a few months before he asked me to remind him if he put his thumb in his mouth, as he had decided not to suck it. Sometimes it would sort of get in accidentally when he was tired or thinking. A reminder and out it would come. In less than a week the habit was in the limbo of forgotten things. He put up the usual Ashwell record and learned to read easily and quickly – most likely could read before he saw school as most of the others had done.

He was quiet, cheerful, full of fun and with the gift of humour, always with a train of boys (mostly his own or lower age group).

Bill's misdeeds were plain for all to see. Roy smoked behind the summerhouse. Of all the family, he most resembled his Dad. Walt's words were often carefully chosen to veil the real purpose, red herrings across the trail.

Schoolwork was no trouble to him though maths was not his forte. He had to work hard to keep a good standard. He was an omnivorous reader, so he easily outshone his compeers in English. The gift of humour lit up his excellent essay writing, and the school walls featured much of his work, even more so at High School. The head of Ohakune District High was a remarkable man,

Mr. A.J. Blyth, known (behind his back) as "Joey". He was the district's ablest and best-known mountaineer. Part of the High School curriculum was some time in the pupils' career a trip up Ruapehu – mostly reserved for the two highest forms.

Miss Hind set as an essay "A trip up Ruapehu".

Roy turned "Joey" into a bird, and described the bird's trip up the mountain. What it saw, who it passed, in short the whole climb. No one who read it could be in any doubt of the principal character, his idiosyncrasies were pinpointed. For a long time it stayed pinned up on the walls of the High School. Later, I think after Roy's death, it was sent to us.

Roy was at High when Bill went back to get his matriculation and higher leaving. He was always a favourite with the boys, in fact he was lovable. Miss Hind thought very highly of him, and of his ability. She said to me at one time "It seems strange to see two boys, of same parentage and identical upbringing, so very different."

Perhaps they are in some measure responsible for what they "accept" of the environment, and for the development of their gifts, but as no two people are identical, we certainly cannot blame those who do not turn out the same. The parable of the gift of the talents applies. To whom much is given of them, shall more be required.

Looking back, I cannot remember even one who was at all unfriendly to Roy, not one in his 22 years.

Last week I visited the cemetery with my friend Mrs Smellie. It was her elder son's birthday and she went to lay flowers on his grave. We looked up Roy's (No. 1 of the last World War). There it was Roy Bertram Ashwell 22. It was not his name, but the 22 that hurt. I looked at the next grave – also 22. I found as many. So much heartache, so much waste!

When Roy was seven, Laurie-John was born 12 September 1925 on his Uncle Fred's birthday. When, in spite of my wish to not have more children, this youngest son put in an appearance, he found the same loving welcome as the others.

Showing him to a friend, his greeting was "So this is the 1925 model", by which it will be guessed New Zealand had reached the motor-car age, though the first car came to our town some four years previously when his brother Roy was about four.

Walt had not wished his name onto any of the children. However, as this would almost certainly be the last child, it seemed to me only right that he

should have one of his father's names. Also, I had not managed to give the name I liked very much 'Laurie' to any of the family. So we suggested Walter Laurie for him. The girls wanted John. Dad suggested dropping the "Walter", but to this I would not agree, so he was registered as Walter Laurie John. The Walter certainly preserved his Dad's name, but was never used, and the owner has always looked upon three names as being too many.

By this time we had acquired a son-in-law 'Laurie Nation', so the little fellow became "Laurie-John". In later years, when he was the only Laurie left, the "John" fell into disuse.

Roy loved babies, and had a soft spot for all little animals. In one of the photos left to us of Roy, he is proudly holding his new little nephew, Bill's eldest son Jim.

In spite of the seven years difference in age, the two brothers became inseparable.

When Laurie was five, Dorothy took him to be with her where she was teaching, first at the school serving the S.A. orphanage near Putaruru. It was well-intentioned. At that time our affairs were at a low ebb. Dad was near to a nervous breakdown, so I consented.

Dorothy sacrificed quite a bit to give us this aid, but after each school holiday Laurie went back with increasing reluctance. He missed most I think his brother.

I remember getting him ready to go back after the last holiday of the year, the tears coursing down his face as I washed it. I whispered to him "Only this once, dear. I won't let you go back."

It seemed hard for Dorothy that it should end. She had spent a lot of her earnings on him, and done her best to make him happy. But homesickness is very real suffering. After his return the brothers became inseparable. They did everything together, and when Roy started work, took their holidays together perhaps to Auckland, or to Florrie's at Ohakune, but never apart till Roy joined the RNVR.

Chapter 22 Florrie's marriage, Florrie Gordon, Hope

War, certainly total war, with its broken homes and disruption of normal family life, carries its trail of devastation into the following generation. Deprived of a father's strong ruling voice, boys and even girls can get out of hand.

Even in remote New Zealand far from the war centre, there grew up an element of irresponsible youth, especially noticeable where home discipline was weak.

It was in this social atmosphere our two eldest finished their schooling and went to work quite unprepared for the social atmosphere around them after the almost convent-like seclusion of the Wanganui Girls College.

After a year of probationary teaching, Dorothy went to the Teachers Training College, boarding at the Hostel, attending varsity lectures and obtaining in her two years, four units of the B.A. degree. Her intention was to complete her B.A., seeking Wellington appointments. However, eye trouble caused her to postpone further study after finishing her two years at Teachers College.

Florrie, finishing Wanganui Girls College when Dorothy did, at first helped us in the business.

She had the lovely violet blue eyes which came from Walt's mother's people, and had been so noticeable in Nell and Walt. She was indeed a very attractive girl, and her warm friendliness was an asset to the business. Outside offers came for her services, much higher wages than we could pay, so, when a very attractive offer came from a drapery firm, we encouraged her to take it. We could not with clear conscience hold her back.

With the young set she was a prime favourite. Her gay humour and musical ability made her an asset to the parties. We made sure she was chaperoned and in someone's responsible care, or I would myself go with her.

There was in her "set" an older girl who had also been at Wanganui Girls Collegiate, but whose mother had died when she was young, and whose father was no fit guide for his lovely daughter, being a heavy drinker and quite unfit for such responsibility.

Most of the lads in Florrie's set were decent boys. One, however, was not. He was lively, had plenty of money, a car (not so common in those days as now). He was learning farming under the manager of a farm which would one day be his. He was moreover a quarter caste Maori though his father was a Scotsman.

I did not like the friendship, nor a few of those who were in Florrie's crowd.

We had business relations with a Wanganui man who knew practically everyone in that city. I asked about this lad, and was told that his brothers were rather wild, that the one I was enquiring about was a better type. My informant was quite wrong. The only one in that family who could merit that was the girl, a fine character indeed.

In judging him the one redeeming feature was his youth. He could not have been quite 18, possibly a year older than Florrie.

One of her college friends invited her to Wanganui for a holiday. She went with our consent, but this I think must have been when she went to see the boy's mother. She was not long away, then broke the news of her condition to me. After her interview, she was seen by our aforementioned friend, sitting on the riverbank. To this middle aged man she opened her heart, telling him she was going to throw herself into the river. His sympathy and kindness helped her past this stage. He told to go straight back home, that knowing her parents as he did, she was sure of understanding and help. Their love, he said, would never fail her. Life was not over, because a mistake, especially as the young rotter responsible, and not her own desire, was the cause. He took her to his home and his wife cared for her till she was able to board the train for home.

If ever a friend earned our heartfelt gratitude this man did. Indeed, his name is now one of our family names. What seemed near tragedy to us – that the young man did not face up to his responsibilities, turned out far otherwise.

I went to Wellington and made arrangements for Florrie to go to a reliable woman who would take her for some weeks prior to the expected event. She had been recommended to me by a friend.

I went back home satisfied that all had been done to keep things quiet.

I returned to find quite a new situation. Enter Greatheart! He had fallen in love with Florrie, and asked us if we would accept him as a future, and not too distant, son-in-law. He had spoken to Florrie, and she had explained to him the situation. It was then he showed what true love was. Not only would he marry Florrie, but, as perhaps for us the easiest way out, would accept paternity.

To this last, both Walter and I gave an emphatic "No". Perhaps the ill natured supplanter who had blazoned the state of affairs abroad had unwittingly done an honourable young man a service.

In due time Florrie went to Wellington, where the prospective bridegroom visited her at least every fortnight till she returned home.

He never visited her empty-handed and dainty small garments were added

to the layette. When he gave Florrie his love, he included in that love her unborn child. There are not many Greathearts of that quality.

When, after their marriage, on the honeymoon, he legally adopted the little girl, the magistrate, with the documentary evidence put forward, said "You are a noble young man". He was more right than he knew, for the documents showed some of the facts, but none of the continual acts of loving kindness shown. Actually, but not legally, he had accepted paternity, and in the years ahead made no difference between his own children and the one who is not. For me, truly the finest character I had met, and that goes for the Ashwell clan also.

He could have been a worthy model for Bunyan's "Greatheart".

What mattered if the villain of the piece got off scot-free?

The year 1929, then, saw the first marriage in the family, when Florrie was married to Lawrence Watty Nation.

Florrie, when she left for Wellington was supposed to have gone to a situation, and letters to us were mailed from Christchurch, through a friend, who thereby earned our deep gratitude. Having had honourable business relations with us over many years willingly helped us and asked no questions.

When Betty was born, through a nurse friend of ours, there was a temporary home for her in Nelson, and to this place Florrie went till Betty was brought home as a young relative of Laurie's mother, before Florrie herself came home to prepare for her wedding.

Partly because the sun was shining through all the cloudy months past, and partly because the bridegroom wanted the world to share in his happy day, he did not want a quiet wedding.

We had over 100 guests, and then invitations were confined to near relatives and close friends on both sides and young friends of the bride.

Laurie was a born chef, and it was his wish that his mother and I should not give the wedding feast to caterers but do it ourselves. It was a tall order, but we did thanks primarily to Laurie's mother's gifts, and it was a good show, and a most happy occasion..

The little Methodist Church was the scene of the ceremony, beautifully decorated by Florrie's friends under the leadership of my cousin, Mrs Isabel Knowles of Wanganui.

Our pulpit, being occupied then by Sister Rita Snowden, whose name was not on the list of officiating ministers, we had to import the Taihape Methodist minister Rev Handy to marry our young couple.

By arrangement, my brother Bill Mahony was to meet Rev Handy at Ohakune Junction, and accompany him to Raetihi. Our private catering for the wedding had been somewhat of a strain. It covered, not merely the wedding spread, but so many details of frocking and arrangements. And then that toast list! When Bill ushered Rev Handy into our home I took a look at this small, certainly not distinguished looking man, and rather worriedly thought "I am afraid you won't add much to the gaiety of the occasion!"

How wrong I was events were soon to prove. The bridal party attendants were Dorothy and Joyce Urwin and Dave Cunningham and Hope and Pearl Nation as flower girls.

The festive celebrations were held in the Druid's Hall, conveniently close to our home. Sister Rita and Rev Handy worked as a team, and ensured a most interesting occasion. When the "eats" had been duly attended to, Rev Handy rose, and began to speak. From my vantage point I watched the reaction of the gathering. Eyes were raised to the speaker with rather bored looks from those, who used to such celebration, prepared to give polite attention, with applause at appropriate pauses, to the speaker.

I have always been glad to recall the scene, the polite attention, the dawning of real interest, then as our gifted speaker Mr. Handy got well going, first smiles, then gusts of laughter. No forced laughter but real spontaneous wit.

Walt and I were invited guests at mostly all the local weddings, partly because we were old and well-known citizens, and perhaps partly because every licence in a wide district was issued by us. In all our experiences, it was the most enjoyable wedding of all. Given Sister Rita Snowden, and such an entertainer as Rev Handy, how could it be otherwise?

The usual and more formal toasts over, the young couple and afterwards parents (proposed by the eldest friend present, Mr. Walter Harris), Sister Rita proposed "Girlfriends of the bride" which was responded to by Marjorie Sandford.

After their wedding holiday, Laurie and Florrie took the baby girl home, little Betty Nation, a lovely little thing and as bright as she was pretty. No doubt there was plenty of gossip, especially at the lower levels, but they both agreed to let that live itself down. Both our families were highly respected and our friends were with us. For the rest, not one of us cared much.

One thing did cause our sorrow and concern. I had kept the whole story from my sister in Helensville, knowing it would cause her much pain and besides, was it right for me to circulate such a matter, and cause added pain to a betrayed girl and to her honourable husband?

Yet, it was a Christian man from one of the assemblies who, when my sister, knowing nothing, spoke to him of the recent family wedding said "Yes and

a ready-made family, too". His wife shut him up before he could add to his disclosure. Had he not been a Christian, his lapse from Christian principle would have passed unmarked. I do not know his previous history. He may have been one of those fine people who at the Lord's invitation could have cast the first stone at the woman taken in adultery. On that I have no information. I do know, however, that our sinless Lord said to that woman "Neither do I condemn thee".

I have written about Florrie's friendliness, and her popularity as a child. All her life she was most unselfish, and her greatest joy was to make people happy, to do a kindness, to give a helping hand in need. However, her sort are a small minority. Often too, their kindness does not receive the appreciation it deserves, though a return is the last thing in their thoughts.

When I visited my sister some time later we spoke of it. She, like her Lord, had no word of condemnation, but only compassionate love.

It did however, add an anxiety to Florrie's cup of sorrow, by opening her eyes to the danger of a certain class of people who would think it their duty to tell the child of these things as soon as she was a little older. She got in first, and told Betty that "Daddy" wasn't her real father. Her real father was not a good man, and did not take care of her or her mummy, so she got a better Daddy for her.

This is only a small episode in that time. How much could be told on the other side. The wonderful kindness and understanding of Laurie's mother, who welcomed her son's wife with a mother's love and generous help.

Our friends, too, rallied round and made much of the little bride. Their attitude was a great help, and did much to discount the attitude of the nasty minded few.

For "the party of the first part" this can be said. Refusing to keep at school, he lagged around with a drunken father. With no proper home discipline, the youngest of a wild family, little, if any Christian teaching, was he altogether to blame for his lack of principle?

We are glad to have so fine a blood-stream mingle with ours, and become tributary to the Ashwell stream. Were I to become contributor to the series of sketches "The finest character I have ever known" I could but pick our Greatheart, Lawrence Watty Nation.

When we knew of Florrie's condition we of course tried to keep it quiet – difficult in a small community – but not impossible. Vain hope! It was common talk in the mill community where the young man went for his bride. How?? There is only one answer. Not the immoral young man, surely not the girl's people, who would scarcely want to advertise the grave misdeeds. Who then, but a vulgar girl trampling over one so much her superior in culture and education.

Time brings its revenges, or shall I say God sends retributive circumstances. Divorcing the husband she had taken from another, she fell in love with another man. As a Catholic she would not think she was married without a church ceremony. To get this she went from priest to priest in various scattered districts – to meet with refusal. She could not be married while the prospective husband had a wife, divorced or not, living.

During the older children's schooldays, we had Aunt Florrie [Gordon] with us for some months.

Going into hospital for a minor operation something went wrong. Instead of making a quick recovery she became worse, especially when she was passed the liquid food stage. Unfortunately the very distinguished surgeon in charge had taken a lull period to snatch a fishing holiday.

As Florrie's condition got worse and the pain unbearable, he had to be hastily summoned. She had complete stoppage of the bowels. The time that had elapsed before the locum and staff realised the gravity of the illness, had led to much suffering and aggravated the case. Bill Gordon, her husband, was sent for urgently. When taken in, he took one look at her and fainted dead away.

When the operation over and she recovered sufficiently for travel, Uncle Bill Gordon brought her down to me, as giving her the pure cool mountain air, and loving care that would aid her recovery. She was with us many [weeks].

She was just skin and bone, and so weak that Walt used to carry her upstairs to bed like a child. Unable to keep shoes on she had got a pair of ladies boots (quite unobtainable now, I should say). These, laced as tightly as they would go, were all she could wear. When she came she wore these over thick bed-socks.

In spite of the long journey, Bill came often to see her, and eventually after many weeks had the joy of taking her home.

Between our families there had always been most cordial relations. We enjoyed their visits, gladly welcoming them and sorry to see them go.

Both businessmen, Walt and Bill had much in common, and Florrie and I were happy to be together. There were only one daughter Jean/Mrs William Gardner and Doug, now Dr D.A. Gordon, with quite an array of following letters.

Dad was up to the neck in town politics and Bill Gordon was until his retirement because of ill health Matamata's first citizen, and Florrie an able Mayoress.

It must have been about 1930 I learnt of Easter convention at Ngaruawahia, probably through our then Minister Mr. C. Roke. About this time we acquired (for business purposes) our first car, a sturdy used Ford A. It was Dad's idea. He said if business would not come to him, he would go out after business.

He soon got a number of customers as far north as National Park, previously called Waimarino. As the district was the Waimarino, some confusion was caused over mail. If addressed to say, the Waimarino County Council, it would often reach National Park, causing muddle and delay. It was Walt who, in an indirect way, by telling the idea to some of the councillors and suggesting alternative names, as Ruapehu and some euphonous Maori name, or the name of the locality which was National Park. The councillor caught on to this idea and so National Park was chosen. It did not worry Dad in the least that someone else got the credit. He was like that. As long as the job was done, he never did trouble about the credit going elsewhere.

When we got the car, I realised attendance at the Ngaruawhaia convention was not an impossibility. Miss G. Scarrow, sister of Rev J.A. and Dorothy went on the first trip, which thereafter became an annual trip as long as we were in the King Country. New vistas of spiritual attainment opened up with each convention. Others in the King Country followed suit including Mr. W.A. Sandford. I still remember his jubilation when he told me he would be in Mr. Yolland's Bible Study Circle.

We got to know B.T.I. folk, and became supporters. One year Rev J.A. and Miss G. Scarrow went with us. Dorothy mostly came, and once or twice Bill in whom Mr. Cameron took a deep interest. We got great help and inspiration from the speakers, Rev Nicholson and Corrie ten Boom, but personally, I was helped most by Mr. J.O. Sanders.

In time I was given captaincy of the more elderly ladies who slept in the large hall.

Circumstances changed, and only once after we left the King Country was I able to join that happy throng.

Conditions in camp varied. Persistent rain or early cold snap caused problems, but never marred our enjoyment or dampened our ardour.

Living in the highlands, our doctor advised an annual trip to the sea for the family. About this time 1933 Tauranga was not the holiday resort it has become. When we first went visitors were not numerous. We carried a couple of tents, and had great times at no very great expense.

We left early from Raetihi, and went either by Taupo route or via Taumarunui. If we went by Taumarunui, we returned Taupo way. It was at the Mount we saw in the Herald Bill's name in the matriculation results. He was swimming at the time the paper arrived, but came in as he saw us waving and dancing a fandango on the beach. That was when he had been only a year back at school and was something to rejoice about.

Florrie's marriage to Laurie Nation [12 September 1925] took place in mid-winter in the Raetihi Methodist Church. Dorothy was bridesmaid and Joyce

Urwin, Hope aged eight, and Pearl Nation were flower girls. Hope had not long recovered from rheumatic fever, but seemed well enough for her role. As all eyes would be on the bride it may be that Hope was not under close observation, but at the reception I noticed she was very shaky, and next day called in Dr Feltham. He answered my ring by saying, if I had not rung he would have got in touch as he, too, had noticed her and thought she had St Vitus Dance, which often followed on rheumatic fever. He was right, and she was under treatment for some time. Doctor gave instructions as to treatment, and said she must not go to school for a year.

When we told her she broke down and sobbed bitterly. No school! She was heartbroken. Seeing she was so upset, Dr modified the order, and said if she were to go to a country school, where she was to be allowed to go out and rest whenever she wanted, she could try that out.

Roy had a country friend with whose folk he had spent an occasional holiday, Herbie Meyer. When Mrs Meyer heard she promptly invited Hope to live with her. Her youngest daughter Margie had just finished her Teachers Training course and been appointed to our school. Simple! We just exchanged daughters. On Mondays Margie Meyer was driven the 9 miles from Orautoha, and Hope was the back load. On Fridays Hope was brought in and Margie taken home. [She once said] I would love to have as much junket as I could eat.

The country air, freedom at school, farm fare, and Mrs Meyer's loving care made it possible for Hope's education to go on. Instead of her illness setting her back educationally, she gained ground. The schoolteacher boarded with Mrs Meyer, and that too was a help. One of the settlers gave each year a gold medal to the scholar making most progress. This Hope won, and was regarded as that year's Dux. The arrangement with Mrs Meyer was continued for a further year. The Meyers had become fond of Hope. Indeed it seemed Mrs Meyer had hopes that her second son Arthur, a fine lad with a piece of land already marked for his future farm, would marry Hope. Arguing that it would cost me at least twice as much to keep Margie in the town as it did to keep Hope on the farm, she asked for Hope to stay another year. Then, when the year was up Betty Voelkerling, Mrs Meyer's niece was needing town board. The Voelkerling's farm was close to Meyer's and they begged us to exchange with their daughter. Betty was a quiet girl, no trouble at all, so Hope was at the Orautoha School three years in all and had passed Stds II, III, and IV.

Chapter 23 Bill Ashwell, Dorothy's marriage

Perhaps the most colourful member of the family was Bill. Where he was, there was always something stirring. Without the fighting instincts so strong in him, my Chronicle would be minus this chapter.

He was born March 31, 1914, so perhaps the fighting spirit came from the national atmosphere of that time.

Dorothy was five and bringing home all the usual infantile epidemics, which Bill promptly took, in spite of all our care. When he was born there raged a severe type of whooping cough, attended in a number of cases with pneumonia.

Bill was kept upstairs, away from the family, but in spite of all our precautions he succumbed to it at 11 weeks. Whooping cough is a severe and long-lasting infection. I myself had lived through countless epidemics without succumbing to it until at 77 a small great grandchild infected me. I did not need the experience to know what it was to an 11 weeks old baby, for I was his only nurse. How he fought! After a bad fit he would lie back in my arms, as limp as rag, his face white and eyes closed, till, recovering a bit he would open his eyes … and smile.

What a gallant spirit. He sure needed it.

When he started school at five, he had every infection listed on the school entry form but one. Diphtheria had missed him, but to balance that he had rheumatic fever.

Perhaps having battled successfully with the Grim Reaper in infancy had developed that fighting quality of his.

When he was a toddler, Dorothy, five years old came in with the news "Bill is having a little fight with another small boy".

I should be surprised to learn that he ever ran away from a challenge or that he had been worsted by any boy near his size.

As a small boy in the early standards, one of his jobs was to bring the milk home from a farmlet near the school.

Once he was very reluctant to go. After a while the reason came out.

"I can't go by there, old mother so-and-so will give me a hiding".

"Why should Mrs so-and-so want to give you a hiding?" I asked.

"She says I hit her boy and she is going to whack me."

"Well" I said "that's your fault but if you go a little further round, by Duncan Street, she won't see you ".

"But I can't go that way either" was replied. "Old Mother such-and-such is looking out for me there".

As regards school work – no trouble at all. He gathered in his proficiency certificate at 11 years and eight months.

He had a year's high in Matamata, and in the third form entered for the best poem contest, open to all forms, and took his place among the prize winners with his poem on "Ruapehu" . The poem is printed in the M.D.H.S. (Matamata District High School) magazine of 1926-7.

After the Christmas holidays, Bill begged to be allowed to go to work and learn farming. We wanted him to get Matriculation first. He was then not quite 14. His father and I after thinking it over, realising that if sent back so much against his will, another year or two could turn out to be wasted. It seemed best to let him try a farm job.

When he did not return to Matamata, the head wrote personally to us saying that his work in the previous year had been so good he would, with our permission put him into Form 5, confident that he would hold his own in that form.

It was with deep regret that we replied to that kind letter. Perhaps it would have been best had we sent him back. Matamata District High School of that day was regarded as one of the best in New Zealand.

He started work on a farm some miles away, in from Pipiriki Road.

In the next three years he tried out two or three farms, liked the work, but was then old enough to see little prospect, no matter how hard he worked, of owning his own.

So he asked if he could go back to school, and in one year landed his Matriculation. After another year to consolidate his gains a bit, school days were over.

We were right in the slump. In the cities boys who could have made good got no work. Where they had no other help they went on the dole and tightened their belts on their complaining stomachs.

Bill went on the government relief works. Because of his education he was put in the P.W. [Public Works] office, near enough to Wanganui to go in there at weekends.

During his high school days, in his matriculation year he had two particular friends Joe Bryers, whose people owned the Waimarino Hotel, one of our two boarding houses, the other an Ohakune lad, Mick Whale.

The three planned an ambitious cycling tour to the far north for the Christmas Holiday vacation. They would go to Rawene, where Joe's people came from. Joe's mother was British, and very fair complexion. His grandfather was a fine aristocratic old Maori not heavy in feature as the King Country tribes were. Strangely, the only one of the Bryers family having distinctly Maori features was the eldest boy who was as fair in skin as his white mother. Joe was very like his aristocratic old grandfather in feature, but had the dark complexion of a full Maori.

The three youths put a lot of clever planning into their preparations for the trip. A light box, mounted on two bike wheels was attached to one of their bikes, Bill's or Joe's. The two free bikes took the rest of the gear on carriers, including one tent and a "pup", the latter to house the gear while the boys slept in the big one.

They went off, travelling via Taumarunui-Te Kuiti route, camping when they found a suitable spot. The weather was good at the start, but deteriorated shortly.

They battled along the King Country stretch, passed Te Kuiti, and when they got to Otahuhu, wet-through in a semi-tropic downpour, they saw bright lights and the bakehouse where next day's bread was being prepared, and thought how nice a hot pie or two would be.

They were given a great welcome, a hot drink, and a spot to sleep on. Next morning they were wakened by the proprietor with plates heaped with bacon and eggs, mugs of tea to help it down. Then like new men they passed through Auckland and up the west coast by easy stages to reach Rawene at last.

The tribe put on a hui for them. Joe's people entertained them and took them trips.

Bill had a further year of school, the second to get Higher Leaving Certificate.

For his success great credit must go to the Ohakune High, and in particular to his teacher Miss Hind. A country High, even though serving a large district was lucky to get a teacher of her ability and quality.

Leaving school, he went to work on a station near Wanganui.

Working in the homestead was an attractive young girl a few months his junior. We saw Bill on occasional holidays. He was quite at home with the other sex. Indeed when he was young the family found it difficult to keep

abreast of the changes. Quite a family joke was to ask "Who is Bill's girl this month?"

Even so, it was no small shock to get a letter in a girlish hand addressed to me conveying the information that she was pregnant and that Bill was responsible. Bill had not been backward in talking of his sister, the Mayoress of Ohakune. The letter reached me in care of Mrs Nation, Mayoress of Ohakune, and inviting me to meet her mother in Palmerston. This was arranged. I arrived to find Mrs Williams and her older daughter, Mrs [redacted].

When the daughter joined, we were out to do our best in the situation, Mrs [redacted] left Mrs Williams and I to discuss plans.

They were very happy to learn that we were ready to take the child. While we were making these arrangements, Bill knocked at the door to ask if he might take Brenda somewhere for morning tea, to which Mrs Williams agreed. Before we parted, in walked the young pair saying they wanted us to agree to their getting married. Well! Well! Anyway we sent them off while we discussed this new development and recovered a bit from the shock.

We had arranged to take care of the baby when it arrived, and take it into the family circle.

So, now we arranged that Brenda's mother should bring Brenda to us, and Dad and I being Registrars, a quiet wedding in our home was agreed to. We settled a date. Brenda and her mother were to go to Florrie's at Ohakune.

It was not to be a wedding by registrar. Our Methodist minister would marry them in our church, quietly, one evening with only the family and a few very close friends. When Bill married in 1934, we already had three grandchildren Betty, John, and Peter Nation.

We leave affairs thus arranged till later to introduce the Minister.

Our Methodist church had been rather badly let down by two young ministers whose matrimonial entanglements (they were not free to marry till some years had been served) had left us without a minister, though the Synod was doing its best to find us a man.

So it was, one evening, I was working quietly in the kitchen. Our home was behind the shop, so the private entrance was from an alleyway at the side. In the dusk one evening, I heard a noise as someone stumbled up the steps, and went quickly out to see what was what.

A dark young man was regaining his footing, and on my appearance explained he was the new minister, name, Skuse, just arrived from Wanganui.

Inviting him in, I set about getting a meal, the family being out on their lawful occasions. The furthest thing from my thoughts would be that I was entertaining my future son-in-law. But it was even so. His arrival happened when Dorothy was teaching at Taumarunui, 40 miles away, so that she would often come home for the weekend.

Our church was not very financial, and to help them get a man we had offered to provide his meals. In our size family one more made little difference, and his salary would be proportionally smaller to the church, and all they could afford.

So, except for breakfast which he preferred to have at the Parsonage, he was with us for two meals a day.

Given a dark young man, a fair young girl, meeting each weekend, almost as members of a family, and it doesn't need a Sherlock Holmes to predict the outcome. In due course we acquired a second son-in-law.

In less than three years they were married, and farming on the Ohakune Road, a few miles out. They were married in December 1937, Dorothy changing school teaching for farming.

Dad did not approve of the match. He was very proud of his gifted and fine-looking daughter. For her to marry a Methodist probationary minister who had not even been through college seemed simply foolish. Of course the prospective son-in-law could not marry and remain in the ministry. He resigned and leased a small farm a few miles along the Ohakune Road, and George milked a small herd, and proved a good farmer.

At this time our affairs were at their lowest ebb. Had Walt had any previous business training, he would no doubt have acted differently when struck by the slump. He had not graduated into business. He had learnt his craft of watchmaker (really watch repairer) as an apprentice of his watch maker and jeweller uncle in Bishops Stortford, Herts. Coming to New Zealand with the family as a youth of 19, he helped break in their virgin 400 acres, having some idea of getting, with his two brothers, a part of the family farm, when the bush was felled and burnt. Please don't get any idea of cleared land. It had been heavily timbered with wonderful timber trees which a criminally foolish government compelled to be burnt off. It was only the light timber that burned, but on the clear places and wherever grass would grow, seed was sown, and then a small herd of cows was bought. As time went on and clearing went on of the lighter logs and stumps, the herd was extended and a few sheep added, fowls, geese, and even turkeys reared, but the Waimarino was too cold for turkey breeding to succeed. It usually ended with a decent flock of domestic fowls on the farm.

In this sort of farming Walt took his part. When the farm was "going", Walt began to get work which he did at the family home, in his own trade. There was no watchmaker nearer than Wanganui, so folk brought their clocks and "turnips" to Walt to repair.

It suited all parties. Walt lived at home, worked when needed on the farm and did watch repairs in between, mostly in winter.

His brother Fred became an expert fencer. People requiring fencing work done knew if they got Fred Ashwell and Bob Spence as a team, they got the best in the Waimarino. So, as the farm got in going order, Fred went out to work on his own, and Walt had his own craft to make him independent. He was quite satisfied, being naturally a bit of a recluse, preferred that life, which gave him all he asked – a living and the means to buy books.

That was his life at least till one Sunday I broke into it.

Chapter 24 Meeting and choosing Walt

Then, one Sunday, in 1904, when it was too wet for Walt to run to cover, probably so wet that visitors would not be likely, we met.

That day was a day of destiny to at least three of the party, and affecting in some degree the whole family, Alfred and Ellen Ashwell, Walt, Fred, Nell, and perhaps most of all, myself.

In Walt I found a kindred spirit, a book lover and thinker. The last named was true of Nell and her mother also. The family were perhaps a bit narrow in their outlook, even on literature. Their reading had been to a large extent biographical but the best available, that is, except for Walter. This is an incident. As a lad he was reading Jules Verne's 20,000 Leagues under the Sea, when his mother remarked "Why read those lies when there are lives of the great and good to be read?" But Walt's mind would not be trammelled in that fashion. He was always open to explore and evaluate new thought. It could be in the realm of discovery, science, or even politics. Those were the days when Bernarr Macfadden was opening up new trends in physical culture. Mrs Ashwell was shocked and distressed that Walt should find pleasure in going to a private spot to roll naked in the snow! Her comment was "He does act queer!"

Walt found it hard in a small house to get privacy. The last thing he wished was to upset the family with his "queer" doings.

My interest in new thought agreed with his, and as the weeks went on so our friendship ripened.

A bookworm growing up in the Victorian attitude of my time with so many taboos, the young folk of my day were not abnormally interested in sex.

Of course we expected to be married in due course to some "nice" member of the opposite sex.

In spite of the rough times of colonisation illegitimacy was far from common. The general outlook was sensible, natural, and clean.

As regards myself, I mixed freely enough with my age group and liked some more than others. One of these, I found later, really cared for me, but thought my (so slightly!) superior education put me a bit out of the class of a carrier which he was. Had he asked me before I met Walt, I might have married him. As he did not put me to the test he missed out. Looking down the vistas of the years, I realised he was a man of exceptional quality and though we

missed marriage, his friendship and interest followed me down the years. He married and lived in Taumarunui. Another of life's "givers" he never missed doing me a kindness. He found a case and packed and carried my piano to the Mangaonoho railhead, paid freight to Taranaki and refused to take payment. He said "I can afford to do you a small service like that".

When I got to know Walt, I knew that if I married anyone else than him I would be taking, for me, second-best.

I need to write about this to explain about Fred. To me Fred was Nell's brother, one of my friends. We three Nell, Fred and I, were much together. It had been Nell and Fred who went places together, Church affairs or communal picnics or trips. When Nell and I became close friends, I still looked on Fred with sisterly affection and interest. He was a good friend and Nell's brother and invariable escort. In explaining these things, please remember my Victorian up-bringing and outlook, and the fact that I was an unsophisticated country girl.

In my children's generation, girls of 14 knew more than I did in my early 20s.

I have often been sorry that I did not recognise easily that he had warmer feelings for me than I had for him. I would have been so careful to hurt him as little as possible. Our cousin, who had lived in close contact with the family both overseas and in New Zealand said this "You are not a good picker, Miss M. You passed the gold and took the gilt. When he said this, I mentally treated his remark with the contempt I felt it deserved. I was very much in love, and perfectly satisfied. Looking backwards down the vista of the years, I realised I had passed by a man of the highest quality. I saw in his, a life lived according to the highest Christian ethics, and in peculiarly difficult circumstances. As A.P. [Alf Parkes] suggested, I may have passed by the highest quality gold, for a lower carat content, but certainly, not for gilt. Believing as I do, that God has placed in our hearts that mutual attraction that should lead to marriage, it is not fitting that each should coolly evaluate the other and decide accordingly.

When Walt 'discovered' me, as I had him, it seemed the most natural thing in the world to accept our finding.

Nell was greatly distressed. She had taken it for granted that Fred would be my choice. As she said, Walt was in no position to marry. Fred was, and it was Fred who had courted me. Besides, Fred was a confessed Christian, living the life. Walt was, in spiritual matters, an unknown quantity. She was sure much prayer was needed before taking such an important step.

Those who set out to follow the Lord are only beginning their pilgrimage. We learn and develop and grow. There was certainly truth in Nell's contentions. I can still remember the intensity of prayer at that time, to know with certainty the will of God.

I know all those concerned would pray, even Walt, to whom prayer was not so established a habit as with the rest.

I know, from my own youth, how young people can get, (or certainly could in my day of much less Bible Knowledge and poor religious teaching) the idea that to want a thing very badly is a sort of idolatry, putting a man (or woman) or anything in front of God. Therefore, for our internal good, God would likely deny us the desires of our hearts.

I knew I spent much time in agonised prayer, especially bitter because of the third party. I was later not sorry for this experience.

The conclusion I came to was that it would indeed be wrong of me to marry Fred, loving his brother.

Mature experience has confirmed my belief that the right thing, God's will, was done.

Marriage has many complexities that youth cannot possibly know about, indeed, of which it can have no inkling, for instance as one, compatibility of blood. It must be for such reasons the attraction we call 'falling in love '(as distinguished from youthful infatuation) can well be God's guide.

In my own case I longed for children, and so did Walt's folk. We did not know then that Nell could not have borne them, nor that Fred, who later married a woman who had borne two sons, yet had none to him, would have none. As it turned out Ern also had none. Walt's and my children alone carry on the Ashwell clan, which is now entering its fourth generation from Alfred and Ellen. Because of this fact I can write plainly, with heart-burnings and hurt to none.

I cannot, just at this, leave the subject of Fred. I was not for him, but surely, it was not in God's will that he should marry where he did.

Nell, who felt so keenly Fred's disappointment, invited a friend of her early New Zealand days for a visit, a bright and attractive young woman, a Methodist. She was nice-looking, musical and artistic. Several water and one colour pictures of hers showed real talent. To Fred she may have been a bright particular star, but alien in outlook to himself.

He had his own attractive little cottage back a block from where later our shop and home would be, and laid the section out in flowers with vegetable garden behind.

Working at odd jobs he had his hot meal at Pike's boarding house where a certain widow was waitress.

Her husband had worked as sub-manager on a farm on the Pipiriki Road. They had two boys, about five and seven, when he died, of pneumonia if memory serves me. Working on the place was one of Walt's cousins Alf Parkes, called after his uncle Alf, Walt's cousin. A short time previously, Alf Parkes brother, George had come from England with his family to settle in Raetihi. His family consisted of two youths, 20 and 18, Bert and Alf, and a daughter Edith about 16. Jeff 14 and Allen 12 both schoolboys.

It was Alf who was on the farm.

When Mrs Hunt was so suddenly bereaved, young Alf was handy, with the result that within a couple of weeks his cousin George came in to us in great perturbation, and poured out his tale to Walt consulting him in his capacity as Registrar of Births, Deaths, and Marriages. Young Alf had engaged himself to a widow with two children. What a calamity – a widow – two children. Walt asked "How old is Alf?" The answer was "18". "Well," said Walt, "you need not worry. Without your consent he can't get married for three years, till he's 21, and a lot can happen in three years".

A very much relieved man left our office. Walt was glad to have been able to help him. How sorry he was afterwards, for the widow moved to town and copped Fred.

Fred was an easy prey. Her sad tale of her two motherless boys, her sob stories of hardship, untrue because her husband had left plenty for their younger days in insurance as we knew because in fact the legal firm offered to invest in our business, as being safe and sound. In fact, Walt had been prepared to accept the offer, until he learned its source and turned it down.

However, Fred's knowledge of womenfolk was of those who would not in any circumstances stoop to a lie; his mother, sister, were of the highest integrity.

So he swallowed the bait, line, hook and sinker, and it cost him all his former life had gained him. It brought an alien element into a united family. He was a man of many friends, the friendliest and merriest man in the church socials and community "do's". His marriage cut him off from all his erstwhile friends.

Everywhere he went, other than to work, she was on his arm. She took him from the Church of which he had been a foundation member. Indeed, the Church might not have been in existence but for the countless man-hours of work he had put into its building.

At first she came, all smiles, hanging on his arm (and he did hate public demonstration!) then found fault with the attitude of the women, with as little truth as could usually be found to come from her lips; for the folk were of the friendliest and least critical.

Then, Fred came alone and she went to her old fold, a Brethren Assembly (closed). Then she talked of how people criticised her going alone so, and prevailed on Fred to go with her. So Fred went with her. Numbering among my dear friends folk of that assembly, I am sure the remarks reputed to them had as much truth as her assertions as to the Methodist church reception of her.

The only derogatory remark I can remember was that of a visitor from Nelson. The occasion was a wedding – whose, I cannot recall. My sister-in-law had a strong voice with the quality of an ungreased cross-cut saw. Had she sung through a hymn her voice would not have jarred so much, but her habit was to break in loudly every now and then, usually off key, and cause a rift in the harmony. As the gathering dispersed the lady turned to her hostess – the organist, and asked "Whose was the voice that roared o'er Eden?" It struck me as being most apt and witty comment. I know she was not responsible for her voice but she certainly turned it with a weapon. There are unusual people in any congregation, who, if they do not add to the harmony, do make "a joyful noise unto the Lord". Even a little disharmony can have its place in a harmonious whole, and be lovely in His ears whose praise is sung. What can be said that, the intent of which is to draw attention to its possessor? With such intent could even the voice of a prima donna be musical to Heavenly ears?

Before his marriage Fred used often to come to us for an evening or on Sundays. He loved the children, and they him, and regarded us as his own folks.

When it became known to us that Fred was contemplating this marriage, Grandpa Ashwell and Nell were much disturbed. So was I, not only because of the episode on her husband's death, but among my close friends were members of the Brethren sect, the kindliest and most hospitable of folk. They were wonderful Christians, very hard toiling dairy farmers. Sunday was their great day, open house, Assembly service in the mornings, Sunday School afternoons, in which I was permitted to take a class, on condition I taught only on certain lines untainted by modern thought then in its heyday. A promise I was glad to give.

Sunday was given wholly to the Lord, though a huge herd had to be milked nine months of the year. The other three the cows were "out" turned into large tracts of virgin bush. Then outside Brethren speakers and evangelists were invited and many of the foundation members of coming churches made their decisions at "Berry's Sunday School".

A farmer friend of mine, who left school soon after I came to Raetihi, and is one of the finest Christians I know, an original thinker, a keen Bible student, an elder in his church, when I asked him in recent years when and how he made his decision, he replied "in Berry's Sunday School, when I was 12." My reply was "I might have known it!"

When Mrs Hunt lost her husband, Berrys took her two children, giving them the best of care, for how much? Believe it or not 2/6 per week each. Mrs Berry told me this, rather apologising for taking any money at all. "It will pay for their school needs".

We deeply regretted that Fred should be the one to follow young Alf Parkes, but as Nell said "Fred is entitled to his choice and our loyalty".

So they were married and Walt and I gave the wedding spread – like Bill's – a family affair. She was 4 to 5 years older than Fred at their marriage.

The Ashwells were a most united family. She set out to ingratiate herself with Grandpa. Grandma was now old and losing hold. Dear old Grandpa was her target. She brought her boys along with great stories of their fine qualities. Then she carried tales of our children. The things they did! These probably had a basis of truth. They were certainly no little plaster saints, just normal healthy kids. No doubt they got away with the usual kinds of devilment, climbing to dangerous high places.

At first, Nell, thinking of the children' safety, would tell me about these things, but she was not fooled for long. Grandpa, sitting helpless in his invalid wheel chair, began to worry and Nell had to ask her not to tell him these stories because he loved the children so much he would worry needlessly. Most children lived dangerously, and incidents were few. Nell also put Grandpa's mind at rest with her sensible tactful remarks. She also stayed in the room during her visits, which would certainly cramp her style quite a bit.

Chapter 25 Roy

Roy has come into the story just in his infancy and early childhood. Luckily I have photos of him at various stages.

He was a beautiful baby. I have never liked to have babies photographed in the nude, partly because there is nothing children hate more than to see in later years such affronts to their dignity. We have photos taken of the children. Dorothy in Wanganui Girls College uniform, Florrie and she together, the family when Bill was little and Ruth the baby. The Ashwells delighted in these family records. Nell used to say "They, the children, change so quickly, and it's good to remember them at each stage. Our memories may not carry all we would wish to remember."

On one such occasion the photographer, a lady, asked to take our lovely little baby naked. He was the only one, and his personal reaction was the usual one of amused disapproval.

I think I have more individual photos of Roy than of any of the others. I believe God knew, in years ahead, how precious they would be. He was certainly attractive, not only in looks, but in personality. An early nickname, which fortunately did not stick, was "Snowy" given by outsiders. He had very large deep blue eyes and crisp fair curly hair.

There was nothing of Bill's aggressiveness in his disposition. From his earliest school day he was surrounded by a crowd of boys having fun – lots of it, if noise was any criterion. Yet he himself was not noisy but where he was hilarity resided. He had a great sense of humour. It bubbled up. The ability to see the humorous side of things was strong in them. Many a time a quick flash of humour saved him in a tight situation. If one can make an irate parent laugh, righteous anger can be turned aside. He was generous, though sometimes at others' expense. I know the case of apples we usually had melted quickly and often unaccountably. What matter! As a friend who was a child lover used to say "Somehow apples and boys seem to belong together." So, unless things got a bit too hot, Mum turned a blind eye on the apple box and in other such places.

In school he did well. English was his best subject. His gift of humour made his essays outstanding. Like the rest of us, he was a great reader. He did not chase the top places in the class, but would always be Grade A+ and not far off top. He liked school very much, but I think chiefly for its wide companionship.

When he was somewhere about four years old (1922), motor cars were beginning to be occasionally seen in our Waimarino back blocks. The first car owner in our vicinity was a sawmiller, a Mr. Messon.

These 20th-century wonders captured his deepest interest. He knew them all. I remember one day we were out visiting a friend when he broke into the conversation with the remark. "I can hear the 'Kune doctor's car." As the said car was making for our doctor's home, I asked "How do you know it's the 'Kune doctors car?" "Why, I know its noise" he said. He did indeed know the peculiar sound of every local car at that time.

Naturally, at this time, cigarette makers used to use the new interest in pictures for their wares. Roy was an industrious collector. I remember he saved up for an album in which to keep his collection.

He was a born mimic. One of his stunts was to give us imaginary conversations between the three local men who stuttered. He had each one's individual peculiarities down to a fine point. A conversation between any two, or all three, would convulse any audience, adult or juvenile.

We did not encourage this means of entertainment, and as he grew older he gave it up as being unkind. Perhaps it was used to entertain his pals. One of his "ways that were dark like the heathen Chinese". We wouldn't know.

He was a bit sensitive about his lack of inches, so he enrolled in some professor's correspondence class, one of those whose abnormal muscular development captured the imagination of young would-be he-men. He evidently had not taken note of the dictum "Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit to his stature."

I think his media were dumbbells. It certainly was a good healthy interest even if he did not thereby develop into a six footer. I know his young brother used to take snaps of him at the exercises to record his development.

He was always climbing, and heights did not bother him. I suppose it was watching him, not to mention his "gang" that gave the snooper in the backstreet material for her attacks on the children, on which black background her own boys would appear pure white. I remember when he was about three, we were having our building painted. The workmen had gone to dinner leaving a ladder which they were using to reach the top of the walls, standing where they left it. As our building would be of 24 feet (12 foot studs, top and bottom) the ladder could have been 20 feet long. I went out to find him smiling down at me from very near the top. I remember that I kept my head, did not scream, but as gently as possible attracted attention while I climbed up and guided him down. I made sure after that that all ladders were left on the ground. That did not stop climbing. He had only one bad fall, off the roof of a house next to the Druids Hall. He must have had a cool head, as well being quick in his reactions. Though far removed from those cowardly

nitwits that set booby traps, he always welcomed the chance of creating fun. His Dad was fond of Gorgonzola cheese, far too strong for the family taste. The dish (cover removed) was placed near Dad. Roy tied a piece of string round a suitable piece then ran the invisible string along the white tablecloth. Great was hilarity when a piece of cheese was seen making its way along the centre of the table apparently propelled by its invisible inhabitants. Then Dad, absorbed in this paper would look up and enjoy the joke together with the rest of the family.

The happiest recollections I have of my own father, were the times he would recite to us. He had a great repertoire and was really good. We liked best Horatius or Shamus O'Brien, and bits of Dickens. Because of this, I had to read much aloud to the children. Whole books, according to their age, but poetry was often in demand.

Once he was nursing Bill's baby Jimmy who was teething and dribbled on Roy's sleeve. Looking up, he grinned and said "And the kid turns on the spit". A far cry from Horatius but typical of Roy's ready wit and sense of humour.

"And in the long nights of winter
When the cold north wind blows
And the loud howling of the wolves
Is heard among the snows
When the oldest task is opened,
And the largest land is lit,
When the chestnuts glow in embers
And the kid turns on the spit.
With winking and with laughter
Still is the story told
How well Horatius kept the bridge
In the brave days of old."

He enjoyed school, mixed happily with all, and I am sure never gave the teachers any trouble, or, as far as I know, never made an enemy. With these quiet ones, one never knows.

One day a very surprised Bill came home with a great story. A big Raetihi boy was bullying a much smaller lad, not for the first time. Roy threatened to fight him if he did not let the boy alone, and actually took him on, but the bully desisted when he saw Bill coming along.

Bill was thrilled and said "He was first rate. He tackled the bully with all he had." From that time the undersized lad was freed from molestation (in that quarter?).

Raetihi was a small town to have its own newspaper. We were fortunate in that a man with journalistic ink in his veins took a look at us, isolated and 60 miles from the nearest large town, and started a paper. He was Joseph Iness, who was responsible for starting a number of country papers in small growing towns. The printer and publisher was a fine public spirited young man, a real asset to the growing town, Mr. Laurie Fryer. I think it was he who was responsible for naming the paper "The Waimarino County Call". Anyway, he became proprietor and built up a fine paper with a good circulation.

When he went to serve his country in the 1914-18 war, he sold out to Mr. C. Nation. The Nations had been in journalism for about 200 years, first in Britain then in New Zealand.

So popular had Laurie Fryer been that it took us some time to appreciate the new ownership, but in time they were accepted as true Raetihitians.

When Roy finished school, Mr. Nation [Charles Cecil Nation] was a very sick man, and his son Laurie came from Ohakune to take the oversight of the concern, which had developed into a good business. Roy went to work there, and was very happy.

About this time, my 50th year (1932), quite out of the blue, God called me to renewed dedication. As I have written, the need of our church drove me into preaching. The children were expected to attend morning service after Sunday School, but were excused evening attendance. Roy tried every scheme to dodge the mornings it would be my turn to take the service. A friend of mine asked him why he didn't want to attend when his mother was in the pulpit as his mother was a good speaker and not likely to break down, to which he gave this answer. "It's like this, Mrs S. I would go, but I feel so afraid Mum will forget and say Mr. Roy Ashwell will now lead us in prayer".

Like Brett Harte's "Heathen Chinese" he may have had "ways that are dark and tricks that are vain" which were hidden from us. They do say "When ignorance is bliss, tis folly to be wise".

I think Roy worked at the "Call" office for a little less than two years.

It was the advice of another employee that brought a change. He told Roy that with his education he could better himself by going in to the Public Service where prospects were so much better. Though happy in his work he saw that the advice was sensible and took it, at a very opportune time.

A new Government Department was coming into existence, Social Security, and Roy started there. He liked the work and "the fellows" and, to his own surprise, suffered acutely from home-sickness. When he was leaving for

Wellington, he naïvely said "Don't expect too many letters Mum, but I will write once a fortnight! Letters were almost daily affairs from his end, because he confessed "It eases the home-sickness". After a time this phase passed. With his gift for making friends he soon settled down, and letters became weekly instead of daily affairs.

Before long a new absorbing interest entered his life. He joined the R.V.N.R. [Royal Volunteer Naval Reserve] with a batch of 40 cadets. He trained on the Achilles, taking to seafaring as the proverbial duck to water. He was quick at acquiring the various skills. There was great competition among the learners. He was the smallest in his group and the C.O. called him "Tich". Once, on a competitive job, the C.O. remarked "My money is on 'Little Tich'". He won the medal awarded the best cadet of his year.

There were occasional cruises on weekends, and on long weekends (as Labour Day) long cruises were undertaken though boys in the R.V.N.R. were held to be excused at their jobs if they were not back to work on Monday morning.

Before joining the Navy, the occasional holidays were a pain in the neck to him with no relatives near enough to visit. When we left Raetihi for Gisborne he said "Oh Mum why didn't you go to Palmerston or somewhere I could reach for weekends?"

To his great delight leave was granted for him to go on an island-hopping cruise. It was whispered that the crews might even take in San Francisco, where he would be able to visit our cousins the Mills family. Aunt Lily Mills was my mother's only sister, who I mentioned leaving New Zealand in 1886, just after the destruction of the famous pink and white terraces. That, however did not eventuate, though the voyage was a long and interesting one. He returned convinced that if he could choose his career it would be the Navy.

By the irony of fate, that voyage ended all hope of a naval career or any other. At one of the ports of call he caught dysentery, and was treated by the ship's doctor. I have always held it against that doctor that had he done his full duty we would not have lost our son at 22. He was his patient, and should have been warned that sufferers from amoebic dysentery should be under medical supervision for at least a year afterwards.

Roy, working in Wellington, living in lodgings, was not warned. I remember once he wrote to me asking what was good medicine for persistent diarrhoea. I gave him the usual home remedies and dietary precautions and told him by all means to see a doctor if it did not clear up.

Then, just ahead of the official declaration of war, the R.V.N.R. was called up and put on sentry duty around Wellington. This occurred just after his annual holiday spent with us in Gisborne. He came at a time I was looking after some babies, who had chicken-pox.

When Roy was out on Mount Wellington he fell ill and was sent to hospital with chickenpox.

There he was examined by a young intern who found he was suffering from severe colitis. This doctor was most concerned, and did all that was humanly possible, though it was too late to affect a cure.

Roy longed to go home for Christmas so he was allowed. His doctor sent us all particulars of his case, and diet. These instructions were most faithfully observed. He himself never wished otherwise.

Our own doctor, Dr Singer, took his case, examining him periodically, then on 5th June, his last visit, ordered him to hospital. We begged for one day's grace, as 6th was his birthday. This Dr Singer granted with precautions as to what he should avoid in the way of "eats". Unnecessary in his case. He never wished to do other than obey orders. So on 7th June, aged 22, he was admitted to "Cook".

At first we were hopeful and so was he. Whatever his thoughts, and the thoughts of youth are long long thoughts, we did not hear any grouses. Once only, he did a private moan to me when he said "Am I the chief of sinners, Mum. Boys of my age are enjoying life, playing footy, going places. Why should I be here?"

I answered that he was in the best place for being made well, and we all were praying that he would soon be home again.

A little later he asked me "Mum, why are you so sure I am to get better. There is no sign of it. I lost 5lbs this week."

I replied "Surely not, it could be a mistake."

"Mum" he said "They don't make those sorts of mistakes here."

This was Thursday, visiting day, next day Mrs Dr Hall received patients' relatives. I told her I was very troubled and mentioned the 5lbs loss of weight. She seemed surprised, and said "We've been treating him for his trouble. Now we build him up." This was Friday afternoon. Early next morning, our good neighbour, Mrs MacDonald whose phone we had been invited to use for communication with the hospital came to say Roy had not had a good night and we could see him whenever we came, but we should call first at the office.

I went straight over to the neighbours, about ½ mile, and she just waited to change out of her cow-shed boots, covering her working clothes with a mack. Before we could get the car out of the shed, the phone again rang. I answered, to be told Roy had just passed away. I did not tell Walt as we passed our home, thinking the news could await our return. He was still lying on his bed, the nurse beginning on her last service to him. He looked just as if he were asleep, and there, after a silent prayer, a last kiss, I left my beloved. Dad did not want a last look. He always preferred his memories of the living.

He was buried in the Taruhera Cemetery, No 1 grave in the servicemen's plot.

As, occasionally, I look at it, I say with a friend of ours who lost their only daughter "How many hopes lie buried here!"

The loss of Roy was a great grief to us all, but to none more than to Laurie.

When Laurie started school, Bill had left home. He grew up with Roy, who took him under his wing. They were inseparable. Roy had great tenderness of heart toward all little and helpless beings, and his small brother was usually in his company.

I think that Laurie's grief at going away from home must have been mostly missing his big brother.

When Roy left school, the two planned holidays together. Once it was to Auckland where they stayed a week at the People's Palace, doing the usual country-folk round of the zoo, museum, art gallery and beaches.

I was surprised in one letter from Laurie to find a printed text of a sermon. Later I wondered if indeed they had been inside a church, let alone had remembered the text. A strong suspicion was that the said text had been copied from the Baptist Tabernacle noticeboard! As far as I am concerned it may remain one of life's unsolved mysteries.

Roy's one sport after he left school was fly-fishing. Waimarino is the county of trout streams, beloved of outside enthusiasts. The secretary of the Waimarino Acclimatisation Society, Mr. A.C. Henderson, took Roy under his wing and taught him the elements of fly-fishing, and many a day they had together. Only real masters of the craft get many trout. If one wants to bring home a full basket he had best go to Taupo. Because it is such a fine joy to catch a wily fish that has eluded many anglers, dyed-in-the-wool fishermen used to return year by year to the more difficult King Country fishing.

This I know, for my husband issued licences from the foundation of the society, years before our marriage.

When Roy came to join us in Gisborne, he went back for a time to his work in the Gisborne branch of the Social Security Department, then situated near the Town Clock. Laurie was his right-hand man, joyfully serving him, and as his health declined, he was waited on hand and foot, his every want anticipated by his brother. Their beds were in the same room. Laurie valeted him, finding nothing he could do a task, though none of us expected the inevitable event, not at that time.

Chapter 26 The slump and Walt's breakdown

Somewhere about 1932 we had the chance of taking over a small business in Rangataua. I am not sure of the details, and have nothing to refer to for checking what memory brings to mind.

We had a local employee quite good for the job and she knew the people.

Our old Ford A enabled us to take it on and bring out stock as needed. Those old time Fords deserve a cheer. They seldom let one down, as newer and showier cars so often did. They were admittedly a bit heavy on the petrol. When we traded it in and acquired a Chev, I am not sure we did the right thing. The Ford would probably have served us our remaining years in business.

We were too heavily involved for the business to recover. Part of the blame must go to the local government of Raetihi. For a town so young and small, it was ill-advised to go in for amenities necessary for large towns growing into city stage.

The prosperous days of sawmilling, when we lived as it were on inherited capital, were times when it would have been wise to consolidate gains in view of the unknown future.

We had sold part of our town section and still held the best section in the heart of the town, and one good back section on which we hoped one day to build a home for our retirement.

While the slump was on, all we made in business went out in rates and our living expenses. We never lived extravagantly, though the few years of the elder girls' secondary education cost a lot. Except for Bill's one year in Matamata, there was no secondary education available locally. Seeing that this expenditure included the girls' keep, even that could not be termed extravagant.

I look back on the last five years of our life in Raetihi as the most unhappy of my life. The burden of the business was the cause of Walt's breakdown.

We should of course have called our creditors together and placed the situation before them. This Walt was not willing to do. He wanted to fight it out and come through.

Had we any previous business experience, we would have known it was the only right thing to do. In the end we seemed always robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Florrie's trouble had been the means of introducing me to a Wanganui

solicitor, a splendid Christian man. He represented us in the negotiations with the father's people. In a delicate situation like that one, when we desired above all, secrecy, we could not well employ a local firm. However good the locals, their employees, typists etc. were locals and a very likely source of leakage.

Then, I had occasion to go to Wanganui, I think, to see indent samples. On such occasions, when we would be giving indent orders, the firm concerned refunded the cost of the journey. This was less expensive for the firms such as jewellers where there would be only one or two customers in the town.

I arrived home about 11 p.m., very tired, for it had been a long day. Dad was up and made a cup of tea

After I had drunk the tea and was ready for bed, he followed me upstairs and said "You know, dear, you would be better without me. People are always ready to come to the aid of a woman."

That shocked me wide-awake. I sat up and said. "We are doing our best to save the business and our home. But what would that matter to me if I had to live lonely all my life? What would life mean to me without you? Don't ever think that way."

The answer came from the depths of my heart, and I hope relieved his despondency at that time.

A little later he said he would like to go to New Plymouth and visit his brother. Ern had married a very fine woman, about his own age. It was a very happy marriage, and we rejoiced in it. Ern being very deaf had been cut off so much from intimacy with others. They visited us on their honeymoon. She had such a natural happy way with her we took her to our hearts at once.

I was glad that Walt should think of such a break, and could well carry on in his absence.

I happened to mention to Mr. Bert Drury (of Urwin and Drury) a fellow businessman that Walt had gone to New Plymouth. He at once said "I am glad to know and will tell Arthur (his brother who had left Raetihi for New Plymouth) so that he can look him up and take him round a bit."

He got in touch with his brother and in a few days heard from him that he had got in touch with Ern, and that Walt had not arrived there, nor was Ern expecting him.

I put him off by explaining he may have had a look around the Wanganui firms, and I would doubtless hear shortly.

A short time previously Dad had acquired a rifle, and to my queries he said that he knew Bill would like it. It was a handy thing for a farmer. It had not cost much.

Though a bit dubious I accepted the explanation. Then came a ring from the police. I explained he was away for a few days and asked if there was anything I could do, to which he replied "No, it was only about the gun he had spoken of registering." Without giving any sign of the fear which was growing in my heart, I looked for the gun. It was missing.

I rang my brother and asked him if he could possibly leave his business for a few hours, as Walt was away and I needed his help. I did not trust the privacy of the manual telephone.

In the shop it was of course business as usual. The phone was not private. Only my wonderful office helper, Marjorie Sandford, was told. She was a tower of strength, and later when the story could be told to my friends Mr. and Mrs Sandford, they were as much surprised as anyone. Marjorie had lived up to the needs of the crisis, and never by word or attitude, gave any indication of the crisis we had lived through.

It had to be just at this time Horopito a small settlement 8 miles to the north, was disturbed by a man, obviously a mental case, who was going about frightening the women.

How relieved I was to have my brother's counsel and help. I told him everything. He said he would drop into the billiard room, as the best place (women please note!!) to pick up news and rumours. He did, and soon scotched the crazy man rumour. There had been a mentally handicapped man around, but the police knew him and took him in their care. Possibly an escapee from National Park.

Bill commended my way of meeting the situation, which was to act as if nothing at all was the matter. At that time only he and I and Marjorie knew the situation. He advised keeping sufficient cash for any foreseeable need, banking only not negotiable cheques, as should anything be amiss, the bank account would be frozen.

He continued to wander round the town, and before leaving cheered me up by saying he felt quite sure there was a reasonable explanation and that Walter was the last man to commit a rash act. Trying to recall such times is not easy. When they pass we try to forget as completely as possible. I can't remember whether it was five days, a week, or more, that we carried on, keeping in touch with Bill.

Then one evening, shop closed, Marge had just counted the cash and recorded it when the door to the house opened. Marge was directly opposite, gave one look, and discreetly vanished shop-wards, murmuring to me as she departed "Mr. Ashwell".

It was. Pale, thin and gaunt, begrimed with dust, I am glad I was able to greet him almost as casually as if he had just been as far away as the Post Office and that no one else was about, as I asked "What will you have first, a feed or a bath?" He answered "I think I would like the feed".

It wasn't long before he was doing justice to bacon and eggs, the most rapid meal procurable. He had to wait for his bath. I was sure, in his starving state, a bath would have finished him. Neither was he in a fit state for talk so I gave him the papers while he rested, though he was almost too tired to read. Meantime I warmed fresh clothes and got all in readiness for the bath. He volunteered that he had gone into the bush and got lost. He later said he had left the gun under a log in the bush. Someone finding it will wonder and perhaps think of escaped prisoners or someone shooting out of season. Who knows! I had also acquainted my Wanganui legal adviser. He, like my brother, expected Walt would turn up. Commended my good sense in keeping the matter so quiet.

It may seem strange that I did not ask any questions, either about his intention and going away as he did, or of his experiences. One cannot live with a man for so many years, and not know his idiosyncrasies. I knew to talk things over would hurt him.

The strain of the last years had been heavy on us both, but with a woman business is only part of her life. Her deepest interest is in the home and family. With a man business is his life. On its success or otherwise depends his standing among his fellows, his public esteem. In some cases it may mean the family's attitude to him as well. In the latter case if things go wrong this burden is heavy indeed.

We carried on till the end of 1937. Then, as soon as the legal offices opened we filed our schedule in bankruptcy. We tried to pay up small firms to whom the loss of an account would be serious. The old-established wealthy firms could better afford to lose. For many years they had profited by our business and we had done all we could.

With the failure of the business his commercial instinct had built up, Walt's health broke down. Had he started a few years earlier he would have been sufficiently established to have weathered the slump, and no breakdown would have come. It was a heart-breaking ending to a good start, and certainly not the fault of the founder. Neither was the slump a New Zealand affair, but a period of recession which was worldwide, largely the result of World War I.

It caught in its devastation not only small country concerns such as ours, but city businessmen with many decades, some almost a century of successful trading behind them.

Why do not those concerned to see the ominous signs, and shorten sail to meet the storm? The answer is simply that business goes on from day to day, then, without warning, suddenly the bottom drops out. With seemingly sufficient assets to carry on overnight they are merely dead weight, a burden which must be carried. So it was with us. We had some of the best property in town, but though we had often been asked to sell, and refused, now even the best were unsaleable, though mounting rates had to be paid, when so little was coming in. During recent illness, in a bad dream I was back again in those times, not knowing where to turn, bills mounting.

At the first approach, people wiser than we immediately turned their affairs in. These had early, in better times, put their private property into the wife's name. Our house and business were one property, so all went in one fell swoop. We were given time to make other arrangements, before the newcomers took over. The creditors were very decent. They had grounds for blaming us for not putting the position before them sooner.

There was one thing I was quite determined about. Our new home would be as far away as I could make it. I thought of seeking a home in Palmerston North, as being out of the way as regards the Waimarino.

My old friend Carrie Berthelsen now Mrs Paterson had made her home in Gisborne. We exchanged letters about once a year and so never quite lost touch.

Just when I knew we could not carry on, I received a letter from her. Its purpose being to inform me of her mother's passing.

In my reply I asked her if houses were available in Gisborne. Her reply was that a rental house was as rare as a dodo (a bird extinct for many centuries) but that beach cottages were often available after the holiday season had passed. I told her my needs and asked her to look for one available about mid-January. That would be 1938. A business firm had quite a nice one, which would be large enough for Walt and me and Hope (16) and Laurie John (12).

I wanted to move in time for the children to commence school in February. I was sorry I had to leave Walt to face the winding up of the business, for he was the one legally responsible. I could not take that place, though I would have stood beside him had it been possible.

Walt and I had been active in many avenues of civic service. I think about

the only organisations we were not connected with were the Federation of Farmers and its women's counterpart the Women's' Institute. Walt had been on the Borough Council from its inception, and other civic bodies as well as a foundation member of the Waimarino Acclimatisation Society. He had been foremost in all Patriotic activities. Indeed Bill had been Raetihi's nominee in our county wide Baby Contest for war funds, and runner-up to the Ohakune Baby.

Many invitations to stand for the Mayoralty had come his way, but were turned down because living behind the business, we were not able to offer the type of hospitality that would enhance our town's prestige. He took however the position of Deputy, and gave unstinted community service always.

It followed that we were not able to slip quietly away, but were given a great send off. I had been in most local efforts with my husband, but principally School Committee work which I had served as Chairwoman and Secretary, and was also a foundation member of the Plunket Society. When on King George's coronation, medals were given to each civic community to the man and woman who was foremost in service, Mr. Sam Ford and I were awarded the honour. In this connection I said at the investiture, that mine was attributed largely to my husband's service, for I had followed his lead. And that was the truth.

The townspeople made up of small purse and passed it to me. It was under £50, but that was enough to start us on our new life.

Leaving the place that had been our home to so many years was a fearful wrench. I had taught children, seen them grow up, issued their marriage certificate, registered the births of their children, and, often with moist eyes, their deaths. Our roots were deep in the King Country soil.

My best friend, Mrs Sandford, clung to me with tears, and said "You are going so far away! Will I ever see you again?"

That was 24 years ago. One thing the years have given, it is the truth of the old hymn which says

"Those sundered far, by faith we met
Around one common mercy-seat."

When we meet, now-a-days, it is as members of a family whom circumstances only have separated for a time.

Chapter 27 Moving to Gisborne (1938)

I had just taken up the pen to write of our last days in the King Country when the radio woke to life with a most arresting item and one certainly new to me. A vibrant young voice was singing "Taumarunui on the Main Trunk Line".

I put down the pen to hear the singer through his items. There were a group of songs so typical of the old King Country that it took me back to the 35 years I had known it, its bush, its sawmills, journeys to visit the Auckland warehouses.

Travel either to Auckland or Wellington began about 10 p.m. when the expresses passed through. One stepped out of the clear cold mountain air into crowded stuffy trains, reaching the terminus in time for a late breakfast, jaded and dusty. Then the day was spent in visiting warehouses. A quick meal and another journey on the express.

From Auckland, the song just heard most aptly expresses one's condition when Taumarunui was reached. We dare not go to sleep and risked being carried past Ohakune. This happened once to Walt who awoke to find himself at Taihape from whence he took a slow train back to Ohakune. As there was no transport service for slow trains, he left his bag to be picked up by the station bus, and walked the 9 miles home. Yes " Taumarunui on the Main Trunk Line" certainly revived a few memories.

Our goodbyes said, we were ready to set out on our long journey to Gisborne.

Most of our personal belongings including bedding had been packed for dispatch by rail.

Our Minister then was a young man from Christchurch, William Trusttum. Friendly, homely, he was ideal for the King Country having the ability to fit in any company with good-natured ease, and being free from the awkwardness that besets some big men.

Now in Raetihi, and indeed that goes for most of the King Country, rugby was no mere game, but was followed with almost religious fervour. And "Trusty" as he soon came to be called, was an expert. He joined the rugby crowd and soon as was generally remarked, "Had them eating out of his hand". He had an agreement with them. "Football on Saturday – Church on Sunday". He captained the King Country representative team, leading them on from victory to victory. The final match, which they lost to Hamilton, was played there on a Saturday. On Sunday he led the entire team into the Methodist Church services, making headlines in the press. He used to tell how, when he

became a Christian he laid his football on the altar. Then God gave him back his football. His best work was done among the young football crowd.

It was all too common, after football, for teams to 'roll out the barrel'. Trusty's team hied them to the milk bar, and out the booze. He was a gift to the journalists but never courted popularity, taking it all in his stride.

He seemed set for national honours in Rugby, but ill-health intervened, ending his athletic career.

Already engaged he married, but died a few years later, deeply mourned by his many King Country friends.

When we were leaving, he was to all appearances, in the best of health. He offered to drive us as far as Matamata and return the car to Raetihi, which offer we gladly accepted.

Gisborne was at that time an isolated community. Railway connection with Napier (150 miles away) had been held up by bad times. The only place of any size was Wairoa a mixed Pakeha and Maori town, and like Gisborne, a busy port for a large area of farmland.

We realised holidays would likely be rare and expensive, so decided to go first to Auckland and take farewell of my mother's two brothers, Harry and Charlie Nightingale, and of other friends from Raetihi who had settled there.

Among the closest friends we were leaving in the King Country was the family of the George Roses, whose three daughters had at various times been in our employ before their marriages. George Rose's brother Joe lived in Otahuhu. Hope and I were to stay with Uncle Harry and Aunt Maggie, Trusty and Laurie sleeping in the car, the seats of which were hinged to form a bed. We visited the Roses and were given a warm welcome.

We spent a pleasant hour or two with them. In the midst of our talk we were startled by a sudden altercation, which appeared to come from the garden outside the room. A boy's voice was raised in the angry protest "I won't go back! I won't go back! I want to see Laurie Ashwell. I won't go back." We were all surprised, and Laurie's face was a picture of amazement as he stared at the window nearest the source of the sound. Then we all broke into laughter remembering that our host was a ventriloquist.

At our farewell an old slow-speaking Salvation Army friend drew me aside and said "Dear friend. I have prayed that God will be with you when you leave, that he will go with you on your journey, and that when you reach Gisborne He will meet you there." A comprehensive prayer that!

And it was granted, each petition in detail, as it had been offered. I recalled it as we farewelled the Roses. We had been provided with a more than adequate lunch for the road, including fruit and cordial. Trusty had his foot on the clutch when a voice halted us. It was Mrs G. Rose with a lovely spray of rose and maidenhair, which she pinned on my coat.

Was not this the working out of the first part of our friend's petition? Surely it is through His servants such prayers are answered.

Our next lap was to Matamata, the home of Aunt Florrie Gordon. We went via Hamilton purposely to see a young married friend of our Raetihi young folk, and a chum of the driver's, Cyril Harvey. We arrived on an auspicious occasion, the birth of his first child, a boy. Though we insisted we had our lunch with us, Cyril would have us break the journey at his home, where his wife's mother was in charge. I think the young husband and father was keen to show us their home. His wife's mother was in charge, and added her welcome, as we made a short stay and then pursued our way to Matamata. The Gordons would have liked us to stay for a day or two, but our arrangements ahead prevented that. Trusty started on his way back, and Jean Gordon's husband Will Gardner drove us to that day's destination, Matawai. Though invited to stay, Will Gardner had to turn back, probably to work through the night, for his family were bakers.

My dear friend, Mrs Burgess, was the Jessie McIntyre of my earlier story. What a friend! In my youth she had been a combination of mother and sister to a lonely homesick girl. I recall one of her early administrations had been to help me lengthen my serge skirts. "Them was the days" of white blouse, long serge skirts, ankle length or longer. Mine were too short and I was still growing. With meticulous care she matched the serge, then the grain of each panel, while I worked on the sewing. She was that kind of friend. It was to her house we came and stayed over the Sunday.

On Monday morning, we boarded the Motu-Gisborne train for the last lap of our journey. It was a slow train. The young folk were together looking out. We had the long carriage to ourselves. I, too, looked out on the countryside with mixed feelings. What did the future hold in this new strange land. The dear old King Country had been my home with two short breaks, for 35 years. Now, nearly arrived at journey's end, something of the beauty and peace of the landscape stole into my heart, and with it the thought "This is <u>your</u> country, <u>your</u> home. My old friend's prayer answered? I realised that indeed God had met me on the threshold of our new life, and filled my heart with peace.

The short train journey was soon over. The train rattled into the shabby little station, which seemed unworthy of the fine town glimpsed from the train.

What matter! For standing there to greet us was my good friend Carrie Patterson to welcome us to Gisborne and to her home.

After lunch and a rest, she drove us out to see our Wainui beach home. It was on the top of a cliff with a track down to the beach. From the back door we seemed to take a hop, step and jump and we were in the wide Pacific – that is at full tide, a little longer at low tide.

We could all swim a little, and in the heat of Gisborne summer it was great joy to take a dip in the dark before going to bed. Not by any means to be recommended except to expert swimmers. I know one night I went out a bit far on the receding tide, and had a big struggle to get to shore. In the dark with a strong tide against me, rescuers would find themselves much handicapped.

Now commenced the gruelling task of looking for a rental home. We used buses sitting each on separate side and looking for houses without curtains or blinds. We made enquiries everywhere, without result.

Meanwhile we lived at Wainui enjoying to the full our ocean home.

We found two empty houses in Mangapapa. They were in bad repair, but they were shelters, if nothing else. We enquired. We could have them rent-free, if we put them in repair till we had worked the cost out in rent. But we were not even modest capitalists. The owners were not allowed to let them as they were, however urgent the would-be tenant's need.

Then, after some months, Walter joined us and the hunt was resumed.

Came a day when we started on the canvas of unlikely places, for even a few rooms in large houses. Walt went one way, I another, in Mangapapa arranging to meet at the bus stop by the Mangapapa store. I was there first. A lady came in and sat down, whereupon with a smile, for it was a top notch joke in Gisborne, I asked if she knew of a house to let. She replied "Funny you should ask yet. There is one just vacant down this road. The people had a row with the landlady and went."

Walter joined me. We met Hope and Laurie for lunch, and then set out to see this wonder of wonders, the vacant house. Some workmen showed us where it was and added "That house on the hill is the landlady's". We took a look from the outside at the house, and went up the hill to interview the owner.

We told our tale, and she trusted our bona fides, and the house was ours. Just like that.

We lost no time in moving in.

We had been six months at Wainui, and made a number of friends there, as well as among the members of the Methodist Church. The owners of our Wainui beach house used to go down for a weekend there, and had missed that while we had it. Like Walt they were English folk. We did appreciate their great kindness to us.

Our new home had a fine orchard and flower garden, and even the remains of the last tenants' vegetable garden. With the money from the sale in Raetihi of our surplus furniture we bought enough for immediate needs.

In the train from Matawai I had prayed for a house "with an established garden, fruit trees and a passionfruit vine". The last was for a tropical luxury. Passionfruit could not be grown in the King Country. I looked at the house on the first view and there was a magnificent passion vine. There was the house I had prayed for. The passion vine the sign and seal.

Chapter 28 Early days in Gisborne and foster children

The life of any New Zealand born citizen of the late 1880s must be largely that of a pioneer. Even the Auckland of my infancy was very new. Cox's creek was out in the wilds, a picnic place for hardy young adults. My story follows the track of colonisation in the Rangitikei and Waimarino districts. When we arrived in Hunterville we were in the van of colonisation. Strangely to us in these days, the railhead had extended to the little flag station of Rangitira to serve the interests of farmers. Then settlement began to push on, and the railway followed to Mangaonoho. There it halted for many years, not for lack of enterprise, but because of the nature of the terrain.

My father came first to a job in Hunterville. There was the end of civilisation, then a new place was spoken of as in the van of progress, Ohingaiti, horribly mispronounced as O-nee-i-tee. Here my father managed the first store, and owned his first little piece of New Zealand where our home was built. From Mangaonoho there was first a tunnel to be made then what was for some time the highest known viaduct, Makohine, was started, not without tragic cost. Before that section was opened pretty well another decade had passed, but we had long gone on to our next post, spoken of as 'three-log-whare'. It seems that the first surveyors had built their shack in a small clear space in the triangle of three fallen trees. "Three-log-whare" it remained for some time till the town to be was planned on paper and the sections put up for sale. Now it had its official name of Mangaweka which means "Home of the black weka", a bird like a small domestic fowl, now found only in very remote parts. It is a ground dweller and a prey to dogs, cats and introduced vermin.

I remember the weka as a cheeky little bird. When natural food was scarce, the more daring would come and feed with our fowls when grain was thrown. It was full of curiosity too, and an adventurer. New Zealand, seeing it had so many of our human qualities, should have been kinder to this attractive native. The tale of our misdeeds in this beautiful land would make sad reading. We forget, often, there is a God who "sits among the shadows, keeping watch upon his own". Nations of old have come under judgement, been found wanting, and are not much more than names in the history now. Will we be numbered with them?

In Mangaweka, when the family left for Paeroa we were on the outskirts of colonisation. Then we began to hear a new name 'Taihape'. We knew of Maori settlement northward at Utiku, after the chief of the tribe, but Taihape was a region beyond, now being opened up.

I saw it on only one occasion before my marriage, when I stayed one night

at a hotel there. I remember it as that time, leaving early in the morning, I left behind a presentation turquoise brooch, which could not be found when I wrote so probably became the property of some dishonest housemaid.

My own part in that trail of colonisation ended at Mangaweka. From there it took a big leap into the remote King Country, not via Taihape only 40 miles from my destination, but by the Wanganui River to Pipiriki, then 17 miles inward to Raetihi. So, except for brief excursions as to Wanganui for annual exams, or passing through Auckland to and from home, my life had been spent in the back blocks.

Then, I must needs pick on Gisborne which, though nearing city status, was indeed an outpost in New Zealand development.

It has been my experience that such places are particularly friendly. Raetihi was, and so to an even greater degree was Gisborne.

We came well recommended by our Methodist church, and were warmly received.

These folk, except for our old friends, the Hugh Pattersons, were our first Gisborne acquaintances. Indeed, the whole church went on quest for that elusive home we sought. When we did get a house, Laurie was so happy in Kaiti School he continued there till he got his Proficiency and went to High.

When we were at last settled in our Massey Road home, the Pattersons would frequently visit us on Sunday afternoon.

One day Carrie said laughingly "Do you still want a job? The Social Security Department wants someone to take charge of Maori triplets." I was interested, it being generally thought that even twin births were a rarity among the Maoris, and anything more unheard of. It seems that the Lady superintendent of the Welfare department was looking for a home for these triplets in preference to an institution.

Babies had never been a bother to me. As a foundation member of the Raetihi Plunket Society I had read Dr Truby King's writings and considered myself up to date in child welfare methods.

The need was a challenge, so into our home came Peter, Paul, and David Gerrard. Funds had been provided by public subscription, so the babies came furnished with a cot and high chair apiece, plus a large pram. I am not certain of their age, somewhere between three and six months when they came into our home and very soon into our hearts also, as babies will.

I remember our minister, and elderly English man visiting us. Paul was on my

lap and climbing all over me, as we chatted. Every now and again I would kiss the little fellow just as naturally as I had my own. When I went out to see about afternoon tea, I heard the minister say in the most surprised tone "I believe she really loves the child". He had spoken truth. My surprise was in his surprise at so natural a fact.

A strange thing and worth recording that while we had our trips [triplets] white babies seemed a bit insipid looking to us. The lovely golden glow of their bodies was very beautiful to us.

The little fellows showed strong individual traits from the start. Peter, the oldest and strongest, was leader. While they were on a purely milk diet, all went well. They steadily put on the required weight.

When solids were introduced – alien food, there was some difficulty. They sat in a row on their high chairs, each with his little saucer of food. First Peter would be offered a spoonful. It had to be Peter, neither of the others would open his mouth until Peter had taken his. Should Peter turn it down, they would also refuse. This seemed to me probably a natural reaction, sort of 'follow the chief' attitude. The one item of diet they positively refused was citrus. Though the oranges were the finest imported, beautifully sweet and luscious, they would have none of it.

In the end I gave them the juice on a spoon, like medicine forcing them to swallow it. It was a must in the Karitane regime.

Peter was leader in their little games. They grew and did well till an epidemic of summer sickness caught up with them. I wondered how they caught it. None of us had it, and concluded it was too much public notice. Any stranger would be liable to stop the pram and ask questions about the children. I could not always prevent their touching the children.

The Plunket remedy was then starvation. Nothing was allowed for 24 hours but boiled water. From the start a doctor examined them frequently and gave good reports of their welfare and of our care. When the summer sickness intervened, the babies naturally lost weight. The doctor thought, in their case, hospital treatment was desirable. As he said, one could not take any chances. Hospital kept them three days, then sent them back, no better.

I complained to the doctor, showing evidences of their condition. He promptly sent them back for further treatment. I asked "What if they are sent back again uncured?" Then I will re-commit them" was his reply. Meantime the babies suffered and went down in condition.

Meantime, Roy had come home to be nursed. Though I was used to the babies, the extra nursing would have probably been beyond me.

The Social Security Department, naturally, wondered if Roy had anything infectious. Strangely it was the twins' mild attack of chickenpox which sent Roy into hospital at Wellington, resulting in his coming home for nursing.

So we had to part with our babies, and felt as if we had suffered bereavement, so much had they endeared themselves to us. He mourned their going "O Mum, couldn't we have kept one, even little Dadie". He used to watch them at their play loving them as he had loved his little nephew, Bill's Jimmy.

So Peter, Paul and David passed from our care. In Auckland they were good journalese, and we would from time to time see photos of them in the press, as when they started school their initials worked on their little jerseys.

Their story as triplets ends a year or two back. I did not see them again, though Laurie saw Paul, a thickset young man when he called at the bank to cash a cheque.

The rest of their story, as far as it is known to me, is that Peter was employed on an East Coast farm and Paul and David on another in the same district.

One Sunday Peter set out on horseback to visit his brothers, was thrown, and found dead on the road.

I have often wondered how they got on, and who succeeded to the leadership.

They will in all probability have married and the leadership passed into feminine hands.

As far as I was concerned, that finished my dealings with the Social Security Department.

It seemed however we were not off the map with them. So, when, at a most awkward time, Christmas week, a small boy came on their hands Mr. Keeling came to me "Could you, Mrs Ashwell? Just till after the holidays, then we will be able to place him". Well, put that way, we had small grounds for refusal, and into our home came Trevor.

Since our coming to Gisborne the first outbound train (or service car) saw Laurie on the way to the dear old King Country, where he would be joined by Roy for Christmas at Nation's.

We put Trevor in the boys' room. Our house was nine-roomed, and the boys' room was near the back, off the kitchen. Walt slept in what had been a conservatory, wide open to the front verandah. As he had not yet recovered from his break-down, he liked to be able to put on the light and read if he could not sleep. I slept in one of the two large front bedrooms. The other was Hope's, but just then she was working as "aide" in Te Puia Hospital.

Tea over, Trevor enjoyed one of the boys' books, then I saw him comfortably in bed and soon went off myself. I was just dropping off, when I heard a soft footstep and a low trembling voice said "I am a little bit frightened". I switched on the light, and was going to say a few reassuring words and put him back to bed. One look at the little scared face and I thought "One can't reason away real fear". I got up, rolled up Hope's bedding and transferred his to her bed, tucked him up, left his door into the passage open also mine, facing his and told him if he felt frightened just to call out to me. I was very near and would hear and answer him. I told him most people felt strange in a new place. Would he like the light left on? Then he was soon asleep. I wondered what his story had been. Who had ill-treated him to cause such helpless fear in a small child?

I had intended to keep him only over the holiday period, as had been arranged.

Next day I called in to the office of the Social Security Department and told them what had happened. They said their trouble was to find good homes for those committed to their care. Would I take Trevor? I agreed to do so provided my husband was agreeable.

We talked it over, and I asked "What if it were our beloved grandchildren who were "a little bit frightened" and no one to care!" What had occurred in this boy's past to cause such devastating fear?

So Trevor stayed. He was in his 12th year. He was just average in his school work. I helped as I had my own family. Arithmetic was his worst subject, and he was in fact no scholar. He was with us till school leaving age then 14. At that time I had a visit from Mr. Keeling, who was giving thought to the lad's future. He was not likely to benefit by further schooling and the question of his future was a problem. The school report was not helpful. Office work for one so poor at arithmetic was out, so what? It happened that I knew the answer. Had been thinking much about his future. Trevor was in one respect unusual. Boys, in my experience, had little interest in their appearance. All they seem to trouble about was to be "like the fellows". The unusual did not appeal. What the other fellows were wearing was fashionable for them. Trevor was unusual in that he was very particular about his appearance. I did not have to make sure that he had washed himself properly. He kept his clothes nice. He would pass judgement on my appearance. Once he said "That frock isn't as nice as your other ones". It was one I had picked up because it was cheap and met my need of an afternoon house frock. He had good taste, in fact was born with clothes sense. The best job for him was in a drapers. He would make in time an extremely valuable buyer for men's outfitting. Mr. Keeling agreed and interested a leading firm who were willing to take him on. We were both satisfied we had the right solution.

The unknown factors in the situation were the people who had thrown the boy over. They had moved to Wellington, had made a home in an outlying suburb where they had a cow. Then they developed a deep interest in their former ward, who could milk. They went to the departmental offices in Wellington and spoke of their deep love and interest in the boy. They would like to have care of him again. They wished to give him the chance of training as a mechanic. They declared the boy was the making of an engineer.

The Social Security Department here told their story, backing it up with his school reports. A mechanical trade to a boy who hated to be dirty was about the last choice. Gisborne protested strongly against the project. The interested couple who were both working full-time pestered the department. In the end the edict went forth "Let the boy decide".

Now. I ask you! In Trevor's mind an engineer was a clean man whose tool was a screwdriver, one who went round looking at electrical gadgets. Add to that a train trip to Wellington, and our protests got nowhere. So after having spent two years with us Trevor went. By then, we were in a new home, 3 Dalrymple Road, very much of a pattern with our first home – a large building, right on the bank of the Taruheru, and surrounded by acres of grazing land. When we moved in Trevor made a request "Could he sleep on the verandah?" So far had he grown from the frightened little lad who had come to us from these very people who were now wanting him.

The sequel to this story was that he went to an opening in an engineering business – which was altogether above his capability. The firm said he was hopeless at figures and no use to them. The department sent him back to school, and presumably his "friends" had his service in milking and other chores before they got home from work. But they had lost the boy his one avenue of work at which he would have had his best chance.

The Gisborne Department, and we, had done our best. Our Lord had a word for those who serve themselves of children one of which He spoke. These took advantage of a friendless boy.

Later, the city missioner asked Trevor what he would like best to do! The answer which I had from the missioner himself "I would like best to live with Mrs Ashwell". But the chance of ideal employment had gone. Trevor was too old, and there was no opening here.

Trevor had one remarkable trait, he loved little children. He fraternised with his playmates' younger brothers and sisters. Toddlers delighted him. I realised then how much these orphaned or unwanted children missed family life. An uncapped reservoir of love was there.

When my boys left me, their names stayed on my prayer lists, and mine for Trevor was that he might marry a good girl and have all the joys and interests of family life.

I count among the happiest days of my life, the time we moved into Massey Road. Here I was in a home of my own, simply and solely housekeeper, wife and mother. After decades of being at all times subject to the calls and worries of business life, to have a private home and nothing to do but care for the family seemed peace and bliss. What mattered that we had the bare minimum of furniture and little enough to live on. The large old house was full of happy singing, as I went about the chores which seemed to hold no toil, after the burdens of business life. Gisborne folk are so kind. We had only moved in when Scots neighbours across the road came over with vegetables. They had plenty, they said, and it would be some time before we could get ours going. When they learned we were thinking of poultry farming they gave us advice from their own experience. They never failed to have a good excuse for doing a kindness. Was it any wonder I felt like singing. Hope and Laurie went off to work and school, and Walt and I set about the work of the place. We answered an advertisement, and bought three good cows. Walt milked and separated in readiness for the cream van. We bought our cows through the Okitu factory.

Walt, too, was happy and enjoyed those early Gisborne days as much as I. He had to overcome the effects of ill-health, and so the alteration in his outlook from black despondency to renewed hope and anticipation was more apparent than the change in me. We had a home, prospects, a happy church connection with the Mangapapa Methodist church. We got to know the Glanville family, English like Walt, and kindred spirits. We found in that little church a true family spirit. The hurts began to heal. New friends took the place of the old, each bringing its quota of interest and friendliness into our new life.

I had at Raetihi, envied women who had only their household duties to do. The choice of a business life was never mine, but was inevitably my lot.

Walt wore himself out trying to do two full-time jobs, build up a business and work at his trade of watchmaker. Either was a full-time job. With the wisdom that comes from experience I wished I had got him to teach me his trade. He was a good businessman. Had we started 10 years earlier I could doubtless have written "a successful businessman" for then we would have been too well-established for the slump to have hit us so hard.

If we had, no doubt we would never have come to Gisborne but have lived out our lives in the back blocks, perhaps grown complacent and self-important. Who knows?

I know Auckland, city of my birth, quite well, but can truly say it amazes me how folks can retire from Gisborne to live in Auckland.

Gisborne has comparable amenities with the big cities, wonderful beaches and park lands. When fully developed it will have 8-9 miles of beaches, from ocean at Wainui to more sheltered bay beaches. It has excellent educational facilities.

Chapter 29 Foster children and Dalrymple Road

Trevor left on his journey to Wellington as to a great adventure. I furnished him with fruit and reading matter, and spending money that he might have the fun of breasting the tea room counter in choosing his own eats. School was finished and he was now entering a new phase of life. He was to be our 'working boy'.

After seeing him off I took his Post Office Saving and ration books into the Social Security Department. My feelings were a bit mixed. Perhaps relief was uppermost. I did wish I were more satisfied with the result. Both the office and I had done what we could, and we all had a feeling of frustration.

As I handed in the books at the counter, I noticed a boy of about 12 in the office. I was invited to enter, and the same proposition was repeated "For a few weeks, until school recommenced."

So Arnold Wallis, which is not his name but will do, came home with me. Exit Trevor, enter Arnold.

This was no depressed frightened lad coming from orphanage life, he was used to taking care of himself, and chatted cheerfully as we went off together. I showed in his room and the layout of the house. After lunch he helped me wash up and asked if he could go to the pictures. As he had just arrived from Auckland, I agreed after giving him the instructions necessary to find his way back.

He was fair and very freckled with a ready smile and cheerful disposition, a likeable boy.

As school he was immediately dubbed "Spotty" later abbreviated to "Spot". With his friendly disposition and no mean capacity for getting into mischief, his acceptance with his peers and equals was assured.

As regards brains I summed them up as a bit above average. At the end of the term class test I was not much surprised but very relieved to learn that he had come out top.

I rang the office. Mr. Keeling was pleased, but pointed out that he was not in a high grade.

Now my teaching experience was with small town schools, and of course I was not conversant with large schools of 700 or so pupils. Naturally, at the Intermediate, which catered for Stds V & VI there would be about 10 classes in each standard and some would be entered for specialised training in

commerce or agriculture, the rest the general course. I found Arnold had been placed about halfway down in intellectual ability. As a consequence I went more carefully into Arnold's work and was quite sure he was wrongly placed. I considered my opinion was right. My own children had been at or near the top of their class throughout school. Three had finished up "Dux". I knew Arnold was capable of taking a good place in school attainment.

I went more carefully into his work, then took the matter up with the Intermediate head, who was kind enough to grant me an interview.

After I had stated the case as I saw it, the Head said he himself had set Arnold's test when he was enrolled, and on that he was graded.

Against his argument, I advanced my opinion. I had been a teacher, had watched with deep interest my own children's work. They had been keen scholars, but I considered Arnold was capable of a standard comparable with theirs. I could see that Mr. Sleven had rightly judged on his work, but that was not by any means his best work. Mr. Sleven had set a reasonable test which Arnold had scrambled through, not caring how it turned out, anxious only to get out to play. I argued that the boy was indifferent because there was no one to care whether he did well or ill, and he personally couldn't care less.

The outcome was another test and after some oral questioning also, he was placed some grades higher. He more than justified my opinion of his ability, and was graded A when he passed out to enter secondary school.

So much for his intelligence. His conduct was another matter. I fear he was at heart an outlaw. As his class teachers said. "If there is any mischief afloat, Arnold is never far off."

He was not good at sport as such high-spirited boys usually are. This seemed strange to me. I argued that he should be good at rugby or soccer. He said he thought he might have been but he could never get football boots, had tried playing barefoot, but as the others wore heavy boots he had no show. Even when I got the regalia he wasn't keen.

In school sports day, when parents are invited the pupils are expected to attend, whether they are in the teams or not. Usually the pupils wouldn't be absent. They were most enthusiastic side-liners if noise is any criterion. I can vouch for this as for a few years I lived "next-door" to the Intermediate, though not at this time. We lived then in Dalrymple Road.

Sports day came. Arnold, fed up, came home at midday, thinking he would not be missed. On his record, I should say his absence would be noticeable! However it was, and he was called to the Head's office on a truancy charge,

and penalised in many ways. The one which hurt him least was that he lost the privilege of sorting apples. This needs explanation.

At that time, in Poverty Bay at least, where apples were plentiful, the schools were supplied with sufficient to give each child an apple. Perhaps a suggestion came from someone with a grudge against the medical profession!

The loss of his job as apple sorter didn't trouble Arnold. He probably volunteered for it to get out of lessons. We had an orchard and he could have as many as he liked.

His grievance was "There ain't no justice nowhere."

He had been heavily penalised. Why? Because he was a welfare boy.

This is the story. A neighbour's boy had played truant for weeks, before being found out. When he was spending much time in the library reading his type of literature, the custodian got suspicious and rang the school.

Arnold was very worried for his friend, wondering what dreadful thing would happen to him. He need not have troubled. The boy's mother paid a personal visit to the school taking the truant with her. She said her father was a very heavy-handed man, and had given the boy an unmerciful thrashing. She hoped the master would take this into account.

The facts were that the boy's father knew nothing at all of the matter. The mother's story was a tissue of lies.

Arnold didn't know what to make of it all. In his opinion, the dice were loaded against such as he, who had no mother to lie for them when trouble came. Some boys had all the luck!

I have gone on writing of my experience from one boy to another. There was also a little girl, who was in my charge at the same time as Arnold. Riria was her name.

She was in a poor state. Her face was covered with unhealed scars, still under treatment. The story was that she had crawled or fallen into the fire. Afterwards I came to doubt the truth of that tale. I thought they could easily have been the result of dog bites. The doctor who attended her was not satisfied with the story of fire burns. What made me doubtful was Riria's unreasonable fear of dogs. We all know the curs that are found in considerable numbers in Maori settlements. With all other animals, Riria was quite at home. Cows, fowls, cats, caused no alarm whatever. She played with them, strolled among the cows at milking time, and carried a bantam hen in her arms. Why should a naturally fearless child be so terrified of dogs?

She came to us at Massey Road, and for a time I had to wheel her up to "Cook" [hospital] two or three times a week for observation and treatment till her sores were healed. Luckily that chore wasn't long continued. There were hospital buses for visiting hours, but not for my times of appointment.

My own story, or should I say the family one, has halted while I wrote of my foster family, and must be brought up to date.

We enjoyed our first home in Gisborne. I have told of our good landlady Mrs Bruce, and her unfailing kindness. When, in panic at the entry of the Labour Government into the Treasury benches, she feared confiscation of property and put the house we were renting into a land agent's hands, she stipulated that her tenants should be given time to get other suitable accommodation. It was as well she did, for as soon as the sale was made the land agent put on all the pressure he could. Mrs Bruce's lawyer was able to counteract these tactics for he was present when she gave Walter the promise of a year's notice. A verbal promise is good only for a year. Had she said two years it would have not held, but a verbal lease of 1 year is tenable in law. This we had, and the word of an honourable man to guarantee it. So again we were hunters, as hopeless a job as before. Roy had died.

The country was at war. Laurie still at school now High, with Proficiency a year or two in the bag and School Certificate on the horizon.

Roy's motorbike had been shared between Hope and Laurie. When Hope worked at Te Puia, Flo was not too well, and the Nations sent out an SOS for Hope. We had not long moved into Dalrymple Road when she left us for Ohakune.

Living a few doors from us was a family with one son [There were three sons, two at home at the time]. I sometimes passed a greeting with the father as he worked in the garden. One time when Hope was having trouble with the motorbike one of her friends advised her to get help from the son of this family who was a motor mechanic. As none of us had much mechanical knowledge though she was very shy, she did pluck up courage and ask for help. So our circle of acquaintances was enlarged by 3, name Smith. From that encounter came to pass a Mr. and Mrs Smith, and Walt and I came to be grandparents to their children. But that was quite a bit in the future.

While Hope was still with us, she and Geoff became engaged. About the time she went to Flo's, Geoff was called up, and being a certified grade A motor mechanic was drafted to [Ohakea] where aircraft servicing was done. This was very handy as Geoff could reach Ohakune quickly by the main trunk line express. While Geoff was at the station they were quietly married at Ohakune. When Geoff was moved to Christchurch she went and they lived

in special flats for married airmen. As Geoff was on necessary home-based work he did not go overseas.

Laurie, as soon as he reached 19, applied for entry into the Navy as soon as he reached the specified age. Instead of the Navy he was posted into the Fleet Air Arm and trained at Christchurch. He got his "Wings" after training in Canada but by then the war was almost over. He had hoped for some war experience in the Pacific. He may have regretted this miss, but we certainly did not.

At Flo's wedding Dad had said in his speech "It has not been my privilege to give a son for my country, but I am doing the next best thing. I give my daughter to a Nation". He did, however, live to do both.

Walt and I got our Dalrymple Road home in this way. During the year's tenancy of grace, we and our friends were looking round but with no success. Our wants were not extravagant, but we wanted privacy and at least two bedrooms and one convertible room. We were still attending the little Mangapapa Methodist Church. A dear friend, Mrs Hoe, often asked me to dinner, but as Hope stayed at home to look after our foster family, I felt I should at least relieve her in the afternoon. So the invitations were regretfully turned down. But one Sunday, Hope suggested I accept, as she did not want to go out. I did, and it was undoubtedly the guidance of God for she had heard of a place just vacant about a block away. Her only doubt was that it might be a bit large. It was vacant and under offer, but the prospective tenant wanted a lot of improvements, and wasn't keen to take it unless these were done.

As soon as the office opened next morning, I was there to ask for it if the prospect turned it down. That Sunday afternoon Mrs Hoe took me down to look at it from the outside. I looked for my sign and seal I had asked for. Yes it was there, a passion vine.

Chapter 30 Dalrymple Road and Anzac Street

Experience with children not my own reminded me of something I once heard my mother say. "Some people call themselves lovers of children when what they mean is that they have a deep affection for their own. Even animals have that! No one has a right to say they love children unless their hearts go out to all children." Then she would tell us of pitiful need in the 'Old Country', of children who never had as much food as they needed. Therefore, to her, waste seemed a crime. I often wished as I ate my own meals that I could do something for hungry children, but what could I do, so far away? No one was hungry in New Zealand, certainly not among those I knew. She taught me a great truth, unknowingly, that it was up to us who had to share with those who had not.

Though she had grown up in a well-to-do middle-class home, the need of others touched her heart. There was a Greek family near us of 12 boys, steps and stairs, and she served for them, asking for old clothes which she could use to make pants for them. Goodness knows she was poor enough herself.

I found that the care of children was to develop a love for them. I have known that in my teaching days to a certain degree, but learned that more certainly in my care for my young charges.

Of Riria I was very fond. To her we were 'Mum' and 'Dad'. She played around as happy as the day was long. Even without her scars she could not have been a beauty, having heavy features. What she lacked in looks she made up in disposition, being happy and affectionate. All of the foster children won places in my heart, but none was quite as dear as Riria. She was with us in Dalrymple Road, and when she reached her 5th birthday went to school at Mangapapa.

Then the inevitable came to pass. One day she put her arms around me and said "You are really, truly mum, aren't you?"

What could I say? I reminded her of the day we had been in Gisborne and a lady had given her a pretty doll. That lady, I told her, was her real mother. But that mother hadn't a home, so she let us have her because we would look after and be good to her. So that was how she got us for Mum and Dad, and we loved her.

I'm afraid I felt anything but kindly towards the children, who must have been old enough to know better, who had been at such pains to tell her. Perhaps I should have pitied them for the type of parents in a home responsible for them.

However, she was reassured as to her place in our affection, and spent some happy years with us.

After the opening of the Napier-Gisborne rail way we had visits from the family. Flo was, I think, first of my own children, though Hugh Knowles from Wanganui came earlier.

In Massey Road we had a visit from Uncle Harry and Aunt Maggie, the best loved of our uncles and aunts.

They were on a visit to their son Spencer Nightingale, an engineer on the development of the Wairoa-Gisborne section of the railway, whose home was midway at Wairoa.

It was a very brief visit but gave us much joy. Their home was always open to us when we visited Auckland in our Raetihi days. Uncle Harry had been Mum's favourite brother. That, in itself, would have made him a 'special' to us, but we came to love both him and Aunt Maggie very dearly indeed. Uncle Harry died not long ago, at the age of 90. When I saw him last he was very old. His daughter, Mrs Thomas, my cousin Molly, was afraid he wouldn't remember me. His greeting was a little casual, when suddenly he turned to me and asked "Whatever made you stay so long in that Raetihi?" Nothing feeble about his brain, anyhow!

I was glad for it is most distressing to see our dear ones lose themselves in old age, though there is the comforting thought that they do not suffer, or are not even conscious of any change.

We heard of a vacant house in Dalrymple Road through a friend. This was a nine roomed house on the banks of the Taruheru River. It had just been vacated. As soon as the Social Security Office opened next morning Dad was on the spot and secured the tenancy. Our names had been on the books since the sale of Massey Road. It had all that we desired in a home. A commodious house, the soil wonderfully fertile, fruit trees in full bearing, and last but very important, good neighbours.

Laurie John, Hope and I put in vegetables, and trimmed up the flower garden.

There were four acres of land, bounded on two sides by a creek which flowed into the Taruheru, and the Taruheru was the third side boundary. The fourth was the Dalrymple Road frontage.

We brought our stock, three cows, one very good, and our poultry, about 100 leghorns, with the incubator from Massey Road, for we raised our own chicks and sold day olds also.

We grew our own maize. Walt did the milking, a skill I had not acquired, and looked after the crops. In Massey Road we paid a neighbour to plough ground for cropping, but in the new home we dug the garden ourselves and had only the paddock shut up for hay reaped by paid labour.

Though Walt had come from generations of farming stock, he himself had been apprenticed to his watchmaker uncle, at about the age of 14, and worked in that business till in his 20th year the family emigrated to New Zealand.

So, though he had been brought up on a farm, he had never done that kind of work. If truth be told he was a bit too old to learn a new job, which would include animal husbandry. He could never ill-treat an animal. I think farm husbandry resembles the work of a mother, which is an anticipation of needs before they show up.

He liked the life in the open-air, and his independence, and it gave us a living.

Hope worked as nurse aide at the hospital in Raetihi and liked it. So, after two or three years doing photography, she took a job at Te Puia Hospital. Then when her sister Flo's health gave way she answered their SOS and went to Ohakune.

Our Dalrymple Road home was much like our first in Massey Road. Both were built 40-60 years previously, when timber was plentiful and labour cheap.

My father had always liked a large home. I, like him, hated to be cramped, and we felt ourselves most fortunate to find large homes available. Dalrymple Road had nine rooms. Surely God had led us to the two spacious homes we had been blessed with, and where we had room for the family to visit us.

Flo was, I think, our first. I was delighted to see her arrive unexpectedly one day. She could have had no doubt of her welcome.

We found, to our sorrow, all was not well with her. It was indeed the onset of a nervous breakdown. We did our best to help. She said she was not feeling well. Our excellent doctor who had cared for Roy in his last illness suggested hospital for rest and examination. We had taken her out sightseeing, but she preferred quiet, and seemed restless and unhappy. She thought hospital might be the best.

On her arrival we had wired her husband, Laurie Nation, of her safe arrival. On the doctor's advice she agreed to go to hospital.

The lady doctor questioned me as to her home life. Was she happily married, was there another man in her life? In her experience this was often the case in these otherwise inexplicable breakdowns. I replied that I knew of none, that her husband was one of the best of men.

A little later she suggested we get Laurie to come up. I advised him accordingly.

So anxious was he that he got my nephew, Alec Spence, to drive him up. They set out on the long journey and travelled night and day, reaching us about 11 p.m. By this time Flo had been in hospital about a week or 10 days if my memory serves me aright.

Next morning we were early at the hospital, where Laurie had a talk with the doctor who advised he go to the ward unannounced. He and I went in together.

She saw me first, then Laurie. Immediately her face lighted up and she held out her arms to him. The doctor was satisfied, and felt sure all was well, and the patient's breakdown only temporary. Her advice was that Laurie take her to a specialist in Wellington, as soon as she seemed well enough to travel. She herself was very hopeful of the case.

So, in a day or two, they set out for Wellington by easy stages.

The specialist's verdict was hopeful. The patient wanted to go home, and he was sure the cure had begun and home was indeed the best place.

The outcome left us all reassured and happy, especially Laurie, whose deep love for her never wavered, whatever happened. I always think of my son-in-law as the most remarkable character I have met in a long life.

What I did not know then, was that the doctor's conjecture was right. The man who had spoiled her young life had turned up again, and Laurie himself, out of the goodness of his heart, had allowed him to visit occasionally his daughter now legally Laurie's. Betty had grown up to be a most attractive girl, excelling at most sports, and he had asked to be allowed to visit her occasionally. Laurie agreed, and though it would have been against the grain – should have refused.

When he asked Flo to marry him she was perfectly frank and told him she had no love for anyone but Betty's father. Laurie, strong in the strength of his own deep unalterable love, was sure he could win hers in time, and it was on those terms they married.

To meet this other man again in his visits to the daughter, was too much for Flo. As to being permitted to visit Betty, he had forfeited any right to her society and love before her birth. Out of the goodness of his heart Laurie had opened the door to one who was to destroy his happiness and cost Flo her life.

Laurie was one of those rare souls who could forgive almost any injury. Would even God blame him if this last crime against his wife should seem beyond forgiveness?

Yet I have known him extend forgiveness to men who had done him much injury, and to give a second chance to some who had robbed him previously.

Small of stature, he was great of soul. There was no pettiness in his nature.

I once begged a photo of him as a young man, from one who had known and loved him. The owner refused saying "Don't ask me to part with it. It is all I have of the best man I ever knew."

Truly, he gave with both hands, and asked for little in return. I should call him a great man. How much of God's discipline is needed to bring us to the place when we can freely and fully forgive.

The river, Taruheru, was subject to floods, a menace we had not hitherto encountered. The Rangitikei, the big river of our youthful days, flowed between high banks. The kind of disaster characterised as acts of God that we had known were earthquakes and fire. Flood menace was as yet outside our experience.

Our first year in Dalrymple Road was to give us the knowledge at first hand of yet another example of things beside which a man stands helpless, flood!

Our smooth running river became a torrent. Our home was not in danger, though the water came up to within 20 feet of the backdoor, and covered the fowl yard. Even so, we suffered no loss of poultry, for the wise birds stayed safe on their roosts till the ground was clear.

This was no ordinary flood. There has not been its like since. It followed a very wet season and torrential rain.

From our backdoor we witnessed an unforgettable sight. For hours, it seemed, an endless stream of flotsam and jetsam were hurried swiftly by, tree trunks, sheds, dog kennels, hen coops, haystacks, and in between and around bobbed huge cattle pumpkins. These did not float g e ntly b y, they w e re hurriedly carried away out of sight to be followed by others, the bodies of brown beasts, sheep and fowls. Many people had to leave their homes, especially those in the Waipaoa region. The waters flooded their homes, leaving a coating of silt. I was told that although the houses dried out, they were never rid of the smell of the flood. It sounds probable to me, though I but tell the tale as it was told to me.

I was told that such a flood occurred about once in 20 years. The cause of this abnormal rise was the overflow in the upper region of Waipaoa into the Taruheru. It was, as we say, some flood. I would wish to be excused a nearer visitation. As a spectacle it was awesome, but once is enough. The loss in property, the suffering of trapped animals, the erosion must make a huge total of suffering and monetary loss.

Each rainy spring we would ask ourselves "Would there be another flood?" There was not, and I hope such will not occur again. The Catchment Board is working to prevent it, and appear to be successful, if man is ever wholly successful against the so-called 'Acts of God'.

Dalrymple Road we found, was part of an estate held in trust till the youngest beneficiary reached his majority.

This occurred in our time, but, as the law stood, we could not be put out until another suitable residence was found by us or for us.

The time soon came when the trust matured and 3 Dalrymple Road was up for sale. In short, we were again in the position of tenants under notice. Then the property was, in terms of the trust put up for sale.

Even in the great Gisborne house famine, not many people wanted a house in occupation. That is how our son-in-law, George Skuse, came to be its owner, for he could, without consent, come into occupation. They sold their King Country property and moved in.

We were to live with them. Arnold was sent back to Auckland, where I continued to keep in touch with him.

He was found a job and was at last the 'working boy' he had so looked forward to being. He was placed with a grocery firm. When he began to think things over, he greatly desired to learn a trade. Though he liked his work, he felt that, with a trade, he would be safer should times of depression come. Having no parents or relatives to turn to, he felt the need of a trade skill. He was less happy with his boarding place. These were Church of England folk, while he was a Baptist.

I got in touch with the Social Security Department in Auckland, and had a sympathetic hearing, so that Arnold was transferred to a Baptist family, and given the choice of a trade. He chose upholstery rather to their surprise. I knew that answer. A lad who had been his friend in his former Auckland life had gone into that trade, and never looked back. He now is happily married, and owns his own business which is upholstery.

So he was apprenticed according to his choice and in due time became a qualified tradesmen.

Often, I am sure, all these homeless, or poor home boys, need is a helping hand at a critical time.

The story of Arnold's friend is worth telling. When Arnold came to me his friend was placed with a farmer, who was very satisfied with the lad's

capabilities. He spent his weekly holiday with Arnold at our place. On a cold winter's night we three sat round the fire. Arnold expressed a wish that he too, could leave school and go to work. His pal held a contrary view, and said "Don't be a fool, Arnold. I used to think that, now I know what I have lost. If I went to a sale, I could not hold my own, or know if I was being cheated. I wish I could have my chance again." I pricked up my ears. "Would you really like to get more education?" I asked. "Too right I would" was his reply, whereupon I told him of night school, free, for boys like him. He was surprised. I advised him to consult Mr. Keeling, who would be only too pleased to help. He thought a minute and said "I couldn't Mrs Ashwell, I have run away from school more than once, and now he has outfitted me for this job I have. No, I couldn't." "Well" I replied. "Are you willing I should talk it over with him?" He was more than willing and thanked me.

The result was an interview with the instructor, who asked what course he wanted to take. His reply was instant "Woodwork".

"And English" supplemented the teacher. "No one can get on without knowledge of our language".

So he was enrolled, and did so well that a joinery firm was happy to take him as apprentice, from which he graduated and followed up with a successful course in upholstery. He now has his own business.

I had hoped to keep Riria, my little Maori girl with scarred face, but could not. We were relatives, there only till a house could be found, and Riria was definitely out.

How much heartache it caused us both is known only to God. Riria was taken away ostensibly for a holiday. I did all I could, which was just to put my loving wishes into her outfit. I think she went first to Nuhaka, with people of her own race, and later to Wairoa. For a long time she pleaded with the welfare lady "She had had her holiday. When could she go home to Mum?"

I grieved, and so did she, but maybe it was best after all. Her future was with her own people.

I saw her once again. She remembered the house in Dalrymple Road and sought us there, where she was given our address and came to see me. She was then working and begged me with tears to take her as a boarder.

To my sorrow, I could not. Walt was not well enough then to be happy with anyone but me around. As things worked out, all I have been able to do with her was to pray for her daily. Perhaps it is the very higher service, for why I am powerless in myself to help her, I write it in capitals GOD CAN.

[We moved from 3 Dalrymple Road to a pensioner unit at 50 Anzac Street] or rather a half unit. As we went in the neighbours in the other half moved out, so both new families began together, and lived in mutual friendliness, even when later Colleen [Bill's eldest daughter] and the children came.

Though the name was O'Grady, and he real Irish, she was the typical English colonist, and set in her ways. He was very kind, and when mowing his small lawn did ours as well. Our next door was also friendly and kind. She and Mr. Russell did many a little thing for us, and we were glad to share our ladder and tools with them, as they would loan us theirs.

Her teenage daughter was not easy to manage and got into bad company, causing them a bit of trouble and heartache. I felt sure as she grew older and got more sense she would get more cooperative. To be able to talk things over together made a bond between us. They felt we understood.

As Walt was not happy in other people's homes, we got outside interest including the use of a piece of ground out Kaiti way to use as a garden. He sometimes did a little gardening for other people for which he was paid.

It gave him an interest outside the home. When we moved to Anzac Street he continued to carry on till the crops were mature, and then made a garden at our home.

We had not been long in Anzac Street before he met with an accident which crippled him.

It was his custom to get up at dawn, then about four a.m. and go off on the 3 or 4 mile ride to Kaiti. That morning was very windy, a heavy gale. The bike was loaded up with tools, hard to stow properly. When he mounted a stiff gust blew the bike over and threw him against the curb, the loaded bike on top.

Luckily, I too rose early, and put the electric jug on to make a cuppa. While it came to the boil I looked out the window. There was a bike lying against the kerbing. I did not recognise it as Dad's, but was puzzled as to whose it might be. No one near at hand rode bikes. It was too out of the way, Anzac being a blind street, for a stolen bike to be left there. I thought I would go out and see if there was any clue. I opened the front door, and found Walt lying near the steps, close to the house and so not visible from the window out of which I had looked.

He must have been unconscious till my coming roused him. He was most concerned that I should take the bike around to the shed. He would have hated neighbours to know he had had an accident.

Across the street, a door or two further down, Geoff's people lived. Before I lifted the bike I quickly slipped over to get Archie Smith to help me get Dad in. Also I woke their neighbour who had a phone to call a doctor. Then Archie carried Walt in. We should have left him till the doctor arrived but the wind was keen and it seemed best to get into shelter. Dr was new to us. Our own dear old Dr Gunn had died. Dr Allingham had taken his place, and answered the summons.

We gave him a hot drink and made him as comfortable as possible till the ambulance came to convey him to hospital.

I won't forget that ride. I went with him, inside. Talk of "rattling his bones over the stones!" Even I found that rough, and he must have been in great pain. I do think it would be better to let the patient wait longer for attention, and give him easier transport. I shudder to think of how more seriously hurt patients suffer. If it is always like that transportation, it is a wonder they get to hospital alive. The driver and his companion, on the "box" seat are of course quite comfortable. They should be lying on the bare floor and see how it feels to whole people. They might have more sympathy for the unfortunate transportees. I was thankful indeed when the hospital was reached. He must have felt about all in.

The relatives were very upset. It seemed too bad to have waited so long for a home and then for this to happen.

To Walt it meant crutches for life. If he had had more expert care after the accident, the bone might have knitted, though that was not probable at his age, then 78. But he had a fine constitution and had never taken strong drink, never smoked till he started aged 40 at the epidemic. The three Ashwell sons, also till then non-smokers, all started then and continued to smoke, though in moderation. Walt should have been longer in hospital. However, at Christmas time only those who would die if moved, are kept there. Even serious cases are "Allowed out for Christmas". Walt, of course, got his discharge.

Needless to say we put on a family celebration.

We had great hopes that Walt would be able to discard crutches for a stick but his age and increasing feebleness was against it. For some time he pottered round the garden, hoeing the weeds, planting a few potatoes, but soon even that was more than he could manage. He hated to own up to it being too much for him, and would go out on his crutches, try to do a bit, then come in and sit down. As time went on he gave up even that pretence and spent the mornings in bed, getting up after lunch, to sit in the living room where he could watch the traffic and life of the street. {The boy who asked why he was not dead}

There came an interlude when my heart seemed not too good and I was sent to hospital for observation. I was there not more than two weeks, if that. There was no organic trouble, so I was sent home to "take it easy".

I had to leave Walt, but the family undertook to care for him. Then he managed by himself getting up only to get himself a meal.

Before I left I had told an enquiring neighbour that he did not feel up to early rising as he had used to.

Weeding the garden on my return, the same neighbour came over for a chat.

Then she volunteered "Do you know I think your husband plays upon you. When you were in hospital he used to get up and mow the lawn. Now you are home he stays in bed".

"Well" was my reply. "When a man is nearly 84 he should have earned the right to work or not as he pleases". However, when the neighbour in the other unit told me how he used to walk down (on his crutches, of course) to the woodpile and carry in a piece or two, I saw the light.

Before he died, on that very day he thanked me for having looked after him instead of getting him to hospital. He said how much happier he was at home. Putting the neighbours' tales and his talk together I knew he had got round a bit to show he was able and fit to care for himself – in case they thought the poor old man should be put in a home.

Chapter 31 Church attendance, Thomas

In Arnold's case, taking into my home, and heart, a needy child brought rich reward. There grew up between us an affection that neither time nor separation have altered. Another outcome was change of church affiliation.

My father had been a Congregationalist, member of the old Beresford Street Church in Auckland. My mother's people prided themselves on being 'free-thinkers', a loose sort of term that makes a good excuse for lack of interest in religion. Only one brother had any church interest, Uncle Ritchie, who returned to New Zealand from Australia. His wife and children attended the Baptist Church.

When my father moved to Hunterville, we went to the nearest church, which was old-style Anglican, the spiritual home of great early Victorian stalwarts as Wilberforce, Gladstone, Francis Ridley Havergall and hosts of others, but my father used to call himself a Presbyterian. I never knew the denomination we children attended in Ohingaiti as Sunday School members. In Mangaweka we went to the Methodist Church. There was then no Presbyterian.

The same situation I found in Raetihi. The Methodist was the only non-conformist church there which I attended though not in its membership.

After my marriage into the Ashwell family, Walt's cousin, Alf Parkes said to me quite casually "I have put your name on the membership roll. Is that alright?"

I assented, and became a Methodist – shall I say – by marriage. It was a good Christian fellowship that was now my spiritual home by right. My status was now "member" where previously I had been merely "adherent". I notified the Baptist Church in Palmerston North of the change. There seemed little likelihood of Baptist work in the King Country, though indeed, it did come to Ohakune 10 or 12 years later, when Capt. Gray Thornton and his gifted wife established a work there.

When I took charge of Arnold, his denomination was given to me as Baptist.

When I told Arnold I was entering him in the Baptist Sunday School he said "First thing I knew about being a Baptist but I suppose I will have to go where Mr. K says."

I explained that there was very little difference between my church and his, and promised that I would go with him to the Baptist Church at least once a month.

Then Mr. Tolland, dean of the Bible Training Institute at Auckland came to Gisborne church to hold a teaching mission. This was a two weeks mission open to all Bible lovers.

I did not miss a meeting. Even Sunday evenings, I left my own church service during the singing of the last hymn and cycled quickly to the Baptist Church.

Cycling home from the last meeting in the quiet dark the thought came. "The Baptist is really your church, at least you have accepted the only tenet in which it differs from the Methodist Church." To this I gave mental assent, and let it go at that.

I write here in what may be called "an unknown tongue" for non-Christians. We call it the leading of God. I realised, after that mission, that the Baptist was indeed the church of my convictions. Had I not, with my sister-in-law, felt led of God to be baptised, in the way the Baptists practice it and as the Lord himself was baptised?

I tried to put the thought aside without avail. I was happy where I was. I knew no one in the Baptist Church. Most of my friends, who had welcomed me so warmly were Methodists. The thought of a break was most unwelcome.

There were so many facts against a change. The Methodist Church was the family church. It meant division there.

For weeks I tried to avoid the issue, but could not. At last I faced up to it, and went first to my own minister and his wife who were dear friends. I found he was leaving after the close of the year, because of his wife's health. The doctor advised for her, a higher altitude. I postponed my resignation till after he had himself given his, so that my break would not be considered to be due to any lack of friendliness between us. Our relations had been most cordial. With no other minister, except perhaps Rev Fred Martin of my early married life, had the relationship been more happy. Hope, too, loved them both.

I knew, for myself, that in that change, I was obeying God's will. After Mr. Blakemore's desire for a change for health reasons had been announced, I sent in my resignation to take effect at the end of the current year.

I soon settled into the new church environment, doing much the same work as I had in the Methodist Church. Hope kept her Methodist connection for some years. After Roy's death Laurie could not face church. They had been inseparable pals, and Laurie felt he could not get through a service. Later it became a custom that on Mother's day, he came with me to church, and sometimes on some other special occasion.

For years, there were times when I mentally wondered "Why the change?" I

was a Christian of some maturity, my faith had been 'an oaken staff' so long. My help was needed even more in the church I had left, than in the new one.

The answer came in time, when both my daughters followed me. Why? Not through any persuasion of mine. They were drawn by the clear forthright teaching based on the word of God, especially its youth work. Those brought up in such teaching can truly say "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day (The day of the Lord's judgement).

The answer to my "Why?" seems clearer with the passing years. I had seen what the change meant to my husband, who, right until increasing weakness prevented him, refused to miss the morning service.

The minister of his time said to me after Walt's death "I never knew a man of his age to grow as much spiritually in the time I have known him (almost a decade)." Even though he had been brought up in the best Methodist traditions, it was only in the Baptist Church that he enjoyed in his own experience fellowship with his Saviour. In our old age we established family worship, which had been the custom in the Ashwell family.

When we married I suggested we keep up the custom. He said "Wait till we have children old enough to join in". The result was that we never did until we were both old.

Now, with deep satisfaction, I see children and grandchildren worshipping with me, members of the Sunday School and Bible Classes, ready, later on to take up the work I will have laid down. With great enjoyment and interest I now have a place in the most senior Bible Class of all ages Sunday School, of which my daughter is leader.

It is interesting to find that so much that has added interest and pleasure to my life, came through adding to my household a small boy in need of care and understanding.

Better still to know him now an educated man, married and in an honourable profession.

When our Dalrymple Road home was sold Walt and I stayed on as boarders.

After our marriage, except for the first few months, we had only one change of home, when we built another house on our section in the fifth year of our marriage. There we stayed till we left Raetihi.

In Gisborne, no sooner did we settle in than the place would be sold and we again without a home. When 3 Dalrymple Road was sold to our son-in-law, we still were only boarders.

Walt did not ask of life much of the world's fine things. He would have been content with his own home and wife however small and plain the home, as long as it had sufficient ground to make a garden, and books to read. Now in his 70th year, to live in someone else's house, even his daughter's fretted his spirit. He was unhappy. He shut himself up in his own shell, moody and morose. I feared the return of the old breakdown.

He had never liked George, though he was a good man and to my mind, easy to get on with, and we were good friends. So, much the same situation developed as when I was house-keeping. I was far from happy myself, being the buffer between the two contending parties. But I had the interest in the children, who usually mean so much to Grandma.

Though we had not a home of our own, we did have a roof over our heads. We lived in our own one room, for I would not leave Walt and he refused to leave it except for meals.

Dorothy and George had two children when they first visited us. Rosemary was not quite four, Roy about two. They arrived late in the evening, and the children were asleep and were put to bed at once.

Next morning I was up preparing breakfast when the door opened and a shy little fellow with curly hair and big eyes peeped in. It was little toddler Roy, followed by his sister of about four, Rosemary.

Then, through another sorrow, came for us an interlude of peace and joy.

A young couple, valued friends, suddenly lost their little one, a lovely wee girl. Their cup of sorrow was made more bitter in that it came through a kindly action done to another. The wife had, on holiday, met a lady who had lost a little child. She invited her to come to Gisborne for a visit. The visitor brought the same germ that had killed her child and infected her hostess's little one, who quickly succumbed.

After the death of the child her parents went to live with the husband's mother, living alone in a large house. The bereaved mother could not face a return to the house which was so full of memories of her lost little one and offered it to us for a few months at least.

We were tenants for nine months, and how Walt enjoyed that time. He planted a good garden, fished in the nearby river. It was one of the happiest times of our life together, the only cloud to our joy and peace that it had been its cost to our young friends. Now, another little one was expected, and this new hope brightened the future. They were ready to come home in preparation for the event.

We went back to 3 Dalrymple Road. Walt slumped again, but got some relief in working in his little plot at Kaiti.

Our daughter's family was now three, the last lovely little brown eyed boy Thomas, now a toddler, eagerly exploring his world of wonders. He had learnt to overcome a number of difficulties. He could safely negotiate the three steps leading from the back door to the concrete yard. The world still held many hazards. Interfering grown-ups were always shutting gates and doors which led to some delectable land. He would stand at the gate into the cow paddock watching those huge cows that came quite near, or moved about the paddock. The fowls too. They were always moving about and making chookie noises especially the big one with pretty feathers. Pussies, too, were good to play with, though they had a way of getting up and walking off just when a fellow wanted to play with them.

One thing the grown-ups were always saying "Where's Tommy?" Many times a day they would pick him up in their arms, kiss him, and put them somewhere else. This was almost sure to happen when he had found a new and most interesting place. What matter? There was always other intriguing places and things to find and explore.

There came a day, a beautiful day as I remember, when the familiar question "Where's Tommy" brought the answer "He's all right, he has just gone into the shed." Then a cry, a cry of distress and tragedy.

Tommy was picked up, in the shed, but the cause of the cry was not at first visible. His mouth was bleeding. Then we found the cause. On the floor was a small pile of caustic soda. In last summer drought, when Hope with baby John had lived with Dorothy while Geoff had been in the air force training camp, caustic soda had been the means of softening the hard well water for the laundry work. When the drought broke, the deadly stuff was put at the back of the highest shelf in the shed-wash house, out of reach of even an adult.

George was putting up a cycle shed behind the wash house. The hammering on the wall had caused that tin to fall among some timber stored in the shed. Baby found what looked like a sweet, and as babies ever do, put it in his mouth.

I tore up to the nearest neighbour having a telephone, but it was she who had to ring a taxi and the hospital to expect us. Then back to help Dorothy, who kept him in her arms. We were afraid to give him a drink of milk, in case it would send the caustic into his stomach.

We met the taxi at Stout Street, so that no time was lost getting him to hospital. He passed away some time that night to that good land which holds no death traps for babes.

Dorothy and I walked home from Hospital. She tried to pick up the work she had left but could not.

I got her into bed, from which she did not rise till, six weeks later, she went into hospital for the birth of her fourth child.

George and I carried on without her. I was glad to be a comfort to George. Dorothy was too deeply shocked to want anything but to be left alone.

At such times human help is of little avail.

The doctor said it was 'delayed shock' and said the rest and quiet the patient sought was the best cure.

The new baby was a son. When we went up to see her, the sister told me the new baby was so like little Tommy they were afraid to let her see it.

My opinion was that to see the little one, so like Tommy, would be more likely to help than otherwise. So it proved. It seemed to her almost like having Tommy given back to her.

Those who have had like sorrow, know that the loss is never thus made up. That the arms be new filled, is, however, the greatest help.

Four [surviving] grandsons were born within that 12 months one to each family and Tommy, the youngest still has his place in our memories as the youngest of the quartet. [1944 Paul, Michael, Barry, Malcolm, Thomas]

Chapter 32 Grandchildren

While we were at Dalrymple Road, Hope was living in Christchurch, Geoff being there training in the air force. There John was born and given the family name John Ashwell Smith.

When Geoff's unit was moved to Ohakea, Hope with John returned to Gisborne. We moved up a bit closer, and Hope was given the large front room for her family.

The house famine was felt most in the cities, but nowhere was that more severe than in Gisborne, because of a problem peculiar to the locality.

The labour shortage consequent on the war had local factors which made the housing situation acute.

As men were drafted out to the army Maoris from back pa's moved into town where labour was in urgent demand. The house famine grew more and more acute after peace was declared, and the soldiers began to return. Before Geoff was demobilised, Hope's second son, Malcolm Geoffrey, was born. She was allotted a flat in Maude St in Kaiti. Naturally, young married Army men received first consideration. Dad and I stayed where we were. I remember the night she moved into the vacant flat. I went with her, as she had two babes in arms. The rain poured down. I should've stayed with her, but not having made that arrangement with Dorothy, I returned home. When I did return and thought about it, I could have kicked myself. No matter how strained the home situation was, I should've realised Hope's need. A wet cold night, two small babies, a cold house.

Hope as she always does, rose to the situation, in spite of such appalling conditions. She was so happy to have a home that she brushed off the thought of unpleasantness. The taxi driver did not budge from his seat to help with her suitcases. I held one baby while she held the other, struggling to find the keyhole in the dark. She went out through the pouring rain for the suitcases, while the driver sat there and watched, no doubt noting with satisfaction while the meter ticked up the cost till I was free to return.

I don't wish him (and his like!) any harm but it would be poetic justice, if when old and ill, he should receive similar treatment, and be left standing in the pouring rain, and icy wind, and no help at hand.

After Hope was settled in Maude St, I got the housekeeping job at Wainui, and so was able to see quite a lot of the little household and called on occasions take the two small boys out in the pram.

When, the war over, Geoff was demobbed and he found a job as mechanic on the City Council which included a Council house, which had a small plot of land. We shared their pleasure in that it was only about 2 minutes' walk from our home, access being through a vacant paddock which backed the school ground.

The year George Skuse was born saw the advent of the [second surviving] girl in two generations of Geoff's forebears. Geoff and Hope were the proud parents. She was called Irene Helen, the latter being the only family name. "Irene" was Hope's choice [named after an aunt on Geoff's side] and a break-away from the tyranny of family names.

Irene came home to the new roomier house in Disraeli Street.

Hope missed coming home empty armed by a narrow margin. Baby was strong and vigorous when born, taking her meals with appetite. After a day or two she became listless. Hope mentioned her lack of appetite to the nurse, who brushed it away saying the baby must have been sleepy.

Hope insisted that her doctor be informed. Reluctantly the nurse consented but so casual was her call that the doctor did not come till evening. When he did things began to happen very rapidly. Baby was rushed to the main hospital, and for six weeks and was treated as a prem. Hope went home and every four hours had to express her own milk and see it was chilled and sent up to hospital. Such a performance!

The cause of the near death of a perfectly strong and healthy child is known only to the delinquent nurse and God. The child was, in the doctor's opinion, left lightly covered after her bath and got chilled, so that she was unable to pass urine. Perhaps the call to a tea-break came when the baby was being bathed.

We who only know the result can but conjecture the cause, whether nurse or sister in charge were to blame. When she was rushed to hospital, there was no hot water bottle in the crib, so Hope's was taken. Luckily I went to see her just then and cycled straight home for my own bottle for Hope otherwise there might have been two casualties.

Hope was unlucky to have been sent to an annex hospital with no heating, in the bitterest winter in 20 years. One good resulted from this evidence of carelessness or inefficiency, no time was lost in putting central heating in that annex. The situation of this hospital was most unfortunate. The mists from the nearby river made for damp and cold temperatures.

The only heating in the nursery where the babies were bathed was a one bar electric heater. It no doubt kept the well clothed nurse comfortable. The baby was no one's concern apparently.

In the same annex, same time, twins were born. The parents got away with one, after burying its twin, during the first week of its life. The husband simply went, demanded his wife and baby, and took them in spite of any protest, saying, he wanted his remaining child and the mother while they were still alive.

We have the right to our own conjectures. I have sometimes wondered (having for 30 years been deputy register of Births, Deaths and Marriages) what would have been written under the heading "Cause of death" had our little one died, or, what in fact was entered under that heading regarding the twin baby. One may be sure it was not 'gross neglect 'or 'culpable carelessness' on part of attendant nurse or sister.

In hospital care, we must, as in other services, take the good with the – well – not so good. It is a pity human lives and loves are at stake. I suppose nursing standards are of the same standards as other work. If the standards of human life in general are good, so will be the standards in caring for the sick and helpless.

Dorothy's son, born just after Tommy's death, was a beautiful baby, dark eyed, a real Skuse, with little likeness to the Ashwells. As if in compensation for their tragic loss, he was a perfect little fellow, with a happy disposition, which has always made friends whenever he goes. The saddened home was made glad by his most attractive presence.

With sharpened anxiety his mother watched over him as he began to get round the house, and later to walk. As if he had a sub-consciousness of danger, he took life quietly and prospered, neither courting nor dodging trouble.

It is not usual now-a-days, to give tribute to the love of God, though it seemed to me that Edward, "Teddy" to his home-folks, at that time was exactly the gift of God sent to the home at that period. The point raises questions as old as Adam, doesn't it? The old question of sorrow and trouble. It seems a necessary part of the discipline of life but that is not the full answer.

Human consciousness has never really accepted the idea that this life is the only one, and that with death the personality we miss has passed for ever from us. The passing of the Ruths and Tommies may have meanings beyond our ken as when men of great usefulness suddenly leave us, when they seem almost indispensable, and at what seems a crucial stage of their life work. Perhaps the answer is they are needed elsewhere, in God's vast universe.

I remember little detail of Teddy's baby days, so it must have been then Walt and I were at Wainui.

I will return to life there. In front of Mr. Peryer's home, were high hills, overrun with blackberries. It was Maori land, so I had an idea. I asked a fruiterer if blackberries were saleable. He said they were but only if carefully picked.

I got a few 20lb cases and took him a sample, which resulted in an immediate market for more. These were not sold in small lots, but in 20lb lots were readily saleable.

I picked steadily, evenings and mornings and was able to take the berries in early each day in good condition. I made about £20 that season, and more the next.

Before I started picking, the place was Gisborne's happy hunting ground, but when I began to market the unwanted fruit, the owners put up a 'Trespass" notice, so that was that.

For a season berries went only to the usual nomad pickers. Then the responsible Government department put the squeeze on and the vines were cut and burnt. As R.L.S. put it,

"There may be a moral But I don't know what".

I got a suit for Walt, and a trip to the King Country out of my venture, and thought it worthwhile.

I could have earned more at my old calling, teaching, but that would have been work. I had tried in our need, to get that work, but the H.B. Education Board having once declined my services were not given a second chance. Yet the highest position under the W.E.B. was open to me when I left to get married. When, in an acute shortage I went back at the urgent request of the head of Kaiti School, who was obliged to go to Hospital, to enter the schoolroom and take over seemed so natural as if I had never left it.

During our last stay at 3 Dalrymple Road, we were visited by George's cousin Rev Skuse a Methodist member and his wife. The family likeness of Tom to George was not to be denied. We liked him very much, a Methodist of the good old school. No affectation, simple, sincere, with the love of the Scriptures that was so much his Welsh heritage. The day or two I saw them was not long enough to pass an opinion on his wife. She was an English woman, and like myself, had been a teacher.

Two years after Edward, Georgie was added to the family. Unlike his brother Edward, he took all the chances and was always in the wars. He was, though, a model of babyhood, though not, I think, quite as strong as Edward. No tree was too tough for him to climb so it is no wonder he broke an arm, and also, another time a collarbone. Long before he started school he could read anything his brother read. However, now-a-days children must be their age, clever or mentally retarded must advance at the same rate from age 5 to 12, their places are all set. George could at five, do anything Edward did at seven, but he must still put two or three years at the set routine.

Is there any connection between this age-grouping of children, brilliant or slow, and the modern scourge of delinquency? A clever child, anxious to learn, must be bored stiff and droning through stuff he has no interest in. I wonder if, our highly educated educators, keep future athletes playing 'ring-a-rosie' till they are seven or eight? No, it must be only the intellect they play such monkey tricks with.

But wait! Did I not hear a small grandson say the other day that he had been weighed for entry into the Std I football team! Perhaps one day they will get to using a tape measure on the primers' heads!

A friend of mine, mother of a lively brainy six-year-old, who was always in mischief, went to the head of his school, and put the proposition to him that the cure for the lad was to put him in a higher class, where his mind would be suitably occupied. The head, admitting it was not accepted practice, did as she asked, with the best of results.

Bill was married in 1934, and Jim was born in December of that year. The four children of his first marriage were born in the five-year period that followed -- Jim 1934, Pat April 1936, Colleen July of 1937, and Ngaire two years later in 1939. At first Bill and Brenda lived in the accommodation provided at the Public Works Camp about 20 miles from Wanganui on the Parapara Road. Pat was born about this time in April 1936. When Colleen arrived two years later Bill was in the office of Williams and Kettle, later merged in the firm of Wright Stephenson and Co. and lived in Wanganui. [Harrison St]

Two years after Colleen's birth, Brenda went into Wanganui hospital for her fourth confinement. Here Ngaire was born and her twin brother Paul (the latter still-born) Brenda was left, uncovered and alone after delivery, for so long (about half an hour) that she was thoroughly chilled and was so ill she had to battle for life for a month, and even then was discharged in very poor condition. A friend took little Ngaire, and it is due to that friend's devoted care that Ngaire came through well. About three years later Bill and Brenda parted, by mutual agreement.

The small family, Ngaire was only a toddler, was cared for by a widow [Alma Blummont] with a teenage son, Ron. After the decree was made absolute, Bill and Alma were married. Their first child was given only one name "Barry", Bill's protest against his own burden of family names (Willsford Nind). Barry belongs to the age group quartet, which was headed by Paul Nation.

Chapter 33 Walt's last months

I have written of Walt's accident, and its outcome but not of the intervening months not quite two years.

The years of declining health, of patient suffering should be recorded. A man may accomplish much in the years of strength and vigorous manhood, as Walt did, not only did he build up a good business, he also served his day and generation in public affairs. I have known quite a few who took on public works for their own means, who talked big, did little and gave less. He was among those whose fine brain was used to think through large problems and advocate the most appropriate action. He gave time and money, and with a few others likeminded gave our little town a great push forward.

Raetihi had amenities much ahead of towns of comparable size and much larger population. His public service showed dedicated vision and common sense.

The close of his life showed even finer qualities. One of his sayings was typical. For a long time Raetihi was without a dentist, so the rank and file of the population, who could not afford the expense of a trip to Wanganui and the cost of dental treatment, had to simply let their teeth go. He was one of these, and suffered a lot with toothache. He seldom complained and sometimes even I did not know of it. I protested that he should have told me whereupon he retorted "I don't see why if I have toothache, the whole family should also suffer from it." That attitude of patient suffering was characteristic. To act otherwise he considered beneath the dignity of a man. I had to find out if anything was wrong through observation, especially so in his last years. Should I ask "Leg pain you?", he would reply with an indifferent "Nothing to speak of."

It was seldom I put such a question. It became habitual to watch, say nothing and do what I could in amelioration, or to distract his attention. He liked to have his own bedroom, as there he felt free to put on the light and read if sleep was slow in coming. Often, lying awake in the next room, I could catch a half stifled groan, and know his leg was not comfortable. Sometimes I would get up and make a cup of tea, on the pretence that I was lying awake, and wanted one. This was often effective, and he would be able to settle down. As time went on he wanted just to lie in bed till later in the afternoon. I used to wait upon him while he washed, and when he found himself unable to manage a full bath arranged on the doctor's recommendation, for the district nurse to come, but that was still many months ahead. We managed comfortably enough.

His love of reading was a great help. He had read most of the classics, in his youth, and in these his knowledge excelled mine. His taste in reading was wide, adventure, biography, exploration, Conan Doyle, Mark Twain, and most British classics. He was interested in physical culture and was in his younger days quite a disciple of Benarr McFadden the American physical culturalist of that day.

This background stood him in good stead in his inactive years. He was a modest, clean-minded man, like most of his generation, so the sex-infested literature of more recent origin left him cold. One new author, whose first book delighted him, and whose further writings were sex hag ridden lost his interest. He turned to others who preferred clean writing to making a fortune by the prostitution of their literary gifts. In the end he went back to older writers and found much he had missed in earlier readings. Was it God's reward that he retained his mental faculties to the end? I should think it likely that a clean mind would remain a healthy one.

I am glad God gave me a man of his quality as husband. In most matters we were alike – were kindred spirits. His courage helped in the family sorrows, his mother's and father's deaths, the sorrows of Nell's life and the tragedy of her passing. If to others she was "The finest Christian I ever knew", how much more to the brothers to whom she was the only sister? Then Ruth, Jimmy, Roy, and Flo. Perhaps the help was mutual, but I see only how his strength, love, and courage never failed.

It was his foresight and clear brain that helped the family fortunes. He advised Grandpa to divide his estate before his death, and so avoid the greatly increased death duties he saw looming ahead. By his foresight Fred, Ern, and Nell benefitted even more than he did. Grandpa, seeing that Nell would likely marry, in his estimation, a man who might not wisely use the money, would have tied up her inheritance to pass to the grandchildren. That was his wish, and, as events turned out might have been wise. However, the brothers rightly argued that as Nell had worked longest and hardest to make the family inheritance she should get hers without tags. This she did, and it was hers less than a month when it passed her husband.

The boys were not in favour of this, but at the time it seemed the only fair thing to do. I think we were all happy about it. That Nell should be considered, she had postponed her own marriage as long as the parents needed her, was only justice.

Walt had been longer at school than the others, so it was natural he should be considered the family counsellor. Knowing them all intimately I would say Nell was the brainiest. Though on the Ashwell side, they were people of

the land, farmers for many generations, on Mrs Ashwell's side they were in business, men of some education, in church and law. Both sides could claim missionary relatives, one of the Ashwells being in early New Zealand work. Others were in India and South Africa. The family were Methodists, with a tradition of going back to Wesley's time. One of Grandpa Ashwell's sisters married a missionary, Mr. North who served in China. The Ashwells and Alf Parkes whose mother was an Ashwell were foundation members of the Raetihi Methodist Church.

Walter, reading all the 'liberal 'literature of his day, was less interested in the church than the others – until he met me. Then the fruit of his early faith showed, and he became in later years the circuit steward of our church.

I have written of back blocks religion. Though these way-back churches did not draw educated ministers, no fault could be found with their love of the Lord and their devotion to their calling as shepherds of the flock.

They gave unstinted and willing service, with very few exceptions, endearing themselves to their people. Here a tribute should be paid to the lay preachers whose willing help enabled one minister to serve two or even three congregations. Our church circuit included Ohakune and Rangataua, 7 and 11 miles way respectively. The minister would take our morning service, ride or drive out to Rangataua for an afternoon meeting, and return to Ohakune for the evening service. Or, perhaps a lay man would take Raetihi in the morning and the Minister Ohakune, then Rangataua in the afternoon returning to Raetihi to take the evening church.

They worked really hard, visiting their people, sharing their hardships, their joys and sorrows. In this their showing compares favourably with that of many city ministers who seem to think that shaking hands at the church door fulfils their obligation in that respect.

When we came to Gisborne, Walt enjoyed the services. The ministers were men of education, good and interesting speakers. This was especially so when I joined the Baptist Church. For a time he went to that. He started in Rev. Silcock's time, and what had been more of a duty, became a pleasure. For him, the Bible 'came alive' under the exposition of a gifted well-read speaker and a keen observer of nature and the life of his people. Walt joined the men's fellowship. We took the job of church caretakers, an added interest to him. He looked after the grounds, and helped me with the heavier jobs. I am sure had his accident not prevented him, he would have been baptised.

After his accident we were indebted to our friends, Mr. and Mrs G. Marshall for transport. He could manage with the crutches to get up the steps into church. Indeed his native strength stood him in good stead.

Before his accident he used to enjoy fishing from the Botanical Gardens bridge, or from the Waikanae Wharf. Occasionally he would be lucky, but he always enjoyed these outings, bag or no bag.

There were times when he caused me some anxiety, returning home very late. One time I remember, it was quite dark and no sign of him. Hope and Geoff lived very close to our Anzac Street home, at the bottom end of Disraeli Street. I went through the paddock to see if he was at their place, but he had not been there. I was getting really worried when Hope suggested he might have taken a shortcut home through the Intermediate School grounds. I returned home that way, and found him at home. He was very tired and had stopped in the school grounds sitting on some steps, to get strength enough to go on.

A few times he tried going out on his crutches, but found his strength unequal. It must have overtaxed his strength even to put on a show he did when I was in hospital.

The experience of seeing a strong man going down the hill is full of pain. There is so little one can do, and the pretence has to be kept up that he is not as dependent as he feels. The impulse to go to his aid when he is finding a job difficult must be resisted, must go apparently unnoticed. After he was taken I thought of many things I could have done for him. I think that is the case in most bereavements.

I encouraged him to try his hand at writing – a bit late – for the effort tired him. It was from him Roy inherited his gift of seeing the humorous even in hardship and accident.

I think this gift went hand-in-hand with his tact. Few could deal with a difficult customer better than he. In demonstrating radios he was particularly happy, and seldom missed making a sale, even to difficult prospects.

He had a professional prospect who was adept at raking in the shekels and much averse to parting out. When he demonstrated a popular radio to him, the prospect thoroughly enjoyed the evening's entertainment, but was not prepared to sign on the dotted line.

Walt had chosen a deluxe model which the man could well afford. Walt showed him how well it looked in his rooms, and used all his selling points. I think this time it was I who thought of the point which clinched the deal. Walt came home after his demonstration, leaving the set there till the morning. I suggested he made a bargain that if the customer took the set, he would give him the order for a set of dentures for which his commission would pay. It worked. Everyone was happy, but I am sure no one was more so than I. No more toothache! To have put up with it so long convinced me that he was the stuff that martyrs are made of.

To get back to Massey Road. I picked up hints about pruning, and went to work on the orchard.

The Methodist minister Rev Leadley Senior had been a peach orchardist in Australia and gave me a few pointers, though he thought some of the trees were a bit old, and it would be wise to get a few young ones, which would come into full bearing later on. We did, and when the place was sold we carefully transplanted them to Dalrymple Road, where they are now flourishing.

I look back on those Massey Road days, which held much frustration, and sorrow and loss, as in the main happy, and rich with all the promises of God. While there we had lost two of our family, Roy and Flo, but our clan had been widened by Hope's marriage and the birth of grandchildren, and into our lives had come other needy children. We were richer by very many new friends. The outlook for our family seemed set fair. We remember those days with thankful spirit. Our esteemed friend and former landlady, Mrs Bruce, has passed on. When I see her house on the Hill, I remember so many kindnesses. As when, the day of Roy's funeral, we returned to find she had cooked a fine hot meal for us, which was sent down as soon as we returned.

As I write these memoirs I am sure to forget much I should like to remember, but Mrs Bruce's thoughtful kindness we cannot forget.

During our tenancy she and her daughter took a trip overseas. I gave her an introductory letter to my aunt Lily Mills, mum's only sister. The Mills family were thrilled to meet one who had close contact with some of the New Zealand relatives. My cousin Ethel, a year older than I had married the owner of a ranch in Arizona. Mrs Bruce's daughter was disappointed that their schedule did not allow of a trip into that region made famous by Hollywood. She would have loved to have seen some film scenes come alive.

Chapter 34 Flo and Laurie, Bill's family

After her marriage, Flo lived in Ohakune 7 miles south of Raetihi. There her three sons were born [John, Peter, Paul].

She worked hand-in-hand with Laurie who soon after his marriage was made mayor of Ohakune.

Flo, though only 18, took full part in the social life of the community, helping in all the municipal projects of a growing town. Laurie and Flo gave liberally, by personal work, in cash, to the development of the borough. Incidentally, by a bit of swift work Ohakune secured the district High School. Remembering the right to have been a Raetihi-an, the adjective becomes understandable.

However, though Raetihi was chagrined over this, feeling that the old town had been outwitted, I think Ohakune, being more central was the better choice (especially now served by rail).

When, in his mayoral capacity, Laurie attended many municipal conferences, Flo accompanied him. When, at Levin, I think it was, an enterprising journalist writing up the affair made mention of them as being "The youngest Mayor and Mayoress, Mr. and Mrs Laurie Nation of Ohakune aged 21 and 18" he was right with Flo's age but quite a few years on the generous side with Laurie's.

They enjoyed this phase of their married life to the full, and it must have been a little regretfully that Flo had to forego these junketings when the family began to grow.

Laurie managed the Ohakune part of his father's interests, but shortly after his marriage his father died, and the care of the whole of the family interest devolved on him. These consisted of the Raetihi paper the local rag as it was sometimes irreverently called (The Waimarino County Call) and the "Ohakune Times" published in its hometown, and serving the interests of the surrounding districts of Rangataua and Karioi. The Nation family had been newspaper men for 200 years, in England and New Zealand. I believe they were responsible for the Levin paper previously to coming to the Waimarino.

With the coming of "The Pictures" or the movies, Laurie opened a small confectionery business next to the theatre [in Ohakune] which still belongs to the family.

After his father's death, Laurie surely had a full-time job, for added to the business interests was the care of his widowed mother and his sister, who lived at Raetihi. So, day by day Laurie journeyed between the two places. His

sister [Pearl renamed Anne] took up school teaching, but married, afterwards settling in Australia.

Laurie's loving care of his mother never failed. When he died [in the early 1950s] she said to me when I went to condole with her "How many women have their sons so long as I have had mine, seeing him almost every day of his life?"

Yet, though so much was loaded on his young shoulders, he showed to the world a poised and serene front. Many a time he must have been hard pressed, and always overworked. He kept his difficulties and troubles locked in his own breast, and won through.

Flo, not fully understanding the necessity of easing the weight he had undertaken resented the long working day which deprived the family of his presence.

Had he remembered the terms of his marriage, and realise that he still had to woo his bride and win her love, he might have cut his losses and let some lesser things go. Only those who have known the constant pressure of business interests can appreciate the difficulty of his position. Sure of his own undeviating love, he missed seeing that his married happiness depended on his winning from Flo a love to match his own.

Unfortunately we don't inherit the wisdom of the ages. Each has to acquire wisdom as he journeys on, mostly by trial and error.

I remember his great joy over the birth of his first son, John.

To an adoring grandmother he could let himself go, sure of being understood. As he held the little fellow and looked into the future, he was deeply moved.

In his wedding speech he had spoken of marriage as the beginning of ambition. Looking at father and son I remembered and thought "if marriage be its beginning, surely ambition soars at the advent of the firstborn son."

Sure of my sympathetic understanding he spoke of what he hoped to do for John. Whatever he wanted to take up he would find his Dad right behind him, helping him to reach the goal of his heart's desire. He mentioned business, medicine, science, laying, as it were life's choicest guests at the feet of the unconscious babe.

What to wonder then, that between these two that the ties became so strong and tender. Even as a toddler it was as much to his father as to his mother that he turned. When as a schoolboy he came home, his first word was "Where's Dad?" and as soon as he was found, John became his shadow.

An only child himself, Laurie grieved much over the death of his second child, Rosemary the only girl.

One of Ohakune's assets was its doctor who, coming as a young man, became that rara avis – the true family doctor.

When Rosemary became ill, he advised hospital treatment, which, though entailing a journey to Wanganui, gave the little one the best chance (he did not say the only) of recovery. He must have known how slender that chance was. I travelled with Flo to Wanganui via the Parapara. Flo nursed the tiny mite for almost the whole journey. She seldom let me take her, saying in sorrowful apprehension "Oh Mum, let me keep her. How long will I have her to hold?"

She stayed in Wanganui till the little body was brought home for burial to be laid in the grave of Laurie's father. I saw that plot recently, with the small additional stone at the foot, her memorial.

Rosemary had given promise of more than ordinary good looks, seeming to inherit the best from both sides.

Early in 1934 Peter was born. He was first named Peter William. As the law stood, perhaps is still the same, a given name may be changed within the year.

There had come, to our ken, not so long before this time, my mother's first cousin Belle McCullough. They had grown up together in the north of Ireland town of Newry. My mother's family, the Nightingales, had emigrated to New Zealand, married and settled, and all but Aunt Lily Mills, mother's only sister who went to U.S.A. within a few years settled in New Zealand. We children were grown up and married when the McCullough clan arrived. In the first year of Peter's life, one son Joseph Knowles, learning farming at Westmere, out of Wanganui, was drowned in a lake on the property. It was one of those unfortunate accidents that a little knowledge could have prevented. After a long day mustering on the hills he came back tired and hungry. When he had finished a good meal, the rest of the family were having an evening swim in the lake and chaffed him into joining them. He was seized with cramp and sank like a stone. I was in Wanganui on business, staying at the home of my cousin Isabel, when a policeman knocked at the door. He took a long time (it seemed) to find words to break the news, on his way to the scene of the accident. Hugh got a car and took us out. I was glad to be with Isabel through the long hours of the night while a party dived and grappled for Joe's body. The lake was supposed to have been an ancient volcano, and very deep. It was almost daylight before the search was successful. I had persuaded my cousin to lie down in bed at Westmere and lay beside her. She did not sleep but at every sound got up to see how the search was going. Toward morning it was successful. We had dozed off when I heard the back door quietly opened,

not so quietly but that Isabel was instantly on her feet, even before her son Hugh reached our bedroom door, pouring out questions, and wanting to see her boy. Hugh, however, had seen the body of his brother well on the way to Wanganui before coming to us.

She upbraided Hugh for not calling her sooner, which Hugh countered by saying that it was out of his hands when the police took over. Later he said quietly to me that he knew his mother was very much on the alert, and had got everything arranged, adding (to me) that the body of a drowned person, particularly one taken with cramp, was not a suitable sight for a mother to see. Flo and Joe were on very friendly terms, and in his memory Peter's name was changed to Peter Joseph.

Peter was born in 1934, and that same year Bill had married Brenda Williams and in December their son Jim (Willsford James Ashwell) was born, the fourth grandchild.

Dorothy was married in Raetihi in December 1937 to George Skuse. They took up farming leasing a farm on the Ohakune Road. Two years later the second Rosemary of the family was born. Before giving the baby that name Dorothy talked it over with Flo, who had no objection at all to that name being given to the new arrival. Two years later Roy Alfred was added to our roll. Walt and I were beginning to feel quite patriarchal being grandparents to three new branches (three new branches on the family stem).

When Jim was born, Bill was working on relief works on the lower Parapara. The slump was at its worst, nor had the National (Reform?) Government any idea but the outlook of an unimaginative Scot who was its head. His natural national reaction was for all to pull the purse strings tight, and live on only the barest necessities. Not bad advice to land owners, but what of mill men and other labourers out of work?

It was a very short-sighted policy. Had the mill owners been helped out with Government loans to keep the axes cutting and the saws revolving, recovery would have come more quickly. I speak only of King Country conditions. In towns, where things were otherwise, the position was worse. But much could have been done to encourage work on national projects, or on road development, a more rewarding way of handling the situation, than that of putting men who wanted the work, on the dole. The percentage of folk who want to live without working is small. There were many national projects where men without family ties could have been given work leaving that nearer home for married men with young families.

Bill used his time on such work to take up accountancy by correspondence. It was not until the third term of the year Bill began to study. When he got his

papers it was only a few weeks before the exams. Nevertheless, working four hours before his daily work and four hours in the evening he passed his first section on two subjects.

Then his attention was directed to an ad in the Wanganui Chronicle for office help, by a firm Newton King (or Loan and Mercantile). There were 40 applicants, out of which two were chosen in the finals including Bill. He missed out. The chosen was the son of an influential farmer.

Bill was disappointed at missing out.

However, next day he was offered a job in Dalgetys. The firm was later merged in Wright Stephensons, and Bill has gone on steadily in their employ.

He moved to Wanganui and lived there for many years. His son Jim entered Government service, Pat, who had set his heart on a land career, went to work for a farmer near Wanganui.

Pat was very happy in his work. Dealing with farmers through his job at Wright Stephensons, Bill made friends among the farmers. When Pat went to work, one of this farmer friends said "I would have been happy to give the son of yours a start." Bill thought it could be arranged, but when he mentioned a change to Pat, he was so upset, that Bill did not press the matter. Pat was more than satisfied with both the job and "The Boss".

Chapter 35 Justice, Laurie and Bernice

In writing my story for the descendants there will be some who know of matters not touched upon. What would in any way hurt or hinder generations following, such as youthful misdemeanours, and which have little bearing on the tale, I may have by-passed.

I have never forgotten a remark of that well-known journalist of my youth W.J. Stead, when someone levelled at criticism on his biographical sketches. His retort was that he liked to write of a man as he appeared to himself in his best moments rather than as he appeared to his enemies in his worst! I am happy to chronicle the fact that I have found little to leave out. The only Mahony to get within 100 miles of the police court was my baby sister when she got lost and was brought home by a policeman! The only "crime" I have heard of was when in England, one of Walt's cousins lit a pipe and started to smoke outside the church when the church service was over. His maiden aunt was horrified, and took him severely to task. The abandoned youth quietly replied "Aunt Maria, when you buy my tobacco I will give you the right to tell me where I shall smoke it."

The same youth grew up into a man of unblemished reputation and emigrated to New Zealand. Two generations of his descendants have also lived here and remain incognito to the guardians of the law.

With crossed fingers I hope our future generations, with so many more temptations, do as well. The Walter Ashwells (our branch) lived in the King Country till the beginning of 1938. When we moved to Gisborne and we left behind three families, the Nations with three children Betty, John and Peter; Bill with two sons, Jim and Pat and one daughter Colleen, who was only a few months old. Dorothy and George were married in December 1937 just before we left.

In the King Country the worst of the slump was over. Work was plentiful. The timber industry was in full swing. The land with its rich virgin soil was being released or bought by the Chinese for market gardening, and many Europeans worked for the Chinese at harvest time in picking green peas, beans etc for both Auckland, and Wellington city markets.

In a mixed population and newly opened country, always attractive to city spielers, the Chinese were exemplary citizens.

It always makes me hot under the collar to read of some old Chinese man being had up for opium smoking. We with our disreputable beer parties, with fights and even murder! Some poor old opium addict who does no one but

himself any harm is hauled before the court. Easy money and easy work for the police! It makes me burn with shame at our hypocrisy!

And, apropos to our system of justice how tenderly we treat people who habitually persecute and ill-treat children. If our legislators were doing their job, there would be stiff sentences for men and women who ill-treat children.

We have all but banned corporal punishment in schools. So restricted are teachers that they do their work under great difficulty disturbed by a few louts or their female counterparts. A teacher must enter in the logbook each occasion of punishment, with details.

We handicap teachers, and punish so lightly hefty brutes who so ill treat children that the damage to their nervous state may never be overcome. I hope the day will come when such men will be jailed, and their earnings in prison put into saving accounts for the injured children. To sentence them to flogging would be less than justice. It would be doing once only what they did frequently. I suppose, though, should one advocate that treatment, there would be an immediate outcry that we were "putting the clock back" "relapsing into barbarity".

So we make it easy for cowardly and brutal men to get away with it. I cannot remember a case in which the defence was not "such an awful unmanageable child". Would we be meek and docile, open and above board, living with no redress under the hand of a tyrant? Would we? Then we should immediately stop when we come to the line in the national anthem "Britons, never never shall be slaves."

I notice that children who are taught obedience at home are not the ones who give teachers trouble. Habitual cruelty is another matter altogether. I think that for people of either sex convicted of cruelty especially to children, the police should be given right of oversight of such homes and children including the right of unannounced entry at any time. Teachers, I am sure would be only too glad to pass on for police information, any suspicious cases.

Surely, such unnatural parents are among our worst citizens. They should, on conviction, be listed, like any other criminal. It would at least protect our most vulnerable children, the wards of the State, if, on conviction, the names of these people were, as a matter of routine, passed on to the Social Security Department.

When it became known that the trainees in Ohakea were to be moved to Wigram and that married quarters were available here, Hope and Geoff decided to marry before the move. The wedding was very quiet. The recent cloudburst had ruined the only road bridge midway between Raetihi, where

most of our friends lived, and Ohakune. Those who did come were mostly youthful, as the only access was by foot over the railway bridge, which of course could not be used for vehicles. A few close friends managed to get out.

So Hope and Geoff (Methodists) were married [in Ohakune] by the Anglican vicar in the Anglican hall, while for the wedding spread St Joseph's (Roman Catholic) hall was used.

The young folk of those war years must have a fellow-feeling for refugees, when their greatest longing was for a home of their own, with a sense of ownership and privacy that only one's own home can give.

When peace was declared Geoff came home to Hope and the two babies, John and Malcolm Geoffrey, then in the Maude Street home Hope had prepared. Geoff went back to his old job.

Geoff worked with a motor mechanic, an excellent boss, who had learned the trade in England. A quiet man, he was best known to his small circle as "Aunt Daisy's husband".

Soon after we came to Gisborne perhaps the most widely known lady in Gisborne and its surroundings was "Aunt Daisy" in private life Mrs Elliott who conducted a most popular children's session at Gisborne. Childless herself she loved and understood children to a remarkable degree. With a wizardry all her own she brought out all their childish gifts of songs or self-expression. Over the air it sounded like a peep at a children's happy party celebration. Much suspected talent was brought to light by Aunt Daisy. Over the air it sounded as if, certainly, "a good time was had by all," not the least Aunt Daisy. Even preschool agers piped up their little pieces, while the older ones gave body and strength to the performance.

On the passing of Mr. Elliott, Aunt Daisy went to Sydney to live with a sister. Prior to leaving she was given a public farewell, well-deserved indeed. The children's hour, given over Gisborne's private radio, passed with its leader. Before she left Gisborne Geoff's twin son was given the name Mark Elliott as a tribute both to his former boss and his wife. There will be very many who remember with warm regard that gifted and gracious personality "Aunt Daisy".

Hope and Geoff were still in the Maude St unit when Irene was born four years after Malcolm.

When Irene was about three, Geoff went into the employ of the Gisborne Borough Council. The job was complete with a house more suitable to the size of his growing family. It was situated close by the Council Workshops,

in Disraeli Street. There the twins, Mark and Moira were born, bringing the number of their children up to five.

A half-unit is small enough for the smallest family, yet for a time the Smiths shared quarters with Laurie and Bernice and their small boy. They had the living room for sleeping quarters, but, with Irene's coming advent, Laurie and Bernice went into a tent on the beach with small Mike.

Then the edict went forth. "The beach must be cleared." So the newly-weds went into a camp for the homeless, mostly returned men. There with her talent for making the best of things, Bernice made ready for the birth of Brian. After Bernice came home from hospital, we visited them in the Lytton Road camp. While Bernice looked after the visitors, Laurie and I got away in an odd corner to admire the very new small son, whom Laurie was holding. Such an everyday experience, but with each new born soul, so original and surprisingly new. As new to Laurie as to the first father, so near does Heaven come to Earth, and God to man and this experience. I know of one man, son of an unmarried mother, who as a man, sought out his mother and gave her his love. With his grandmother though who refused to let his mother keep the baby, he would have no dealings. He held that she had forced him to be brought up by strangers, and had, in so doing forfeited all her rights in him. An honourable man, in a good profession, he remembered with affection and respect his foster mother, for his grandmother he had neither.

Can he be blamed? I think not.

Laurie's was the only wedding at which I was unable to be present, though I cannot recall the circumstances.

When the invitations came out and I received mine, I was at once arrested by the name and initials of the bride's father, H.J. Matson.

Like most young men whose lives had been disturbed by the 1939-45 war Laurie was anxious to get married and set up a home of his own. At Christchurch he had got his air force "ticket", and on final leave had met at Bill's in Wanganui Bernice Matson. I had not met her, and it was only when I saw the name on the wedding invitation that bell was rung in my memory. As I read the invitation in Laurie's presence I read out Mr. and Mrs H.J. request presence "Is Mr. Matson's name by any chance Hubert John?"

"Yes, I believe it is Hubert that his wife calls him". "Well." I replied "if that is so, I knew him very many years ago. I was his first school teacher."

This caused much excitement in the Matson household. The Matson's were Danish and great friends of my old friend of Mangaweka days, the

Berthelsens. The families lived a few doors off the Berthelsens and were often in each other's homes, when Hubert John was a very small child.

More strangely, "Hubert John" remembered me, his first teacher and in his wedding speech said he felt very happy to entrust his daughter to a son of his favourite school teacher.

Bernice's mother then recalled as one of a family of three very good-looking tall slender girls who walked a long distance to school during my last short period of teaching at Mangaweka just before my marriage.

The Matsons are a very united family. Laurie was often amused, as an engaged man at the way the sisters seemed like the early Christians to have all things in common. It was "Bernice, lend me your pretty coat tonight. I have a date with so-and-so." Or "Marie, I've taken your prettiest hankie. You won't mind, will you?"

Our children had been taught to respect each other's belongings. At Matsons, the wardrobe especially, was a family affair, even Mum's things were used to serve a turn.

In their case this attitude to possessions and the family, worked out very happily.

Chapter 36 Our Raetihi business

So, in 1946, Walt and I were back where we started, just the two of us, except that we were much poorer! When we started we did have a one-roomed home of our very own. Now we had, as at first, one room, but not in our own home. As I have told each rental home was sold over our heads! The one room we now occupied was rented from George and Dorothy, the owners.

The position irked Dad. To a man who had always owned his own home, large or small, living thus made him most unhappy. He liked his own home to please himself in. On the various public bodies he worked most happily with the other members. Yet, in his own business, he was not always in a happy relationship with the staff. His unpredictable ways did not always make for harmony.

With the public he was at his best. None of us could equal him in handling a difficult customer. With them he would show infinite patience, and rarely failed to make a sale. These contradictory sides to his character have always puzzled me.

Yet with me he lived and worked most happily. It used to be a sort of family joke of mine that when he would approach the Pearly Gates, to face St Peter's questions. "You mean to say you worked and lived with a red-headed Irishwoman for all those years (50 odd) and did not quarrel? Pass in pass in man, you have earned your heavenly ticket." Though business life was the last thing I wanted, yet our partnership was a happy one. I wanted only husband, home and children, but accepted the business life that fell to my lot, and lived in happy marital partnership for more than 50 years. The notice put on the window when he closed the shop to be married "Away for a few days to arrange a partnership" was prophetic. He had been a lone wolf till he married me, having his own pursuits and interests. He was a great reader. Though I had been always a bookworm, and as a teacher had read widely, his knowledge of English literature was greater than mine. My reading declined during the busy years of trying to run a home, raise a family, and be business partner. What reading I did was scrappy, a lot of it popular magazines, which was all I could manage in my scanty leisure. Both Walt and I had the deplorable habit of reading at meal times, often irregular. We handled books and magazines in our business, so light reading was around in plentiful supply.

Among our employees, one family of girls stands out. I think our first was Olive Rose who worked with us most happily till her marriage. Then a second member came to help in the house, and free me for more shop work. Then she married. After the first sister married we had Marjorie who was with us for many years, and trained her successor the third daughter of the first family, who took her place on Marjorie's marriage.

Caring for a household and large family and being involved in the business life around me, most of my reading at this period was scrappy, largely magazine articles, but such light reading as is part of the stock of the business of bookseller and stationer.

Our employees deserve special mention, for loyal and efficient service. Our very first, and only for a short time was Olive Dauphin. She helped with the house work and took care of baby Dorothy. With the coming advent of the second baby, I took over the house work, and we had our first shop assistant in the eldest of the family of the Geo. Rose family. All three of the Rose girls, in turn, worked for us. Olive, the eldest, in the shop till her marriage to Mr. John Bergman, then Kath Bateman till her marriage with another John Bergman, no relation to the first mentioned but an old pupil of mine. This time the business having grown with the growth of the town, we had the second of the Rose family, Lily Rose. Lily did not wish for shop work. She was quiet and retiring, and elected to do housework. She was excellent, clean and tidy and able to take responsibility. Then the war over, Lily married a returned servicemen, also a Raetihian, and changed her name to Mosen. After Cath Bateman, we had for eight years most loyal and efficient shop work, the youngest of the Roses, Ivy.

It was during her time, and also during the time of Walt's breakdown, that we had, in the office, a very gifted girl, who like Ivy, left us after eight years' service to be married. She was Marjorie Sandford, whom no one could ask for a better partner.

Very quiet and soft-spoken, few people would recognise in her, the gift of intellect and statesmanship that she possessed. She was with us in the critical years of the business and to her advice and foresight I was much indebted. When she closed the office door she left the business concerns shut in behind her. I was often surprised to find that her mother, my dearest friend, knew not even the simplest and most ordinary detail of the business. Concerning business affairs, Marjorie was like a clam.

When Lily Rose left to be married, the only candidate offering was a girl from a very unhappy home. Her mother was a woman of violent temper, a terror to both husband and family. I hesitated to employ a girl from that household. However, no one else was in sight and a fellow-businesswoman gave her a great recommendation. My friend owned a bakery business and tea-room, and had had the girl in her employ. She told me to take Florence, that I would find her an excellent worker and scrupulously honest. Florence had worked for her, and the only reason she was not in her employ was that she quarrelled with the rest of the staff or maybe vice versa. "In your employ, Mrs Ashwell" she said "she would be on her own and hard to match".

On this recommendation I took, and found I was being served by one whose love and loyalty was lifelong. One of those times when, as it were, we entertain angels unaware. Florence would think it humorous indeed, to be put in the angel class. In my case she found her love returned, and her loyalty precious indeed. When she had been with me a few days she put her arms around me and said "Oh Mum I do love you. It's like heaven here. No one growls or fights. You are all so happy." So between us, "Love was born". She was indeed an excellent worker, and in later days was earning £10 weekly in responsible work in charge of employees.

The only fly in the ointment was Walt's utter disregard of scrubbed or polished floors. She often found, in her spotless kitchen his muddy footprints. The girls, now young women, used to declare Dad did it on purpose. This I repudiate, but he did have from his English life and forebears, a tendency to class distinction. He may have thought I treated Florence too much as one of the family. She had early asked if she could call me "Mum" as the family did, and of course I said I was glad she felt she was one of us. She surely could have family rights in what to her was our 'heavenly' home. For Florence, home to her must often have seemed more of hell.

I hope I am not, by implication, painting Florence's home in too lurid tones. I learned, as time passed, that her mother had come from an unhappy home, and had been cruelly treated. From her own mother she had inherited her violent temper, and had only that example in her growing years. Yet, she was honest in her business affairs. She seldom asked for credit but when she did we were happy to trust her. Her husband wasn't good for 6d credit. A suave individual, his untrustworthiness caused much of the family trouble. More than once she had given him money to pay an account, and he had kept it. When Florence, during my absence on holiday, was led astray by a plausible rogue, her mother took and brought up the little boy. The man, of course, disappeared, probably to carry on his infamous tricks. What a pity we don't realise that we can get away with nothing. If we don't face up to our ill deeds in this life, most surely we shall be confronted with them in the hereafter, too late to remedy them.

Looking back on the old Raetihi times I think of so many friends, each adding to the richness of life. A farmer friend who was too honest to take the name of her de facto husband; Mr. Keucke who worked so hard handicapped by weakness; his wife, so cheerful, generous and hard-working; Mrs Griffin, who worked like two men, and who now in retirement does much P.R.O. work (though it may not be so labelled).

Two, very near and dear, Mrs McWhirter with whom I was in close and warm relationship, and Mrs Sandford, best of friends. To her should have gone the

King's Coronation medal awarded me but for that she was ineligible because her husband was the male recipient for Raetihi. Of country folk, Mrs Meyer and Mrs Emil Voelkerling, Mrs Geo. Berry, Mrs Frank McNie, Mrs Hanson, and almost the earliest Mrs C.D. Scarrow. These form only the core of a large company, young and old, who added so much of love and interest to life. Men friends, Walt's family equally numerous, tried and true.

I was amused, once, when Flo, I think it was, said "Mum, you like men better than women, don't you?" The statement startled me somewhat. I thought a moment and answered "No, not really, what makes you think that?"

She, too, thought a moment, and said "You seem to like talking to them." I answered "Yes, I do. Men are more easy to get into conversation with. It is easy to talk freely with men. Their interests are wider and less personal."

Naturally, a businesswoman shares similar interests to men. A gathering of women begins to clique up. Young marrieds discuss their children and domestic interests; older ones their common activities often of the public work they share; the elderly, also have their own outlook.

In the leisure which came in later years I looked back over the course of my life, and found only thankfulness to God for leading me to my marriage.

Looking back to when, as a girl of 17, I had been on my own, I could place the hand of God on my life in the then unseen pitfalls avoided, in the friends whose help and advice had been mine at the various turns of the road.

The uninviting back blocks school which was the only one offering and had perforce to be accepted, had led me to find my life-partner in a family of such high spiritual quality as the Ashwells. Our children had been a wonderful interest and joy especially to the Ashwell grandparents. Our children were their only descendants. The four Mahony girls all had families so to the Mahony grandparents ours were not so much a treasure and joy as to Walt's people.

As we begin to feel 'the burden of the years', we look, not forward to the future, but backward, reliving the interests of the past and looking forward, if at all to a rather dubious future, beset with looming perils for those we leave behind. So, I suppose, did our parents, wondering if their children would be able to cope with so unpredictable a time, so startling a prospect.

This should not be the outlook of those who have, in their pilgrimage companied with their Lord. They can look back, and seeing in retrospect the way He has guided them, leave with confidence, their loved ones in His care whose love surpasses ours.

Poem written by Harriet Ashwell

- Harriet Ashwell wrote the following poem for Jack Somerville on his 21st birthday. Jack's mother was a close friend of Harriet's.

His Own Man

"My own man!" The time, long waited, now at last is here
The years of tutelage have run their span.
In law, accountable to none, however dear,
The future is my own to plot and plan.
My spirits soars aloft untrammelled free
While visions of the future, fair, though nebulous
Suggest, not outline, things as yet to be,
In full, free years of efforts sedulous.

This freedom may be used for good or ill;
To make, or mar the future now so fair.
The wisdom that the hard-fought years instil
Too slowly may the mind and heart prepare.
Temptations come, so sudden and so fierce;
Troubles, instant-born, bewilder and dismay.
No mortal sight the hidden years may pierce
Or through some looming cloud may shine no faintest ray.

What then? Do I just wander in some futile way
Gaining the wisdom necessary all too late
For use in life's emergencies; or best I may
Make choice when at divergent paths I hesitate?
I cannot live my life without a plan;
But unforeseen events most careful plan may end.
Yet there is One, all wise, Who, too was Man,
Willing to be, a Counsellor, a Guide, a Friend.

And if I take, as loved Companion down the years
This glorious Son of God, He will make fair
And worth living (because lived for him)
This life of mine, surrendered to His care.
Then what is undertaken – counselled by His power.
And all-sufficient wisdom, nought but good attend.
"Dear Lord, I ask Thee, that from this glad hour
I may be, not my own, but Thy man to the end.

H.E.A. 19.7.37

Family history in a letter to Paul Nation from Harriet Ashwell written in 1962

My grandmother was born Mary Jane McGaffin, and met her English husband, Frederick Nightingale in Manchester where my mother (Annie Amelia) was born, also her sister Letitia (Lily).

They moved to Newry (Northern Ireland). Fred may have been born there or in Manchester. Richard, Harry, Alfred were born later. The youngest was Charles.

The family emigrated in two companies. They were all booked to sail on the Lady Jocelyn (Shaw Saville Line, I think) which was sailing for Australia and New Zealand. However, Grandfather Nightingale had not succeeded in winding up his business (He owned a paper bag factory) so the party split up, the older sons Fred, Richard and Harry, with my mother (to keep house for them) left as first arranged.

When the rest of the family arrived, the first party had established a home in Auckland, and were in jobs – round about 1880.

With the next contingent travelled (from Dublin) a passenger, Willsford Hamilton Mahony, and another who I would term an adventurer. He was Robert Mills, and claimed to be a European aristocratic. The one claim, as far as could be gathered, to this was that he was incurably work-shy!

He married my Aunt Lily, who kept the blighter for the rest of his life. They joined the rush to the American goldfields, but stayed put at San Francisco then a "boom" city, where Auntie brought up a family of 8, who all did well. Harold went into insurance, Fred became Prof Fred Mills (Economics was his line. His book was used as a textbook at Victoria University a while back, now of course out of date).

They were a good-looking family, my mother and her sister were known as "the beautiful Miss Nightingales". Uncle Bill Mahony was told this on his tour after the First World War, by a local old-timer.

My mother was married to Willsford Hamilton Mahony in January 1882. I was born the same year and Uncle Bill 1884.

The family (Nightingale) seemed to live between Melbourne and Tasmania and Auckland. My mother's brothers, Fred, Richard and Alfred married Australians, Charlie a Tasmanian. Uncle Charlie died recently at 86. The others who survived tuberculosis also reached 86. Uncle Harry, the last to go died a year or two ago at Christchurch at 90. His age brought the family average to 87+. Uncle Alfy and my mother died of tuberculosis; Alfy in middle life, Mum at 62.

Birth of a Settlement by Walter Ashwell

By "Pakimaero" "The Teller of the Tale"

Note: This rough sketch would need to be rewritten and by revision much altered, a little added and much deleted. Arrive 4th November 1893.

[Copied from a transcription of notes made by Walter Alfred Ashwell (1874-1958) by his grand-daughter Rosemary Johnston-Faleauto – 4.6.2001]

Are there any living who can write as being present at the birth of a nation?

You smile reader as you think of the tale told us at school – King Alfred and others in Ancient Britain.

By comparison however Britain could be termed the baby of the nations. Much of our civilisation came to us from the continent of Europe. Should the Romans, the Normans and the Greeks have some of the credit of taming or instructing the erstwhile wild men of the wood? But compared with other continents, civilised Europe was only a baby.

There are no European countries which have a high civilisation dating back to that of China in Asia, or of Egypt in Africa. When these nations were at the height of their culture, and the zenith of their power, where were our ancestors? They were roaming the forests and clearings clad in skins in winter and little else but designs in blue dye (woad) in summer.

Our leading and most learned men were busy playing around with large lumps of rock and setting them up on end which may be seen to this day at Stonehenge.

This goes to show that it may not be the wisest to pry into the past of a nation or individual.

I believe Mark Twain tried it and came to a full stop when he found that his ancient and ignoble blood had run thru' scoundrels ever since the flood.

The start of settlement in the Waimarino long preceded the formation of the county, so I will carry on from my first acquaintance with the district.

In 1894 my Father selected 400 acres from a government plan in Wellington, and as a raw youth fresh from a large town in the old land, I left Palmerston and rode with a cousin to possess the land. Walk or ride horseback was the only way and much of the journey was by bush tracks. The Main Trunk Railhead was at Mangaonoho and the fringe of settlement was at Ohingaiti, and we stayed at the hotel there.

On our way a little later, we passed a slab hut with shingle roof and the signboard apparently in charcoal said, "Three Log Whare". This was the first residence in the town of Mangaweka.

Then we passed through a block of heavy bush which later was the site of the borough of Taihape and brings to remembrance our being "bushed" out there, and the growth being wet, the only dry spot we found was a feed box used by packhorses. Half of the top was open and the other boarded in. I first had the open portion and falling sound asleep woke up suddenly having fallen into the bottom of the box.

The next settlement we met was when we arrived at the hospitable house of Mr G. Mansen, the site now being the borough of Ohakune.

Journeying another 7 miles we cross the Makotuku Stream and arrived at the heaviest piece of bush in the district – when cleared this was the township of Raetihi. The only building we found was close to the river bank and was used by Mr Anthony Nathan (in later years Mayor of Taihape) as a tool shed whilst he was out on contracts in the district.

Mr Nathan was a man of very powerful physique and so, well adapted for the hardship of the pioneering life. As a young man he had been very successful as a sailor in the Navy and had an ambition to go overseas and meet boxers in England.

I was told that his Father who was an accomplished fighter said to him, "You'd better take me on, and if you can beat me I will give you every assistance." The bout came off and Anthony stayed at home.

There was no room in the tool shed – so where could we stay the night? We were directed to the camp of Mr C.A. Mountford, who was then surveying the 200 acre allotments of the London Small Farm Settlement, and those who had drawn sections in the ballot were waiting to get on to their holdings.

The pig dogs roused us in the night and we had our first sight of the kiwi which they had caught. The members of the survey gang were a most friendly lot and considered themselves well paid with 7/-per day (wet or dry) and I understood more of the life later on when I took on the job of camp cook for another surveyor (Mr Dunnages). My job included swagging supplies and bringing in mail from the township. Much of the meat eaten was wild pork, as the pigs were plentiful.

The wild pigeons were also favourite fare.

It was a good thing that the men's appetites were good, as my cooking would not have been much appreciated in a more civilised community. The cost of

the food per man was 8/-per week in spite of flour (carried by packhorses from the Wanganui river landing at Pipiriki) being at times 20/- per 100lbs.

The bush was full of native birds of many species and was made bright with their song and bright plumage. The most numerous were the tui, kaka, and native pigeon.

The latter were so tame and came so close that we were almost ashamed to use our shot gun. We waited until they were sunning themselves on the top of the highest limbs and then showed off our marksmanship with the 22 rifle.

In the autumn, the Maoris gathered their winter supply of meat, preserving hundreds in their fat. The natives would go anywhere for the pigeons, in both their or the Pakeha bush. This annoyed a neighbour of ours and he took a rather mean reprisal. One Maori had shot some 60 of the birds. These being heavy he left them by a rimu tree and went further into our friend's bush.

Charlie M. our neighbour stole out of his whare and unperceived by the native commandeered the bag of pigeons. The old native after fruitlessly searching for hours went sadly home. There were too many birds for the settler to deal with, so he hailed any passerby and handed out a few pigeons, and I received a share.

The new settlers' first job was to fell sufficient bush, so a contract was let on the Raetihi township at 55/- per acre, the bush being the closest and heaviest in the district.

The contractor tried for a record drive of big trees and succeeded with 99, and there was some crash as I heard it when working some three miles away. The usual price for felling and scrubbing was 30/- to 35/-per acre, and a good bushman on wages was well satisfied with 1/- per hour and found.

Of that early life in the bush many tales both comic and tragic could be told.

I was for over twenty years Registrar of Births Deaths and Marriages for both Maori and Pakeha, and those lines of Kipling come back "The deaths ye have died, I have walked beside. The lives ye lived were mine."

If I were anything of a writer I could continue,

"I have told the tale of your lives
for a sheltered people's mirth,
in jesting guise, but ye are wise
and ye knew what the jest is worth."

One of the tragedies was a double one. One day a man came to the office, paid for and completed the usual marriage form. The next day we heard over the telephone he was terrorising a country district with a loaded rifle in the attempt to force a reluctant young lady to attend a marriage ceremony. He failed and then losing his head he fatally shot the girl. Just at that moment, in came a relative of the girl – a very powerfully built Maori woman, and picking up the nearest weapon, a crosscut saw, she slew the slayer. At her trial, the community was happy to see her recommended for her courage.

A mysterious disappearance of two bushmen was only solved after many weeks. They had a contract on the Pipiriki Road, and when their camp was visited, it was seen that they had prepared and eaten breakfast, but from that time could not be traced, and no search in or outside the district was successful. Many months later it was noticed that a large tree had been blasted by lightning, and on the off chance this was cut away and the bodies discovered.

As showing the eccentricity and the virulence of the flu germ, two men passed away tragically in the 1918 flu epidemic. Having a bush contract many miles into the back of beyond, they packed in sufficient stores to last them the job. They got no mail or news, or contact with the outside world, and so knew nothing of the epidemic. One man became ill and died, and his mate fell sick also. With his remaining strength, the second man reverently interred his companion and then he himself passed over. How did the attacking germ reach them?

During the devastating bushfire of May 1919, three lives were lost when the flames swept through some dense bush. A man, woman and child had gone there to shelter and when found, it could be seen where the brave woman's last thoughts had been for she lay sheltering the body of the child.

Practically none of the earlier deaths registered, were from old age or sickness. Old people were few among the pioneers and little serious sickness would occur in the midst of a pine forest.

The records read "Killed by a falling tree" – "drowned in the Manganui-o-te-au River."

But enough of tragedy, let us watch the growth of industries and institutions and then write a little of the humorous incidents and characters that abound in any new settlement.

The first sawmill was started by a baker and he had just enough dough with the help of his partner, and of course, bullocks to buy and drag the machinery over the corduroy track to the site of the township. He was a man

of foresight and energy. His name even denoted the last named quality – it was Punch.

Timber prices have recently soared but those were the times of lower levels and I bought best selected heart matai for 9/- cu. ft and white pine was selling for 5/-and trees that would cut mainly xx were not wanted.

Years later other mills cut over the same growth and still found it profitable. Some indigenous supplies are still coming from the Waimarino but there is little left except on steep slopes and in almost inaccessible areas.

It is popular when writing of industry to put farming first. The early Waimarino settlers didn't observe the 40 hour week. It was a case of "root hog or die," as wool fetched about 4d per lb and butterfat 7½ c.

Early settlers when taking up a land were told that the main trunk line would reach and pass through the two townships in five years. It did reach their vicinity in 15 years, but Raetihi was over 8 miles and Ohakune 1 mile away, and I am told that previous to the final survey of the line, township sections were sold in both places as being on the "Main Trunk Line."

Years later the branch line [to Raetihi] was put in and carried heavy timber traffic. Whilst waiting for the line, stores and produce had to come up and down the river from Wanganui, and then by wagon 17 miles to Raetihi.

The Public Works Department planned to expedite viaduct construction on the line and so sent up several traction engines and many tonnes of cement by riverboat to Pipiriki. The road however proved almost impassable – the cement was carted. One engine I know which drew no load took six weeks to complete the round trip of 34 miles Pipiriki to Raetihi and back. They only did this by pulling themselves out of the boggy holes by cables attached to stumps on the roadsides. Then the engines did some good work. They started the metalling of the road from Raetihi downwards. In the meanwhile however the line had progressed to allow supplies being railed to the viaduct. So, cement, engines and drivers went happily home again by the riverboat. Happily refers to the drivers, as during their holiday in the back blocks, they won the first prize of some £4000 in Tatts (Tattersall's lottery].

One driver took his £1000 to Sydney where he started in competition to the experienced bookies, and in the end I believe he had the experience and they had the money. A wiser driver invested his share better, as it started him both a store and a farm. Incidentally the writer scored 50 pounds of foreign capital by selling goods to the drivers.

The local dairy company has been a great asset to farmers especially when wool prices were low and the suppliers of a nearby cheese factory have just

joined up and closed theirs down. Most farmers are particularly careful with their cream, a few are not. One Valley Road dairy man used to put his can of cream in a nearby creek overnight to cool it.

A pig strayed into the paddock and attracted by the smell of the good tucker fell headlong in and was drowned. His owner told a neighbour confidentially that he was lucky to make no loss – the pig brought full value as pork and the test of the cream at the factory was if anything slightly higher than usual.

"Sweet are the uses of adversity" – so wrote Bacon – or was it Shakespeare – and adversity or dissatisfaction was the origin of most local bodies in the Waimarino.

The county area was at first in the Wanganui county area. Then agitation was started as it was alleged that the governing body was spending nearly all the rates in its own area. For instance the only sum ever expended in the township was £8 on the school road. So a new county was formed. Waimarino was in the Wanganui Acclimatisation Society's district and the anglers' grievance was that whilst their licence money was taken by that Society, no ava or fry were liberated in the local streams. There were a few trout in most main streams, but they were there accidentally. A Wanganui friend of the teacher of the Maori school at Karioi, presented him with the can full of young fish for liberation. On the 30 mile journey by road from Pipiriki, the fish had to receive fresh water and some escaped and so started the stocking. In reply to a request for trout ava or fry, the Wanganui Society suggested that the paucity of fish could be overcome by closing the streams for a year or two. This did not meet with approval so a new society was formed.

The Raetihi Borough was previously, of course an independent Town District and before that a riding of the County Council. The County didn't do enough and so a new local body was formed. A £30,000 scheme, including a hydro-electric power plant with reticulation of some country and other town areas, sanitary drainage, water supply, bituminized road and footpath formation, was started about the commencement of the First World War. The two partners who contracted for the drainage worked on a system, which in these days, just would not do. Mr M.A. fifteen stone, six foot expert navvy cut out the pace in the bottom of the trench. The other partner just strolled along the top, and if a worker slowed up he dropped a bit of sandstone on them and told him to come and get his time. One of the men said that he had seen 22 men sacked on that job.

Our first town clerk was a most meticulous man. He was also Secretary to the Dairy Company, and was said to have two inkpots on his desk, one for the town and the other for the Company.

I once had a hand in assisting the local Fire Brigade in putting up an unbeatable record for speed, smartness and full attendance at a fire. In those days the fire alarm system was somewhat primitive, so as I lived close to the station, I was asked to run over and ring the bell immediately instructions came by phone. On the Brigade's annual meeting night, every local brigade man was there, dressed in his best with helmet or other gear on or handy. The meeting room was crowded. In the adjoining room was the engine and a few feet away, the bell tower. I received a phone call "Fire in the next street!" I raced to the bell and gave it the works! The brigade poured out so quickly that it was laughable to see the jam in the doorway, and they made the unbeatable record.

One would expect a Masonic Lodge to be instituted with due solemnity, but No 175 was started with hilarity (from outsiders). Failing a better location, the large dining room of the boarding house was used, and the proceedings were opened with Grand Lodge representatives, candidates for office, and ordinary members filling the room. None of them foresaw the disturbing evening they were to have, or the serious final loss they were to sustain. The practical joker of the town saw the opportunity, and he gathered together in an adjoining room, a dozen or so of his associates in misdeeds, to form the Bricklayers Lodge. When the Masons sang, the Bricklayers sang if not so tunefully, even more loudly – when the Masons gave their charges, the Bricklayers might have been emulating the charge of the Light Brigade. The Bricklayers went first to refreshments, and by the noise and laughter, everyone seemed to be having a lovely time. When the Masonic business concluded, the disastrous news was passed around, that the blankety blank Bricklayers had purloined the Masonic liquor, the only cask on supply in the town, and worse still they had drunk every drop at the close of their infernal lodge.

The Flu epidemic in December 1918 took a heavy toll in a small community. A small hall, a church, and a large drill Hall were local hospitals and 14, mostly strong men, passed out in the small hall.

The only doctor was confined to his room with a severe attack, so persons who were able went from house to house, and came back to the doctor with the description of the sufferer's symptoms, and then back again with the medicine.

Years ago Londoners brought to memory the dates of lesser events by their proximity or otherwise to the great Fire of 1666. So to old Raetihi residents, 1919 will remain fresh in mind, when the memory of other events fades.

This was not an ordinary bushfire, but in some parts it appeared as flames driven by a tornado. I saw places where passages a chain wide had been driven through the heavy bush, every tree being brought down in its path.

A few yards from my own house, large pines over 2 feet in diameter were snapped off by the roots. Every sheet of iron on a large Drill Hall was carried chains away, some of them breaking through the walls of a nearby building. Footpaths newly made up with coarse grit were swept bare.

Starting well to the northwest, the gale carried the burning debris from one hilltop to another and standing dead trees were very instrumental in the spread of the fire. I was an eyewitness of the conflagration in the town, and at one time it appeared that there were fires all around. Our 40 residences and business and other premises were burning at about the same time.

All of the town would have gone had it not been for the fire-fighters who stood by. I saw the then manager of that Bank of New Zealand, the late Mr Hay McKenzie defending the bank hour after hour, with a small water supply and saving a whole block to the north of the main street. It was just self-interest so I took no credit in stating I saved the block to the south of the main street. Whilst I was there, the engine driver at Symes' Mill, completely blackened passed on his way home. I asked him where he had been all night, and he said, "Trying to save the mill." The fire beat him however, so he made for the river. There was no refuge in that direction, as the fire was roaring in the timber on both sides of the stream. He then crawled under a log, and whilst he sheltered there, six trees were blown by the gale, across this log. To complete his day, I believe when he reached his home, he found the house and its contents reduced to ashes.

The loss of stock, buildings, fencing and grass throughout the county was enormous. On one 200 acre place close to town, 300 sheep were burnt or had to be destroyed and the top soil being peaty, nearly all the grass was destroyed. This was common throughout the countryside. I represented our Insurance Company that paid out £20,000, and as there were over 10 other companies operating, the total would be large.

A serious mistake was made in sending a relief train from Ohakune and this depleted the force of firefighters. A man went shouting through the town that the whole place would be burnt. I went to a large boarding house in the centre of the block and found it quite empty. Two men who had no interest in the building were just outside with a hose putting out the fire in the building.

Large volumes of smoke were carried southwards and Wellington offices had to switch on their lights. Some people suggested that Ruapehu was playing tricks – others that the oft foretold end of the world had arrived.

A pleasing feature was the generosity of the New Zealand public, both in cash and kind and the prompt assistance of the government.

Humorous incidents were numerous. People from burnt out houses sought refuge where they could, and until our place came into the danger zone, we had seventeen refugees with us. Nearly all of them had to get away quickly and so had little beyond what they stood up in. One lady (I hope that she doesn't read this), was holding to her breast a pair of dancing pumps, but seemed to have saved nothing else.

The startling spread of the fire seemed to catch some people a bit off-balance. One man spent hours in the safety of a concrete culvert, and couldn't be induced to come out to save his house. An elderly lady on her lonesome in the same street just fought the flames and saved her home.

The Pound Keeper, a very excitable man, had to seek a place of refuge, so morning found him safe in the pound.

Close to the town, a haystack stood in the centre of a large paddock. The fire swept through on all sides, burning up logs and rubbish but leaving the stack unharmed.

The relief committee sent out a request to losers by the fire, to state their losses, so that some compensation could be made.

The maker of a powerful and quickly saleable brand of homebrew sent in a claim for £14 for loss of liquor which he had used to quench the flames. The claim was disallowed, the committee evidently considering that the over-proof concoction would have the effect of stimulating a fire rather than otherwise.

If this random screed is ever read by persons who know the districts mentioned they will detect errors, but at the same time they will recognise that what is written is fact not fiction.

Many of the actors referred to, have played their part and left the stage, but one is debarred from mentioning names lest any offence should be given.

The 1880s in England

Random jottings of incidents on the journey. Humorous pathetic and tragic (skeleton framework to build on).

1874 – 1880

1. Earliest recollections by a three-year-old of the fierce dogfight – no electric fence.

2. Saw trees – Preschool. The end of a fox hunt (the impressions of a five-year-old onlooker) fox in captivity. Happy hours in the English woods, nuts and by the stream – river Rib – the flood came down. A finger decapitated. A rat trap.? Material for Tales for the Young? Wood pigeons (Saw Trees) Pet stalling. Timber hall. The little cart. The old stone breaker.

3. First school 3 miles smallest pupil although poor, class distinction – understood feelings of the stoned – girl and Penny consolation, racks of single sticks – boxing gloves – first experience in the ring. Grammar versus Public School (Wareside). Stone the plutocrat! Girl gave me her only penny.

4. Father has a Farm (Piggots farm) of Lord Ellenborough. Wiped out by recurring floods. Has to vacate farm.

5. Next move to North London. Carman and contracting work – small boy from country brought out saw and with the city boys was cutting – one of the boys called "Here comes the Upper Epping Forest."

Sewerage farm on which were growing crops – immense watercress beds.

Eastern County old farmhouse – moat still remaining on each side, proven it to be one of the old moat/granges. (Piggotts farm),

Employed at Builders – Monumental masons – order 2 tombstones – safe? Thorley brickworks old Roman remains, pottery also old British coins spoiling river and crudely moulded clay pipes.

Then employed for several years – watchmaker – work – Street? Clock in Brewery. (Customers/citizens) included Sir Walter SilbXX and Sir John Beaker, family.

Watch part in eye.

The Music Grinders? Hood removal? Slayer of the Sabre? Cornlish? -- Stret (Chestnuts of composer? An organ grinder?

Boyish tricks

Our apple tree was a large one. It grew high over the eaves of an old lady's cottage. We imps at one time dropped apples down it and at another placed a sack and hiding nearby, watched the surprise of the occupant – right of way through farm – adjoining our farm was the Village Inn – "The Green man."

Chapter headings for the history of England could be compiled from the wording of its signboards. Common ones were, "The George" and "The George and Dragon".

"The George" in our town had stabling on the second floor and visitors were interested in seeing horses gazing from the windows on the journey in this country centre 30 miles from London.

It was situated on the River Stort and barge traffic passed from this river into the Lea and from the latter into the Thames.

Study of the meaning and derivation of English place names is equal with that of the study of words.

This town was named Bishops Stortford. The Bishop in journeying from London to his country residence at Much Haddam forded the Stort at this spot, hence the name. Some pride was taken by the natives of the place in that it was the home of Cecil John Rhodes of South Africa. His father was Reverend Rhodes the headmaster of the local grammar school. I remember this as my father mentioned he used to provide the Rev gentleman with his Xmas turkey.

Nine miles away it was Dunmow where competitions were held annually for the famous flitch. My parents might have been winners but they never competed.

As an early admirer of Kipling's poems "Cities are full of pride." Kipling's poem on Rhodes expressed his admiration for the Empire builder.

Dreamer devout, by vision led
Beyond our guess or reach,
The travail of his spirit bred
Cities in place of speech.

Later study of our hero's life may have somewhat limited but never dispelled our early admiration.

The derivation of some surnames also is interesting. In the early days of radio our [pride of race was increased when in the serial on surnames, the commentator stated our family was probably descended from a famous knight who crossed the duck pond in the train of the conquering William. Before this, we had considered our past was bound up in man's claim, so much would depend on the fact.

We had stressed the old saying, "Kind hearts being more than coronets, and simple faith than Norman blood."

We were glad that we never delved into the past deep enough to find as Mark Twain is said to have done, only to find that his ancient but ignoble blood had run through scoundrels ever since the flood.

Stories not previously recorded

Linton and Palmerston.

Very thirsty, cousin, milk cart – chased fish, loan of Irish jaunting car.

In old land experience of class barriers – Wilfred Frere, Country house, butler and footmen.

Peter Brass that party County Chairman (stories he told me).

Swagging on Pipiriki Road, track so narrow in places that picks bumped the sides. Pack horses over bank.

Characters and tales about them

Wyche – loses himself, loses his farm.

Goodger, Kawarra and Harry Randell.

The Court — (O'Neill's cattle and bad burn, clearing also moon old), and Eves, various Maoris, Wine and early dances with hobnailed boots. First sports on road – Farmers Valley Road – pig in can. Bush accidents pipe, bailed up fallen tree -- McConkey carry 17 miles to Pipiriki and by riverboat, dog killed, men on Pipiriki Road, lost in bush carried pig, went on to spend four days in bush, had compass.

– Parkes and ink, Practical jokes of a shopkeeper (Scarfe) – Cat and the commercial traveller – Parsnip wine and the Maori, Komati.

– Old Gel and mate in jail asks for old [file] to sharpen saw – Constable's firewood.

– Sales of sections, Waiouru, Horopito.

– Ditches on the roadside – Edwards (£5 I lent) Cooked breakfast in the car.

Parapara Road tragedy – Littlewood – Bateman, Hendry and Budsley, Tom Fagg and I and speedster.

The Chinaman and the £90 sovereigns. Piri and the duck, and Albert Wills.

Beaks, Barristers and Bobbies

Am I correct in quoting the Poet Pope as saying, "The proper study of mankind is man"? That study is one of the most interesting and I found the unique opportunity of following it in my years as Court News Reporter for our local paper. It was a fruitful field, as the genus homo were there in profuse variety. Most of those of whom I write will have joined the unnumbered majority.

Few who read this will imagine that they are referred to, as no names are mentioned. Should any consider themselves maligned I would plead that this creed is in part hearsay. Dame Rumour was ever a lying jade and Hearsay whilst her sister, is of firm fibre and often truthful.

I do not consider my little township deserves even a little of that approbation cast on his hometown by the old Scott Minister, but some may. Reading one Sunday from the world's all-time bestseller, he reached the words of Israel's sweet singing King – "I said in my haste, 'All men are liars '." He paused, looked down on his congregation and continued somewhat caustically, "If David had ever lived here in ____ he could ha' sayed at his leisure."

A procession of SMs, JPs, Barristers, Solicitors, Clerks of Court, Police Inspectors, Sergeants, Constables, Probation Officers, Prison Orders, Maori Interpreters, Ranges and others of that ilk – I am privileged and proud in knowing these fine upholders of our law and order, not one of them claiming perfection but with their faces in that direction.

Many years ago Kipling delighted in meeting the many peoples of our far-flung Empire and of writing of them. In one time he stated,

"I have told the tale of your lives for sheltered people's mirth,

In jesting guise but ye are wise, and ye know what the tale is worth."

I would that I could write competently of each member of this profession as it passed through our imaginary doorway.

To do this adequately one would require to have the power of characterisation of an O'Henry, and the inborn humorous insight of a Wodehouse, to descry something of the funny side. The successful collaboration of Bench, Bar, Constabulary, in solving knotted problems convinced me that at times they had something of the Sherlock Holmes touch. Even the short acquaintance with the court would convince one of the efficiency of our Jury system. There are valid reasons for stating there is less likelihood of a wrong decision being arrived at by a jury than by a magistrate operating solo be he ever so wise. His Worship in instructing the jury warns them against preconceived

opinions and says that no weight should be given any matter not contained in the sworn evidence in court. The itinerant magistrate (here today gone tomorrow) is often put on the wrong track by lack of any close touch with local people, conditions and events. Here is where the perfectly schooled and plausible witness ably advised by counsel often scores. No matter how they try I am certain that it is almost impossible for all the twelve good men and true to carry out these instructions.

A number of them may have known the litigant or the prisoner at the bar intermittently for years and are aware of the real facts of the case. Sometimes they know more of the truth than is devolved in the court. Their decision must of necessity be influenced by knowledge obtained from both outside and inside the court. Probably it is well in the cause of justice that this should be so.

I have personal knowledge of a number of wrong decisions by magistrates, but know of fewer by juries maybe through lack of research.

Now to give some incidences! One of the most astute and ablest occupations of the bench that I ever knew suffered periodically from the effects of long war service and tropical conditions. His liver at these times seemed the ruling organ of his anatomy, and while not affecting his judgement, it did his temper. Conditions were hard for all he met.

Word went around among court officers and the bar that the old man was having a bad day and witnesses were specially warned to watch their step (or rather their speech). The witness who obtained favour with His Worship was the one who spoke in a very respectful manner, clearly and slowly, so that it was easy to type his evidence – one who did not repeat himself or let any cross-examination alter his original statement in the slightest.

Such a witness was a plaintiff giving evidence against a local farmer who had refused to pay full contract price, on the plea that the work had not been satisfactorily completed.

I happened to be a personal friend of the defendant (a most fair and straight man). Neighbours of his who knew the facts saw that he was perfectly right.

We could all see through the plausibility of the plaintiff, and realise how near to perjury he was. The plaintiff was of the calibre described above – almost the perfect witness. The defendant on the other hand, was of a nervous disposition. He hesitated, he was prolific and contradicted himself on small details during cross-examination. Finally he got properly on the G strings of a suffering SM and the verdict went against him. An entirely wrong decision.

Another case would have been immediately dismissed had His Worship known the true conditions, or had he not eschewed a contraption called a car.

During the slump a struggling farmer with a large family and little realisable assets got into low water, and the jury rent summons was issued. He lived some 12 miles from town and needed some vehicle for conveyance of his family and farm supplies so he bought a very old Model T Ford. I knew it well, and one of our family had ridden in it. Some of the components were held together by No 8 wire and bits of rope. A cheap buggy, horse and harness would have cost more. Having no ready funds he could not employ counsel and he hadn't the ability to conduct his own defence or even the savvy to say "Your Worship please come outside and view the car." The magistrate was unfortunately known to view these mechanical vehicles with disfavour and the owners of them as indulging in a luxury.

In giving judgement against him, the S.M. dealt out a severe castigation, saying "A man in your position has no right to be jaunting around the country in a motor car." For lack of knowledge, the verdict was unjust.

I had once the honour of sitting on the bench with another erudite and popular magistrate. He even pleased me by inferring that I knew more about the case than he did, and asked what I would suggest. He pronounced the verdict in accordance with me.

I got £2-2-0 for doing very little and I suppose he got many times the amount for doing less. The case was an appeal against the revaluation and I was the appointed assessor for the borough. The property owner and his solicitor put up an objection to the 50% rise in his valuation rates. The borough on the contrary contended that the new valuation was quite equitable and in accordance with the town values. His Worship whispered to me, "I know nothing about the matter, what do you suggest?" I said, "Sir I know almost as little as you do, as we have no recent sales to guide us. I would however suggest that it will be all right if the borough agrees to a 25% reduction of new value." I am sure the property owner didn't expect any reduction of this so he was quite happy.

This magistrate was one of the ablest then on circuit, in his appearance however he did without duress. I would like to say he fulfilled my childhood idea of that liberal and good old man Father Christmas rather than as a stern and solemn exponent of the law. His smiling countenance on entering the court seemed almost to assure us that a happy time was to be had by all. It is said of a crocodile that his countenance is most open when he is taking you in, and I am afraid the S.M.'s manner at times led a litigant astray to his undoing. I have seen a shifty and unreliable litigant grow even more so as the idea gained strength in his mind – "This kindly old chap is believing all I tell him."

Bad luck! Little had he realised the astute and agile brain behind that urbane countenance. Very soon the shifty man realised how, almost unnoticeably, he had been steered far up the garden path. A few pertinent questions from the bench and down came the house of cards.

I have known a number of JPs some of them intimately.

Two JPs were adjudicating on a simple case of drunkenness in a public place. The police had nothing but good to say as to the past record of the defendant. One Justice was fairly deaf, but his mate thought he had spoken loudly enough when suggesting seven days. Evidently he had not as his mate replied rather loudly "Yes, I agree 14 days," and the offender served the sentence.

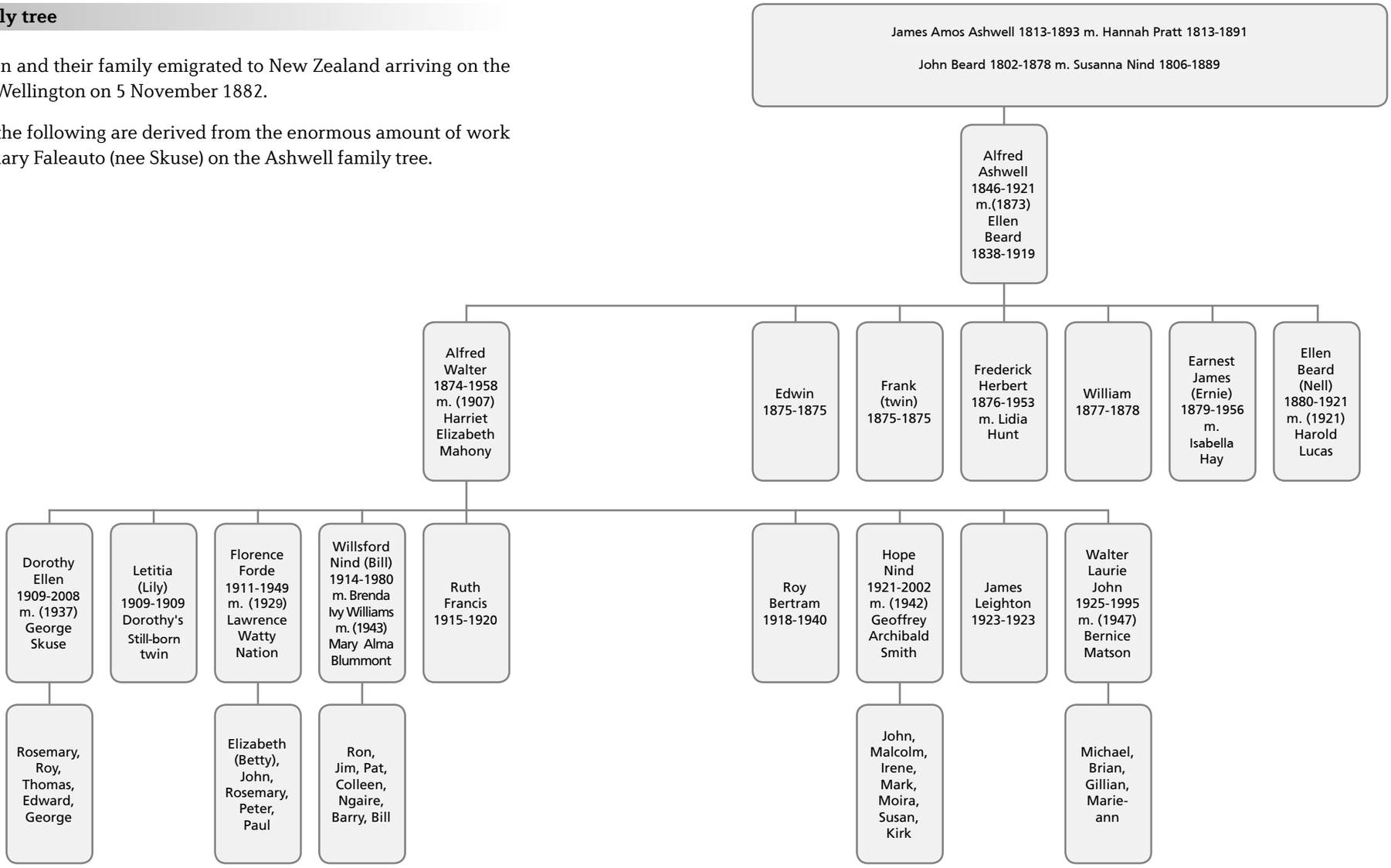
Another JP in a no-licence area brewed a very powerful and quick selling brand of parsnip wine. I cannot say with what truth, but it was stated that a person up before the bench on a charge of drunkenness met with much greater leniency if he had consumed the JP's brand rather than another. A Maori stole into the premises and drinking the dregs of a barrel, died from the effects. This brought the brewery to an end.

For a time let memory hold the door and coming through its magic portals we descry.

Ashwell family tree

Alfred and Ellen and their family emigrated to New Zealand arriving on the *SS Ruapehu* at Wellington on 5 November 1882.

This table and the following are derived from the enormous amount of work done by Rosemary Faleauto (nee Skuse) on the Ashwell family tree.



Mahony family tree

Willsford and Annie married in Auckland in 1882. They were both recent immigrants from Ireland and Northern Ireland.