

By MARY NICOLL

IT is sometimes good to look back, and then to be grateful for conditions of the present day, but it is also pleasant to remember the days before radios, movies, motor cars, central heating and such luxuries.

"How did you ever live? What did you do to pass away the time?" the present generation is inclined to ask. "People lived, and enjoyed living," is the answer, "but in a different way."

We were brought up in a suburb of Bristol, England, towards the end of the Nineteenth Century. It was an old city with many associations with the past, but it was also closely linked with the New World not only because of its geographical position but because of its historical past, associated with explorers.

Even when we were growing out of infancy we found many diversions. Streets were lighted by gas not electricity. On winter afternoons we could watch for the lamplighter, who came with lighted pole over his shoulder. Stepping quickly along he would pause at each street lamp, leaving behind a lighted lamp. When he came to the one opposite our house, we could see the pole pushed up into the lamp, and the gas jet lighted. It seemed a magic wand to us.

About the same time of day a tinkling bell could be heard coming nearer and nearer. At last the muffin man came into sight. He carried a large square basket over one arm. In it were muffins and crumpets, which when buttered and toasted, were a pleasing addition to the evening meal. In one hand he carried a bell, to make known his approach.

From time to time we watched the doctor as he arrived at the house to visit those suffering from colds. He was a typical Victorian medical man, with greying beard, rosy cheeks and smiling grey eyes. He brought necessary medicines with him, sometimes greeting us by saying, "Here's some plum-pudding in a bottle." We found his medicine sweet and syrupy even if we could detect a bitter taste as well. He came in his horse-drawn carriage, with coachman in livery. If the doctor prolonged his visit in winter, the coachman, perched on the driver's seat, would get colder and colder and slap his arms across his chest, to keep warm.

On fine days we were taken for a walk on the Downs nearby, lingering on the way at the forge to watch horses being shod.

Roads were soft and muddy in damp weather, and dusty in dry. Crossing-sweepers kept paths swept across roads, and pedestrians in return gave them coins in appreciation. The best-remembered crossing-sweeper was an old bearded negro, who swept at the edge of the Downs.

We were glad when we moved into a house whose iron garden gate opened to a hilly road having shops of all kinds. This hill had one of the steepest grades in the county of Gloucester. Horses had great difficulty in getting up the hill with heavy loads.

In our garden stood a stone fountain. Three dolphins, their heads resting on the large lower basin, supported the small upper basin with their tails.

A summer-house was made for us where we could hold our dolls' tea-parties. Laburnums hung their golden chains overhead in June, when the air was scented by hundreds of white hawthorns in blossom on the Downs.

On Summer Saturday afternoons, about tea-time, a distant drum could be heard. This was a signal for us to leave everything and race to the gate. The band could be heard coming nearer and nearer. At last we saw the volunteers marching to drill on the Downs. The brass band which led them, and the scarlet coats were one of our favourite "shows." Sometimes we had to be content with the white and navy blue of marines instead.

Brass bands of all kinds frequented the hill. Some came more often in winter when summer resorts were emptied. Hungarians or others would group themselves round their stands and music. They gave us good selections and depended on voluntary contributions. On Christmas Eve sooner or later, the mournful tune of the "Mistletoe Bough" was played, which reminded us that when playing "Hide and Seek" it was well to avoid oak chests fastened with springs or our fate might be like that of the bride in the song.

There were plenty of beggars about, and plenty of wealthy retired people living in the neighbourhood, where the climate was good and mild.

Shops on the hill kept open until 10 or 11 p.m., so although only gas was used, the street was comparatively well lighted. Shops were excellent, even if small, and they supplied fruit, vegetables, confectionery, china, hardware and other goods to a large residential district.

Late hours such as these were not so bad as they sound. Shops were usually run by owners living on the premises. In



the evenings they could sit in the living-room behind the shop, coming out to serve when a bell attached to the inside of the shop door announced the entrance of a customer. Then local gossip and news could pass away the time pleasantly. It is wonderful how quickly news spread.

Shop windows were small and space limited, so green-grocers could only exhibit small amounts of choicest products. Vegetables in bulk were kept in bins. Fruits and vegetables were fresh, supplied daily from surrounding country.

Horse-drawn carriages of many kinds could be seen bringing well-dressed women to shops, or to social functions. Some had a pair of horses, with coachman and footman: some belonged to elderly people who preferred one trusted retainer, and a steady horse rather than dash and danger.

On rare occasions a young dandy would drive tandem (one horse before the other) which caused quite a stir. Prim Victorians scarcely approved, and considered such driving questionable taste. The tale was told of a disapproving cleric who was asked, "What difference can there be between driving a pair abreast or tandem?" "All the difference in the world," he replied, "the difference between this and that," and to illustrate he put his hands at first together as in prayer, and then with fingers stretched out, one before the other, as a street urchin might put them to his nose in defiance.

Funerals were impressive. The procession was led by a hearse drawn by two black horses with long tails and stepping high as they had been trained to do. Large black feathery plumes, like small trees, seemed to grow out of the top of the hearse. The coffin was not to be seen and was shut inside. Other mourning coaches followed, each drawn by a pair of black horses.

Weddings were much more fascinating than they are today. They were not usually hurried events. The bride and groom sometimes had planned for years, while the bride worked on her household linen and trousseau, and the groom at his trade or profession. The wedding day was therefore a great event in their lives and called for the best.

Brides often wore dresses or veils into which many hours of hand work had been put. The bridal coach, lined with white brocade, was spacious with plenty of room for the bride's frills and furbelows. It was drawn by a pair of white or grey horses with coachman and footman in livery. White ribbon was tied on the whip. As weddings had to take place before 3 p.m.,

carriage lamps were not lighted, but instead were packed with white flowers. Other carriages with white or grey horses followed the bride's. No wonder one of the favourite games of little girls was playing at weddings.

Bank holidays brought crowds of holiday makers to the Downs dressed in their best clothes. Some came up from the city of Bristol, some were excursionists from the mining districts of South Wales. Ostrich feathers, probably the gift of sailor sweethearts, adorned many of the hats.

Wares to attract the crowd were sold by street hawkers, playthings for children, candies, and most popular of all—oranges and ice-cream. Many of the ice-cream vendors were Italians who sold it from handcarts, with a container of water at the end. We watched from the gate, as they produced small thick glasses with cone-shaped interiors, into which they dabbed ice-cream. These were licked clean by customers, and the soiled glasses put into the water and used again later. Hygiene was not so much in evidence at that time.

Barrel organs, the handles often turned by Italians and producing familiar tunes delighted us, especially when a red-coated monkey hopped about on top.

On Bank holidays we were taken for our walk early, and not allowed out later into the crowded streets.

Many hawkers and beggars had been disfigured with smallpox, which had been a dreaded scourge sweeping hundreds away. We were fortunate to have been born after vaccination had been introduced. A large space in Bristol, cobble-stoned, upon which no one was allowed to build, was pointed out to us as the place where hundreds had been buried in time of plague. "Pitch and Pay", the name of a house on the edge of the Downs, reminded us of the time of plague when money had to be "pitched" to pay for food.

We were sometimes reminded of special days by the people passing by. When the Oxford and Cambridge boat race was taking place there was added interest because of the emblems of light blue or dark blue worn. During our school days we were proud to wear the colour of the crew we favoured.

Primroses were worn on April 19th by members of Conservative families in memory of Disraeli, whose favourite flower was said to have been the primrose.

Towards the end of April, slum children frequently came begging for discarded ribbons and flowers. On May 1st they reappeared, transformed into gaily dressed kings and queens and



carrying money-boxes for gifts. Our own household had other activities on May Day. The Flower Service at Church was at 7 a.m. and necessitated early rising. Those who were old enough to go, took gifts of flowers, such as primroses and cowslips or potted plants. Later in the day, coloured texts were attached and the flowers taken to hospitals. Most children liked cowslips, for the flower heads, detached, and inverted, could be hung on a string and ends tied to make a soft, sweet-scented golden ball.

"The 29th of May is Oak Apple Day," would be heard on that date as one and another showed the "oak apple" worn to commemorate the day when Prince Charles hid in an oak tree.

Guy Fawkes Day came on November 5th, the anniversary of the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot. Bonfires were lighted at night, when it was a good opportunity to burn up garden rubbish. We liked bonfires, but had to leave childhood behind, before we lost our fear of boys on the street wearing hideous masks to frighten us.

Gypsies' caravans sometimes passed by with brooms, clothes-pegs, baskets and other products of gypsy handicraft hanging outside. The idea of living in a horse-drawn house on wheels and with a window, was attractive although we were not too sure about wanting to live with dark-eyed gypsies.

Street calls daily filled the air, such as "Ripe strawberries, ripe strawberries," "Chairs to mend, old chairs to mend," "Cockles and mussels," "Fresh Herrings," "Rags and bones." These street cries were on the whole pleasant to hear, and each had its distinctive melody. We were glad when a chair was produced for mending. Cane-bottomed chairs were much used, and frequently wore out. We watched the magic which restored a very disreputable cane seat by replacing it with one newly woven. First, all old cane was removed leaving a chair frame with holes at regular intervals round the seat. Then strands of new cane were threaded across from one side to another and held taut by small pegs driven in and cut off even with the frame. After that, other strands were woven in and out of the first, forming one pattern or another of those familiar at that time. Finishing touches were added and then it seemed to us we had a brand-new chair.

The rag-and-bone man came to collect rags and bones, and in exchange he gave money or what seemed wonderful treasures, in the form of vases, and even mirrored epergnes. No doubt some of these today would be quite valuable. Rag-and-bone

merchants were able to dispose of their gatherings to mills and factories which needed them to produce paper and other merchandise. They also sometimes accumulated wealth in this way, and when they died left fortunes behind.

Perhaps one of the most outstanding calls was so, because it only came once a year, on Good Friday. On that day we woke early to the call, "*One a penny, two a penny, hot cross buns.*" This melody had a beautifully chanting sound, in keeping with the day.

We had the usual magazines, and illustrated story books with such tales as those of Cinderella and Red Riding Hood. *Pilgrim's Progress* and Old Testament stories provided as many thrills as children find today in the movies, only we had to depend more on our imaginations. Weapons such as swords, slings and stones, or bows and arrows figured in the stories, but bombs were unknown to us.

On winter evenings, helped by someone older, we liked to settle round a table to paste coloured scraps in a large scrap-book. There was often method in the arrangement. For instance one page had a motto, "*Let Brotherly Love Continue.*" Around this page we arranged heads of men and women representing many nationalities and colours, and in this way, long ago, we produced our own "*United Nations.*"

An old Grandfather Clock stood in the kitchen. It had ponderous weights, heavy pendulum and large dial over which passed hour and minute hands, while another hand moved more quickly round a small inner circle. Its size, movements and loud ticking voice seemed to give it life. Standing before this old clock we learned to tell the time, as we distinguished between ticking seconds, minutes, and the chiming hour. It was pleasant to be taught by such a clock.

Visits to the Clifton Zoological Gardens were special treats. There we saw the antics of the monkeys, listened to apt remarks of the parrots, or fed buns to the elephant. There were lions and tigers to be seen at feeding time, and on one occasion the keeper allowed us to hold a lion cub. Monkeys sometimes excelled, as on one occasion, when we watched a mother and her babies sitting in a row. To our delight she jumped down, put a paw through the rails, pulled a small ostrich feather from a child's hat, and returned to divide the feather with her family. The polar bear was usually swimming in his railed-in out-of-door pool. After we had enticed him out, we had to dash away to avoid the shower bath he sprayed over us. We watched the brown bear come up the pole from his pit, step by step. When

he reached the top he was level with us where we stood on the other side of the railings. He would look at us with sad, beady eyes. Much has been done since "the good old days" to make conditions better for animals in captivity.

An old workbox was always an attraction. In it our mother kept a few things she treasured from her youth in Ireland. The lid of the box was lined with quilted magenta-coloured silk. Among her treasures was a valentine. It had a lacy edging, and small bunches of flowers here and there. We would be told to search for any printed words. At first none could be found anywhere. Then at last one word was found, in such small print it was scarcely discernible—for it was tucked away in one of the bunches of flowers. The word was "Constancy."

In Clifton, valentines were not particularly popular. We went, however, to visit in Wiltshire and it was February when valentines were being displayed. One day we bought a valentine to send home. It was the kind children love, and showed a man ironing his shirt. It was so constructed that we could make the arm and iron move to and fro.

During August cricket matches of nation-wide interest were played, and we were taken to watch. Fashionably dressed crowds, surrounded the playing field and filled the grand stand. It was refreshing to watch those white flannels of cricketers move to their places on the velvety green. Among the players was one, famous throughout the world, and upon whom all eyes were fixed. His long beard marked him out, for it was Dr. Grace, generally referred to as "W.G.". When he sent a ball racing out of bounds excitement was great, and cheering prolonged. Everyone loved to watch his play, for true sportsmen, on either side, appreciated his excellence.

As children we played cricket ourselves, inspired by tales of "W.G." and his high score. We would set up our comparatively small wickets on the Downs, making the pitch short and using a soft ball and so scores were promising. In turn we became batters, bowlers, fielders, hoping to become famous cricketers.

School life was more or less austere and without many compensations children have today. Victorian discipline prevailed and we stood in awe of our teachers. Many of those at the Girls' High School we attended were among the first women to come through the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Some may have been indifferent teachers, but they were gentlewomen, who probably gave us something not to be found in books.

Our school time-table included Latin, German, French, Mathematics, Botany, Physics, as well as Gymnastics and Games.



Each school day began in the Assembly Hall when a portion of Scripture was read followed by a prayer. As the school was housed in a fine old mansion, whose interior had panelled walls, and situated in extensive and beautiful grounds, we managed to spend many happy hours in spite of Victorian discipline. Youth is youth in all ages, and our pranks and adventures were carried on unknown to our elders, as we pried about sealed panels, hoping to find secret passages, or the revealing of mysteries. Results were disappointing but we found fun in it.

Youngsters used to have their crazes too. Of these silkworms were very popular with juniors. We would take them to school in cardboard boxes, in which we had punched holes. We were constantly giving and receiving the worms. In the school grounds stood a mulberry tree, whose leaves were the right food for them, but usually we fed them on lettuce leaves. Like all children who keep pets we had to be reminded by parents at home that the silkworms had not been fed, or that the boxes needed cleaning. As they grew into big worms it was easier to transfer them. By the time we had watched the weaving, seen the moth emerge from the chrysalis, and produce eggs which turned into grubs, we were satisfied that what was to come would be only repetition. Then we were ready to be generous in giving grubs away.

When we reached the top of the school in Form VI, we came in contact more frequently with the Headmistress. She dressed in fashion with the time and wore a train even in school.

Girls then usually at the age of seventeen began to wear long dresses, and put up their hair. We were then allowed to enjoy social events at school to which important people were invited. But teachers seemed to be much more cut off from us than teachers are from pupils nowadays.

Our singing master at school was a well-known composer. Sometimes he would walk to and fro on the school platform, pointer in hand, as if prodding something. "That is how you sing", he would say. Then sitting at the piano, he would tell us how our song should be accented.

Tennis, croquet and cricket were played in summer, and rounders (baseball) in winter, as well as hockey played with sticks—long old-fashioned.

Once a week the whole school assembled when the Headmistress gave an address. She usually told us about the life of a famous woman, such as Elizabeth Fry or Florence Nightingale. "Public spirit" was so often mentioned on these occasions that we laughed at it as we flung the expression to and fro. But her



addresses produced results and many carried out her teaching in a practical way at home and abroad.

In summer, garden parties were held to which outsiders were invited. Strawberries and cream were served, while the air was laden with scent of roses and honeysuckle from the terrace, or the perfume of the out-spreading cedar of Lebanon beyond.

One of the chief social functions came in November when certificates of the Senior Oxford and Cambridge Joint Board were distributed. It was held at night and evening dress was worn. The VIth Form partook of refreshments with honoured guests, before the ceremony, and we began to feel "grown-up."

A Shakespearean play was acted by the Seniors each year for three nights. Unexpected situations attending amateur theatricals confronted us too.

Walking was the chief recreation, and young people of those days managed to enjoy themselves going for long distances into the country. Any refreshment they wanted they took with them or returned with enormous appetites. If they went across the Downs to Westbury-on-Trym, or Henbury, they might pass the houses where Southey and Edmund Burke had lived, and the place where Wycliffe had had a college.

Turning city-wards to Bristol, there were plenty of historical places of interest. At the old church of St. Mary Redcliffe, the verger lived in the past. On one visit, he asked us to crane our necks to see beautiful carving hidden from view. He said, "That was done in the good old days, when men worked as in the sight of God, not for the glory of men." When he showed us the wooden figure of "Good Queen Bess," which had probably been the figure-head of a ship, he said, "I gave her an extra good scrubbing because she said Bristol women were ugly." If Queen Elizabeth had thought they were ugly we were glad to be told that she was so pleased with the way they had done up her ruffles, that she had commanded that grassy Brandon Hill, on the edge of the city was to be free to the washerwomen of Bristol forever, on which to hang out their washing. In later years we saw Cabot Tower rise on the hill's summit. It was built to commemorate the famous explorer's connection with the city.

Girls' schools with the pupils walking in pairs, were often expensive private boarding schools. Others, however, attracted more attention, for they were dressed according to fashions of a by-gone age. The Red Maids' School is remembered because the girls wore scarlet dresses with white aprons and capes, small white straw bonnets with narrow navy blue ribbon, white

gloves, black shoes. This was the summer dress, replaced in winter by dresses and capes of warm material in scarlet and black check. School boys connected with an old foundation, were frequently seen. They were clothed in long, leather-belted tunics of navy blue cloth, reaching to the ankles. With this, yellow stockings and black shoes were worn.

Bristol and its associations could carry us back through the centuries, but when we crossed Durdham Downs and reached Clifton Downs we saw one of the marvels of modern engineering—the Clifton Suspension Bridge, built by the famous engineer Brunel. This bridge spanned the Avon gorge, three hundred feet above the river, joining the counties of Somerset and Gloucester. It had a roadway and paths on each side, and was suspended by heavy, concealed chains. People came from all over the world to see the famous bridge, which even today is a wonder. There was a toll gate at each end. Soldiers were not allowed to march in step when crossing it, and horses went at walking pace to prevent setting up a swaying. Looking below, ships on the river looked like toys, and people along the banks mere dots.

Dancing was popular with many. Waltzes, polkas, schottisches, mazurkas were the dances favoured. Quadrilles and the Lancers, as well as country dances like "Sir Roger" or "The Corkscrew" drew many a hesitating dancer into the fun.

Young people were more dependent on their own efforts to entertain than they need be today, and when they met for parties might contribute good music, vocal or instrumental. Impromptu charades sometimes caused merriment and gave everyone a chance to help.

Holidays were spent at resorts on the Bristol Channel. Of these our favourite place was Portishead where we stayed on the top of a hill, which was jotted over with cottages and orchards. In those days it was a quiet place, scarcely more than a village. Motoring has now made it possible for Bristol business men to reach it easily, and many homes have been built. When we stayed there we received much service which we could never hope to repay. On Sunday mornings we might come down to see a row of well-blackened and polished shoes waiting for us and ready for wearing to church. In each pair would be placed a sweet-smelling buttonhole from the garden such as were usually worn by villagers dressed in best clothes. Sweet-briar, southernwood, pansy, for-get-me-not, wallflower intermingled.

We have certainly gained many things in the Twentieth Century, but may we not have lost something too?