

EPISODE VII

Loss, and Readjustment.

Throughout the first year of the unemployed Club's endeavour, a grievous personal tragedy had again stricken our family. My Mother's younger sister, our beloved Aunt Lily, became ill. Still in the vigour of life, energetic, and of a most gracious nature, the verdict by the doctors in her case too, was of the same grievous sickness from which my Father had died, and from which his sister was dying. It seemed as though some grim fate was pursuing our family, striking our dear ones one after the other.

My brother had to return to his duties, and my sister and her family to Buenos Aires.

Every possible remedy was sought in London; and then towards the end our dear patient entered a quiet nursing home near Hastings. My little Mother was constantly with her during those last weeks. Then aunt Lily died; and she was buried close to my Father in the peaceful garden of Mayfield Church. Her husband returned to Australia. My Mother and I were left, sharing together our sense of heavy loss, but supported still by our deep mutual affection.

Then at length I became myself unwell again. And so I handed over most of my work at the clubs and was invited to stay for a rest with a good friend of mine. This was a very wealthy old Lady, who had been a keen supporter of the Club's idea.

She had a handsome home, and nearby a model farm, in which I was allowed to interest myself. My few months there despite my hostess great kindness were not altogether reposeful. The old lady was a dominant personality and there were stormy periods when her son, a one time

Captain in the Hussars, was staying with us. He had become an adherent of Sir Oswald Mosley's Fascists, and the old lady very strongly disapproved of this. This clash with Fascist elements seemed already to pursue my ways, for soon after when I went to stay with Alex. S., my father's old friend of College days, I found him also to be an adherent of this cause. In fact at his week-end parties, I met not only Sir Oswald, but most of his prominent supporters, including Joyce, the "Lord Haw-Haw" of war years who broadcast propaganda for the Germans against us, and was later hanged as a traitor.

Every effort was made to convert me to active Fascism, but luckily even at that early time I distrusted them, and refused support,— to the bitter anger of my host! Indeed this was an ugly shadow of coming events, though I little realised it at the time; and it shows how materialistic politics can gradually break up families, friendships, nations, and at last the world of mankind itself. May God protect us! For again today we are in the earlier stages of the same peril, under a different name.

The Grenfells, on our mutual return from Tangier had become amongst my keenest supporters in my work in London, and at week-ends I often went to stay with them at their Sunningdale home. I was a guest also of Lady Lilian's brother, the then Duke of Marlborough at his magnificent home Blenheim Palace. It is interesting to look back upon, for Blenheim was then still organised in almost feudal manner, and the Duke lived in considerable state. To me however he was kindly and a genial host. He had nevertheless an intolerant side to his disposition, and it was evident that those around him held him in no little awe. The old Duke has now passed away, and his son reigns in his stead,— but most of Blenheim is closed, and the family can

contrive to occupy only a small part of that enormous palace. In the next generation, one supposes that this, like so many other great houses, will pass to the government or to the National Trust. Very sad in many ways; and yet basically no doubt right, and the only possible thing in these times of England's "bloodless revolution" ! Thank goodness it is at least a bloodless one!

My Mother, still to me the dearest person in my world, continued to live near me — she in Knightsbridge, I in Chelsea. Mother was trying bravely to recover from her losses, but she preferred to live very quietly, and to see the minimum of people. Yet whatever my circumstances she remained my dear companion, and my daily meetings and talks with her were always a comfort and an oasis of accustomed ways and beloved memories. Nevertheless our trend of thought and objective inevitably were different, and to make less the unavoidable clash of such differences, I knew that occasional separations were wise. My strenuous time in organising my London clubs had been a strain and eventually I decided upon a tour abroad by sea to obtain complete change, while at the same time I could study the mode of life of seafaring men on the smaller type of cargo or "tramp" vessels.

So in due course April 12th 1935, found me about to embark at Liverpool. The following diary and letter-extracts now tell their tale of a quite new set of experiences.