

you'll be fine." "Where from" asked I thinking that the coal was rationed and had to come from 20 miles at least. He led me to one of the outhouses in the courtyard stuffed with a mountain of best coal. "Part of my wages" said Alec, "Years of it. I never use it, so you are welcome to it."

Alec's way of heating his own bothy was to lay a tree trunk on the floor with one end in the primitive fireplace giving it a shove from time to time as required. You may well ask how Alec came to be our laird. Roughly 100 years ago now, when Alec was a young keeper, he quarrelled with the autocratic Earl of Dalhousie who owned the entire Glen and everyone in it. Alec took himself off to Australia in a huff, made a fortune, some say in the gold rush, came back and anonymously bought the manse when it came on the market after the old Earl's death. Alec got his old job back and settled down again in his bothy, to be a thorn in the flesh of the Dalhousies, as laird no 2 in the Glen. He carefully looked after the House of Mark which stood empty for many years till we came along.

Another helpful neighbour was Mrs Kidd who loved visits from the children. Her husband was the gardener at the shooting lodge about a mile away which was used as a rest house for Battle of Britain pilots earlier in the War, now empty and deserted. Richard Hillary who was one of the badly injured pilots wrote a book about this time in the Glen at Invermark Lodge, called The Last Enemy. The Kidds lived in a cottage

beside Invermark Castle, an ancient heap at the end of our drive. Mrs Kidd taught us how to make pancakes, girdle scones and oatcakes and eventually how to keep hens and goats. Food was our great and daily concern, milk came up with the post from Tarveside, six miles down the Glen. It had to be boiled at once and chilled in cold water on arrival. The larder was cool and airy with thick slabs of stone for shelves, useful in our daily task of catering for a large family without refrigeration. We had a petrol allowance sufficient to shop at Edzell or Brechin once a month and at Tarveside Post Office for our rations once a week. The garden was productive and our neighbours generous with gifts of surplus vegetables. I fancy Lord Dalhousie contributed greatly to our diet via Mr Kidd.

Eggs we bought from an isolated croft, a day's outing on foot for us all and an education in primitive living. The house stood in a sheltered recess on a steep hillside, it had a breathtaking view of the Loch and its surrounding horseshoe of dark mountains. A burn came crashing down into a dark brown little pool a few yards from the house, the croft's only water supply. There used to be an illegal still there once it seems, one of the best in the Glen, but there were others famous especially at the far end of the loch. The hen, the sow and her piglets roamed free in and out of the house. The peat fire which glowed on an earthen floor had never been out for a hundred years. Dogs and cats were everywhere. The crofters' barefoot children were totally speechless with shyness. The

crofter's wife was a pretty woman radiating kindness and goodwill, unabashed and happy in the midst of utter chaos.

Our mainstay during the early weeks at the House of Mark was the stalker at Loch Lea. At his cottage James rang maybe twice a week from London and I usually made my report to Rosemary's mother. There we listened avidly to the radio and caught up with the war news and the gossip. Invariably the Ferriers shared their bounty with us in the shape of trout, salmon, grouse, venison, rabbits and hares, in season. It was abundance compared with the south, even the basic food rationing seemed a much more liberal concept in Scotland than in England, especially as applied to people living in remote places.

Very soon our life fell into a tranquil flexible sort of pattern, old Nanny was the only one to spend a lot of time standing on her dignity, as deaf as old Harry and crotchety with it, she was nevertheless an invaluable anchor for the children while Peggy and I struggled for survival among the chaos of unheard of tasks.

By the time the school holidays came around we had evolved quite an elegant life style. James arrived bringing Rosemary's two elder brothers. Life with a rather demanding man and two young lordlings in the house became more complicated than at first, but they soon learned to fit in and pulled their weight

manfully. I remember incredibly long days spent by the river fishing, playing with the children, picnicking, pressing wild flowers, observing birds for Rosemary's projects. We found a beautiful spot 2 miles or so up Glenmark near the Queen's Well where there was a superb pool and picnic place. No doubt the dear Queen knew it too when she came riding over the hill from Balmoral with Prince Albert. She had a stone crown built over the spring there, it gleams there still, glinting with coins. We built a designer fireplace there for boiling water and frying the trout as it came out of the river. A huge iron kettle and a frying pan were always left hanging on the branch of a tree. It would not surprise me if they were hanging there still.

There was at this time a great drought in our area, on the high hills large patches of blaeberry bushes turned orange and scarlet in June. At night there was a eerie glow in the sky from the spontaneous heather fires sweeping across the hills. There were rumours of Germans using them as beacons, landing in small parties along the beaches. The head stalker had a string of ^{ponies.} ~~posts~~, I remember a wonderful trek up to Mount Kean with the ponies carrying the children and hampers with food for a scrumptious meal on the very top, overlooking Lochnagar and all the Grampians.

Another grand day out was a fishing party on Loch Lea. The non fishers were ferried to the far side of the loch to