

THE FABULOUS PAIR

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It feels very strange to be so much older than any of you and to be, I suppose, one of the very few left alive who knew that fabulous pair - Sabine and Grace.

They could not have been more different, a most unlikely match, yet I think it was really one of the most wonderful marriages in history.

I could never describe them to you adequately, to make you see them as I do so clearly in my mind, nor to record to you their unique voices.

How I wish tapes and videos had been known in those days so that you could hear Sabine's bell-like singing voice as we heard it in church on Sundays. His speaking voice was sort of vibrant, some quality I have never heard in any other. He didn't speak much - one felt his mind was always working, but when he did speak it was in quick jerky sentences, always interesting, funny, and he loved to tease.

But Grace! Hers was the most beautiful speaking voice I have ever heard - like velvet, mellow I think describes it, in fact I think mellow is the word that best describes her. What a hard life she must have had transported from a simple background to being the Squire's lady in a large house and I believe that when she first came to Lew she was exposed to some hostility from the snobbish gentry in the countryside around. Then fourteen children to cope with, and the house in such bad repair that I believe there were workmen in doing one thing and another through all her life. And an eccentric husband - such devotion between them, but he could not have been all that easy to live with, and certainly, was not much practical help. She had plenty of excuse to make her a bit crotchety at times, yet in all those years I knew her, and I saw a great deal of her, I never saw her flustered or out of temper, she was always the same - warm, interesting and gently humorous - I just loved them both and was proud of being related to them.

Lew was such a different place from what it is today ... bristling with life. Lew House always full of activity, and Ardoch at the top of the hill where my grandmother lived, filled all through the summer months. I spent every summer there all through my childhood and Lew was my heaven. When I felt a sore throat coming, I would pray that it would turn into a really bad 'flu, so that the doctor would say, "better send her down to her grandmother in Devon".

The whole atmosphere was so different in those days ... when one looks back it all seems ridiculously snobbish ... such a strict dividing line between the big houses and the cottages. For instance, when any of the women or girls met any ladies from the big houses they bobbed a little curtsey. It was just the way things were and it was all taken for granted. I suppose there was a dignity about it and there was a great deal of love and caring behind it.

Granny and Aunt Grace were always so concerned when anyone was ill or in trouble and did what they could to help. Of course, there was no transport in the village except for the Lew

House and Ardoch carriages and horses, so if anyone had to go to hospital, one or other of them harnessed up and took them and were at the ready to bring them home.

Uncle Sabine was always so aware of his flock, and his daily airing every morning when he set off after breakfast in the dog-cart, was the time for him to call on anyone he wanted to speak to, or to enquire after anyone sick. I always remember one day I met a woman whose husband I knew was ill, so I enquired after him ... "Oh, me dear," she said, "Squire, he put us in a proper tizzy s'mornin, he come in and walked. right upstairs and into the bedroom before us was properly vitty". That was typical of him, a sudden impulse passing the house, he remembered one of his own was ill - of course he must pop in to see how things were. It would not occur to him that it might be inconvenient.

On these early morning trips if he had no-one special to see, he would pop into Ardoch and find us still at breakfast. There was a lovely relationship between him and Granny - his stepmother, but only a few years older than himself. He loved to tease her and she enjoyed his fun. He would say something outrageous to shock her, and she would reply "hocus pocus, naughty boy."

One wonderful day he suddenly appeared and found us breakfasting ... "Morning Granny - Joan's here in her motorcar - going to Dartmoor - want to take Irene". Was I thrilled - I had never been in a car before so it was just as if a child of today was offered a trip to the moon. Permission was given and soon we were off. Uncle Sabine beside the chauffeur and I sitting beside Joan on the edge of my seat, very shy but nearly bursting with the thrill of it. Everyone in the house came to see us off and as we drove towards Dartmoor, people stared at us in wonder, seeing this fabulous horseless carriage speeding along.

When I look back on it all, I wonder if I really did live it, or was it just a book I have read?