DR ROBERT WILLIAMS

1849 - 1936

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Jackie Markham

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(born in the Croase House - his grandfather's –
where he finally died.)

Robert Williams

Doctor and Ornithologist

Robert Williams was born in Kingsland, where his father, who had a large farm there, was not only a keen sportsman, but an interested observer of bird and animal life; all this he passed on to this son.

In those days good workmen could easily be obtained to keep a farm running with a little supervision, and shooting was obtainable over most of the parish and the district outside. Nor was there any difficulty about fishing, for where the river ran through farm land the tenant was allowed rods for himself and his family as a matter of course.

Brought up under these conditions it is not surprising that the boy became a sportsman too, and learnt to observe and appreciate everything around him. Much of his time was spent on his pony, and his horsemanship was very helpful in after life, when in his early days as a doctor long distances in the country had to be covered.

As we shall see later too, his practical experience of wild-life played a great part in hobby and recreation at a time when it was most needed, and gradually he became recognised as an authority upon any subject connected with the country.

When he was about nine years of age he made the acquaintance of a boy of his own age living at Ledicot, Thomas Rae Irvine, the son of the Agent for all the Shobdon Court Estates. This friend does not come into the picture much, but the influence upon each other's character must have been considerable, as for the next fifteen years they were inseparable.

The two boys went to the preparatory school at Street Court together, from there to Hereford Cathedral School, and after that to Edinburgh University, where they both qualified in medicine and surgery. Wherever he happened to be The Croase was always T.R.I's home for the rest of his life, and eventually he retired and died there, still in as close touch with Robert as he had been in the days when they grew up together.

Not much is known about the school at Street Court, but the boys were evidently a fairly rough crowd, for one of their chief amusements was 'tickling up' the new boys. Someone had secured a very large iron key with a hollow barrel, and drilling a small hole in the top at one end, had converted it into a miniature cannon. At the appropriate moment this was tied to an iron railing, loaded with a charge of gun powder and poppy seed, (perhaps even with dust shot if seeds could not be obtained, for they were none too particular), and the victim called up to inspect the contrivance. A lighted match then did all that was necessary, and everybody was delighted - with one exception of course!

When he was twelve Robert went to Hereford Cathedral School as a boarder, and remained there until he was ready to take the entrance examination for Edinburgh. These years in Hereford brought him little in the shape of prizes for work, but he became a star pupil in the gymnasium, and was so successful as a runner and jumper that he won several silver cups before he left. He was a keen swimmer and cricketer too, and eventually played in the 1st XI, distinguishing himself as a sure long-stop, a post of considerable difficulty in the days when wicket keeping was in its infancy. He never lost his keenness for the game, and in later life turned out regularly to umpire matches.

It was during one summer holiday that he had a practical lesson in bee keeping: the honey had been taken from several hives, and as they had no extractors in those days, it had all been put in muslin bags, a weight placed on the top of each, and they were then hung from nails in a beam, with pans underneath for the honey to drip into. But they quite forgot to shut the window, and when Robert went up next day to see how much honey was accumulating he found the room black with bees from every hive in the district. Nothing could be done about it however, every particle of honey was carried away, and all that was left behind was the comb from which to make the usual supply of beeswax.

When he went for walks round the farm, Robert generally took half a dozen dogs with him, as his father was keen on coursing, and always kept good greyhounds. One of these called Fairy was first favourite, and used to be shut in an out-house when the family went to church, but one Sunday morning got left in the dining room by mistake. No sooner did she see them all vanishing in the distance than with one bound she leapt clean through the plate glass window, cutting herself of course rather badly. They all turned back to attend to the damage and to comfort her, and the family pew looked very empty that morning.

There was another curious dog experience about the same time in connection with a spaniel that used to be taken shooting. After a day in the corn stubble the dog limped home so painfully with cuts in the pads, that the grandmother made little boots of cloth and fitted them to each foot. This cured the trouble very quickly. Twelve months later the same thing happened again, and after limping painfully home behind its master, it did not as usual go into the kitchen for its meal, but whined at the dining room door until it was let in.

It went straight up to the grandmother, raised itself on its hind legs, put both front paws in her lap, and with little whines asked as clearly as possible that more boots should be fitted to the feet.

The workmen too often got cuts and minor damages, and used to come to the house for treatment. Before binding them up these were always well swabbed with eau de cologne as a disinfectant, and in time it became quite a usual thing to hear a knock at the door, and to find a damaged workman outside with the request of "please missus; I ha` cut myself, and will you please put on some of that there molly malone!"

The attitude of the men was not always easy to understand, for on one occasion they sent a spokesman to protest that the cider served out to them had become so sour that they really could not drink it, and would the maister please tap a new cask. It was explained that it would be very difficult to do this, and presently after consulting his mates the man came back again, and said "well sir, we'll do the best we can with it if you'll give us another pint apiece!

After leaving Hereford Robert and T.R.I. went to Edinburgh University, as both had decided to become doctors, and the next few years were given up to the usual routine followed by medical students.

This brought fresh interests into being, amongst them being botany and a specialised knowledge of ferns. Gradually a very complete collection of the latter was acquired, and these were pressed and stored in special cases. In after life a portion of the garden at the Croase was given up to the rarer ferns of the district, though it was a hobby that few outsiders could understand.

The buzzards, ravens, and eagles were always a source of interest soaring about, as none of them were ever seen in Herefordshire.

There is only one account of an interesting accident brought to the hospital where Robert was a student, and that was when a boy aged 14 or so tried to rob a swan's nest. The two birds attacked him, got him down on the mud, and letting drive at him with powerful strokes from their wings, broke his right arm before he could get away. They can be very pugnacious indeed at nesting time, and he was probably lucky to get off so lightly.

During one of the Edinburgh vacations Robert had an interesting experience with a skein of geese. He and his brother went to meet a couple of friends who were going to lunch with them, and all took a short cut home across the fields. Soon after they started they noticed seven or eight geese flying fairly high over the meadow that they were crossing, and decided that they were wild birds on their way to the sea.

The geese seemed tired and were dropping, and presently landed a couple of fields away; seeing this they all got rather excited, and two of them ran home to fetch a gun, whilst the other two, keeping carefully out of sight of the birds, went on home to explain what had happened.

Lunch had finished some time before the sportsmen arrived, tired and hungry, having chased the geese right out of the parish without as much as a shot. They then explained what had happened.

They had attempted to stalk the birds, but as they found them in the middle of the field and as there was no cover, the geese rose into the air and flew away as soon as they entered it. Watching carefully they saw them drop again a few fields ahead, but on getting near them found that they were again out of gunshot in the centre of the field. This performance was repeated time after time, until in the end the birds crossed the river, and it was decided to trot home for the overdue lunch, as the chase appeared to be quite hopeless.

They were in the middle of lunch when a maid came in to say that a neighbouring farmer wished to see Robert's father, and it appeared that he had called to enquire if anyone had seen his geese, as they were known to have flown away, and no trace of them could be found. In the end it turned out that the birds which had been so carefully stalked all the morning were the tame geese in question.

What was so curious and interesting was that these same birds, bred from generations of tame ancestors and used to being fed and handled by human beings, should as soon as they took to the wing and flew away from home have immediately recovered the natural instinct of protection common to their species and have deliberately landed each time in the middle of an open space where they could obtain a clear view of any approaching danger.

Both Robert and T.R.I. did well in the Finals at Edinburgh, and left there with the usual qualifications of M.B., C.M. (Batchelor of Medicine and Master of Surgery). For some of the later months Robert was a dresser to Lister, who at that time was one of the leading Scottish surgeons. He was always proud of having been so closely associated with so great a man, quite apart from the fact of the ready help which had readily been given to him as a student. In after years a portrait of Lord Lister, who had so completely revolutionised the dangers attending operations always hung in Robert's own surgery at the Croase.

After leaving Edinburgh Robert became associated with his father in what was a great joke to both of them, and a matter of interest to fishermen in the district. Adjoining the farm was a good sized pond with fresh water running through it, and they gradually stocked this with small trout taken from the Lugg.

Three or four years later a workman ran into the house one very hot May day, calling out that a curious noise was coming from the pond.

Upon going there it appeared that the water level had fallen, and the fish were coming to the side, turning belly-up, and uttering a queer croaking noise.

They were accordingly all lifted out, the grayling taken back to the Lugg, but the trout killed and distributed amongst friends.

Some were taken to "The Oak" hotel in Leominster, and displayed on a large dish containing twelve fish which weighed $29^{1}/_{2}$ lbs. and everybody was made green with envy upon being told that these had been caught in the river with rod and line, this of course was true, going back a few years. People came from far and wide to admire such a lovely dish of trout; but in the end the joke was allowed to leak out.

After a short spell at home, Robert took a post as assistant to a doctor in the colliery district of Blaenavon, and must have found the manners and general outlook of Welsh miners and their families very different from those of the Scots, which whom he had been so closely associated the last few years.

He only spoke of one bird experience during that time, but an unusual one. He had to attend a case in a cottage there when he heard a blackbird commence to sing, apparently in the room. He looked round but could not see it, and presently the song began again. Upon seeing him look round the room trying to locate the bird the old woman began to laugh, and pointed to the canary in a cage by the window.

It appeared that they used to have a blackbird in the room also, and the canary had picked up its notes, and now often used them instead of its own. This is probably unique, though starlings are great impersonators.

After two or three years experience in Blaenavon an opening occurred in Robert's own home village of Kingsland, the circumstances being well worth recording.

There had been a resident doctor for some considerable time, but he gradually became very addicted to the bottle, and as his thirst increased so did his practice steadily disappear and an exploit in the churchyard finally lost him his few remaining patients.

Years before he had visited Switzerland, and ever afterwards proudly carried an alpenstock. Taking a short cut through the churchyard one night, and being rather more than half seas over, he thought he saw a ghost, and with Dutch courage charged it with his improvised lance, and got such a rude shock in exchange that it knocked him out, and he spent the rest of the night on the turf.

The sexton found him there next morning, still asleep, his alpenstock broken and a large chip out of the tombstone which he had taken for a ghost!

That caused the final collapse of his practice, and as there was nothing left to buy and Robert was begged by many friends to put up his plate, he finally did so and settled down at the Croase, which had already belonged to the family for many years.

So the name of Robert now vanishes, and Dr. Robert (always known to his mother as Robin) takes his place, and after a time this vanished too, and he simply became known to everyone as The Doctor. The practice in Kingsland and district steadily increased, and with a surgery in Orleton which he visited twice a week, his life became a very full one.

He shortly afterwards was engaged to a London girl, the daughter of a Civil Engineer at one time associated with the great Brunel.

She used to stay with friends in Leominster, and in his spare time the Dr. used to go in to see her, using the old field walk near the Mousenatch, and generally returning the same way after dark. This led to a queer incident one night, unpleasant at the time but very amusing to talk about afterwards.

He was still very much of an athlete, and the simplest way of getting over the many stiles to be found on that footpath was to vault them. He had left it rather later returning home, and as it was a dark night one could not see far ahead. Presently another high stile was vaulted, but instead of alighting on soft ground he dropped on something rough and hairy which with a clattering of feet and a clashing of chains tossed him up into the air, and then vanished into the distance. He soon realized that he had dropped upon the back of a hobbled donkey which had been resting under the lee of the stile, but for a moment or two really thought that the devil had got him that time.

At first the Dr. made all visits to his patients on horseback, but as there was soon little time for active sports he began to put on weight, and was forced to invest in a gig.

Keenly interested in ornithology a collection was soon begun, but the first efforts consisted of pairs of eggs only, and all blown with a hole at each end. These mistakes were discovered at a fairly early date, the first efforts scrapped, and a fresh collection of clutches begun, all carefully blown with a neat hole drilled on one side.

This was the nucleus that afterwards became such a famous collection, and made his name known as one of the leading oologists.

One often hears remarks, sometimes from well informed people who should know better, that it is very wrong to take a whole clutch of eggs, and that it would be more sensible to take only a couple, allowing the hen to hatch out the remainder.

Long experience of nesting has proved that when all the eggs are taken from a nest, the pair go at once to a new site and build again. If necessary this would be continued until the hen did hatch out, for the instinct in spring to rear a family is so strong that nothing but the death of one of a pair that has mated will put a stop to their attempts at housekeeping.

The great hunter and naturalist, F C Solomon, a keen and well known ornithologist with a large collection of eggs, bears out this contention. In a biography he says definitely from observation that "if only a clutch is taken instead of a couple of eggs, the same bird either sits again, or more probably makes a new nest, and lays a fresh set of eggs. Thus much less harm is done than if the hen is allowed to hatch out only a portion of a clutch"

After settling down at the Croase the Dr. played cricket in the village team for some years, but one day had the bad luck to rupture a muscle in a thigh as he leapt from the crease to snatch a single. One would think that his medical instinct would immediately have pulled him up, but sportsmanship took charge instead, and he completed the run, saving his wicket and tearing the muscle still more badly in doing so.

It took many weeks of rest to put that right, and he never played again, but turned out regularly to umpire matches.

It was in one of his early games in a white overall that a swarm of flying ants swept across the pitch, and settled on the players. They were there in hundreds, and like one man everyone made tracks for the pavilion, and remained there until the swarm had gone further on.

About this time a tennis court was laid down in the Croase orchard by a qualified surveyor.

He was a good surveyor and it was an excellent court, but he evidently knew nothing about tennis, for he made the fatal mistake of laying it East and West. The result of this was that play in the evenings became impossible owing to the intense glare from the setting sun, and eventually the court was planted with fruit trees, the palisades taken down, and the orchard restored to its original condition.

In the meantime the egg collection steadily increased, and a patient who was a carpenter turned out large and excellent cabinets as they were required.

Some of the country people could not understand the hobby at all, and even went so far as to imagine a very unusual employment for the contents extracted from the eggs! In fact one old woman accused him of this to his face, and went on to say "I knaaws wot I'm a-talking about doctor, for the last bottle of medicine I had from you was full of rotten uns, and it tasted orrible."

A great occasion in Kingsland was the annual fair every autumn, which had been in existence since its Charter had been obtained by Margaret the widow of Lord Mortimer, 600 years before. In previous days it used to be held at Fairfield and was then a much more important event. In later days pens from sheep and pigs were fixed in the road outside the Bell Inn in the middle of the village, cattle took up the footpaths, and horses were tethered along every available railing.

When lunch time drew near the Croase was open house to patients attending the fair from outside, and preparations to feed these hungry guests had been going on for days beforehand.

The doctor and his family were certainly the most popular people in the village that day, and many toasts were drunk to the maister and his missus, not forgetting the two young doctors, as the sons were generally called.

Public appointments soon came along, amongst them being Medical Officer to the Leominster Board of Guardians, Surgeon to the Leominster & Kington Railway, Public Vaccinator for the district, and finally Medical Officer of Health for Leominster and the surrounding parishes: this last post he was still holding when he retired forty years later.

The first of these appointments was linked up with a unique and rather grim experience: at Arrow Green there used to be a turnpike cottage, in which lived an old man in receipt of parish relief. Eventually he died there, and it was discovered that the boundary between the parishes of Monkland and Kingsland ran right through the middle of the cottage. This immediately raised a problem, for as one of the two parishes had to pay for the funeral expenses, the Overseers from both had to go over with the doctor to find out in which of the two rooms the old fellow had died, in order that the correct parish could be made responsible for the burial fees!

But medical life had its humorous side too. For one of the patients was an old merchant skipper named Curtis who lived in Eardisland. He was being attended for bronchitis, but was a tough old boy, and going over to pay him a visit the Dr. was horrified to find him leaning over his garden gate in a bitter East wind, wearing neither jacket nor waistcoat, and with his shirt half undone.

Upon being roundly ticked off and told that he was qualifying for a better world, the old fellow replied, "well Dr., I don't want to go to Heaven yet, more especially if there'd be any chance of running up against my father, for we never did get on together. And anyhow," he added with a grin, "whatever fun or satisfaction could you get in sitting all day long on a cold damp cloud, without any trousers on, singing alleluiah".

The Dr. had not very long been married when an exceedingly nice couple named Lynch settled down at Green Park, and they became not only patients but great friends too. Unfortunately the husband turned out to be a very heavy drinker, and had already been through a severe bout of D.T.'s before he came here.

They were asked to dinner and whilst at the Croase one night, and in the middle of the meal Lynch suddenly jumped up, dashed to the window, and excitedly called out "come quick doctor, somebody's digging a grave in your rose bed, and look, look, there are a lot of little devils in red jackets dancing all round it." A glass of whisky with a sedative in it helped matters considerably, but he had another and very severe bout of D.T.'s.

Soon after that they went to America, and he died there twelve months later. The widow, a very attractive woman, turned up here again years afterwards, and described the difficulties attending bringing back to England the husband's embalmed body, keeping it by the captain's request a secret from the passengers, and refusing no fewer than three proposals on the way over!

Sometimes interesting accidents were brought to the surgery: a gamekeeper from Street Court who had been stung over the jugular by a wasp; his master, who had contrived to get trout hooks deeply embedded in his hand; and a more unusual patient, a favourite collie that, nosing about faggot wood on the Tarrs had been bitten on the lip by an adder. The keeper, a big burly fellow, collapsed and nearly died, but eventually recovered, and the collie did too, though it was very groggy for some time.

Wasps were always a plague in the fruit season, and a local gardener came for advice one morning to ask how he could best destroy a strong nest of them.

He was given a bottle of poison, told to insert the neck in the entrance hole deeply enough to go out of sight, and then to cover it up with a piece of turf. However, he came back again next morning, to say that the plan just did not work, for the wasps were as lively as ever, and in investigating matters he had been stung by two of them.

A visit was accordingly paid to the nest, and it was discovered that the silly fellow had thought it quite unnecessary to uncork the bottle before covering it up with turf. When the joke leaked out, after his telling a friend all about it, it was a long time before he heard the last of that little exploit.

As the two sons grew up they became very useful in collecting eggs, but the annual visits to the large wood at Oaker were never looked forward to with pleasure, as all three of them spent most of the time clearing cobwebs from their faces, as they seemed to be hanging from every tree as they made their way through the under-growth.

Presently they passed an oak tree with an ash growing out of it, and it was noticed that the bark of the oak was covered with hair nailed to it, and upon inspection this proved to be human.

The keeper was met shortly afterwards, and the fact mentioned to him, and it was then discovered that it was the keeper himself who had put the hair there.

It appeared that there is a local superstition that if the hair of a person suffering from a throat disease is fixed to the trunk of an oak which has an ash growing out of it, the owner of the hair will rapidly become cured.

The keeper added that local people often gave him hair to fix to this tree, (the only one of its kind in the district), and he had even received hair from India, South Australia, and other places abroad for this purpose.

Soon after starting in practice the Dr. was appointed Medical Officer to the local lodge of Oddfellows, and once a year joined in the dinner following their church parade.

This was an important event, for practically every working man in the village was a member, and they always marched to church four deep, headed by a brass band, and a huge hand painted banner stretching across the road, and depicting the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Each man wore a broad coloured silk scarf with its fringe falling far below the waist, and carrying a white wand. The latter were used to form an archway as they entered the lych gate, and on coming out of church, and finally they disappeared under it into the large tent where dinner was laid out.

Some of the courses were evidently a little puzzling, for one man was seen to add a large helping of calves-foot jelly to his hot roast beef; and when it was time for the sweet course, another asked for "sum o' that 'ere pudden wi' the pegs in it", and carefully laid them on one side of his plate, being convinced that they were made of wood.

The Rector also used to attend the dinner, and told the Dr. an amusing tale about a man who was the tenant of a big estate near Leominster.

It seems that one Sunday morning this man was walking down the avenue on his way to the parish church, when a rook overhead dropped an unsavoury mess upon his glossy top hat. When he got back, he was so incensed that he sat down and wrote to his landlord, demanding that the rooks should be exterminated. His feelings may be imagined when he received a letter in reply, regretting that it was not considered advisable to wipe out the whole rookery, but that the estate keeper should come to see him, and if he would then point out the particular bird that had done the damage, he would be only too pleased to have it shot.

The egg collection went steadily ahead, and people began to come to see it, and sometimes brought cases of stuffed birds, and curios to hang on the walls. Many of the latter were brought to Kingsland by T.R.I, now Port Surgeon at the naval coaling station of Perim, a sun baked spot near the African coast.

Curiosities sometimes occurred amongst eggs, for the clutch of a house sparrow contained one which was no larger than a pea, and a whitethroat provided an egg that was even smaller.

Once too the village carpenter brought the section of a tree which he had just sawn up. Before doing this one of the limbs looked just as complete as the others, but upon being sawn into it was discovered that the inside was hollow, and that many years before a nuthatch had made its nest there. The interior of the nest contained the usual lining of dead leaves, bits of bark and grass, and on these were still resting the broken shells. In the course of years, 70 or 80 at least, the entrance was grown over and the nest completely enclosed and preserved.

Not long after they qualified both the Dr. and T.R.I. became Freemasons. The latter was, after practising in Abergavenny, given a government appointment in Perim. He often spent short leaves crossing over to Africa to study native customs, and always said how wide spread Freemasonry was and how very helpful it had been to him travelling about.

The Dr. took a keen interest in it too, joined a Lodge in Leominster, and in due course became its W. M. Then he was approached from Kington, and pressed to form a Lodge there, which he eventually did, and was presented with a Founder's Medal. This consisted of their Arrow Bridge painted on ivory, and set in gold: an interesting and treasured ornament, always worn at their dinners.

The trains from Kington did not run very conveniently, and it was not at all unusual on Lodge nights for him to miss the last one, and then to walk the ten miles home in the dark down the railway line.

But he always was a great walker, and there was not an inch of the countryside that he did not know.

In one terrible influenza epidemic he completely tired out both horses, and rather than take them out again he decided to do a strenuous round on foot. He took food along to simplify matters, and on getting home late explained that he had covered more than 20 miles of country, which included climbing Yatton Hill, crossing over to Bircher Common, and then tramping back along the road from Orleton home.

The Yatton Hill portion is a reminder of an amusing incident in connection with it. About half way up there were two or three cottages, and in one of these lived a patient who was being visited from time to time, and on one occasion the Dr. remarked upon the awkwardness of the situation of the cottages, as water had to be fetched from the valley below, several hundreds of yards away, and carried painfully uphill. "Well sir," the old fellow replied, "it never bothers me, for I doesn't drink wayter and I never washes, so I keeps pretty comfortable."

The Croase was gradually furnished with pieces picked up at local sales, the prices being paid in the open market for what are now valuable antiques being today considered fantastic: for instance a handsome large gate-legged table 10/-, and a Queen Anne tallboy for 17/6. Fifty years later the latter was valued at anything between £75 and £100.

But country folk set no value upon old things in those days, for upon seeing a carved oak Bible Box brought into the house; one of the maids was heard to say, "why, we had one of them things at home, and we kep' rabbits in it till it fell to bits.

A massive oak sideboard with a tall cupboard was made for the Croase by Wall of the station, a clever cabinet-maker fond of turning out furniture in Elm, a wood with a level grain but rather liable to warp.

At a large sale at the Rectory he succeeded in buying a massive and handsome double dinner service, and an oil painting of the Church with a French movement inside striking the hours, and this linked up with the clock face. These are still family treasures, but some years ago the latter led to a curious and rather amusing misunderstanding.

The clock in the picture needed attention, and as it was too big and too precious to take into Leominster, the groom was told to call on the usual watchmaker, and to ask him to come out to the Croase to clean and oil the doctor's church clock.

Probably both groom and watchmaker got the message muddled up, for the latter came out to Kingsland, secured the key of the belfry, and gave the huge clock works there a wonderful overhaul!

Nothing was known of this until a bill for the job was sent in to the Rector, and it took quite a lot of investigation before it was discovered how the mistake had arisen.

Until he died Lord Bateman always sent for the Dr. to attend himself and his large staff of servants, and they had many chats together about the countryside. One of their discussions about Shobdon Marsh led to an interesting result.

There was a legend that a little more than 100 years ago a man and his wife lived in the marsh somewhere near the wood. The whole area was practically a bog, almost impenetrable in winter. The man was always called Dick of the Delf, and maintained his family by keeping a cow and two or three sheep and pigs on the adjoining ground. The cottage itself was supposed to be built in the middle of the bog and approached by a path difficult to find.

The Dr. was up at the Marsh one day in an unusually dry Spring, hunting for curlew's eggs, when he suddenly came across the remains of what had evidently been a solidly built hovel, with stones lying all around, and traces of a path running through the bog. The next time that he saw him he mentioned this to Lord Bateman, and they came to the conclusion that it was Dick's old hut that was now lying scattered over the mud.

A curious thing happened after Lord Bateman died, as upon being sent for hurriedly to Shobdon Court, he heard an extraordinary tale from the cook and one of the housemaids, both of whom had retired to bed, and were ill and hysterical.

It appeared that two nights before the cook had seen a man's figure in the long passage leading from the kitchens to the other rooms. She thought that someone had lost his way, and catching up the man she placed her hand on his arm to stop him. Her hand went right through the arm, the figure turned round, and she recognised her master, who was then, unknown to her, lying dead in London.

The next night both the cook and this particular housemaid were on the staircase, when the same figure came up the stairs, and brushed past them as they shrank back against the wall. After that, for a time, Lord Bateman's ghost was constantly seen, sometimes by two or three, and nearly always coming out of the room where the family silver was kept.

The mention of Shobdon Marsh is a reminder of an interesting experience that the Dr. had up there.

At the edge of the wood there are too small shallow pools, not more than 20 feet in diameter, filled with clear water resting on what looks like white mud, but which upon inspection is apparently thin silt, or peat held in suspension. These are called Lady Pools, the belief being that years before a tragedy occurred there.

The country folk always said that these pools were bottomless, and the Dr. had seen a 20 foot pole pushed out of sight. However one day when he was up there he determined to test the depth a little further. In an adjoining field was a farmer at work on the land and with his help a stone weighing a good two hundredweight was tied to the end of a 60 foot waggon rope, and went out of sight. Another rope of the same length was bent on to the first one, and that vanished too. The ropes were recovered after that, and the depth plumbing given up as a bad job.

Sometimes a curious experience leads to something quite unexpected, and equally interesting. After visiting a patient on the outskirts of Shobdon, the Dr walked his horse along the stone wall fringing the spinney which ran down to the main road, as he had heard that occasionally a pure-white sparrow could be seen there. He was very delighted when the bird in question suddenly flew on top of the wall within 20 yards of him, and he watched it for several minutes before it flew away.

He was on the point of setting off for home again, when he saw a movement in the grass a little further along, and on reaching the spot discovered that it was a kitten which had caught and was playing with, a slow-worm. The victim put up with this for a few moments, and then tired of the whole proceeding just snapped off its tail, vanished through a crack in the wall, while the kitten went on playing with the tail, which for a time wriggled about as if it was alive.

The slow-worm in question acted upon instinct but animals and birds sometimes reason too, as the following tale will show.

Going into the orchard one morning, the Dr. noticed several jackdaws hard at work gathering up tufts of donkey's hair from the ground where it had been rolling. Apparently one of the birds somehow discovered where the hair had come from, for next day it was found at the other end of the orchard, standing on the donkey's back tugging out hair until its beak was crammed with it, and then flying away towards the church. A visit was accordingly paid to the belfry, and three or four jackdaws' nests were discovered there, all of them entirely lined with donkey hair.

It is always a good sign when children and dogs take to a person, and that was borne out once at Leinthal where a patient was being visited. A lurcher ran out growling from a cottage, but ended by licking the hand held out for him to sniff. The real joke was though when the dog's owner came along, for he said "that's all right doctor, he'll be friendly enough with you, but he always bites parsons and tramps!"

The Dr. loved children, and rarely went out in his trap without having one or two with him. Every summer he used to raise money to take all the youngsters, 50 or 60 of them, to a picnic on Bircher Common, and the farmers willingly lent waggons and horses to get them there. Organised games and amusements with little prizes made a wonderful day for them, as children were then satisfied with a simpler and a happier life, which the restless young folk today would never understand.

Then the return journey in the evening, with them all singing songs; and the ringing cheers that resounded through the village, as each left for home with a final little gift. Those days are gone for ever, but they are good to look back upon.

Of course some of the youngsters were little rips too, and thought it great fun to ring the surgery bell, and then bolt round the corner to watch a puzzled maid open the door, only to find nobody there.

A series of false alarms was the cause one day of the Dr. dashing out complete with his riding whip, to chastise the offenders.

Unfortunately it was a genuine patient this time, for there on the door step was a startled old woman who was rather scared at the irate figure that had flung the door open so savagely. Explanations followed, and they both had a good laugh at the mistake.

What proved to be one of the most important happenings in the history of the village was when a fire occurred at the Angel Inn. All that could be done was to man lines of buckets from pumps and wells, and a good deal of damage was done before the fire was put out.

Seeing the necessity of something better than this, the Dr. called two or three friends together, told them of his intention to build up funds for the purchase of a fire engine, and with his usual energy set to work at once to carry this out.

The large granary at the Croase was turned into an excellent theatre; seating accommodation was provided for 400 people; emergency staircases were fitted in case of fire; and a stage was erected at one end. The lighting was adequate too, for overhead lamps and footlights with reflectors lit up the stage; wings and scenery were provided as required, the much admired drop scene being actually painted by a friend who had exhibited several times at the Royal Academy,

Concerts were held sometimes, but theatricals became the great feature, and were looked forward to by the whole surrounding district. Starting with farces and simple plays, the people taking part went steadily forward, and finally obtained distinction in dramas such as "The Ticket of Leave Man", "Our Boys", and "Caste". Indeed three or four of them were borrowed to act with professionals both at Malvern and at Hereford, and did credit to the training that they had received in Kingsland.

The proceeds of these various entertainments provided the bed-rock upon which the fund was slowly built, but it was going to be a lengthy business as the required fire engine with all the necessary equipment was so costly.

Then a generous old lady in the village sent for the Dr. one day, and offered to buy and present to the parish a manual fire engine, if he in turn would build a Fire Station at the Croase, would purchase the necessary extra equipment from his available funds, and act as captain to the new brigade. Thus the fire service in Kingsland came into being, functioned splendidly from the start, and saved from time to time property in the district to the value of hundreds of pounds.

The Dr. did not realise, when he agreed to the old lady's request, that he as captain would have to turn out to fires for the next 35 years!

Eventually the manual engine began to show signs of wear, and it was decided to sell it, add the available funds which were still building up, and buy a steamer.

The Dr. now thought it well to retire, and let a younger man take his place, for in addition to building up a really reliable fire service, he had allowed his own horses to take the engine out whenever it was needed. As a matter of fact both horses got as excited as everybody else when the fire bell rang out, and once when the Dr. and T.R.I, were driving back from a visit to the surgery in Orleton, the horse, as it neared Oaker Wood, suddenly pricked up its ears, took the bit in its teeth, and completed the journey at a gallop. They had both failed to hear the fire bell when they neared the wood, but the horse hadn't, and excitedly bolted home to share in the fun.

Soon after the manual had been acquired there was a fire at Holgate, and the contents of a large Dutch barn were burnt out, but the remainder of the buildings were saved.

The Dr. was in charge of the brigade, and noticed that a lot of ducks went on grubbing for food quite near and undisturbed by the fire blazing away within a few yards of them.

After the fire had been burning some time his attention was again drawn to the ducks by seeing one of them race across the yard, seize something, and then quickly gobble it up. A moment later and a second duck sprinted in the opposite direction, and then two ducks raced each other to something in which they were keenly interested. He moved a little closer, and then realised what was happening: the fire had such a firm hold on the blazing corn that it had become too hot for the mice which infested it, with the result that each in turn was making for the shelter of the buildings on the other side of the fold. Unfortunately to do this they had to cross the yard near where the ducks were feeding, and as fast as the mice appeared, they were immediately run down and promptly gobbled up.

The ducks had the time of their lives, for although quite a number of mice tried to run the gauntlet very few succeeded in getting through.

Two pigs released from an adjoining sty lost their heads and tried to dash into the burning building, but the hose was turned on them, causing each to produce a wonderful somersault, and they galloped off to a safer place, still squealing for all they were worth.

Unusual incidents occurred sometimes in connection with hunting for eggs, practically all of which were now used to exchange for rarer kinds, as the Dr. had always set his face against buying any. Most of these incidents are recorded elsewhere, and would be of interest only to ornithologists, but one or two are worth repeating for the benefit of people who would not even know the difference between a crow and a rook!

One of these was a blunder that led to a result that seems hardly possible, the Dr had found a plover's nest containing two unusually handsomely marked eggs, and made a note in his diary to leave the nest alone for a couple of days in order that the clutch might be completed.

He then gave precise instructions to his son with regard to the situation of the nest, indicating the gate into the field, and the distance to be covered before the 17th furrow was reached. This was to be followed up for 125 yards, which would bring the searcher right on top of the nest.

The orders were carried out, and the nest in the place indicated, but the eggs did not appear to be unusual at all. The Dr. was very puzzled to find that he could be so mistaken about the nest that he was so keen on getting, but on going carefully into the matter, discovered that his precise instructions had been carried and distances carefully stepped, but that the son had gone to the wrong field!

The real clutch was secured next day, and all four eggs were covered with immense black blotches and splashed, so handsome that they were promptly added to the collection.

It is sometimes hard to convince people that birds have been known to use the power of thought, even if it happens to be in strict contradiction to their natural instinct.

One Spring day the Dr. was walking through a small spinney with a keeper, when he found the nest of a blackbird on the ground, the edge of the nest level with the surface, and in just such a position as a skylark would choose. Within 100 yards he found another similar nest and two thrushes, and the keeper told him that he had found several more, all flat on the ground like the others. As the spinney was composed of small trees and bushes, none of which held a nest as might have been expected, an explanation was asked for. It then appeared that the owner of the little wood had made constant raids upon blackbirds' and thrushes' nests the two preceding seasons, as they destroyed so much of his fruit, and the birds apparently realised that they must select safer nesting places in future.

Apart from concerts and theatricals the big room already mentioned was often used for dances the guests, probably numbering anything up to 100, would give themselves up to an evening's enjoyment. A string orchestra provided music and the stage was screened off by the drop scene, which at the appropriate moment was raised, revealing tables laden with good things for the hungry folk below.

At one of these dances there was a man whom we will call Mr. W., a frightful fop; he always seemed to think that if he appeared perpetually bored he had achieved the height of distinction.

Noticing that he was not dancing much, the Dr. as host said that a girl in the room was a stranger, and rather short of partners in consequence, and that he would like to introduce him to her. Upon which Mr. W: in a very bored voice drawled out "Oh yes doctor, I don't mind, twot her out." Unfortunately the suggested victim was seated near enough to overhear this, and taking an instant dislike to the young man, in answer to a request for a dance, crushingly replied "I'm afraid not doctor, as my pwogwamme is full, twot him back again." That lost nothing in the telling of it afterwards!

One night when friends had been asked in to dinner, the question of practical jokes was raised, and the listeners were told of two highly successful ones played upon other guests by young people staying at the Croase at the same time.

The first of these consisted of putting a tin box containing a reel of black cotton under the appropriate bed, and carrying the end of the cotton beneath the door where it could be easily manipulated. Giving the unfortunate man time to get drowsy, the cotton was then drawn slowly in, making queer rattling noises which for some time was attributed to mice, and sworn at accordingly. At last the exasperated sleeper jumped out of bed, hunted everywhere for the mice, and soon discovered the trick that had been played on him, while his tormentors departed to their rooms highly delighted at the success of their prank.

On another occasion the pillow of the selected victim was smothered in flour, and when he at last hurried down to breakfast next morning his wonderful head of curly black hair was now completely grey. "I cannot brush this out of my hair" he wailed, "how on earth can I get rid of it?" Solemnly his hostess said "There is only one thing to do, and that is to rub thoroughly into the scalp the white of a couple of eggs; I will go and get them ready for you."

The poor wretch did as he was told, and in a few moments the top of his head was turned into a wonderful pudding. How he got rid of the masses of dough in his hair was never revealed, but until this was done he must have been a fearful and inspiring sight.

But a practical joke was shortly to be played which brought an emergency patient to the Dr. and nearly had serious results.

To the various card parties in the district a popular old fellow, whom we will call Mr. S., was always asked, and it was a boast of his that although he enjoyed like everyone else a glass of hot grog, he had never in his life been drunk. So some of the thoughtless men decided that it would be great fun to get the better of him in this respect, and laid their plans accordingly.

Another card party was arranged, and when drinks were handed round a glass of hot toddy was mixed to S's liking, and placed by his side. After a few sips he decided that the mixture was too strong, and added more water to it from the kettle on the hob. More sips and more water followed each other pretty frequently, and S. began to hate himself for appearing so fussy and kept on filling up from the kettle. At last it was time to go, glasses were drained, goodbyes were said, and S. stepped out into a keen frosty air, and - dropped like a log.

The thoughtless wretches had filled up the kettle with pure gin, which of course looked just like water, and the poor old fellow had to be carried home, and was quite ill as the result of their senseless prank.

An almost unbelievable occurrence befell the Dr. and his younger son, when they visited a huge lime tree near Street Court, as amongst the variety of birds nesting in it, quite often a brown owl could be found there too.

It had been a long wet period, the clay soil was in a very soft and muddy condition, and it looked as if someone had been climbing there, for the bark was quite muddy for some little distance up the trunk of the tree.

It was however decided to climb up to the hole usually occupied by the owls, and this by measurement afterwards was found to be exactly 35 feet from the ground. But the cavity had been considerably enlarged, and the new tenants had taken possession, for there sitting on their haunches, side by side, were three fox cubs, nearly half grown. Next day the find was reported to the estate keeper, who until he also climbed the tree refused to believe such a thing possible. He was however soon convinced of the truth of the tale, for though the vixen had carried the cubs down the tree in her mouth after this disturbance, she left behind a vile smell, the legs of fowls and pheasants, and many odd bones and feathers. Photographs and an account of this were sent to "The Field" and provoked quite a lot of interest and discussion.

When the two sons were at school at Lucton as day boys, they had of course to take food with them in their satchels, and there was nothing they loved so much as a roly-poly pudding cold, or as it is sometimes called plum duff. They used to ask for this sometimes to for their midday dinner on Sundays, and this, with a little sherry flavouring the white sauce was always a favourite dish.

This plum duff, a large sausage shaped grey pudding plentifully studded with currants, always provided the Dr. with one of his stock jokes before it was cut.

It appeared that an old sea captain from Edinburgh was feeding with a friend and his 1st mate when a massive plum duff was placed in front of him on the table. "Do you like pudding ends?" asked the captain of his guest, who thanked him and said he did not care much about them. "Well that's a pity" replied the skipper, "because me and my mate does," and cutting the plum duff through the middle, the captain, to his guest's dismay put half of it on the mate's plate, and the remainder on his own!

After nearly 40 years spent in practice in Kingsland without a single week's holiday, an accident occurred on Lugg Bridge which at last compelled the Dr. to take one.

With his small grand daughter they had just arrived in the trap on the crown of the bridge, (very much narrower at that time), when a carelessly driven motor van ran into them, damaged the trap and both its inmates were flung out. The child was unhurt, but the Dr. was thrown against the parapet, dislocated his shoulder, and badly wrenched all the surrounding muscles.

That meant months of rest and treatment with an old friend, a Bristol doctor, and in the meantime the practice at home was carried on by locums.

After he had recovered from this, and was back at work again, he suffered another and most extraordinary accident, which might easily have had more serious results.

There had been several days of bitter hard frost, and reaching up for the stock bottle of ammonia in the dispensary he found that the contents were completely solidified. So the bottle was taken into the kitchen, placed near the cooking range, and eventually partially thawed out.

Carrying it back into the surgery, and vigorously shaking it as he did so, his foot slipped, his hand holding the bottle crashed against the door handle, and the bottle at once exploded, smothering the Dr.'s face and neck with a mass of partly frozen ammonia. Luckily, the cook heard the crash outside, rushed to see what was the matter, and had the presence of mind to wipe off the stuff from his face with her apron. Very gradually he recovered his breath, but without her help it might easily have been the end of him.

A much more amusing accident occurred when he was writing out his annual M.O.H. Report one day, when he was hammering away at it, and his wife was writing letters at the table by his side.

Presently there was a violent ring at the surgery bell, and he had to go out to attend to a patient who had just been brought in with a broken arm. The wife, a short little person well under five feet in height, was too low in her chair to write comfortably, so she whipped the seat out of the chair he had been using, put it on top of her own, and managed much better after that.

After a long time the Dr. returned to get on with his report, hastily pulled his chair out from under the table, plumped himself down on the seat, and - went right through its framework, and stuck there! Naturally the wife made things worse by shrieking with laughter, but the groom had to be called in before he could be extracted, and in the end he was released little the worse for a little exploit which never failed to raise a grin when afterwards related.

Whenever possible the Dr. loved to spend a day by the river, as he was a very keen fisherman, and rarely failed to get a dish of trout.

He was on Lugg one day when a very high wind got up, making it almost impossible to cast properly, but he got his line on the water somehow, and knowing exactly where the fish lay, he managed to secure eight or nine.

Presently a voice behind him called out "have you had any luck?", to which he replied "yes, I've got a few." The man in the field behind, a complete stranger, then asked if he might see them, evidently thinking that the creel was empty, it being quite impossible to catch fish under such difficult conditions. So the Dr. turned his basket out upon the grass, and the man who had been fishing the water higher up without a single rise, then went away, green with envy.

The fisherman in question was staying at the Oak Hotel in Leominster, and in the evening was talking to people in the bar, and saying that he had had a blank day, as it was quite hopeless to try to cast against such a high wind. He then went on to say that while up there he had come across the most amazing exhibition of fishing that he had ever seen, for the man he watched managed to get his line on to the water, but with a splash as if he was throwing stones; then he added that the fish came up to see what all the row was about, and before they knew anything more they were hooked and quickly netted.

Two or three leading questions were put to the man; and then his informant said with a grin, "Oh, that was evidently Dr. Williams, who is one of the cleverest fishermen anywhere round here." This was passed on to the Dr. afterwards, much to his amusement.

Accidents in the country are fairly common, but two of them brought into the surgery showed such an amazing amount of stupidity that they are well worth mentioning here.

It seems that, as was not unusual in those days, a farm lad who slept in the house always wore a celluloid collar. The button hole gradually broke away, so each morning he used to tie it up with a bit of string.

On the night in question however when he went to bed he found that he could not get his collar off, for the knot in the string had jammed, and he had no knife. What was he to do? Suddenly he had a brain wave, lifted up the candle, and put the flame against the obstinate knot. The collar of course blazed up at once, and the lad was rather badly burnt before he could extinguish the flames. However he got all right in time, but swore that he would never wear a celluloid collar again.

The other accident was even more stupid, for it is quite possible that the farm boy did not know that celluloid is so frightfully inflammable.

At Waterloo Mill, a farm on the outskirts of the village, men were at work threshing corn with a traction engine, the fire box of which had constantly to be re-fuelled. This gave a bright idea to a boy of 15 or 16 who was watching them, and he accordingly galloped off home, annexed his father's copper powder flask, and returned to the engine.

He thought that this was a wonderful chance for the display of some fireworks, so inserting the end of a long stick into the fire box, he pressed back the release in the powder flask, and into the open cavity inserted the red-hot end of the stick.

One of the men on the rick of straw which they were building up nearby called out, "d'you 'ear that Bill, somebody's a shooting?" To which his mate replied "yes, I a 'eard it too, and I saw the bird fly over th' end of the rick." Then they heard groans down below, and upon investigating matters discovered a frightened and damaged boy, very sorry for himself, and howling.

He was more lucky than he realised, for the explosion might easily have killed him, while all that had happened was that the hand holding the flask was badly scorched, and the thumb dislocated and lying back upon his wrist.

The bird seen flying over the rick was of course part of the powder flask, and if one wanted to make an incendiary bomb, the technique could not be improved upon, though the insertion of a length of fuse would certainly be an improvement upon the end of a red-hot stick!

Tragedies in the bird world are not unusual, but the Dr. had the good fortune not only to prevent one, but at the same time to refute the assertion of people who insist that a cuckoo lays its egg by sitting on the nest of the selected foster parent.

He was out one day with a son looking for a few clutches of sand martins eggs, and the latter was lying flat on the edge of a high bank over the river, in order that he could peer into the different holes. Suddenly in a hole within a few inches of his nose he saw two little shining eyes, and a great red mouth which was slightly hissing.

Upon investigating matters he found that the hole was occupied by a pair of pied wagtails, and in the nest was a half grown cuckoo absolutely imprisoned, for the mouth of the hole was much too small to allow more than its head to pass through. Before he left he enlarged the hole sufficiently to enable the young bird to get its freedom when ready to fly. The steep bank was quite sheer down to the edge of the water, and the egg could only have been inserted in the nest by the parent cuckoo carrying it there in its beak.

Once since an imprisoned fully fledged cuckoo was found in a pied wagtail's nest in a very small hole in a pollard willow tree, and if this had not been enlarged with a mallet and chisel, the young bird must have died there. The position of the hole was such that there again the egg could only have been inserted by the hen cuckoo carrying it there in its beak.

Only once was the Dr. really puzzled by the identification of some eggs sent to him.

One of the sons living in Leicestershire had bought a tortoise for the children, and it was one day discovered digging in a flower bed, and then apparently burying something. So the youngsters began digging too, and soon unearthed three eggs that the reptile had laid.

This was a wonderful opportunity, so the eggs were carefully packed up, and posted to the Croase, with a request that they might be blown. Back by return came a postcard from the Dr. which read "I have no intention of trying to blow sugar imitations of the eggs of the Little Owl".

It was then explained that they really were true eggs, and he succeeded in blowing them, but afterwards upon being told what they were said that the shell was so thick that it could hardly be drilled at all, and that neither of the eggs contained any yolk at all.

Some years after the Dr. had been in practice in Kingsland, queer occurrences took place at the Croase which have never been explained.

The house is very old, part of it late Elizabethan; originally black and white, but cased in brick and added to by a great grandfather many years ago.

When the older boy was about three years old he used to sleep in a tiny dressing room, in order to be near his father's and mother's bedroom. Often in the mornings he used to tell them of a little old lady who came and sat on his bed in the night, but this they put down to his imagination.

In the following Spring an aunt who had been very ill came here from London, to take three months' rest, and she was put in the room that the child had previously occupied.

One night the Dr. heard her bedroom door open with a click, as it always did, then footsteps and the rustle of a dress as it passed his door.

The footsteps passed on down the stairs, and of these, which are of polished oak and very old, some creak when stepped upon, and the baize door at their foot opens and shuts with a peculiar click. After a few minutes the baize door opened again and then shut, the stairs creaked, and footsteps went back into the little room from which they had come.

The wife was roused, and asked to go in to see if anything was wrong with the invalid, as she was quite unfit to be moving about. To her surprise the aunt was fast asleep in bed, and when awakened declared that she had been asleep all night, and that she certainly had never left the room.

After this the same thing happened frequently, and on several occasions when the footsteps had vanished downstairs, the wife visited all the rooms quietly, family, guests and servants, but nobody was missing; then, shortly after going back to bed again, the usual sounds would be heard as before, indicating that 'it' had returned.

One night there was a card party, and the wife who had received a letter in the morning that she had not had time to open, slipped away about 11 o'clock, went in to the aunt's bedroom, (vacant for the time being as the aunt was much better and playing cards downstairs), and soon became buried in her letter.

Presently she heard the baize door open and shut, and stealthy footsteps come creeping up the stairs; as they got nearer, she thinking someone was about to play a joke upon her, called out cheerfully "I can hear you coming, so you need not think of trying to frighten me".

Then there was dead silence.

She repeated this, and taking the candle went out into the corridor, only to find nothing there, although certain of the stairs still creaked as if someone was stepping on them.

Then for the first time she remembered the footsteps in the night, and terrified rushed downstairs to join the others.

In the summer her father came to stay at the Croase, and also a very intimate friend, a House Surgeon at Guy's Hospital. They of course were told about these queer happenings, and both laughed heartily at such nonsense.

However, one night the usual performance took place, the wife as usual looking in at every room, and finding everyone fast asleep. In the morning her father was down first, and said "Oh, Robert, I was so sorry to hear you have to get up to a case in the night, but luckily you were not kept in the surgery very long." To this the Dr. replied "but I was not called up in the night." "Oh, but I heard you myself; I distinctly heard you go downstairs, I heard some of the steps creak, the baize door open and shut with a click, and after ten minutes or so I heard you go back to your bedroom again."

Just as he concluded his sentence, the friend hurried into the breakfast room, and called out "Hello doctor, are you very sleepy this morning?" Upon being asked what he meant, he said "well, I didn't hear the night bell, but I did hear you go downstairs, and some of those beastly steps go off with a bang, and the door at the bottom open and shut; then in a few minutes I heard you go back again, supposed you had got ready to go out in the trap, so turned over and went to sleep again.

The wife stared at them rather blankly, and said "now perhaps you will both believe what you have been told about this."

In the end the Dr. some time afterwards followed the visitation downstairs, and thoroughly searched house, out-buildings, and garden, without finding anything unusual. On returning to his room, he sat up listening for a long time, but the footsteps never came back up the staircase, and never again was anything abnormal heard in the house.

A curious accident happened to a patient near Leinthal, which was so extraordinary that an account of it afterwards appeared in a London newspaper.

A woodcutter had unfortunately dislocated a shoulder several times, the result being that under strain there was always a tendency for the same thing to happen again. He was at work with other men who were felling a large oak tree, and volunteered to strap on climbing irons and fix the rope high up in order that the tree could be brought down just where it was wanted.

For the benefit of anyone not acquainted with these irons, it should be explained that each consists of a narrow upright bar, which is strapped under the knee on the outside of the leg. The lower part is again strapped round the ankle while the foot rests on a flat stirrup, which is prolonged into a curved sharp hook: thus as a climber drives each hook alternately deeply into the bark, the weight is rested upon it while the arms secure a fresh purchase round the trunk above.

All went well until the man was 50 or 60 feet from the ground, and then with one spike driven into the tree, he incautiously raised the damaged arm as far as he could reach up, when it at once slipped out from its socket.

The men below could not help, as there was no other pair of irons, and no ladder available. So the wretched man clung there, with the whole of his weight depending on one foot and a finger grip rapidly tiring.

He stuck this out for nearly half an hour, while ladders were being brought from a farm some distance away, and in the end was got down safely, but he took care never to climb again.

It was not often that the Dr. had his leg pulled, but this was once done very neatly by an old fellow whom he was attending in Eyton.

When he got to the cottage he found his patient at work in the garden, so he greeted him with a cheery "good morning John, I'm very glad to see you're better." And the old man replied "Oh yes doctor, thankee I be, but I wish you'd have a word wi' the missus, for she's got a awful bad mouth."

So the Dr. makes his way up to the cottage and the door is opened by the old dame in question. "Good morning Betty" says the Dr., "I'm glad to see that John's better, but he tells me that you are under the weather, and that you've got a bad mouth. What is the matter?"

The dame promptly exploded, "Oh, the old wretch" she cried out, we've had an awful row this morning, and the old sinner said e'd make me sorry I 'adnt kep my temper."

The Dr. grinned, and went back to his trap, but he noticed that John had vanished until the gathering storm blew over.

One last anecdote will bring these records to an end.

His younger son had borrowed the Drs. gun to go out at dawn to try to secure some wood pigeons as they came over to feed on the corn. He got one or two, and then decided to return home to breakfast, touching on a section of the river on his way back.

As he did so a couple of wild duck got up, and to his great joy he brought both down with his first right and left.

When he got back to the Croase the Dr. heard his footsteps and went out to meet him. "Have you had any luck?" A wild duck was brought out from each side pocket and held aloft.

A few more questions naturally followed, and then the Dr. said "you young devil, you have not got a gun licence, you've been poaching, and it's two days before they come in to season. Put them in the larder quick." The Dr. was a good sportsman, but he was nearly as pleased as the boy at such a piece of luck.

And now the end of the road is in sight; the Dr. is 84, has sold his practice and retired, and has resigned all his public appointments.

The question of the hobby which for 60 years had served him so well was difficult, for the collection required a very large room for the housing of all the cabinets, and it was quite hopeless for either of the sons to consider taking it over. So it was reluctantly decided to sell it, and it realised £400.

The greatest authority in the world on cuckoo problems came down to stay at the Croase, and took all the cuckoo clutches, 134 of them. Then he brought down other collector friends too, and in the end the whole collection containing 3800 clutches of eggs was dispersed.

Altogether there were 374 different species of British birds' eggs, the rarest being that of the Golden Eagle.

In some cases intense specialising had taken place, as for instance with thrushes, where 32 clutches showed every gradation from nearly white eggs with no markings at all, to a very deep blue, with heavy blotches.

Thus a life time hobby came to an end, while for many years the Dr, had been recognised as an authority upon anything connected with ornithology.

And then the end came, and a rather wonderful end too, for after a very happy Christmas with friends and relations dining with him, he had a final stroke in the night, and slipped away in his sleep.

The press published a long account of his life and activities, (which will be found on a separate page at the end), but the country folk showed a much deeper appreciation in their simple way, for go where you would, you never heard of him being spoken of as Dr. Williams, or even just as the doctor, but instead his name was always mentioned affectionately as

DOCTOR BOB

Could anyone ask for a happier memorial than that?

PRESS REPORT - JANUARY 1937

It is no exaggeration to say that for over 60 years no name has been more closely associated with Kingsland than that of Dr. Robert Williams.

He was educated at Hereford Cathedral School and qualified at Edinburgh. He was Medical Officer of Health for Leominster Borough for over 50 years, and upon his retirement glowing tributes were paid to his work.

Not only was he a beloved physician to a wide district, but he was also a staunch friend and shrewd counsellor to many homes.

Few men have given their lives more wholeheartedly or in more capacities to the service of their fellows. His activities and energies were remarkable, and his interests manifold - Freemasonry, Ornithology, Sports and Athletics of all kinds knew him as an outstanding figure.

A prominent Freemason, Dr. Williams was the founder of the Arrow Lodge in Kington, and was a Past Provincial Grand Officer of the Province of Herefordshire.

One of the features in the life of Dr. Williams was his interest in dramatic art. His activity in this sphere was very pronounced, and for more than 20 years he produced plays in the Croase Room in aid of local charities.

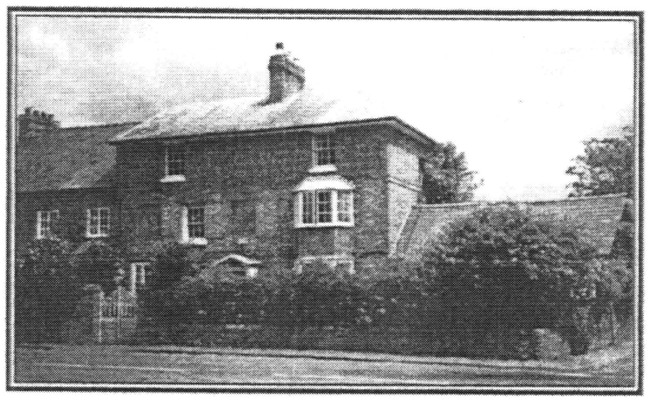
It must be remembered that in those days there was not the same interest in the drama as in later years, and consequently difficulties were many. However Dr. Williams persevered, and all who remember those delightful evenings will recall the vast amount of hard work and training necessary to produce such excellent results.

Another absorbing interest of Dr. Williams' life was the Fire Brigade which he founded, and in which for 35 years he acted as Captain. The old manual engine was eventually replaced by a steamer, largely obtained as a result of the efforts of Dr. Williams to obtain one.

He was always a great friend of the children in the parish whom he loved, and from time to time he spent much care and thought in organising outings for them, and this was an enterprise highly appreciated alike by both parents and children. Any charity or worthy cause always found him eager to help.

There are many who have lost one of their best friends - a man whose integrity was never questioned, who could be quite ruthless in his championship of what he believed to be right, and very faithful in rebuke when needed: for all these things the village loved him.

Thus a long life of work and example has passed from us, but it has left a mark that will last for many years, and that will always be a real encouragement to those who knew him.



Dr Robert Williams was born in the Croase House -
his Grandfather's - where he finally died.

Additional Note
by R C Williams July 2003

This is an OCR transcription, made by the above, of a limited print booklet published by:

Bob and Barbara Williams

The text in the booklet was written by
Edward Robert Williams, Dr Robert Williams' elder son.