

Hon. Ruri-Decanal Organising Secretary for the Church Defence and Instruction Committee-- an office which, during the twelve years she held it, afforded her perhaps the most strenuous work of her life. It entailed, amongst other things, a tremendous amount of walking, for the Rural Deanery then comprised 24 parishes, an area that extended into an adjacent county. Here the parish could only be reached on foot, as to begin with Dart had no cycle, and her first duty was to visit the incumbent of every parish. For it was for him to appoint a representative on the Committee, and when Dart took over there was but a solitary parish with a representative, and he was purely nominal. She next helped with arrangements for parochial lantern lectures on the Church as the pioneer of education in England: organised others in large central halls for the Deanery: secured subscriptions and donations for the work: and kept a watchful eye on the local Press in case anything published concerning the Church required a letter of correction.

The introduction of the first "Education" Bill seeking to establish "Birreligion", or "skinned milk" Christianity universally in the elementary schools, found Dart fully prepared for the fight. From this time onwards, she enthusiastically worked sixteen hours daily, attending every parochial Church Defence meeting and addressing some; obtaining members for the Parents' League, and arranging Mass meetings in opposition to this and successive "Education" Bills -- all aimed against the Church. This work entailed the obtaining of well-known public men as speakers: the drawing up and "lay out" of posters: their distribution and bill-sticking and the arranging for the invariably required overflow meetings. On every occasion when these Bills came before the House of Lords, Dart obtained tickets for the debate and followed them closely.

When there came a short respite from fighting the Church's battles, Dart began writing a historical romance, and arranged and produced in the open air a series of tableaux illustrating the Conversion of Britain. She spared no pains to ensure exact correctness of every historical detail from tonsures to properties and herself made all the properties.

HOW THEY MET.

When, in 1909. H. became engaged to be married, Dart realised she could no longer be to her all that she had previously been. Then it was that Dart first met Althea's sister Alice, whose high intellectual attainments attracted her, and Dart was able to persuade her to relieve her of the honorary Secretaryship of the Church Institute. Whilst this sister was re-arranging the Institute's Library Althea and Dart first saw each other, though of this meeting Dart had no memory. But Althea, who must have kept, as usual, in the background, retained a vivid recollection of it, and told Dart that

her face at once attracted her and that she wished there and then that she might have her as a friend.

Dart's first remembrance of seeing Althea was as an unobtrusive and silent figure who, after a missionary meeting held in their drawing-room, slipped in to help with tea and as quietly disappeared afterwards. But it was not until the Advent of 1911, when the Mystery Play "Eagerheart" was locally performed twice daily for a week that Dart came under the spell of Althea. For, besides being responsible for the organising of the play, Dart was hon. sec. of the selection and working Committee which chose Althea to take the silent part of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She had a little room all to herself in which Frances dressed her for all the rehearsals and performances in which she could take her part. But because of her overmastering headaches Althea had to have an understudy - a pious but poor substitute. Dart well remembered the pangs of disappointment she experienced when Frances, who was her head steward, came down without Althea, and the sympathy her painful disability roused in her.

The impress made by Althea was deepened by the first sight of her art. This was a large poster done in crayon to advertise the performances of "Eagerheart". It showed an angel with a smoking golden censer and was typical of Althea's finished drawing and exquisite colouring, reds shading through orange to yellow and lemon. When the run of the play was finished, and Dart mentioned her intention of recovering this poster, Althea disparaged it as worthless. Consequently, she did not share Dart's indignation when she found it had been ruthlessly torn down from the window where it had been displayed. Althea's exacting standards left her always dissatisfied and she frequently threw away pictures which her sisters as frequently ~~repeatedly~~ rescued.

At this time Althea gave the impression of being entirely aloof, inscrutable, and somewhat cold, for she did not smile. Yet from the first moment Dart saw her in "Eagerheart", her whole being was so profoundly stirred that she was instantly enthralled, and above all things craved her friendship. She gained the impression, however, from Althea's impassive and joyless expression that any advance would probably be repulsed. But mindful of the proverbs "Faint heart never won fair lady", and "nothing venture, nothing have", Dart made careful plans for the assault of Althea. She decided that any approach must be cautious and tentative, and that "accidentally" designed meetings would best accomplish this.

The two roads in which Althea and Dart respectively lived -- their homes eight minutes apart -- ran at right angles into the main road to the town, Althea's the further off. But whereas to gain the town, Dart's nearer way was to turn left on leaving home, she thenceforward turned right. For by so doing, she might "accidentally" cross Althea's lonely path when she had discovered her usual time for going townwards. As was to be expected, this strategy met with varying success, but one meeting counterbalanced many disappointments, as Althea never raised any objection to Dart's accompanying her as far as their ways coincided. This was so encouraging that soon

Dart thought out a further advance. She told Althea of her newly finished historical romance, and wondered if she would care to read it to judge if it lent itself to illustration. As Althea agreed to do so, Dart became quite exultant; for she felt she had at least got her foot into the doorway, and that the crossing of the threshold might possibly follow. It did. In course of time, Althea said the tale interested her and called for illustration. The upshot may be guessed. Meetings became necessary and frequent to discuss the choice of pictures and the many historical details involved. This would not have been possible, however, had Dart not proved acceptable, primarily to Miss Annie, who guarded Althea jealously in every conceivable direction, and to the rest of the family. On the other side Dart's mother warmly welcomed Althea as she did all her daughter's friends.

Next year, Dart's greatest activities were directed against the third and last "Education" Bill, but nevertheless she managed regularly to spend a few hours weekly with Althea. She then began to realise under what a heavy handicap of ill-health poor Althea suffered. For, not only was Dart unable to see her prostrated by her sick headaches, but generally there was some other member of the delicate family in bed at the same time. When it was "Miss Annie" who suffered, Althea unless laid aside at the same time, nursed her with the utmost devotion. Miss Annie, reciprocating when she was well, allowed no one else to look after Althea when she was ill.

This year Dart spent her holiday with Scots friends in Skye. The hottest days she chose for long and unflagging expeditions amongst the Coolen alone with a gillie for guidance, as her friends neither appreciated the heat nor such strenuous days which indeed were entirely outside their compass. On wet days, Dart spent some time in writing a mystery play, which was simultaneously published with the illustrated romance, the former to be acted that winter under the same conditions as "Eagerheart", with Althea in her old part. As soon as these writings were in print, Dart began work on a first volume on the Highlands and Islands. On this she was engaged, as other work allowed, during the following 8 years, most of it being written at night and into the small hours of the morning.

It was in connection with the coloured illustrations of the historical romance that Dart persuaded the artist to let her act as her business agent, for some friends had asked to buy the originals. But Althea demurred at the prices offered, as being "far too much", and insisted on reductions. Later on, however, when Dart had spent exciting times in London calling on publishers to procure commissions for Althea to illustrate in colour suitable books, she did accept without hesitation the good terms they offered. Dart never had any difficulty in securing these commissions after she had shewn specimens of Althea's work; indeed she obtained more than the artist, in view of her very slow rate of progress, could accept.

That Christmas saw the beginning of Dart's intimacy with the family, and she never forgot the delight of that first Boxing Day spent in Althea's home. Here Christmas, as the Feast of the Holy

Nativity, was truly honoured, every part of the house being generously decorated with greenery and the dinner table set round a most attractively arranged Christmas scene in miniature. In the drawing room, a simple little Crib had been realistically set up, lit by Christmas candles, and here, carols were sung, accompanied by Althea on the organ.

Miss Annie was a gracious cultured lady of strong and forceful personality, who ruled the household kindly but firmly. She was rather too obsessed, however, by the health of the family, though never by her own. An essentially good woman of great interior humility, it was in her that Dart subsequently found she could invariably confide, sure of complete understanding, sympathy and co-operation where Althea was concerned. Miss Jennie, her sister, of no such dominating character, had many ecclesiastical interests and a very warm heart. A district visitor of her parish, she took lively concern in the lot of the poor and needy, for whom she was always making useful articles of clothing when not engaged in household mendings. Because of the unwittingly amusing things she was constantly saying, and her, at times, somewhat incoherent statements, Miss Jennie was the very good-natured butt of the family.

Althea's sister, Frances, was distinguished by her masterful character. She was very clever alike with her brain and her hands, which she could turn to anything -- in this respect utterly unlike her sisters. Alice had plenty of humour and a brilliant intellect. She took infinite pains in coaching backward or not over-clever candidates for Holy Orders, especially in Greek Testament, and was extremely keen on Church architecture, in which she was joined by Dart. But all three sisters parted company from her in their love of animals, and excepting Frances, in their vegetarianism. In the matter of women's suffrage there was another divergence between them, for Dart who had been utterly repelled by the violent tactics of the militant women (as indeed were they) became an anti-suffragist. The three sisters, however, continued to be keen and active members of the constitutional society to which they had belonged for many years.

Both Frances and Althea were a source of great pride to Alice, by reason of their respective gifts, but when Dart first knew Althea she was not particularly attached to either. (Latterly, however, she became so.) Indeed it was a matter of some concern to Miss Annie that, until Dart's advent, Althea was not only unsociable, but almost unapproachable, withdrawing herself on every possible occasion to the solitude of her studio at the top of the house. She was hermit like, too, in her dislike of going out, unless to do a little gardening, for which she had a great love.

It was this unwillingness to stir from home that gave Dart the idea of suggesting riding to Althea. This proposal roused the first signs of animation in her, for she actually jumped at the idea. Miss Annie, however, received it with a show of alarm: Althea was not strong enough: it would never do for her to attempt it, and so on. Miss Jennie, on the other hand, warmly acclaimed the suggestion, and derided her sister's attitude. So, too, did the doctor, who

himself rode, and thought it would be an excellent thing for Althea. His opinion, of course, carried the day. Althea took to the saddle as to the manner born, but so unexercised were her muscles that, to begin with, her lessons could not last longer than half an hour at weekly intervals. Double that time became her limit when, on short riding holidays with Dart, a daily ride was the rule. On these holidays, always out with a Master, Althea learnt to take both high and wide jumps equally well, and throughout her life, nothing gave her such pure pleasure as these exercises on horse-back. She had good hands, a good seat and looked more distinguished than ever on her mount. Later on, in War time, occasional rides were obtainable, when the pair went out unaccompanied, and Althea was rather alarmed when occasionally Dart, riding astride, was thrown. But having throughout her life-time been well broken-in by every sort of accident, Dart never experienced anything worse than a sprained ankle, and always managed to recover her hack.

The first time Dart stayed with Althea was at the seaside, where she joined her friend delightedly. Her outstanding memory of that occasion was ~~her~~ an instance of Althea's refreshing characteristic disregard of silly conventions. It was in the days when it was ~~not~~ considered "not respectable" for "ladies" either to enter a public house, or to carry parcels wrapped in newspaper -- the latter perhaps the worse offence. Althea not only thought nothing whatever of entering a public house to buy some bottles of beer for Dart's consumption, but further calmly outraged public opinion by emerging with them naked and unashamed. Dart proudly walked side by side with her through the village, sharing in the shameless flaunting of the bottles, to the horrified gaze of all respectable spectators.

Dart's last, big undertaking in connection with Church Defence work was the organising in 1913 of an imposing out-of-doors demonstration against the Welsh Disestablishment Bill. To ensure the arrival of every one of the 24 parochial contingents on the meeting ground at the appointed hour, every detail was minutely worked out before hand, and the result ~~re~~ created the town's record. Neither in these Church questions nor in politics generally was Althea interested, except, increasingly, in so far as Dart's personal part in them was concerned. But though personal participation in politics was remote from her nature, Althea's convictions were innately conservative, and with the advent of Socialist Governments, she became increasingly anti-Socialist in her outlook.

About this time began a series of visits of a fortnight apiece to a few hitherto unknown Cathedral cities, in which Alice accompanied the friends. Indeed, during these diversions, Dart saw more of the sister than of Althea, since her enthusiasm for architecture and the historical interest of everything to be seen was not comparable to theirs. They were indefatigable in their systematic daily explorations, over which they lingered lovingly. Besides Althea's much less interest in the details of architecture, on one of these occasions she had to devote most of her time to illustrating a book, over which work, in her opinion, the publisher unduly hurried her.

In one of these cities only did the three have rooms near the Cathedral, when Dart was glad of the opportunity of attending the early services daily. She was surprised, however, that not even on Sundays did Althea accompany Alice and herself to the Early Eucharist. But not yet had Dart reached any stage of intimacy with Althea, so that no comment on the subject was possible even when they were alone. Though their friendship was steadily growing and strengthening, it was not till after the Great War that that stage of intimacy was reached when any subject might safely be broached.

Despite her naturally impulsive and impatient nature, Dart, by some strange new intuition, seemed to have realised from the first that Althea was not to be taken by storm. So, for the first time in her life, she began to exercise that patience which throughout her association with Althea was to have so many severe demands made upon it.

A new phase in Althea's life opened when Dart suggested that, after her day's work in the summer time, it would be refreshing to take supper out into the country to enjoy a meal in the open. Althea at once fell in with the idea, though she made the astonishing statement, that never before had she done such a thing. When the arrangement became known in the family, Alice actually demurred, saying she thought it a very strange and uncomfortable idea, and one that she herself could never entertain. Althea was by no means pleased by this suggestion that Dart was leading her astray, as in opposition to confirmed habits, and resented it. Soon Alice was even more perturbed when Althea, having acquired a liking for this introduction to outdoor life, readily agreed to spend a whole day in the country, taking lunch and tea and going by train further afield. Feeling things were really being allowed to go too far, the anxious Alice had something more to say. Having herself, as she owned, no capacity for an ardent friendship, and obviously incapable of understanding one, she expressed to Dart her fear that her evident devotion to Althea could not possibly last. When it began to cool, Althea who was, she admitted, certainly reciprocating, might suffer, and her mind was not eased by Dart's emphatic assurance that she was anticipating what would never happen.

After taking an active part in the great anti-Home Rule Demonstrations in Hyde P of May 1914 in Hyde Park, Dart, having found in an English friend a really good walker, set off with her for a walking tour in the Highlands. The outbreak of War caught them there, and hurrying back to find War work, Dart made her choice of an offer from the bishop's wife to join her in the local work of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association. Unfortunately however, soon this work was forcibly divided, and her chief drafted Dart to the Town Hall to act as colleague with a very able man on the Executive Committee of the newly created Borough branch. With both were associated a company of six women chosen by them for their abilities and capacity for hard work over long hours daily. Dart was most happy in this post, and was truly grieved when, public funds being misappropriated, and no action being taken, conscience compelled her and four of her colleagues acting independently to resign. Althea, however, was strongly of

opinion that Dart should rather have insisted, as she could have done successfully on the prosecution of the guilty persons. With this view, Dart became forced to agree, for she ~~would~~ owned she had allowed herself to be swayed by one in authority to whom she was greatly attached.

It was early in 1915 when applying for work in a local engineering works that Dart was appointed their first progress clerk. Meanwhile Althea had been offered and had accepted a very attractive Allotment. On most evenings on her ~~ix~~ return from work, Dart joined her there, and took a special interest in cultivating uncommon vegetables.