

Intimacy.

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 accepted a very attractive allotment. On most evenings on her return from work, Dart joined her there, and took a special interest in cultivating uncommon vegetables.

After six months, Dart's work as progress clerk came to an end, and a landmark in the consolidation of her friendship with Althea was reached when Dart announced that an old Scots friend had found work for her in the Highlands. Miss Annie anxiously enquired if Althea could possibly accompany her, as she thought such a complete change would be of the utmost value. Dart's astonishment and delight at the suggestion was boundless, and instantly overflowing with eagerness and enthusiasm, she jumped at it. It remained to hear what Althea herself thought of the proposal, as Miss Annie had not broached it to her. The rest of the family heard, quite incredulously, that the hitherto stay-at-home, who had never previously been separated from her family, was very pleased at such a prospect.

All arrangements were duly made, and the date fixed for the start. This, however, was but the first of a series of similar fixtures which had to be deferred. Althea had one of her bad headaches a few days before they were to leave, and the date of departure had, to be delayed. The long journey was broken by a stay with an aunt in Scotland, who welcomed Althea warmly, and showed her every kindness. Such, indeed, was her almost universal attraction that the Aunt parted more regretfully from her than from her niece, and gave her an open invitation to return whenever she liked. This was as much appreciated by Althea as it genuinely astonished her, for with her usual self-depreciation, she had been very diffident in "thrusting" herself upon the Aunt, feeling sure she would only find her "a nuisance." Dart's friend had secured for her not only very comfortable but historic quarters near her work - in large gardens with greenhouses. Her hours were from 7 a.m. till 6 p.m. except on Saturdays when she left off at 4 p.m. Sundays were free.

Althea had been in Scotland previously with some of her family, but never in the Highlands. Her translation from a prosaic and unhealthy existence to one entirely void of convention in one of the most magnificent parts of the N. Highlands opened out both a new world and a new life to her. Freely allowed access to the gardens, now devoted almost exclusively to vegetables, Althea would sometimes stroll through them to see Dart at work. But more often, and when the weather permitted, she would explore the country, or settle down to make a water colour sketch of some subject that appealed to her. Whenever the luncheon hour came round, she would, if the weather were agreeable, meet Dart with the meal at some pre-arranged spot out-of-doors. Such part of Saturdays as remained free, and in the evenings after dinner, they devoted to short expeditions to historic scenes or to searches after lost historical sites.

As regards Sundays, reasonable distances from Church never deterred Dart from attending early services. She walked when the distance did not exceed 5 miles, and when it was further, she secured a pony to ride, the latter affording her many adventures. But here there were no Scottish Episcopal services within 40 miles, so Sunday became most literally a day of rest, wholly spent out-of-doors.

Unfortunately Althea now began first to experience the digestive troubles which were to be hers for the rest of her life. When occasionally

these attacks, as well as her headaches, compelled her to stay in bed, Dart was very distressed to be obliged to leave her. Happily, however, Althea was most kindly and willingly looked after by their young hostess, who speedily became a friend. At these times, Althea's one concern, as always, was that anyone should be troubled by her - to her own sufferings she never gave the slightest thought, much less expression. Indeed, when questioned, she invariably belittled them, and was always optimistic about a speedy recovery. This was one of the most outstanding and constant features of her character.

Three months passed like a flash, and they were such a success that thenceforward, with the exception of one year when Miss Annie was ill, Althea joined Dart for May and June in the Highlands and Islands. On the first occasion after their return home, Althea settled down to alternate work on her sketches and taking over her allotment again from Frances. Dart, finding there was an urgent call for more crutches and bedrests for the wounded, went to join the solitary carpenter, an old gentleman, employed on them at the local War Hospital Supplies Depot.

When Althea had finished a few pictures, Dart took them up to town and speedily disposed of them on satisfactory terms at the Art Gallery she first tried. These pictures sold on sight, and the art dealer was constant in his applications for more and more. But Althea was far too slow and conscientious an artist ever to be able to supply the demand. Painting for her always involved a great effort, specially to begin a picture. No need could ever have made her a mere producer of "pot-boilers." She was void of any taint of commercialism, but such pictures as she did paint, gave her a very good return. With her innate generosity, Althea besought Dart to accept a commission on these sales, only, to be met with an emphatic refusal.

In the December of this year Dart was busied with the "Coupon" General Election, which met with the usual Tory success locally. Throughout the country, too, "coupon" candidates secured a great majority.

Immediately afterwards Dart was asked by the ex-Works Manager of the engineering firm that had previously employed her, to help him in starting a small new machine-tool factory. Though she was nominally only in charge of the office, her work was actually much wider and more varied, ranging from training girls of her own selection as clerks to work under her, to going occasionally on night shift to work off the machines. Initially, and specially on pay-days, when Dart was working alone, Althea came in occasionally to help her with simple clerical work, where her beautiful handwriting was a great asset, specially in contrast to Dart's ugly scrawl.

By now, of course, Althea and Dart were on terms of close intimacy. But Althea's natural reticence was such that she had never volunteered any remark which would give any insight into her views on religious subjects. To ascertain these, however, was naturally of particular concern to a friend who was, before everything, a Churchwoman. It was in no case to be expected that Dart's enthusiasm for the Church and its Services would be reciprocated by anyone of so different a temperament as Althea. But after a few tentative remarks, it soon became obvious that although Althea went regularly at home with the family to church, only the music interested her. Hence there must be every encouragement to open out, and equal assurance that nothing she could say would shock. Thus sympathetically approached, Althea was willing to do so, but she was so inarticulate that, for the most part it was necessary to help her along by the catechetical method of question and answer. This was, in her case,

an incredibly slow process, due, not to any unwillingness, but to her life-long reticence. And, as in everything else, carefulness and accuracy must characterise her replies.

So it came about that Dart was called upon fully to exercise her new practice of patience in a new sphere. For apart, perhaps, from an opening statement by Althea, Dart never received any answer under five minutes: often she had to wait three or four times as long; whilst frequently Althea stated she must have "some time" to consider a specific question. This meant that not until their next meeting would a reply be forthcoming.

Almost at once, however, Dart became baffled by Althea's attitude - entirely different from any she had previously encountered. She found herself opposed to aspects of thought not only completely new to her, but outside her comprehension. At the outset, Althea declared herself an agnostic, saying scornfully, "Only a fool would say there was no God." She had been influenced by Emerson and his doctrine of transcendentalism, of which Dart knew nothing whatever.

Yet Althea never spoke of God as not being realisable in experience, as transcendentalism maintains. Her main objection, which she held with a hard vehemence strange in one otherwise so calm and gentle, was to any idea of sin, which, of course, implies a Supreme Being to whom the sinner is accountable. Sin, she insisted, was merely the negation of good, and as such, had no real entity. It was always sin rather than evil that she so fiercely attacked, though the two, if separable in thought, are scarcely so in fact. But, Dart objected, surely this is a purely arbitrary statement? Might not one as well reverse this assertion and maintain that good is the negative of evil? Then by a parity of reasoning, good has no real existence, but only sin or evil. But can one seriously argue, for example, that truth and lying, sobriety and drunkenness, have not an equally real existence even if one state be called the negation of the other? Or let Althea take an analogy from her beloved garden, where, she would admit, the growth of weeds were detrimental to the cultivation of flowers. Was the one less real than the other? Could flowers be tended and weeds safely ignored?

So arguments on sin, evil, freewill and its many implications passed slowly and dispassionately to and fro, week by week, month after month. Dart never attempted to hurry Althea, and when difficulties were raised to which she could neither give nor find any satisfactory answer outside revelation, she frankly admitted this. She never dreamt of watering down the teaching of the Church to make it easier of acceptance. Althea more than once gave halting expression to her appreciation of Dart's tolerance, her attempts to understand an outlook so foreign and her unfailing patience. After a while Dart, giving Althea, Colonel Turton's "Truth of Christianity" to read, gave up questioning her, and left it entirely to her own initiative to resume further discussions when she felt moved to do so. She acquiesced in this suggestion, and in course of these further conversations, Dart was greatly surprised to learn how strong Althea's belief had always been in survival after death.

But Althea's opposition to any idea of sin was so extremely intolerant that Dart felt she was opposed to a granite wall - humanly speaking, impenetrable. This attitude of mind was immeasurably intensified when Althea learned that Dart conformed to the Exhortation of the Prayer Book, and made her confession privately before a priest whenever she felt the need to do so. By this knowledge Althea was stirred to a depth beyond anything she had yet shewn. She declared the practice indecent, even

when Dart was able to assure her she had never had to confess any sin against purity, to which virtue both gave the highest place.

Althea could not understand that when one made such confessions, the supreme consciousness was that of the presence of God, to which that of His priest was entirely subsidiary and subservient, and that there was no sense whatsoever of the personality of the mere man. Althea retorted that for her to think of Dart practising such Confession was like experiencing a dagger being turned in her heart, and that it set the seal of finality on her present attitude towards religion.

Dart pondered the matter very carefully for some time, and then told Althea she was moved to give up the practice, in the firm assurance that Almighty God would accept her sacrifice in view of the reason that dictated it, and would make good her loss. But if a time came when she felt impelled to resume the practice, she would tell Althea, who was greatly moved by the abrogation. It certainly had a marked effect for the better upon her, though she repeated her conviction that her views could undergo no change. She could never see differently: she could never accept the Creed: she could never want to worship.

Althea's attitude of mind at this time was one of utter despair and hopelessness, and her face reflected it. She would like to believe as did Miss Annie and Dart, but it was quite impossible, she never could. But Dart knew better, and speaking with absolute conviction, she said so. Why should Althea lose heart? All who think at all have found difficulties in the path of faith at some time or other in their lives. How could it be otherwise considering what our minds are in comparison with God's mind? Dart knew, with a certainty that nothing could shake that, ultimately, she and Althea would be as united in the Faith as they were in every other foundation stone of friendship.

In the meantime, Dart obtained certain specific promises from Althea, who conscientious in everything, never gave one lightly, nor withheld one because it was difficult of fulfilment, but invariably kept it both in letter and spirit. ~~Now Dart realised~~

Now Dart realised that as far as her direct dealings with Althea were concerned, persuasion and encouragement to persevere were more wanted. So, seated with her arm round Althea, Dart, able by such contact to convey more than could her words alone, would talk to her. Then Althea's arm would steal round Dart, to respond wordlessly with a gentle pressure when anything that was said found its way home.

Thus she was persuaded to resume the habit of private prayer, at least at night; to pray for the gift of faith, and only after much striving, to cease going to church, and above all, to cease making her Communion. This, of course involved telling Miss Annie the reason, and it was because she feared the shock that such a confession would give her, that Althea shrank from the ordeal. But at last she was persuaded that Miss Annie would be much more shocked, indeed horrified, to know that Althea's sole reason for communicating was to please her.

Meantime, pending Althea's agreement to speak to Miss Annie, Dart had for the first time confided something of Althea's difficulties to her. Though naturally grieved to hear of them, Miss Annie was in complete and grateful agreement with the line Dart had taken, and promised that after Althea had spoken to her, she would take care that the family made no comment whatever in her presence on her ceasing to attend church. After Althea had taken the difficult step, and had met with much sympathy, her release from church going was obviously a great relief to

her, freeing her from the first deterrent to advance.

Early in 1918, Dart obtained progress work in the "Tank" dept. of the Ministry of Munitions and therein continued till the end of the war. Then she took a leading part locally in the "Hang the Kaiser" General Election that followed, and next year she was elected to the Diocesan Conference, as a representative to the National Conservative Council and a delegate to its yearly Conferences. In addition she was soon elected as a member of the Executives of two divisional Committees of the National Conservative Association, and never missed any meetings of any of these bodies. Nor was she always a silent member. Political interests were now her main occupation, and almost daily "in the season," she was either presiding or speaking at Conservative meetings, in addition to perfecting organisation and instruction in every department of political work. But scarcely a day passed without her contriving to see Althea for a short time, and when Dart was staying away from home for Conferences, they wrote each other daily.

In the early summer of each successive year, the pair now went off to the Highlands, Althea, by this time, having acquired a zest equal to Dart's for outdoor life and adventurous expeditions. She had also become a very good walker, and on occasions covered as much as seventeen miles a day without becoming unduly tired. Expeditions by boat were greatly favoured, especially in the nesting season and when in the neighbourhood of islets when one after another could be visited. On one such occasion, Dart let slip the painter when pushing off, and recklessly made a dash for the gunwale of the boat. But all she achieved was waist-high immersion in the water out of which Althea on the instant gallantly hauled her at a not inconsiderable risk of a similar fate. At another time both were taken out to a remote uninhabited island of great ecclesiological interest, difficult of access because of the currents. The boatman was an old fellow who, as soon as they were landed, wanted to take them back again. But in view of the bargain they had made with him, they refused to return for several hours, and left the old man muttering queerly while they explored the island. They subsequently heard that he had been taken a fortnight later to the Mental Asylum where a brother had preceded him.

It was a very different type of man who left them one evening on a similar island but of even greater interest, that they might spend the night there out in the open. He warned them that it was not unlikely that a landing - difficult enough then - might be impossible next morning when he was to come to take them off. But though as a foretaste of things to be expected, they in order to land at all, had to jump on to slippery rocks and their baggage was literally thrown after them, Althea was completely willing to take the risk. Both, indeed, were considerably disappointed when next day the boat grounded almost at the pre-arranged hour.

Both experienced the climax of enjoyment in two years' successive camping - before this became a fashion. Initially they found absorbing interest in planning and obtaining their equipment which a horse and cart took over beds of disintegrated rock to an isolated site on the shores of the Atlantic. There, on the smooth turf, within the walls of a dilapidated sheep-tank, they rigged their tent and fly-sheet.

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A flight lower was a turf-covered alcove which was their dining-room in fine weather. Below this again was the sea, and the expanse of pure white sand made an ideal place for Althea to bathe and swim. The outlook over the sea was wholly enchanting, and inland one of wild grandeur with steep rocky hills in the background. A small clear burn with a rock jutting into the water was used by Althea for the washing of cloths and towels, and a daily scene of camp life was of her carefully pegging these out along the lengths of guy rope whilst Dart, a bucket in each hand, balanced herself precariously on the broken tank wall on her trip back from the burn.

It was one of the many neat ideas which camp life drew from Althea to use an empty tea chest as a baffle against the prevailing wind, thus making it possible to "cook without tears" in the open. Another was to catch rain in vessels as it ran off the fly sheet, and so minimised Dart's water-carrying. When camp duties were finished, the friends would spend hours happily hunting for oyster and other babies of waders, and grew expert in detecting them camouflaged amongst the stones. Althea loved to pick them up and stroke their fluffy bodies, and she served as a patient assistant to Dart in photographing them.

Wet days were spent in reading, writing and chess, which Dart then first learnt to play. But they were too unequally matched, for Dart nearly always was checkmated after a short game and never once won. Discussions were frequent and a favourite subject with Dart was the principle of gravity which, without being in the least perverse, she entirely failed to understand. Again and again they grappled with the subject, until even Althea's extraordinary patience was exhausted. At last she gave it up in despair and flatly refused ever to revert to it again.

Both thoroughly enjoyed their snug nights in the tent, sleeping with the "front door" open whenever the weather permitted. Then came a night when heavy snortings awakened them from sound sleep, and they just managed to avert the entry of a questing beast. This could not be permitted to occur again - but it did. The attraction of the camp was too strong, and the pertinacious cow ate its way through the rope fence which the pair had erected against it. It was not until Althea again resorted to her favourite box-of-all-works - an empty tea chest which she filled with stones - that the cow was successfully defied.

Althea, a good business woman, having considered from their experiences, that the renting of a cottage in the Highlands would prove a good investment, one year tried the experiment. A furnished cottage was taken for nine months, and was without any difficulty satisfactorily sub-let to two different tenants for seven of them, thus proving Althea right in her surmise.

During the two months she and Dart occupied this cottage, Dart's first large volume, containing several illustrations by Althea, was published, and despite its big price sold out in three months to be followed by two further editions.

Thanks to these yearly holidays in the Highlands, Althea's general health gained enormously, though, unfortunately, her headaches, as always, persisted, though not with the same frequency when she was away from home. But there was no change in her outlook on religious questions, though she said little on the subject when away on holiday, and Dart, in pursuance of her settled policy, kept silence.

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