CLEM FATHER & POLITICIAN FEB 20 - 1985

On a Winter day in January 1883 the children of a comfortable Victorian family were playing in their nursery when it was announced that the new baby boy born that day was to be called Humphrey. There was an immediate outcry from the three boys and three girls. They would not, they could not have a brother called Humphrey.

A few weeks later the baby was christened Clement Richard. He was to be known to millions as Clem.

Clem was a small baby and in those days of high infant mortality an undersized child was automatically thought of as delicate. I can only think that it was for this reason that he was taught at home by my grandmother. The fact that he could read by the age of four leads one to think that he had her undivided attention. While Laurence, two years younger, went to school before him. Perhaps she was so delighted by the progress of her young pupil and his voracious appetite for all books, particularly poetry, that she was loath to give him up. He was nine years old before he joined Laurence at school.

At the end of the First World War, when Clem was in his mid thirties, he had no vision of himself either as a father of a family or as the leader of a major political party.

The best thing that ever happened to him was meeting and marrying my mother. It was as great a factor in his life as that first visit to the boys club in Stepney which had such a profound influence on him. She was so different from the intelectual Fabians or the political women of his acquaintance. He fell in love with her as they travelled by train across Italy chaperoned by her mother & brother Edric. She would wake from a doze to find him looking at her and smiling. It was a love that was to last a lifetime. A love that endured through all the

difficulties and uncertainties of political life. Although my mother wasn't strong and sometimes felt overwhelmed by the small problems of everyday life she was always superb in a crisis.

So many people struggle and strive to get a foothold on that slippery slope that leads to power and high office - For my father the struggle was all for other people, and the power that went with it just part of the job - the publicity and the limelight something to be brushed aside.

We children thought it great fun when a photographer and a reporter visited our home and we were photographed posed cosily on the sofa or out in the garden holding puppies and kittens.

He taught us easily in life not to take too seriously articles written about him in the press, and not to worry if they were critical, which they frequently were.

He had an interesting theory about people who collect their own press cuttings -

I was very disappointed in 1945 when a firm wanted to present him with a beautiful book filled with all the press cuttings about the election complete with articles and pictures about our family and he politely declined it. You see he said the man who collects his own press cuttings gets so used to seeing himself in print that his behaviour is influenced by a need to stay in the limelight.

When we were all very young in the late twenties and thirties, life was very busy for my father - three elections - posts in the Labour government under Ramsay MacDonald, two visits to India with the Simon Commission. But he still found time to read to us and tell us stories. Kippling's Jungle Book was a favourite. For many years I thought he was the author of the song of the White Seal.

There is a line:-

"Ah weary wee flipperling curl at thy ease"

which I construed as:

"Ah weary we flipperty curl up thy knees".

I always slept curled up in a ball and thought he had written the poem especially for me to soothe away my fear that a cow was climbing the bedroom wall.

Though he spent long hours at the House of Commons he rarely missed taking us all for a walk on Sunday mornings. *

He was always a great doodler and in those early years he would draw picture stories for us, telling the story while he drew. Later there were school stories of Hailebury. To our disappointment he always seemed to have been one of the good boys but he invented a boy called Sniffkins who was addicted to anniseed balls. After many colourful adventures, Sniffkins disappeared down the dormitory ventilators leaving behind a faint sniff and the smell of anniseed balls and was never seen again.

Later it was tales of the Great War. How when he had dysentery in Gallipoli he was lifted off a troopship on a stretcher by crane swinging high above the harbours. In France he narrowly escaped death by heeding his Sargeant Major, a crusty old regular. He was about to lead he men round the perimetre of a field "Cut across the open su - shouted the S.M. and as they did so the hedge surrounding the field exploded with machine gunfire. He was a marvelous raconteur. He always had a wealth of funny stories too. These would enliven Sunday lunch - as did our family game of guessing the dates on pennies - if you guessed right you kept the penny.

His hobby was potting about in his workroom always known as the village room - originally a basement room when we lived at Woodford Green, it was an empty bedroom

at Stanmore - there were two workbenches - lengths of wood planes, chisels, hammers and nails. We made swords of wood and small boats to sail in the weedy pond at the bottom of the garden, While he painstakingly mended a broken cup a china dolls head with secotine or fashioned dolls house furniture out of cedar wood cigar boxes. Whenever anything got broken the cry always went up - Daddy will mend it.

He was an expert at getting his offspring down when they got stuck half way up a tree. We had three huge oak trees in the garden and climbing them was a family pastime. There was no question of his fetching a ldder or phoning the fire brigade. He would quietly talk us down foothold, hand hold, until we were low enough for him to hold a foot in place with a reasssuring hand.

In the very early years we had little idea of his political opinions or even what he did. He had been Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Postmaster General in Ramsay's Government, so on being asked "What does your Daddy do dear" - the reply was "Oh he's the Lancashire Postman".

Later when we were all at private fee paying schools, I was asked by a fellow pupil why wasn't I at a State school - I took this question home to my father who explained that the man who lives in the world as if it were already the world he hopes to achieve - is a crank. He hoped that one day his dream of a superb state system of education would come true.

The thirties were busy years with Labour as a drastically reduced opposition. My father was frequently at the House of Commons until the early hours of the morning.

It was a strange paradox that
while living at Woodford he was mistaken for a burglar -
(It was early on a winter's evening, but already dark when a Policeman rang the bell

and asked my mother if she knew that there was a burglar on the roof. "That's not a burglar, she replied, it's my husband clearing the gutter".

While at Stanmore my sister Janet and I mistook a brace of burglars for him. We saw a light in the hall in the early hours of the morning. Until we heard footsteps running down the garden path we were happy thinking our father had just returned from a late night sitting in the House. Our screams woke both parents. I can still hear his voice saying "Vio the front doors open!" as he went downstairs to investigate.

Ware came while my father was convalescing after an operation. We were all on a family holiday on a farm in North Wales. He must have fretted at his inability to be in close contact with his colleagues. There was no telephone and the news of war was brought by a telegraph boy who our Welsh terrier nipped in the leg as if she knew the bad news the telegram contained. In those last few days of peace we picniced, relaxed and swam on the beach went fishing. In the evenings he read Buchans Greenmantle aloud round a driftwood fire.

We saw little of my father during those war years as we were all away at school in the safety of the country. Later Janet joined the WAAF's, my brother Martin the Merchant Navy.

He and I had a few days togehter in the Cotswolds in the summer of 1940. We stayed at the Swan at Bibury and were to have been away for a week, but alas the Germans chose those few days to turn their attention on London - Phoning London from Bibury was impossible, so we drove to Oxford and stopped at the porter lodge at Univ. The porter, an elderly man, remembered my father as an undergraduate and loved saying "I want a priority call to London for the Lord Privy Seal". They had bombed the docks so we drove straight back to Stanmore. The sky was a livid orange with the fires still burning. Later I went with him to Stepney and he stood grim faced

watching while the digging went on among the rubble and talking to the pathetic queue of people waiting for news of their next of kin.

Once he became a member of the War Cabinet he spent most of his time in London. He had an austere bedroom at No. 11 and later slept underground. He came home to Stanmore whenever he could and in the holidays we had family evening of rummy and in the summer he joined us in games of tennis on our overgrown grass tennis court. Martin thought he had solved the problem of mowing the tennis court.

One summer term he paid £1 for two goats. Tehy arrived from his school in Somerset by rail. He and I drove them through the town like the drovers of old. Not only would we have a neatly shaven tennis court, but the goats milk would be an enormous asset. It didn't turn out quite like that. We named the goats Mary & Joan after two girl cousins, neither seemed very keen on being milked. In fact Joan was so temperamental we had to stand her on the garden seat, pull her legs from under her and milk her lying down sideways. The grass was as straggly as ever, merely trampled here & there - Mary had enjoyed a delicious meal among the lupins nearby.

After a summer holidays planned entirely to fit in with the goats milking time my parents had had enough. We gave Mary & Joan to the milkman who reported delightedly, a few weeks later, that Joan had given birth to twins - no wonder she was temperamental.

Despite the enormous work load and the difficulty and discomfort of travel in wartime my father found time to visit us at our various schools and colleges and to address our fellow students.

As a family we have never been able to recognize our father in the austere friendless figure sometimes depicted by writer & journalists. He had many friends

and was on terms of deep affection with colleagues and those who worked for him. The leader of any party has to stand a little apart. Perhaps his greater friend and confidant was his elder brother Tom whose ideas were so similar to his own and who too had lived from a time in the East End of London.

The Attlee's were all in their different ways great helpers of the under priviliged and great lovers of children. Our Aunt Mary, my father's elder sister was a missionary in South Africa. Janie Smutts had enormous regard for her, told me so one breakfast time at Chequers.

She was one of these people whoe unselfish kindness can be an embarrassment to others.

She was returning by boat from Cape Town. She told her fellow passengers with pride of her brother Clem. On the voyage a poor coloured woman who was travelling steerage gave birth to a baby. Aunt Mary insisted on giving up her cabin to the woman and travelling, as there was no other free cabins on the ship, steerage herself. The Captain was appalled. Could he possibly steam up Southampton Water with the Prime Minister's sister in the bowels of the ship - But help was at hand! Aunt Mary rang Waterloo. She was on her way to No. 10 and a dear friend was with her. We gathered in the hall expecting Aunty Mary and a sensible woman in well worn tweeds and pull on felt hat. We had met those missionary friends before. To our amazement an elegant creater wearing a fashionable little feather hat, diamonds twinkling on every ginder (finger) swept into the hall. Aunt Mary's new friend was a wealthy South African, who had come to the rescue on board ship and so kindly found a birth for her in her own first class uite. I would like to think that such kindness was motivated by charity.

My father too did things for purely altruistic motives and the results weren't

always what he expected.

One winter weekend we were down at Chequers. My mother was away. There had been an oil crisis - petrol was in very short supply. My father decided that the visit to his constituancy planned for Saturday afternoon should be undertaken by rail: bus as he was going in his capacity as M.P. not as P.M. I remember the press caught up with us on the bus. The leapt on the step crouched on the seats taking pictures from every angle - crowds gathered and his detective was worried about security - rather ruefully and to everyone's relief he agreed to return to Chequers by the official car.

Some years later when he was no longer in office and was leaving the train at Baker Street an elderly woman said "Has anyone ever told you that you look just like Mr. Attlee", "Frequently" he replied and went smiling on his way.

People find it extraordinary that before that election day in July 1945 we had never sat down as a family and discussed what we would do if my father should become Prime Minister.

It was such a strange election with the three week wait between polling day and the count to allow the huge postal vote from the servicemen and women overseas to reach their constituances.

July 26 was a day which began with breakfast round the kitchen table at home; my mother driving us to Stepney for the count and the day ended with a wildly enthusiastic Labour Party rally in Westminster Hall where my parents arrived a little late having come straight from the Palace. It was the early edition of the Evening Standard, glimpsed over a fellow passenger's shoulder at Oxford Circus, which brought home to my sister Alison the full impact of what had happened. There was a picture of our father smiling and waving a rosette in his buttonhole and a banner headline

"The New Prime Minister". Alison and I joined hands and danced our way down Oxford Street.

We didn't move into No. 10 until October as my father had no wish to hustle the Churchills out. He lived at the annexe in Great George Street as a temporary measure while my mother saw to the selling of our Stanmore home.

Living over the "Shop" as he described No. 10, it was a great joy to him. We had a comfortable family flat on the top floor and once up there he could leave the cases of Cabinate & State behind. He could pop home for tea or to relax for an hour or two before going to an official reception or back to the House.

He used tea time as an opportunity to get to know the vast influx of new Labour M.P.'s. They came to tea three or four at a time. Anthony Benn once told me it was rather like going to tea with the headmaster. As I was teaching at a Nursery School in Bermondsey I was often there for these tea parties.

Homecoming at No. 10 was frequently fascinating. Once evening I came in to find my mother on the telephone. She had been to a service at Westminster Abbey and seen an elderly lady bleeding copiously from the nose. All those Girl Guides and members of the Red Cross she said and no one doing anything about the poor old thing, so I swept her up and brought her home. She is lying on the bathroom floor. I am ringing her Doctor, would you ask her, her name Darling. There sure enough stretched on the bathroom floor was an elderly lady in thick stockings and several hand knitted jerseys. I came back stifling my laughter. That poor old thing is the Duchess of Abucorn.

After years of travelling in and our of London our proximity to the House was a great joy. My father loved and understood Parliament so well - its in joker - its traditions rooted in history and he took great pride in the fact that two

honourable members could argue bitterly across the floor of the House and then walk amiably down the corridor arm in arm to have a drink together in the Smoking Room. In that Parliament of 45.50 there was very little of the personal bitterness between government and opposition which was found in later administrations. So many of the Ministers & Shadow Cabinet had been fellow memebrs of the wartime Government. They had shared the burden of steering this Country through one of the most challenging times in her history.

Thinking of the friendship and affection between Government and opposition reminds me of the evening of June 8 1946. The day of the Victory Parade. At 9.30 that morning we had foregathered in one of the State Drawing rooms at No. 10. First Mr. Chamberlain, then the Churchill family arrived, to be followed by the Commonwealth Prime Minister. My father and Winston Churchill drove together, in an open carriage, saluting bare in the Mall where they stood beside the King for the tremendously impressive March past.

There were fireworks that evening and we went down to the terrace of the House of Commons to watch the Royal Family arrive by launch. The weather had turned rought and windy. Later we watched the fireworks from indoors - Princess Alexandra, a small child of six, ran from window to window exclaiming with delight. To get a good view two large men perched precariously on two small gilt chairs - Winston Churchill & Ernest Bevin. I heard Winston say "Mine is a political seat", "so is mine" said Ernie "and it's not safe".

One of the lovely things about being Prime Minister are the weekends spent at Chequers - that beautiful Elizabethan house set in the Buckinghamshire countryside - Chequers with its priceless picture treasures and furniture was given to the Nation in 1921 by Lady Lee of Fareham to be a place of rest and recreation for her Prime Minister forever. My father loved the sense of history of the old house - He had always been a great admirer of Oliver Cromwell and so was delighted that one

of Cromwell's descendants had owned the house and endowed it with interesting letters and relics including a lifemask of Cromwell himself.

My first visit to Chequers was a weekend in August following the election. My father had recently returned from Potsdam where he had astounded the Americans and confounded the Russians by returned with the same team of secretaries and advisors as had accompanied Churchill. Saturday was one of those perfect English summer days and we sat out after lunch in the shade of a copper beach and later had tea on the terrace overlooking the rose garden.

There was croquet on the north lawn. My father played with great skill and a horrid habit of croqueing one from a long way off just as one was nicely positioned to go through a loop. We played tennis too on those summer weekends. Down the road was the Golf course at Ellenbough where my parents enjoyed informal rounds of golf.

Those weekends at Chequers gave my father a chance to see his colleagues and members of his government in an entirely new light. The service chiefs too came to stay.

Bamber Harris was our first guest. He and his wife came to dinner one Saturday evening in August. I remember him enquiring if the regime at Chequers had changed. In Winston's day it was late to bed and late to rise. Were they, he wondered, expected to sit up until two in the morning. My father laughed. We go to bed soon after 11, he said.

Christmas at Chequers was a special joy, with murder in the dark played after dinner on Christmas night and a childrens party on Boxing Day. The backbone of our party were two large families, the Pakenhams and the Ramdays. The Ramdays farmed the Chequers land. They had a new addition to their family every year -

always a baby Jesus for their nativity play. My father loved watching the children play musical bumps in the Great Hall and hide & seek round the house. My brother Martin made an excellent Father Christmas appearing from a door in the pannelling when the childrens backs were turned.

Of course Chequers was used for official lunches and dinners too. I remember the Burmese delegation coming to lunch in 1947 - Thakin Nu - Aung Sang - U Saw U tin tut. They were charming and looked to me like delightful school boys. A few weeks later U Saw had Aung Sang assasinated! My father remarked dryly "Well my dear it isn't aften you sit down to lunch with the murderer on one side and the victim on the other".

Those were fascinating years living so close to history in the making years which nevertheless took their toll on my father's health.

After the election in 1950 when Labour returned without a working majority, continuing to govern was hard. It was a year when sick men were carried through the lobbies to vote, when the very civilised custom of pairing almost broke down - when my father felt he hadn't the country's mandate to carry on. It was almost a relief when the tide turned against the Labour Party in 1951. I remember we had an extraordinarily convivial family dinner party that night in October when we knew our days at No. 10 were at an end.

When my father took his seat in the Lords it was not with the title he had often joked about. Lord Love-a-Duck of Limehouse! The man who had been known to so many of his supporters in Stepney as The Major became Lord Attlee.

The gentle pace of the House of Lords was more in tune with his declining years. When my mother died he moved to the Inner Temple within easy reach of the House

and was looked after until he died by Alfred Laker with great devotion.

His last thoughts were of Haileybury and the school boys of his youth. The last book he read Jane Austin's Pride & Prejudice.

To the word he was a socialist, even perhaps a revolutionary. At heart he was a romantic. He loved the pre raphaelite poets. His favourite poem was George Meredith's Love in a Valley. He was a man who held dear the ties of home and family, who wanted others to enjoy what he had has in such full measure.

The young held a special place in his heart. How glad he would be to know that his memorial is helping the young of to-day and of future generations to come.