

DR GRAHAM'S HOMES, KALIMPONG

Tuesday, 4 May 2010 (Evening)

This week's report is coming a few days early, as Philip, Eleanor and myself will be travelling to Sikkim after assembly on Wednesday to spend a few days sightseeing, and returning on Saturday – I'd better, as I have the Sunday service to conduct . . . which is in the bag! This early transmission will save me lugging the laptop around with me! And once again, hearty and very warm greetings from DGH – and the children send their love too, for I have been telling them about Kelso and our church. Many of them think that I'm staying for much longer! They also know that on Sundays, some of them have been appearing on the big screen at Kelso North. They are also excited to think that when I get back home, many more of them will be shown to everyone when we have a slide show. Last Friday was a particularly busy day as I had classes for 7 periods out of the 8 assigned for each day. I spent the first 3 periods with the newly-appointed teacher of Home Science, Miss Betheka, and her Class 12 students (36 including, 10 boys with another 5 students absent). Back home the maximum for this kind of class would be 20! Splitting them into groups, we showed them how to make scones and pancakes (dropped scones), though I have to admit that mine weren't a patch on those served up at the Saturday Coffee Mornings! Nevertheless, the students had a cracking time and did exceptionally well, considering the limited facilities. Everything that was made was served up with butter, jam and honey – and tea. Nothing was left, with some of the girls wrapping some of their produce in paper to give to their friends at break . . . aw, nice!! I think she's wanting be back again to do a sort of "Indian-Scotch Pie" – the mind boggles! Class sizes continue to be around anything from 36 to 60+, with a diversity of abilities. "Thank you!" in Mizo is "Kalawme!" and "Hello!" in Dzongkha is . . . wait for it . . . is "Hello!" And "Good morning, Sir!" in Dzongkha is "Kadeen-che-levey!"

After school on Friday I decided to have a walk into the town; I took the 'long route', which took around 40 minutes in sweltering heat. I got a taxi back, which usually costs Rs 70/- (70 rupees), which works out at just over £1! Again it was like being back in Kelso, for as cars and minivans passed me walking into town they were packed with students being taken home, the smiling faces would turn round and arms would begin waving. Some also did the 'creatures' bit of "He's got the whole world".

Saturday saw the Cottage Gardens Competition. It turned out to be a particularly hot day, though thankfully not as hot as Delhi. The gardens were looking lovely, and it was evident that many of the students had put in a lot of effort. We won't know the winners until Monday. As soon as the judging was over, the wet clothes were put back out on the washing lines for drying! Two of the Boys' Cottages had painted lovely eggshells and put them on some of the trees, plants and bushes. They looked in disbelief when I said to them, "And I thought that eggs come from chickens – but in India, they grow on trees!" I'm a good lip-reader, and I could see them saying – again – "Who is this eejit fae Kelsae?" A few hours was spent in town on Saturday afternoon and I treated myself to a set of robes, as worn by Buddhist monks – all for around £15! Rest easy, for I'll not be getting my head shaved – well, not yet!

Sunday was a very special day – but it's always very special in Kelso too! After breakfast, Philip, Eleanor and myself set off into the town, as I had been invited to preach and concelebrate Holy Communion at the Macfarlane Memorial Church (a member of the Church of North India, in the Diocese of Eastern Himalaya), where Dr Graham would have preached many times. The service was due to start at 0900 hrs, but surprise, surprise – it was around 0910 hrs before we started. The church was

full – they obviously thought that it would be someone else who was preaching! People were still coming in after 0930 hrs – a bit more laid-back than KN&E! The men sat on one side of the church, and the women on the other – this is what happens in the Chapel at assemblies and on Sunday mornings. A dog sat in the aisle throughout the service, and at one stage I thought it was going to come forward for Communion!

And yet it was as though we were back home. Although the singing was in Nepali, we recognised the tunes and sang along – or rather, hummed along. We opened with “O God our help in ages past”, and as we sang the second hymn, I thought that this is what we sometimes sing at baptisms, “A little child the Saviour came”. And right enough, a young man, Keiran around 20 years of age came forward to be baptised, after which we sang ‘The Aaronic Blessing’. The notices/announcements are done partway through the service, and I think they were just slightly shorter than the sermon! During the service 14 ladies came forward to be dedicated and blessed; they were the new committee of the Woman’s Guild. Every two years the committee members retire with new ones taking on the mantle. The recently-ordained Presbyterian (a kind of auxiliary minister), along with his wife, received gifts from the congregation on account of his ordination. I also received a ‘church scarf’, similar to the one presented to me at DGH when the new prefects were being inducted, the first week I was here.

During the offering the Choir of around 20 – with the women wonderfully clad in lime green saris and red and white headscarves – sang “Just as I am”, to the tune which I would associate with the Billy Graham campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s. Chill out! I’ll not be bringing back lime green saris for Molly, Grace and the Choir at Kelso North . . . I’m bringing them back for the men!!! We then sang “Kum ba yah.” I then along with Pastor Samuel and the Presbyterian (a kind of auxiliary minister), presided over Communion. The Communion hymn was “Twas on that night, when doomed to know” to the tune “Rockingham”. The clergy, serving elders and the choir were served with the cup and wafers. The congregation were served with wafers and with individual glasses (plastic), although they came from their pews to be served. Everyone stood for what I took to be one of the Creeds. I gave the Blessing at the close of the service, which was followed by the “Three-fold Amen. The service finished at around 11.10 am, after which we met the congregation at the door. As they shook hands or made the ‘praying gesture’ with their hands, many of them (of all ages) lowered their head for you to place your hand on it – a kind of blessing, I suppose (sorry God, I know that’s not the correct phrase!).

After the service we retired to the Park Hotel along with the Headmaster, Mr Bannerjee and the School Bursar, Mr Foning for a lovely lunch, courtesy of Mr Foning. Both he and the Headmaster are members at Macfarlane.

On Sunday, 9 May I’ll be taking Philip and Eleanor, Kevin and Claire (the students sponsored by KN&E), and Moses (the student sponsored by Philip and Eleanor), along with the two Gap students Sarah and Kyle, back to the Park Hotel for Sunday lunch – my treat!

I think the sermon was well received; no one left during it, apart from the ‘kirk dug’, once or twice! The translator/interpreter had said that I was very easy to follow, (which doesn’t always happen at KN&E!), although it transpired that at times, he had given a slightly different interpretation to what I had been saying. This was very possibly because some words and phrases do not translate well. It was obvious that a number of people understood English, for at the ‘funny bits’ they laughed – and laughed a second time when it was translated into Nepali! Students from the Girls’

High School and the Scottish Universities' Mission Institution (SUMI), both in Kalimpong, had been in church with some staff and it looks as though I'll be invited into both schools on my return to Sikkim next week to talk to the students and staff. As I mentioned in a previous report, Kelso Rotary Club along with Kalimpong Rotary Club recently raised money for a new toilet block at SUMI for the boys at the Robertson Hostel. Speaking to Larry the Superintendent of the Boys' Cottages before the students went into the dining room for their evening meal, "Reverend To, I hear that Sunday's sermon was wonderful". I'm not sure who bribed him to say that.

It was then back to DGH and a quick trip up to the hospital – Steel Medical Centre (SMC) – where there were around 20 students. With a new television having been purchased, it was good to see many of them sitting around watching it. It was then down to Kalimpong as Philip, Eleanor and myself had been invited by one of the teachers at the Kindergarten to her wedding reception. It was a very enjoyable experience with many folk there – young and old – and a good many staff from DGH.

Monday began with the Senior Assembly in the Jarvie Hall, where the results of the Garden Competitions were announced – McGregor Cottage won the Girls' Competition with Wiston Cottage, winning for the boys. Adrian, one of the prefects gave a short talk on "The importance of being on time" – something which people tend to disregard in India, as "tomorrow will do . . . or even the next day". Then it was a quick sprint down to the Kindergarten for their assembly. The school's open-air swimming pool opened on Monday morning, with some 25 students converging at 0530 hrs for swimming trials. I didn't make it, but I shall make a point of going down at some stage.

I spent some of Monday morning in the Library catching up and downloading some photos from my digital camera onto my laptop and memory stick. At lunchtime a Class 7 boarder (boy) asked if he could see me at the end of the day, which I did. "Sir, I have a little treat for you, for you have been so kind to me. I wish you could come to my home (in Calcutta) for I would have given you more". And from his bag he produced a bag of "Marsala Munch" crisps and a bar of "Dairy Milk" – and all for me! And so I gave him a big hug! In the afternoon I had filled in for two teachers – Class 11 and Class 10, both English. "But Sir, why can't you come and teach us all the time?"

At the end of the school day, I had a walk to Lucia King Cottage, where the wee ones are – the ones who got the teddies. As I walked into the house and as all the wee ones saw me and started to charge towards me, I suddenly thought of Jesus' own words, "Let the children come to; do not stop them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to little ones such as these". And to think that some of their parents had abandoned them. And so we played, and they jumped on top of me as they jostled for hugs and cuddles. We also sang some songs and we said a prayer. And before I left they all got a lollipop . . . "Thank you Sir . . . please come back!" And as I left I took with me some lovely pictures they had drawn since my last visit. It was then up to the swimming pool where around 40 students had gathered to take part in trials – practice on Tuesday at 0530 hrs and 0600 hrs – but not for Tam!!!

Tuesday started off particularly hot. A boarder from Scottish Cottage arrived at 0800 hrs with some lettuce grown in the cottage garden. "Sir, why are you leaving? Will you leave me some of your socks?" I know I've still got a fortnight to go, but it's getting increasingly difficult to prepare myself for my eventual departure. On arriving at the Chapel for the Junior Assembly, three little girls came up with the usual "Good morning, Sir!" This was followed by one of them asking me, "Sir, what joke will you

be telling us today?” And we finished the assembly with a rousing rendition of “Halle Halle”, with many of the students now clapping as they sing!

I had lunch in the Dining Room – something that was the size of an orange but resembled a lime – and when you cut it, it was an orange inside! Just before dinner we had a visit from members of Lothian Presbytery who are in twinning with the Diocese of Eastern Himalaya, of which the Church of North India is a part – Revd Alison McDonald a Minister in Musselburgh and Revd Sandy Horsburgh, a Minister in Dalkeith. It’s now thunder, lightning and heavy rain – some things never change! And it’s off to bed soon.

Again, my grateful thanks to all of you for allowing me to come to this wonderful part of the world, and to share a little bit of my life with all those at DGH.

As always, with love and best wishes.

Tom xx