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Testament for Social Science

When the sociologist T.H. Marshall gave his inaugural lecture as a Professor of Social Institutions at the London School of Economics in 1946, the whole tenor of his text was to defend sociology as a serious subject. The defence was necessary. As Barbara Wootton pointed out in her autobiography, 'The social sciences are indeed not much older than I am myself'.¹ Marshall's metaphor was that of sociology as a 'poor lady' standing at the crossroads wondering which road to take. There was the journey of theoretical sociology through the realm of abstraction – what Marshall called the 'path to the stars'; and then there was the passionate empiricist, driven to collect more and more facts without quite knowing why. This latter 'path to the sands' was equally a mistake. No wonder the poor lady hesitated.² By the time of Marshall's lecture, Barbara had already made some of her own choices, and she had had others made for her. Starting out as a classical scholar, she had migrated to economics and discovered the limitations of that subject as a practical study of the real world, so the road ahead for her was clear: she needed to turn herself into a more broadly based social scientist instead. But she would take neither of Marshall's paths. *Her* social science was to be informed by important social questions and moulded by the need to find answers from the material of people's lives and experiences.

Barbara Wootton's journey from Classics to social science did not follow a linear, rational pattern. She herself always said she never thought of her work as a 'career' in the sense of a chosen ladder which led her determinedly from one place to another: 'There was never a time when I sat down and thought what shall I do to earn money?'³ 'I don't at all feel as if I had shaped my life, but rather that it has just happened to me.'⁴ In 1944, when she was forty-seven, she had a quarter of a century of work in education, political activity and public service behind her. The second world war of her lifetime had not been so personally disastrous for her as the first, but she recalled it (a little strangely, perhaps, in view of the significant agitations for peace and human rights which she had helped to command), as a depressingly fallow period, 'a semi-conscious interlude between one phase of life and

the next'. She remembered 'looking at some women in a bus queue, and thinking to myself, "Those must be women in their forties. What can it feel like to be a woman in her forties? This is a decade that I don't ever seem to have had"'.⁵ She was still a formidably good-looking woman, dressed in a secure middle-class style – from the London store Debenhams and Freebody's, according to friends.⁶ She had a husband, but marriage was not conventionally demanding as it was then for most women. She did not have to cook or wash or clean for George – not only because of the famous Mrs Brown whose wartime duties were composed of relieving JP Mrs Wootton of hers – but because, as early as 1947, Barbara held the modern view that, when man and wife are both working, their domestic responsibilities should be the same. Men already did quite a lot of washing up, she noted with approval, and some could occasionally be glimpsed pushing prams in which toddlers clutched the family ration books; but real domestic equality would take a long time to come. It would be a gradual revolution, if only because men would not stop exploiting their wives until their mothers stopped spoiling *them*.⁷ (There are perhaps echoes here of Barbara's own childhood experiences as a girl with two brothers.)

On the eve of a new era of Labour Government and the much-acclaimed welfare state, Barbara was in many ways at the height of her powers. She was in no doubt that social science had an important role to play in designing this new society that would maximize welfare for *all* its citizens, and she was poised to be one of its principal actors. But where did Barbara Wootton really belong? The cloistered corridors of Girton College had not proved a suitable institutional home; research for the TUC and the Labour Party had been disappointingly, but unsurprisingly, subject to the constraints of party politics; and adult education, both at Morley College and for the wider University of London, had made use of her very considerable talents as a teacher and an organizer, but had not supplied a base for the kind of research she knew ought to be done (and which she wanted to do). The struggling social investigator inside Barbara is evident in two small pieces of work she undertook with her adult education students in the early years of the Second World War. In the first, they designed a study of the contemporary class structure, with a questionnaire for fellow-students which asked about family occupational history, political allegiances, schooling and employment.⁸ The inquirers particularly wanted to know what the terms 'working class' and 'ruling class' then meant. This project, conducted in the difficult circumstances of the bombing of London in 1940, involved much usefully disciplined thinking about how to define social class, and yielded a fascinating table detailing the backgrounds of current politicians, civil servants, judges and magistrates, which included information on which clubs they belonged to and at what annual cost.⁹ The second outcome of Barbara's empirical enquiries with her

students was called 'Chaos in the Social Services', and was the forerunner of many subsequent more ambitious descriptions of how the social services work – or not. Most of the students who helped with it were professional social workers, and they must surely have been horrified to find so many anomalies and contradictions in the cash benefits available to citizens. For example, it was financially better for a man to be injured in an air raid than by an explosion at work, although for young men this rule was inverted; and health insurance enjoyed 'the ignominious distinction' of putting 'a premium on sin' by paying less to married than to single women.¹⁰ All this, and much other, chaos, had been inherited from the old poor law, and it was up to William Beveridge in his eagerly awaited Report to tidy it up.

William Beveridge did just that. 'So full of meat, yet so appetizingly written, and with a record of sales which would hearten any established novelist – the Beveridge Report is a grand piece of work', wrote Barbara approvingly in February 1943, two months after the launch of the famous *Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services*.¹¹ Beveridge's early years had been spent in India, firmly within the embrace of unprogressive English colonial society, and he had arrived, like Barbara, via the study of Classics at Oxbridge, at an appreciation of the considerably greater challenges that were to be found for men and women of energy and commitment among modern cultures. In 1919, he took his conviction that empirical research and observation lay at the heart of social science's role in solving social problems to the LSE, where he became Director. His Social Insurance Report provided the Government with a Plan for Social Security which was not only visionary but workable, and its publication, as Barbara Wootton intimated in her review, transformed him from an obscure academic figure into a national hero. Within two weeks of the Report's publication, nineteen out of twenty people had heard of it;¹² Pathé News flashed pictures of Beveridge, 'looking prophetically white-haired and benign'¹³ into every cinema in the land. Frank Pakenham, Lord Longford, recalled going into his local newsagent the morning the Report came out and asking for a morning paper; they were all sold out. "'It's that Sir William Beveridge," explained the shopkeeper. "He's going to abolish want".'¹⁴

'A revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for patching,' explained the benign white-haired man as a guiding principle for all his recommendations.¹⁵ Beveridge's remit, to 'tidy up' existing schemes of social insurance and related services and make recommendations, particularly about the inter-relationships between these multiple schemes, had been interpreted as widely as it could possibly have been. His Plan for Social Security was part of a broad social policy programme, an element in a much-needed attack on the five 'giant evils' of physical Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor, and Idleness. The Beveridge vision

was of a society in which the capitalist spirit would, significantly, still be nurtured: security against the five evils could, and should, be 'combined with freedom and enterprise and responsibility of the individual for his own life'.¹⁶

Barbara liked the Beveridge Report because what it proposed was precisely the simplification of the sorts of anomalies she and her students had found. She liked the Plan for its universalism – no longer would we suffer the distinction of the insured and the uninsured classes: the principle was that everyone would pay the same weekly national insurance contribution, and, in return, state benefits would be available to meet the needs of the sick, the unemployed, retired or widowed. Since the rich would not be exempt, this, following characteristically sharp Wootton-esque logic, had the advantage of 'saving anyone the bother of finding out whether you are rich or not'. Further, the Beveridge Plan took the eminently practical and wise view that the benefits available for those who cannot earn (for whatever reason) must be enough to live on. But the Beveridge Report's conventionally sexist treatment of married women did not escape Barbara's keen eye.¹⁷ Perhaps, also, what people did not quite realize – and this Barbara pointed out in a Forces Educational Broadcast in the summer of 1946 – was that Beveridge's Plan had a history. It was not quite his own invention. Germany had introduced compulsory insurance against sickness in 1884, long before Lloyd George's National Insurance Act of 1911 in Britain, on which the Beveridge Plan was built, had initiated compulsory health insurance for wage-earners. The New Zealanders were also pioneers in introducing a Social Security Act in 1938 which covered all the same principles as the Beveridge Plan on a very generous scale. 'I don't think that there is much doubt', declared Barbara, 'that some of the Beveridge ideas come from over there. I hope that Lord Beveridge won't mind if we say that his plan is a bit of a mongrel.' She softened the blow by adding, 'Mongrels, by the way, are sometimes said to be intelligent'.¹⁸

Intelligent mongrels do not, however, necessarily spur governments into action. The wartime Coalition Government considered not publishing the Report, and the House of Commons debate was lukewarm in its appreciation. 'What has happened to the Beveridge Report?' demanded Barbara Wootton in an article in *The Political Quarterly* in the autumn of 1943.¹⁹ 'It is dreadful how the public has gone cold about the Beveridge Report', she wrote to its author in 1944.²⁰ Beveridge shared her desperation, convinced that his plan needed to be put into effect before the end of the War, and that the Government would have to be leant on for this to happen.²¹ To this end, a campaigning body, the Social Security League, was formed in the summer of 1943. Barbara Wootton was its Chairman, and the magazine publisher Edward Hulton was its Treasurer; Beveridge later agreed to be President. Barbara, Hulton and the League's Secretary, Joan Simeon

Clarke, wrote to *The Manchester Guardian* explaining the aims of the League: to 'press for swift action' by further publicizing the details of the Report and urging the Government to respect 'the popular desire for immediate legislation'.²² They held a party to celebrate the new initiative: 'Socially secure in Mr. Edward Hulton's Mayfair house and free from want on an anonymous donor's chicken sandwiches and claret-cup', indelicately observed *The Manchester Guardian*, guests listened to Beveridge, recently returned from his foreign travels, enthusing about international support (in North and Latin America) for the principles of his plan.²³

For those, like Barbara Wootton, who had lived through the inter-war years and had struggled to imagine a better organized, more peaceful and just society, Labour's landslide victory in the 1945 election must have seemed the entry to a promised land. It is the habit of warfare to generate radical politics, and these particular manifestations grew from the seed of the 'planned society' which policy advocates such as Barbara Wootton had persistently contended in the 1930s, and which the circumstances of the Second World War had made a matter of national necessity. And so the new Labour Government *was* the promised land, in many ways. Prime Minister Attlee rapidly set about the business of reconstruction, with Barbara's friend Hugh Dalton at his right hand as Chancellor of the Exchequer. The King's speech that year straightforwardly listed public ownership of industry, a comprehensive scheme of social insurance and a national health service among the new administration's immediate goals. The Bank of England, the Coal Industry, Inland Transport, Civil Aviation, and Cable and Wireless communication all came under public control in 1946; Electricity and Gas followed in 1947–8. The 1946 Housing Act established the principle of housing as a public rather than a private problem, and the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 created order out of chaos by cutting the number of agencies involved in planning from 1,441 to 145.²⁴ The right to education was extended to secondary school level, and universities entered a welcome phase of expansion, aided by increased Government grants to the tune of two-thirds of their budgets in 1951.²⁵ With a series of Acts in 1945–8 – Family Allowances, the NHS, National Insurance and National Assistance – much of Beveridge's Plan was put into effect. Among the deviations from the original, which the members of the Social Security League were quick to point out, were that levels of provision for children, older people and the unemployed proposed in the Beveridge Report had been scaled down, and the Government's scheme replaced social insurance with emergency assistance as the guarantor of freedom from Want. Along with nine others, including G.D.H. Cole and Seebohm Rowntree, Barbara signed the document putting forward these criticisms.²⁶ Thereafter, she kept a watchful eye on the way that Beveridge's principles were implemented.

Why, for instance, she asked in 1949, did the new National Health Service treat feet differently from eyes or teeth? Feet were out, but eyes and teeth were in. Three million people had acquired or were acquiring spectacles, and 130,000 were going to the dentist every week. Since neither wearing spectacles nor visiting the dentist were things you would do unless you had to, Barbara took this as firm evidence that state intervention was successfully preventing many bodily inconveniences.²⁷

As regards the role of social science in understanding society, Beveridge was a man after Barbara's own heart: 'If, in the Social Sciences, we cannot yet run or fly,' he declared on retiring from his LSE post in 1937, 'we ought to be content to walk, or to creep on all fours as infants ... theorising not based on facts and not controlled by facts assuredly does lead nowhere'.²⁸ At this time, for some time to come, and in line with Marshall's metaphor of the hesitating lady, social science was still an immature discipline, the child of arguing parents – one passionate about social reform, the other devoted to the scientific study of social facts. The only real chance of the marriage working was if science could be seen as the route to effective social reform. This was how most of the key instigators of social science in Britain, in continental Europe, and in the United States saw it. Comte, Mill, Spencer, Booth, the Webbs, and others whose names are all indissolubly attached to the emergence of social science, had faith in a natural science of society that would yield unassailable facts about the workings of the social system – the here-and-now of how human beings interact with one another and their material environment. Social science offered a way – *the* way – to understand, and thus to control, a society subject to the disruptive and socially unequal effects of rapid change. Barbara's own philosophy was in direct lineal descent from these figures; it was 'positivist' in its belief that the realities of the social world can be described and quantified, and in understanding that such an exercise is key to social progress.²⁹

Before the Second World War, the social sciences occupied, outside London 'the smallest, least popular, and least well-endowed position' of all university subjects.³⁰ Within London, they had the LSE, founded in 1895, as their first institutional base in Britain. The idea of the LSE had been born at a Surrey breakfast in the summer of 1894, when the renowned 'firm' of the Webbs (Beatrice and Sidney) had got up early to discuss what to do about a bequest of money left to benefit Fabian socialism by an eccentric Derby solicitor.³¹ The LSE was 'the most successful of all the Webbian experiments',³² but, until at least the 1920s, it was a small and quite obscure part of the University of London. Britain's first Professor of Sociology, L.T. Hobhouse, had been appointed to the LSE in 1907. Hobhouse was a liberal theorist, trained, like Barbara, in Classics; he taught philosophy, was interested in trade unionism, wrote for *The Manchester Guardian* and had no qualifications we

would today recognize as relevant to a professorship in sociology. But sociology was then very much a matter of 'armchair reflection'.³³ Sociology was not the same as social science or empirical research. For many years, social science retained its historical connection with social work; the Department of Social Science which was founded at the LSE in 1912, for example, was intended for the training of social workers, as was the social science that was taught at Westfield College in London where Barbara Wootton cut her own teaching teeth in 1919–20 on the young ladies she remembered as pearls-and-twinset do-gooders.

By 1937, when Beveridge relinquished the directorship, the LSE was the largest centre for the study of social sciences in Britain, with a threefold increase in its premises and a sevenfold increase in its budget since its modest beginnings.³⁴ The writer, and later *New Statesman* editor, Kingsley Martin, who was also on the staff of the LSE for a time, once paid Beveridge the compliment (subsequently much quoted by Beveridge) of saying that he 'ruled over an empire on which the concrete never set'.³⁵ This empire, with its mix of theoretical and practical activities, would have been a natural home for Barbara Wootton, but her research scholarship there in 1919 had not been a success. However, a new opportunity to work at the LSE arrived in 1944, with the advertisement of a Professorship in Social Institutions. By this time, Barbara felt she had spent enough years 'in the highways and byways of extra-mural education' and wanted to find a more mainstream academic post. The choice was limited, because she was reluctant to leave London.³⁶ Another possibility presented itself at the same time, a Readership in Social Studies at Bedford College. Barbara asked Beveridge to write her references for both posts, but she hesitated about the Bedford one, because the place she really wanted to go was the LSE.³⁷ In his willingly-written testimonials, Beveridge praised Barbara Wootton's combination of 'three things not always found together': 'the capacity to understand and argue about matters of economic theory'; 'knowledge and interest in social problems and the working of social institutions'; and 'clarity and force of expression'.³⁸

The LSE rejected Barbara's application. There was already a favoured candidate, the sociologically-minded T.H. Marshall, who had been on the staff there since 1925. So it was Marshall, the inside man, the man with a theoretical disposition, who got the Professorship of Social Institutions at the LSE, and Barbara, the outside woman, the woman whose mind turned on the empirical usefulness of the social sciences, went instead to Bedford College in 1944 as Reader in Social Studies. The Bedford offer 'only partially mitigated' her disappointment at being rejected by the LSE,³⁹ for in those years the LSE was very much the 'intellectual bastion'⁴⁰ of the social sciences, and exclusion from such a bastion could not be taken lightly by

anyone with any ambition. Had Barbara got the LSE post, the future of sociology at the LSE might have been quite different, and so might her own.

She made the best of her disappointment. That summer, she wrote to Vera Seal, her long-time student, supporter and colleague, 'I hope you will be pleased that I have got one of the only two jobs in the world I wanted'.⁴¹ The Tutorial Class Department was sad to see her go; in its note to this effect, the Council particularly noted her 'high academic attainments, her wide intellectual sympathies, her administrative skills, and her keen interest in Adult Education which have enabled her to render notable service to this cause'.⁴² Barbara certainly left her classes in a healthy state: eight-eight, the largest number ever, in the 1943–4 session: 1,583 students producing the tutorial burden of 9,420 pieces of written work. But she had for some time been weary of the tutorial class problems, which recurred 'in much the same form with monotonous regularity' year after year: variable attendance, poor quality of written work, opinion rather than a thirst for knowledge.⁴³

Bedford College presented a different set of challenges, but it was a bit like going home. While working for the Labour Party, Barbara had given a course of lectures in social economics there in 1924. Her mother, Adela, had started her own undergraduate life at Bedford College in 1882, and had later replaced the Greek lecturer at Bedford for a term. Aunt Fanny had held a position as Honorary Secretary to the Council of Bedford College for two years before Emily Davies recruited her for a similar post at Girton College, and from 1909 had also been a long-term Trustee of Bedford College. A student who was at Bedford College in the 1880s recalled the real personal interest and 'gracious kindness' of both Fanny Kensington and 'Mrs Mylne' (Aunt Juliet – though what Aunt Juliet was doing in the corridors of Bedford College is not clear).⁴⁴

Barbara joined Bedford College in October 1944. Her new workplace was in an attractive area of London, in Regent's Park, with its boating ponds and flower gardens, and close to London Zoo. Bedford College, 'the first and last University College for women in England',⁴⁵ had started out as the 'Ladies' College, Bedford Square' in 1849, twenty years before Emily Davies and her co-campaigners established the modest beginnings of Girton College. Bedford College was unique among the early women's colleges in providing a full range of teaching for women students within its own walls. It had moved to Regent's Park from Bedford Square and adjacent houses in 1909, as a result of a legacy left by Robert Turle, a wealthy businessman. The Turle bequest enabled the College to take over the Crown Lease of a large Victorian house and eight acres of grounds, and to design and erect a whole new set of buildings incorporating a classical quadrangle and a 'bridge of sighs' as well as science laboratories, a residence for the Principal, rooms for students

and a library. The woman whose vision inspired Bedford College, Elizabeth Jesser Reid, was a wealthy social reformer, like many of those who pioneered women's education, and she saw the College as 'a place where by culture of the mind and the acquiring of some knowledge young women might be saved from the dreary futility of the life led by the greater number of those whose parents belonged to the professional and upper middle classes'.⁴⁶ When Barbara took up her appointment, Bedford College still admitted only women students: men came as postgraduates two years later and, as undergraduates, only in 1965. She observed a transformation in student habits since she had first been at Bedford twenty years before: hats had disappeared, stockings were on the way out, and students requested leave of absence for such modern reasons as to get divorced and compete in a motor cycle race.⁴⁷ But Bedford retained a genteel air of unimpeachable Edwardian respectability, with waxed floors smelling of fresh polish at the start of term.⁴⁸

The duties of her post covered responsibility for students taking the BA Honours Degree in Sociology as well as those preparing for the College Certificate in Social Studies. Like the departments at the LSE and at Westfield, social science at Bedford College inherited the tradition of social-work training. The department Barbara headed there was a reconstituted version of a 'Hygiene Department' which had provided courses for a two-year diploma taken by women public health workers from 1895 to 1919. In 1916, the Charity Organization Society set up an arrangement whereby the College would provide lectures on Social Economics and Social Ethics as part of its Social Work Certificate course. This was the kernel of the Department of Social Studies, whose first Director was the social reformer Eva Hubback – the woman who had in 1927 taken over from Barbara as Principal of Morley College (the world of academic social science was truly a small one in those days).⁴⁹ Most of the students who were Barbara's new responsibility at Bedford College were destined for careers in social work. In the years of post-war university expansion, there was such a high level of demand for limited places that Barbara, with her characteristic scepticism of customary but unevidenced methods, proposed they might take all applicants who wore size five shoes, a common size that would yield about the right number of students. 'The suggestion, I need hardly say, was not taken seriously, but I have often wondered whether the results would have been noticeably different if it had been.'⁵⁰ Women with different-sized feet enjoyed Barbara Wootton's attention as a teacher. Freda Russell, then Freda Holomstock, recalls Barbara's vibrant figure and wry sense of humour at lectures; when she was interviewed for a place, Barbara interrogated her: 'What do you want to come here for? Why didn't you apply to LSE? We're only women here'.⁵¹ The 'only women' clause had a new meaning in the post-war years, as another of Barbara's

students remembers: 'Coping with a diverse group of ex-service women who had carried responsibilities usually confined to men, was a new experience for the "Ladies' College" and quite a challenge for us all'. In a time of 'bankrupt Britain', with rationing and high unemployment and low wages, Barbara's approach to life, teaching and learning was 'both serious and demanding', and it gave her students 'a vision and hopes for the future'.⁵² Rachel Pierce, a sociology degree student in 1951–4, retained a strong memory of Barbara for 'her encouragement and almost cajoling of us, a class of young women, to go out and make a contribution to the world. We should not hang back and wait for opportunities, but go out and sell ourselves, demonstrate the, relatively new, skills we would be gaining as sociology graduates'.⁵³

In 1948, Bedford College elevated Barbara from a Readership to a Professorship. She was made a Professor of Social Studies, not Sociology – as she argued, social studies rather than social science was the most that could be claimed at this stage of things.⁵⁴ She always disliked the word 'sociology', preferring 'social science', because the latter term referred to method rather than any coherent body of knowledge, and the social sciences had a long way to go before they could catch up with the natural ones.⁵⁵ Her definition of the social sciences was broad: 'all those studies which seek to explain the behaviour and relationships of human beings and the nature of their customs and institutions through the method of inference from accurate observation which is common to all scientific investigation'.⁵⁶ She was excited by the possibility of setting up a programme of empirical research at Bedford College. Social research was lagging even further behind general social science in its fight for academic recognition. Two years after she took up her new post, the Committee on the Provision for Social and Economic Research chaired by Sir John Clapham bemoaned the general lack of appreciation for 'the great practical knowledge' social and economic research could supply to the smooth running of modern industrial communities. The Clapham Committee had been set up at the behest of Clement Attlee, then Deputy Prime Minister, who was sympathetic to the pleas of those social scientists who argued that their skills were needed to understand social change.⁵⁷ Its Report showed that spending on social science posts was a mere six per cent of that devoted to science and medicine; among the social science subjects, economics was fairly well represented, but the study of social questions was scarcely at its beginning: 'the idea that provision for research in these fields by way of libraries, calculating machines, computers and research assistants, is as important as provision for laboratories and experimental stations seems still to present an appearance of novelty and paradox'. These aspects of social science university departments consumed less than two per cent of the budgets allocated to science and medicine. Lamentably, social research depended on the 'sporadic and discontinuous subventions of private benefactors'

(insecure handouts from private individuals).⁵⁸ The Committee recommended an injection of some £250,000–£300,000 a year (between £6.5 million and £7.8 million in 2010 prices) into social and economic research, but it proposed that this should occur as a gradual development. It rejected the idea that a Social and Economic Research Council along the lines of the Medical Research Council should be set up with government money to provide a formal infrastructure for social research. This milestone would happen only in 1965, after Barbara had left the academic world.

The Clapham Report also recommended to the University Grants Committee (UGC) – the body established in 1919 to advise government on the disposition of state grants to support university education in the UK – that a Sub-Committee should be appointed to consider further the position of social science research. Barbara Wootton was invited to be a member of this Sub-Committee. Other familiar names on it were G.D.H. Cole, Margery Fry, Hector Hetherington, T.H. Marshall, Lionel Robbins and R.H. Tawney. *Their* recommendations were for a substantial increase in the earmarked grant for social science research.⁵⁹ The increase, which was agreed, was intended to provide for Chairs and other teaching posts, research staff, libraries and equipment. The timing was splendid for the new energetic Head of the Bedford College Sociology, Social Studies and Economics Department. Here was the opportunity to set up a research laboratory, a powerhouse of testable hypotheses and practical projects of field enquiries that would root the contribution of social science in the soil it needed to flourish – detailed investigations of real people's experiences and living conditions. With the new UGC money, Barbara was able to set up a small research unit, and she recruited Margot Jefferys, a social scientist, to head it. Margot had trained in economic history at the LSE and was in the process of transforming herself from a civil servant into an academic.⁶⁰ She always got on well with Barbara, although she remembered her as someone who could unwittingly make enemies. 'It was partly, I think, because, if she thought you weren't talking sense, she found it very difficult not to convey that ... Her caustic tongue, when she used it, was quite difficult to take.'⁶¹ Barbara and Margot designed a modest study of employment changes in Battersea and Dagenham. This was an attempt to look at industrial mobility among male workers in 1951 in two areas of London, chosen because they were both within easy and cheap reach of central London and they provided contrasting labour patterns. The study addressed the kind of mismatch between economic theory and practice which, in the 1930s, had led Barbara to lament the nature of the contribution economics could make to public policy: if free market capitalism was an efficient method for distributing resources, why did workers move or not move between industrial sectors with different labour demands, opportunities and rewards in ways that

did not seem to serve the efficiency of the market very well at all?⁶² The book published as a result of the Battersea and Dagenham project was commended as 'an excellent study' which answered a number of employment policy questions.⁶³

The labour mobility project was the first output of the first social research unit at Bedford College, but it was also, unhappily the last. Some of the new unit's academic colleagues were hostile to Barbara's initiative. The sabotage campaign was led by Lillian Penson, Professor of Modern History at Bedford, and politically aided by Penson's post as Vice-Chancellor of the University of London. Penson and her colleagues cited the principle of academic freedom as a reason why funds should not be devoted to research.⁶⁴ In other words, they were jealous.⁶⁵ The details of the campaign against Barbara have been lost to history, but it is clear that she was not alone in being the victim of professional jealousy. Ross McGregor, son of O.R. McGregor (Mac), the sociologist and friend recruited by Barbara to Bedford College in 1947, recalls his father having 'a huge punch up' with Bedford, overtly over Mac's purchase of a primitive computer; the scientists assumed that any piece of expensive mechanical kit was for them and nobody else.⁶⁶ Underlying the College's reaction to Barbara's attempt to institute empirical research as a key element in any social science enterprise was the contemptuous attitude towards sociology still held by many in other academic disciplines. There was also what some considered the 'terminal sickness' of Bedford College itself, which, as a result of weak leadership and other problems, would eventually relinquish its status as an independent school of the University in 1985 and merge with 'another unsuccessful college in the outer suburbs'.⁶⁷

The upshot of these wranglings was that Bedford College returned the UGC money and Barbara's research unit was disbanded. Margot Jefferys left Bedford College and went to the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, although she later returned to Bedford and overcame these early disasters by becoming Director of Social Research there and the first ever Professor of Medical Sociology. Barbara had to soldier on. She was hugely disappointed by these experiences. It was not at all the kind of opportunity she had envisaged when she had decided to become a proper academic. In a letter to Vera Seal, she said that what had happened at Bedford was 'enough to give anyone a persecution mania, mine was really getting very bad. I should have got ill if I had gone on ... If the truth was told I have hated the job there all the eight years I've done it and I think for good reasons.'⁶⁸ With that adroit mix of serendipity and careful networking that marks the careers of many successful people, Barbara did manage a creative solution that enabled her to stay in mainstream academia while devoting her time to research. She was successful in obtaining a six-year grant from the Nuffield Foundation to

survey the achievements and future needs of social science research – a story told in the next chapter.

She told the College about her grant from the Nuffield Foundation in January 1952. Geraldine Jebb, who had just retired as Principal of the College, and who had in common with Barbara a Cambridge economics background, wrote to say the news was perfectly splendid but ‘the fly in the ointment’ was her giving up the Bedford post in which she had ‘done such magnificent work (even in a state of frustration!)’.⁶⁹ Richard Titmuss, two years into his own appointment as Professor of Social Administration in the parallel department to Barbara’s at the LSE, and having his own troubles with professional territorialism, wrote to her, too: ‘What delights me most is the news that freedom for B.W. really lies ahead. What fun it will be!’ He went on to say, ‘It is sweet of your students to want me as a “second best” (for I’ve heard how they adore you) but I too want freedom’.⁷⁰ Presumably Barbara was concerned about abandoning her students, and, either seriously or in jest, had suggested to him that he might take her place.

Being Barbara, she was unable to let the whole episode of the stillbirth of social research at Bedford College go without publishing a sustained counter-attack. In her ‘Reflections on Resigning a Professorship’, she observed that at least some of her negative experiences at Bedford were of ‘more than autobiographical interest’ – they happened to other people as well.⁷¹ The problem was not only that non-social scientists failed to understand the need for such research, but the universities were suffering from an overgrowth of bureaucracy. The contractual requirement, common to all professorial posts, to advance one’s subject through research, could be viewed only as a ‘piece of misplaced irony’ when the actual conditions of one’s job were so overloaded with administrative burdens – committee meetings; decisions about syllabuses and courses, and staff and student problems; appointing staff; writing testimonials; arranging field visits and student placements; advising government departments; participating in professional associations; and so on and so forth. A peculiar aspect of the way universities have developed is that all of this work has accumulated at the top of the status hierarchy. The more important you are, the more of it you have to do. Moreover, the traditional notion that research and teaching must go hand in hand (teachers are good only if they are also researchers and vice versa) was quite without evidence. But where are the research professorships that are needed to solve this dilemma? Before the Nuffield Foundation solved hers, Barbara had been unable to find any for which to apply. (If she had been a man, she would have been eligible for a Fellowship of All Souls College, Oxford.) The sting in the tail of her success in getting the Nuffield Foundation grant was that, although the grant paid her a professorial level salary

(plus other expenses), Bedford College saw fit to strip her of her title. This was not technically necessary, and would almost certainly not happen now; one is bound to wonder whether an element of gender discrimination was involved, but Barbara herself did not spot one. Giving up a professorship was not normal academic behaviour, and doing so in order to fulfil one of the most important conditions of its tenure (carrying out research) was to label oneself a deviant from the dominant academic culture. Finding herself at odds with dominant values was something that happened to Barbara all her life. Her resignation, in March 1950, from the UGC after only two years, must have been connected with her disappointment at the fate of her efforts to establish social research at Bedford College.⁷²

Fortunately, however, there were other ways of advancing the cause of social science outside the narrow jealousies of particular institutions. Richard Titmuss and Barbara Wootton were both signatories of a letter to *The Times* in May 1951 headed 'Sociological Studies' which reported the recent founding of a new body, the British Sociological Association (BSA).⁷³ The object of the Association was to promote interest in sociology, advance its study and application, and encourage contact and co-operation between workers in different fields. It would provide opportunities for the discussion of both theoretical and practical problems, and promote good research whose results would be cumulative and lead to the development of a systematic study of society. Within two weeks, the letter had drawn 360 enquiries.⁷⁴ The BSA's sponsors thoughtfully decided not to define sociology: 'If a definition of the interests of the Association is needed, it should deliberately be made very broad, embracing such fields as contemporary, historical and comparative studies of social structure, morals and religion; sociological aspects of Law; social philosophy; social psychology; social-biological aspects of mankind; social aspects of urban and rural settlement; human geography; and methodological aspects of social investigations'.⁷⁵ One senses the brushstroke of Barbara at the end of the list. Apart from being a founding member of the BSA, she served a term as Chair (1957–59) and was President from 1959 to 1964. During this period, she was one of only five women to be associated with the BSA; the other forty-five activists were all men.⁷⁶ Perhaps it was this history which led the BSA to hail the election in 1975 of Sheila Allen as the first woman President. When Allen apologized to Barbara for this error, Barbara expressed no surprise at becoming so invisible so quickly.⁷⁷

A.H. Halsey, later Professor of Social and Administrative Studies at Oxford, was a cheeky young man at the launch of the BSA in 1951. He was reminded of the occasion when it celebrated its 50th year. At this, 'Jo Banks [J.A. Banks, Professor of Sociology at Leicester] gave a reminiscence talk ... in which he referred very confidently – and he did have a good memory – to an argument that I had had with

Barbara about whether this thing should be formed or not ... He said it electrified the rest of us because I was very cocky and self-confident. I'd already decided that she, being the Cambridge sort of woman that she was, was automatically in the Establishment and she had just as confidently put me down, so it was sort of honours even, and what the content was I can't remember ... she was interested in some way or other in the formation of the BSA: at the time it was a very important question, it mattered a great deal. There was a small group of people – like Jo Banks and myself and Dahrendorf [Ralf Dahrendorf, later Director of the LSE] and ... Lockwood [David Lockwood, later Professor of Sociology at Essex], who were very, very blatantly and vociferously demanding that it be established and putting ourselves forward as being the first generation of sociologists.⁷⁸ In his Report of the Conference, Barbara's contender for the LSE post, T.H. Marshall, recorded the absence of a sharp line between the academic and the practical: 'There is a place for social scientists among the men of affairs and for men of affairs among the social scientists'.⁷⁹ As a woman of affairs and of social science, Barbara chaired a group discussion at the Conference on 'Needs and Standards in the Social Services'.

In 1950 she published her own case for social science. *Testament for Social Science*, a title perhaps modelled on Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*, was subtitled *An Essay in the Application of Scientific Method to Human Problems*. Barbara's *Testament* is an intensely serious and somewhat didactic book. It begins with the contrast between 'man's' impressive ability to control his material environment, a control achieved largely through science, and his obvious incompetence at managing the affairs of human society. Poverty, hunger, misgovernment, crime, unhappiness, all cry out for a rational application of the scientific method to social problems. The differences between the natural and the social sciences are those of degree, not kind, and the rewards of applying this perspective are inestimable, not only in curing social distress, but in disposing of the 'clouds of superstition' under which many human beings still live. The book was intended to educate people about the essence of the scientific method, to allay some well-worn concerns about the inapplicability of science to social issues (the problem of the familiar; the obstacle of jargon; the complexity and indeterminacy of human behaviour; the misclassification of social studies as 'arts' not 'sciences'), and to point out the socially damaging effects of what Barbara called 'pre-scientific mental attitudes'. For example, theories of punishment commonly supposed that, if you punish offenders sufficiently, they will see the error of their ways. But there is little evidence to support this. Barbara attacked religion, Marxism ('pseudo-science'), and high-flown social theory in her book. As the last chapter observed, 'The proof of the social science pudding must be in the eating; and that, of course, lies mostly in the future, for the greater part

of the pudding is not yet cooked, and ... the public are reluctant to taste the few morsels that are ready'.⁸⁰

Barbara Wootton's view of social science very much echoed that of the Webbs who had, eighteen years earlier in their *Methods of Social Study*, outlined the methods of investigation they themselves used in their various studies of trade unionism and local government. Barbara had reviewed the Webbs' text approvingly: 'Perhaps the reviewer's best comment on the book,' she concluded, 'is to reflect how much human misery might have been avoided had we but on the one hand more investigators willing to practise what the Webbs have both practised and preached with such splendid consistency, and on the other hand administrators with an ear less deaf to the results of investigations conducted in this spirit'.⁸¹ The Webbs and Barbara Wootton shared a sense that insisting on the commonality of all the sciences would help to make sociology respectable. 'The division of our studies into separate sciences is justified only by its convenience in concentrating our attention upon particular ranges of phenomena,' pronounced the Webbs, 'the intellectual method is one and the same.' Where Barbara departed from the Webbs was in her argument that social science, like other sciences, should occupy itself with targeted questions, with hypotheses to test. The Webbs considered this a mistake: the right approach was to choose a particular section of the social environment and sit down patiently in front of it.⁸²

Barbara's tract for social science is scarcely remembered today, and at the time it fell mostly on resistant ears. The resisters included the reviewer in *The Manchester Guardian*, who said that he had heard the 'science as saviour of mankind' thesis far too many times before,⁸³ and the *Scotsman* reviewer who shivered at Professor Wootton's 'cold intellectuality' and disregard for the religious instinct in man.⁸⁴ *The Times* was happier: *Testament* was a 'brilliant and fascinating ... highly persuasive and supremely reasonable' book.⁸⁵ The professional journals gave it a mixed reception. Despite finding her argument 'eloquent and sustained', *The British Journal of Sociology* was not comfortable with Barbara's stance on science and morals.⁸⁶ *The Economist* reviewer thought her 'courteous, incisive, sensible, witty, cool ... a paragon among controversialists', but she claimed too much for science.⁸⁷ The methodological pragmatism of *Testament* failed to resonate with fashion among many social scientists in Britain, who were beginning to be captivated by the 'grand' theory emerging from the US and Europe – T.H. Marshall's 'path to the stars'. Empiricism of the kind the book recommended was well on the way to becoming a dirty word.⁸⁸ The book's optimism about the promise of a scientific attitude to social problems could be, and was, called 'naïve'; Terry Morris, who wrote Barbara's obituary in *The British Journal of Sociology*, described *Testament* as

exemplifying the 'bright-eyed and bushy tailed enthusiasm that one can detect in the photographs of the newly elected Labour ministers in 1945'.⁸⁹

The American journals, perhaps because of the more pronounced scientific tradition of sociology in that country, liked *Testament* better: here was a 'little volume so tightly written, so precisely carved in every sentence, that every page is important';⁹⁰ 'a wonderfully clear statement of the nature of scientific thinking and of pre-scientific ways of thought'.⁹¹ One correspondent, H.B. Mayo, Professor of Political Science at the University of Alberta in Canada, wrote to commend Barbara for the craftsmanship, the clear writing, the economy of references and the well organized argument of *Testament*; the reviews he had seen had not done the book justice: 'It has occurred to me that you might get some abuse for some of the plain speaking on matters which millions feel deeply. At any rate I know that people often do get abused, often by anonymous letters, for saying things about cherished ideas and institutions'.⁹² He was right, and there is plenty of evidence in Barbara's Girton College Archives of both anonymous and signed statements of abuse, although it was not *Testament for Social Science* that provoked these, but her later work on such obviously controversial topics as prison policy, drugs, euthanasia and the marriage laws.

Among the friends to whom Barbara dispatched copies of the book, two were particularly enthusiastic. William Haley, Director-General of the BBC, took the book very seriously: 'The *Testament* has been a great standby these past ten days. There it was, every evening, to restore one to an air of reason, serenity, and detachment'.⁹³ Douglas Ritchie, Head of Publicity at the BBC, called *Testament* 'superb'; Barbara had said clearly and effectively many things he himself had been groping for, and he admired her cold logic, especially in the presence of so much 'woolly mindedness'.⁹⁴ Ritchie was a fan of hers in other ways: he wrote to her after one of her television appearances in September 1951: 'Sweetie, You were wonderful – a star – you'll be back in Hollywood before you know where you are. There we were looking at that jolly good film ... and then suddenly Professor Barbara Wootton looking beautiful, poised and dignified, talking easily as though it were the most natural thing in the world to take a few minutes out to talk to three million viewers ... I tried to ring you, but didn't get through – I expect you'd taken the receiver off to keep your fans at bay'.⁹⁵

By the post-war years, Barbara had discovered another more populist route for spreading her messages about the values of rationalism and social science. Broadcasting at the time was only a bit younger than social science – the first complete programme broadcast to the public by the Marconi Company was on 23 February 1920. A technology of communication and entertainment that we now

entirely take for granted was one of many dramatic social changes that occurred during Barbara's lifetime. In 1947, only a fraction of one per cent of British people owned television sets; fourteen years later, this had risen to seventy-nine per cent.⁹⁶ Barbara had begun her broadcasting career in the late 1920s, before Broadcasting House was built, and she had incurred a motoring fine by exceeding the 20 mph speed limit in Regent's Park on her way home to listen to a broadcast.⁹⁷ In 1946, she entertained radio audiences with her Forces Educational Broadcast on the Beveridge Report and a talk on 'Liberty and the Individual' for the Midland Home Service; in 1947 she debated the meaning of evil with the Bishop of Bristol, and exhorted the British people to invest in National Savings; in 1948 she took fifteen minutes of the Home Service's airwave time talking about 'The Right Thing to Do' – though we do not now know what this was. We do know that she was a frequent participant in a popular programme with a distinctly non-populist title, 'The Brains Trust'. This ran on the BBC Home Service (later known as Radio 4) from 1942 to 1949 and was listened to by one in three of the UK population.⁹⁸ Its format was simple: listeners (later, viewers – the programme was transferred to television in the 1950s) sent in questions for a panel to answer. Barbara's role on the programme had earned her the title 'Brains Trust Analyst' by 1947.⁹⁹

The media world brought Barbara another new challenge in 1950, one which she would later look back on as a source of some of the greatest pleasure she had ever had in her professional life. She was invited to become a Governor of the BBC. 'Prof. Barbara becomes BBC Governor', proclaimed *The Daily Express* headline over a cut-out of Barbara's clear-eyed face: 'Professor Barbara is Mrs George Percival Wright. "My husband was a London taxi-driver" she said last night.'¹⁰⁰ There was just no getting away from the media typecasting – one of the issues with which the governance of the BBC was itself concerned. Barbara was one of seven governors, all appointed initially for two years – though she derived much enjoyment from a misprint in *Who's Who* which extended her governorship for 366 years from 1590 to 1956.¹⁰¹ The Governors were paid £600 a year and attended, on average, meetings for half a day a fortnight. Their job was a licence to read the newspapers and do as much listening and viewing as possible, and then at Board meetings to consider whatever it was they were asked to consider using this experience and their best judgement. They received over 200 reports from BBC staff every year and were advised by thirty-one separate advisory committees (for example on music, religion, agriculture and so forth); there was also a general advisory council of around fifty eminent people.¹⁰² Heavy reading and hard work were no strangers to Barbara. It was the social side which gave her most pleasure. As she later said, 'I don't think I actually did anything. But everyone there was

so nice. It was a very interesting and enjoyable time'.¹⁰³ The Governors' lunches, Barbara observed, were always 'excellent in intention' even if slightly ailing in standards of execution. This led her to reflect on a general pattern in types of refreshment offered for media work. The quality on offer was generally tailored to the prestige of the anticipated audience: so, at the bottom of the scale were overseas broadcasts to expatriates or other countries, for which rather an inferior selection of sandwiches and similarly restricted drinks was provided; next came 'Woman's Hour' lunches, with 'a reasonable, but in no way ostentatious', meal: 'Women are apparently ranked a cut above "natives" or "foreigners", but are still not quite first-class citizens'. The apex of the whole business was 'Panorama' or 'The Brains Trust', where one attained the luxury of a 'really slap-up meal'.¹⁰⁴

She enjoyed the food, and the company, but it was also a rather tense time, although the tensions did not involve Barbara directly. The central question was who was supposed to be running the BBC? Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, the Chairman of the Governors when Barbara joined, did not get on with Sir William Haley, who was Director-General; there was also a general lack of clarity about the responsibilities of the two posts. As Lord Simon put it in his recollections *The BBC from Within*, the three documents that laid down the constitution of the BBC – the 1946 Charter and Licence, and a White Paper – were 'almost bewilderingly vague'¹⁰⁵ on its governance, and the two million words given in evidence to another of William Beveridge's lesser known enquiries on Broadcasting in 1949–50¹⁰⁶ added little illumination. But the constitution did say that the Governors, led by their Chairman, were ultimately responsible for policy and programme content. However, Sir William's view was that *he* ran the BBC, with the Governors acting as 'a reserve of wisdom' – a reserve which Barbara's sharp retaliation noted was most useful when not drawn on, like the gold reserve of the Bank of England.¹⁰⁷ This left the Governors, and especially their Chairman, in an awkward situation, with titles but little power, a situation which Beveridge in the wisdom of his Broadcasting Report had suggested ought to change.

Simon and Haley disagreed about the BBC's function in society. Haley saw the BBC as a vehicle for improving people's taste; according to Francis Williams, another of Barbara's co-governors, Haley wanted the Home and Light (the latter becoming Radio 1 and Radio 2) programmes to wither away entirely so everyone would end up listening to the Third programme (later to become Radio 3). Simon took a more plebeian view.¹⁰⁸ Barbara supported Haley's worry about changing standards; in a piece she wrote on 'The BBC's Duty to Society', she bemoaned its obsession with 'the standards and values of show business and of journalism'.¹⁰⁹ Matters at the BBC eventually came to a head over the appointment of a Director

of Television. Radio had three Directors (for talks and news, for general home broadcasting, and for overseas broadcasting), but television was so new it only had a 'Controller'. Simon wanted the existing Controller, the journalist/publisher/novelist Norman Collins, to become Director of Television, but Haley thought Collins (who had previously worked on the Light Programme) would take far too popular a line, and wanted George Barnes, who had been head of the Third programme, instead. Haley enforced his decision and Collins resigned, subsequently taking a lead role in commercial television (which naturally proved Haley's point).

William Haley, the son of a French grocer's daughter and a Yorkshire clerk, was born and educated in Jersey at the same school as some of Barbara's own relations had attended. At various points, he ran, not only the BBC, but Reuters, the Press Association, *The Times*, *The Manchester Guardian*, and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Barbara and he became close friends. She gave him much support in the struggles that developed between him and Lord Simon. Later, Haley would remember 'the two of us sitting next to each other at Board meetings. Also the little notes you used to jot down for me'.¹¹⁰ It seems from the correspondence that Barbara took the initiative in expressing support for Haley's position outside the formal meetings, though he did write to her after one such meeting to ask her what she had meant when she had said that, if anything could bring her to doubt the idea of the BBC, it would be the BBC itself. He wanted to come and see her to find out privately what she meant.¹¹¹ Francis Williams described Haley as 'an extraordinarily shy man, of strong principles and unbending intellect', a man who found it difficult to display warmth; he was known among his staff as 'the man with two glass eyes'.¹¹² But there is great warmth in Haley's letters to Barbara. He thanks her for her expression of companionship and for her 'great kindnesses to him'.¹¹³ He sends her poetry and they have lunch. Friendship is a most precious thing. 'And difficult as it is to find the right words to say so I do want you to know how much yours means to me. I am afraid I am not very handy about such things and often become most tongue-tied when I should be the reverse. Then the occasion goes by, and one never says what one should have said.'¹¹⁴ When Haley leaves the BBC in 1952, Barbara attends his leaving party; she makes a speech in which she recalls something he had said at their first meeting. This causes him to be 'nearer to losing control than ever before'. There are lots of things he wants to say to her, and someday he *will* manage to get out all he feels.¹¹⁵ But what is not said, or written down, is not known, and is therefore not available for the record. Haley and Barbara would retain their close connection until he died of prostate cancer in 1987, the year before her.

Barbara stopped being a BBC Governor in 1955. That was the year in which a lecturer in Educational Psychology at Aberdeen University, Margaret Knight,

gave two BBC radio broadcasts on 'Morals Without Religion'. Her broadcasts sparked a 'hysterically hostile reaction' among some sections of the press and the public, who were unused to having one without the other.¹¹⁶ Knight was a humanist, and her infiltration of the BBC would not have happened without the support of Barbara Wootton and her BBC connection.¹¹⁷ Barbara was a leading supporter of the Humanist Broadcasting Council, which was set up as a pressure group by various humanist agencies. Responding to her own case that rational public policy needs the help of social science research, she also agreed to act as advisor for an inquiry into the effects of television on adults. This was sponsored by the BBC's own Audience Research Department, and run by William Belson, who headed the Research Techniques Unit at the LSE. It was intended as a parallel study to a rather better known inquiry looking at the effects of the new medium on children: *Television and the Child* by Hilde Himmelweit and colleagues. Both inquiries responded to alarmist concerns that television might be terrorising children, affecting their moral and physical health, and destroying family life. The study on which Barbara advised focused on the relationship between television-watching and family life and sociability. A detailed survey was conducted of some 8,230 people in London, Birmingham and Wakefield. Some effects were found: for example, television seemed to bring families together more in the evenings, but 14- to 22-year-olds compensated for this by going out more at other times; the pattern of visiting had changed, with television-watching to some extent replacing conversation. However, on balance, Belson was able to report 'hardly any evidence to support the large and sweeping generalizations often made as to [the] effects of television upon family life and social habits. This in itself is a finding of great importance and not less so by reason of its negative character.'¹¹⁸ This is exactly the kind of comment one might have expected from Barbara, who did not write the report, but who advised on the study's methodology.

Although she was often seen as an inveterately serious person, Barbara did know how to enjoy herself. Someone who helped her to do this during this period of her life was Vladimir Raitz, a young ex-LSE economics student, originally from the Soviet Union, with a flair for spotting unusual business opportunities. While Raitz had been on holiday at Calvi in Corsica in 1949, a local socialite had suggested to him that Calvi would be an ideal place for British holiday-makers, and he guaranteed to arrange a concession of a large piece of land on the beach. Raitz promptly set up Horizon Holidays, which was the beginning of the mass package-holiday industry. He advertised selectively for his first clients in *The Teacher's World*, *The Nursing Mirror* and the *New Statesman*, promising flights, accommodation for two weeks in US Navy tents (which he had bought up cheaply), local wines and meat twice a

day (an attractive proposition for refugees from post-war austerity Britain) – all for £32.10s (about £650 in 2010).¹¹⁹ The first holidays were in a camp under the pine trees by the beach. Barbara visited Calvi many times with George. They often went with friends, including the McGregors: both Mac and Barbara braved the first Calvi flight in May 1950. After the holiday season in 1952, Barbara described her stay in Calvi as ‘refreshing, entertaining, and in some respects decidedly “sauvage”’;¹²⁰ by 1954, the place had become ‘our beloved Corsica’.¹²¹ Her long-lived association with Horizon Holidays continued into the 1960s, when she contributed to its publicity material a short piece advertising ‘Tour C1 – 15 Days in Calvi from 42 Guineas’. She recommended Calvi because it was not too smart – a holiday location must be such that the young and shapely ‘(and perhaps even the not so young and shapely) must be able to wear sun clothes anywhere anytime without looking conspicuous or appearing to be exhibitionist’. (Perhaps this was a reference to the eyebrows raised by George’s swimming attire.) Calvi was a place where real people (fishermen) lived, and there were bars where one could sit and drink in the evenings ‘and watch the colours change and the world go by’.¹²² On the tenth anniversary of Horizon Holidays in 1959, Barbara was delighted to be flown by Raitz with other faithful clients to lunch at La Pyramide Restaurant near Lyons, although she complained that no-one had asked her to lunch in London that day to give her the opportunity to score a ‘lifemanship’ point by saying she was popping over to France for lunch.¹²³ After a further decade of Horizon Holidays, Raitz took 74 friends and clients on a VC 10 to Istanbul where they consumed 114 bottles of champagne. None of the party – which included TV stars Barbara Kelly and Bernard Braden as well as Barbara Wootton – knew where they were going until they got there.¹²⁴

Like many academics, Barbara benefited from the opportunity to combine work abroad with new horizons. In 1947, she went to Jamaica to take part in a course for West Indian social workers: the students were ‘gay, zestful, keen on their jobs and above all welcoming and friendly’. However, she felt she was only one step ahead of them in what she taught, and was sharply aware of the limitations of the idea that British experiences can automatically be transplanted to such places; she recalled, with some agony, the British botany teacher who had once lectured in Jamaica on the English primrose, a flower completely unknown in that country. A Poor Law Officer from Trinidad acted as Barbara’s chauffeur and made her a present of a St Christopher medal which thereafter accompanied her on all her world travels – though only after she had removed with a nail file the inscription in the back which insisted that the bearer was a Catholic and would require a priest in the event of any emergency.¹²⁵

Despite its shortcomings, Bedford College granted her four months’ leave of absence in 1948 for a Visiting Professorship at Columbia University in New York.

During her time there she talked on 'Labor, Economics, and Politics in Great Britain Today' to an audience of 150 economics and government students, many of whom had to stand because the hall was so full. They gave her a rave review in their student publication: 'There are rare, rare occasions at lectures when a harmony of the speaker and the audience takes place', but this was one of them. Dr Wootton was 'charming and witty', turning the complexity of her subject into simplicity, and provoking far more applause than was customary at such meetings.¹²⁶ Barbara's most abiding memory of that stay was her astonishment that anyone would *choose* to live in New York if they could live anywhere else. The skyscrapers of Manhattan did not impress her. Now, in her early fifties, it was the Fenland skies of her childhood and her stays in the Surrey countryside that were calling her increasingly back to a rural way of life. But she made good friends in New York. This was where she met Douglas Ritchie and his wife Ev, who became lifelong friends. Ritchie had been temporarily loaned by the BBC to the British Information Services in New York, and one of his duties was to entertain miscellaneous English visitors. After he had a stroke in 1955, Barbara visited Ritchie in the nursing home, and when he wrote a book about his journey to recovery, she added an affectionate Preface.¹²⁷

As Barbara had noted in her paper about resigning her professorship, among the increasingly burdensome duties of senior university staff was that of responding to Government requests for expert help. The *Enquiry into the Closing Hours of Shops*, chaired by Sir Ernest Gowers of *Plain Words* fame, with which she was involved in 1947, was not nearly so demanding as some of these requests. Obviously the task before this Committee was important, since there were at least two million shop assistants whose work was affected by rules about closing hours, and everybody went shopping, although the hours at which they were able to do so had been laid down by a process of historical accretion rather than the kind of rational, evidence-informed decision-making process Barbara would have preferred. Should shops be forced to close, as they were, at 8 p.m. every night (9 p.m. one night a week), always by 1 p.m. on one weekday, and always on Sundays? Why should there be exemptions for sugar confectionery, table waters, ice cream, and cooked or partly cooked tripe? The Committee commissioned a social survey about shopping habits (one senses that Barbara might have had a hand in this). There was an active contingent in favour of 6 o'clock closing, but, 'We asked many advocates of that hour when a woman who worked in a factory or office up to, say, 5.30 p.m., was to do her shopping ... some said on her way to work, some in the luncheon hour, and some on the late day. We do not believe there is a satisfactory answer.'¹²⁸

The Gowers Commission resulted in a wide range of recommendations for what would now be called 'occupational health and safety'. Barbara found Gowers

to be quite the most skilful and delightful chairman she had ever encountered. She appreciated his ability to seize the essentials of any discussion and 'to deplete windbags without loss of good will and good humour'; and, of course, she very much liked his appreciation of linguistic niceties, which made drafting the report an exhilarating exercise. Taking part in this inquiry expanded her own repertoire of entertainment, since its remit included theatres, restaurants and racecourses; being entertained by the Directors of the Greyhound Racing Association with excellent food and drink might be viewed as corruption, but at least she could report that her own bets were 'uniformly unsuccessful'.¹²⁹ She had to miss some meetings because of ill-health, but Gowers reassured her: the meetings were sparsely attended and two very charming representatives of the National Coal Board came prepared to answer all sorts of questions to which Committee members did not want to know the answer and were quite unable to answer any of the questions to which they did.¹³⁰

More important in some ways (though not to the worker-housewife struggling to get her shopping done) was the Royal Commission on the Press, which Barbara joined in 1947. Its object was to 'inquire into the control, management and ownership of the newspaper and periodical Press and the news agencies, including the financial structure and the monopolistic tendencies in control, and to make recommendations thereon'.¹³¹ The instigators of the Commission had been the National Union of Journalists, who, the previous year, had called for a thorough investigation into the British newspaper industry, which would focus on how the freedom of the press could be safeguarded and enlarged. When the Report was published, its length and general obscurity (with respect to finances, particularly) were noted.¹³² The Report acknowledged the central dilemma that a free press is essential to a democracy, but a press driven by commercial interests is not really free. The Commission's deliberations allowed them to declare the British press so far more-or-less exempt from the dangers of too much of it belonging to too few hands, and relatively alert to the possibility (which had worried the National Union of Journalists) of undue influence from advertisers. Its main recommendation was the setting up of a General Council of the Press to encourage public responsibility among journalists, a development that would take a further four years, mainly due to wrangles about the balance of lay and press representation on such a body. Barbara Wootton was one of those who held out for a core of lay members and for a lay chairman unconnected with the newspaper industry.

Throughout all this public service, and while fighting to establish social research and dealing with her students at Bedford College, Barbara kept up a stream of interests in a wide range of social issues. In 1944 she wrote a foreword for *A Worker's View of the Wool Textile Industry* by M. Agnes Smith, a first-hand account by an adult

education student who had worked in the textile industry from the age of twelve;¹³³ in 1946, she was exercised about the arrangements being made for British wives in Germany;¹³⁴ about the London County Council's School Care Committees, which required men and women to volunteer some of their time (the children's writer Noel Streatfield added her name to this particular Wootton-signed letter to *The Times*);¹³⁵ and, with social workers Lady Cynthia Colville, Margery Fry, Eileen Younghusband and others, she campaigned for donations to a hostel for delinquent girls in Hampstead.¹³⁶ The same year, she became a member of the governing Committee of the Bureau of Current Affairs sponsored by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, and Ellen Wilkinson, the country's first female Minister of Education, appointed her a member of the Central Advisory Council (the new body set up under the 1944 Education Act for whose implementation Wilkinson was responsible). In 1949, the immensely busy Professor Wootton almost made the headlines when she contested the alarmist opinions of the Archbishop of Canterbury about the 'shattering' increase in juvenile crime. Examining the statistics, she pointed out that in 1947, 985 out of a 1,000 14- to 17-year-old boys (the most problematic group) had clean records, but so had 989 in 1937 – hardly a shattering difference.¹³⁷

The year Barbara went to Bedford College was also the year her mother died. Adela Adam's death notice in *The Times* was stark, in contrast to the one Barbara and her brother would later place there for their redoubtable nanny, The Pie. But Adela's own reputation *was* considered notable enough to merit a short obituary in *The Times*; this referred to her brilliance as a student of the man she later married, along with her authorship of works on Plato and Greek ideals of righteousness, on her husband's classical studies, and on the life of her beloved son Arthur. Her sterling service to Girton and other women's colleges was noted, as was her membership of the Cambridge University Musical Society.¹³⁸ Adela Adam's desire, to die while singing the Sanctus from Bach's *Mass in B Minor*, was nearly achieved, as the last time she went out it was to a rehearsal of this piece and the fatal heart attack occurred on her way home.¹³⁹ Adela Adam had been a Governor of Girton for twenty-six years, retiring at the age of sixty-six, and for the same length of time, from 1918 until her death, had represented Girton on the governing body of the Perse School for Girls, which Barbara had attended; she was also a governor of St Paul's Girls' School, and had taught, not only at Girton, but at Newnham College and Bedford College. In short, she was a woman with a considerable reputation. Her commitment to women's education and civil rights was one her daughter shared, although they disagreed about almost everything else. Once Barbara had left Cambridge, the gulf between them had grown, and Barbara never entirely emancipated herself from the childhood hostility she felt towards her mother. She made no secret of this, telling one

interviewer who asked her (when she was seventy-nine) whether she and her mother had mended their relationship in later life, 'No ... I tried to be humane – I mean, I used to go down and see her but I never could do with her. I tried to ... see her point of view, and the sort of unreasoning childhood hatred disappeared: after all, she no longer had power over me.'¹⁴⁰ Writing to Girton about Adela's memorial, Barbara said, 'I do not think one could have wished Mother's life to be much prolonged, she had lost or lost touch with, so many friends that she was beginning to feel very lonely, I fear; and the difficulties of the war mean that the old not only lose the little comforts (though Mother was as independent of these as anyone could be) but they are also much cut off by the fact that everybody is so preoccupied and overworked that little personal attentions become impossible'. On behalf of herself and Neil, she declined the invitation to write an obituary of Adela for the *Girton College Review*,¹⁴¹ but she provided information for 'J.R.B.' who did write one, especially concerning her mother's travels in the 1930s: starting at the age of sixty-eight, Adela had visited Russia (with a nephew-in-law), 'about a dozen other countries', and 'the near east', and had been on an Amazon cruise (on her own).¹⁴²

Adela's death brought the final break-up of the household in Barton Road, Cambridge. The aunts, those resourceful figures from Barbara's childhood, had died in 1923 (Juliet) and 1931 (Fanny). The Pie, who had continued to live in the Cambridge house with Adela and service the household, as nannies very often did in those days long after their charges had left home, moved back to be near her own family in Somerset. Some of the escalating fame that 'Missie' enjoyed reached The Pie there; she sees photographs of Barbara in the newspapers, including one of her newly abbreviated hair-do, which The Pie decides is acceptable. She knows her 'Own Dear Missie' is now a public figure, an achievement she thoroughly deserves, but she is concerned that Barbara needs new clothes for her elevated status. It is kind of Barbara to visit when she is so busy, and even kinder are the chocolates and the flowers and the new dressing-gown and the cheques which Barbara sends, and the ultimate generosity of Barbara and 'Mr Neil' in paying the expenses of the various nursing homes between which she moves, especially the last, Westwood House, in Taunton, in 'a very nice part of the town'.¹⁴³ The Pie's room there is bright and cheerful, and the house has a lovely garden with beautiful shrubs, some of which she has never seen before, and beyond the kitchen garden is a grass field with cows in it that she can see from her window. Again and again in these letters, The Pie thanks Barbara and her brother for making her life easy and comfortable in ways that would never have been possible without their financial help. The Pie has relatives in the town who help her, but the regular visits from Barbara and Neil are clearly much looked forward to.

It was these visits to The Pie in Somerset that also provided Barbara with the closest approximation to family life she was willing to manage. The Pie brought her and her surviving brother, Neil, together in a common interest. In many other respects, brother and sister were worlds apart. Neil was a proper scientist, an expert in quantitative surface chemistry, the author of that 'bible of surface chemistry', *The Physics and Chemistry of Surfaces*, first published in 1930 when he was thirty-nine and working at University College, London, on the payroll of Imperial Chemical Industries Ltd.¹⁴⁴ The topic of his work was 'difficult' even to those who knew about it; it belonged to the general area of surface science, which is the study of physical and chemical phenomena occurring at the interfaces of different materials.¹⁴⁵ Neil Adam's ingenious experiments were of theoretical interest, but they also had practical applications: for example, with respect to the surfactant actions of detergents. A more sinister relevance was to the study of chemical warfare agents. During the Second World War, he had transferred his expertise to the Chemical Defence Experimental Establishment at Porton Down, where he organized work on the vapour pressures of these substances in case they were deployed by the Nazis. Those very skills at glass-blowing he had demonstrated as a child with his sister in the Balfour Laboratory in Cambridge came in useful at Porton Down.¹⁴⁶ Barbara's dislike of warfare is unlikely to have endeared this aspect of Neil's career to her (assuming she knew about it, which she may not have done), but the scientific approach of observation and experiment was one she applied to her own work. Brother and sister had this in common, as well as an impatience with imprecise verbiage, the ability to write lucid economical prose, a talent for engaging student audiences, and the capacity to speak together throughout their adult lives the rapid backwards language they had invented as children.

They were also, claimed Barbara, the first brother and sister in Britain ever to be University professors at the same time.¹⁴⁷ In 1937 Neil had moved to the Chair of Chemistry at Southampton, where he gained a richly-deserved reputation as an eccentric. His red hair and his birthday (5 November) gave him a tendency to explosions. His interest in water and birds resulted in a house full of toy ducks who would sit with him and his family at the dinner table; sometimes he would quack to colleagues or make a silent quack 'by apt movements of thumb and forefinger' in University meetings. His valedictory lecture at Southampton, a masterpiece of caustic wit and surface chemistry, was called 'Water Off The Duck's Back'.¹⁴⁸ The ducks were, according to a relative, a response to the severely disciplined childhood Neil had shared with Barbara, and for the same reason he took up dancing in his sixties, determined to have some fun.¹⁴⁹ His colleagues remembered him wearing cycle clips and gown, and walking with the rolling gait of his favourite duck, or

'sitting in rolled-up shirt sleeves at his cluttered desk, his hair tousled, his temper verging on the irascible, and his labours punctuated with cries of impatience and off-the-cuff scraps of nonsense'.¹⁵⁰ At home, there was equal disarray: tea-time visitors would be greeted with the Professor's long-johns airing on a clothes-horse in front of the fire, piles of books and papers everywhere, and Mrs Adam in her gumboots. The Adams were strict Christian Scientists; Neil believed that the powers of the human intellect developed in higher education were manifestations of divine intelligence: 'We should know' he wrote, 'that in reality we are one with the infinite Mind, whose creation is wholly good and harmonious and spiritual'.¹⁵¹ It was a curious philosophy for someone whose life's work was devoted to the understanding of material reality, and it would not have made any sense to Barbara. But she was fond of him; she sent him copies of her books, inscribed, mysteriously, 'From Willie to Willie'. Yet her fondness did not extend to keeping in touch with Neil's children and grandchildren. His daughter Jean Adam, born in those troubled days of the First World War in Cambridge, confusedly married a man called John Adams, and they had a daughter, Carolyn, and a son, David, both of whom married and had children of their own. Neil's son was named Arthur Mylne Adam, the 'Arthur' after Neil and Barbara's dead brother Arthur, and the 'Mylne' after Aunt Juliet, and this Arthur followed his father in taking like a duck to water, science and eccentricity. Arthur Adam worked for Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Company Ltd in Chelmsford, Essex, the first purpose-built wireless radio factory in the world. He lived with his wife in another cluttered house near the saltworks in nearby Maldon with ancient outboard motors in the loft, a catamaran at the bottom of the garden, and nothing ever thrown away, including the family papers and photographs inherited from Neil.¹⁵² There are references in Barbara's archives to at least two godchildren – Anna Furth, the daughter of her publisher at Allen & Unwin, Charles Furth, and Jane Brunton, whose father Gordon was a businessman and publisher and a friend of Vladimir Raitz, who had introduced Barbara to package holidays.¹⁵³ Gordon Brunton and his wife had adopted Jane through the Agnostics Adoption Society, which Barbara had helped to set up.¹⁵⁴ But, if Barbara had any close contact with these godchildren (a concept which surely must have seemed rather alien to her), she left no record.

Barbara Wootton was not happy about her lack of a successful family life. Her public achievements, of which there were many in these inspiring times of post-war social reconstruction, helped to fill the void. Much had been accomplished, yet there was much more still to be done, including her most substantial and controversial academic work – a review of social science research which would shock the academic and professional world in its demonstration of just how far social studies needed to advance before it could earn the label of science.