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The Nuffield Years, and Vera

It was originally to be a comprehensive review of all the achievements of all the social sciences. Barbara Wootton's model was historian Arnold Toynbee's mammoth twelve-volume *A Study of History*. She thought the social sciences needed their Toynbee, and she wanted to be him. Like Toynbee, her vision was to include everything in her scope, to ask universal questions and to provide a convincing theoretical and methodological framework for her answers. The whole field of social research would be covered, together with all the social science sub-disciplines: sociology; social anthropology; social psychology; criminology; government, administration and law; and economics. But, while there would be an awareness of disciplinary terrains, the project would differ from Toynbee's in having a highly practical starting point: 'the main social problems of contemporary society, particularly industrial society'.¹ What did the social sciences say about these, and what lines of enquiry ought they to follow in the future?

The eventual product of her vision was one volume and not twelve, as in Toynbee's case. The four hundred pages of *Social Science and Social Pathology*, published in 1959, after six years' hard work, represented a logical next move for the author of *Testament for Social Science*. Two particular sets of personal experiences drove Barbara's commitment to a view of social science as an activity that could, and should, struggle to resemble the natural sciences. Firstly, as an economist, she had laboured to see what useful explanations and predictions could possibly be dug out of the theoretical mud of pre-Keynesian economics; secondly, in her many years as a magistrate in the Juvenile Courts, she had faced the task of treating thousands of children and young people accused of varying degrees of anti-social behaviour. The former had given her a lasting impatience with theory for its own sake, the latter an overriding concern with the need for academic work to have a *practical* focus. Barbara saw contemporary social problems as falling into three groups. The first group were problems related to 'the normal industrial way of life': for example, how do political institutions work, or what are the social functions of the family?

The second group of problems were those of anti-social behaviour: people found guilty of crime, labelled as mentally ill or simply badly behaved; here the challenge was to untangle definitions and to identify causes and cures. The third group of problems resided in the relationships between different cultural groups: dominant and minority 'racial' groups; people of different nationalities; and 'displaced' persons and their host communities. The difficulty with social science work in each of these social problem areas was that, although there were many studies, most of them were small and had been carried out in isolation from one another, using different measures and definitions, and making cumulative knowledge – one of the key criteria for any science – impossible. This vast and repetitive literature needed to be sifted; sadly, she anticipated the likelihood that 'the hard core of reliable knowledge' would be 'much smaller than could be wished'.²

It was an ambitious enterprise for one woman a few years short of retirement age. The work that went into *Social Science and Social Pathology* was funded by the Nuffield Foundation, a charitable trust established in 1943 by William Morris (Lord Nuffield), the founder of Morris Motors, to advance social wellbeing through research. In 1950, the Foundation had sponsored an informal conference on the social sciences. Out of this arose the suggestion that the time had come for some kind of survey of the achievements of social research. According to the official record, one of the Foundation's Trustees, Sir Hector Hetherington, aired this idea with Barbara in October 1950. Barbara had worked with Hetherington in the late 1930s and early 1940s on the Royal Commission on Workmen's Compensation. Around the same time, and also with economists Hubert Henderson and Austin Robinson, she had shared with Hetherington membership of the Executive Committee of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research – Britain's longest running independent economic research institute set up in 1938 and still in existence in 2010.³ Hector Hetherington and Barbara Wootton had also, crucially, both been on the Sub-Committee which had persuaded the University Grants Committee (UGC) to recommend increased investment in social science research. When Hetherington got in touch with Barbara about the social research proposal, she was occupied with a possible visit to the USA, and it was May 1951, before they were able to have 'a good long talk' about it.⁴ He found her wonderfully receptive. She laid before him her much more ambitious plan – the *whole* of social science, *all* its accomplishments to date and its potential for the future – and he supported her request for a professorial salary for herself plus salaries for a secretary and a research assistant, and the costs of a base from which to work for five years. At the end of the note Barbara provided for the meeting of the Nuffield Trustees, she admitted, 'I have a very strong urge to tackle this job: in fact, I am determined to find a way of doing it'.⁵ It is entirely

possible that she had some scheme of this sort in her mind when Hetherington approached her; it is also conceivable that she planted the idea in his.

The response of the Nuffield Trustees was to consider it very likely that something 'good and interesting' would emerge if a grant were made to Professor Wootton, but to decide that she had set herself an impossible task.⁶ They asked her to make some selection from within her ambitious programme, and on that basis they would support the expenses of the work. In focusing down on a do-able project, Barbara chose to settle on the second of her groups of social problems – those of social pathology or crime and delinquency or cultural deviation; various terms could be used. This would have a number of advantages: it was an area she herself knew well; it had huge practical importance, since 'All forms of social failure or irresponsibility are a nuisance to somebody – usually *both* to the persons concerned *and* to the community';⁷ and it was a specific area of social science work that could stand on its own, but also involved a number of social science disciplines. Most importantly, the study of cultural deviation would meet the requirement of the 'simple ultimate test: how far are we finding out the things that we really want to know, and doing this by the most efficient methods possible?'⁸

The years of the Nuffield Foundation work were some of the most important in Barbara's life, and *Social Science and Social Pathology* is one of her most significant achievements. But she did not do it on her own. The book's authors are listed as 'Barbara Wootton assisted by Vera G. Seal and Rosalind Chambers'. She had accomplices in what would be seen as a major destruction of the myths of value-free social science and of the pretensions to expertise of psychiatrists, doctors, social workers and almost every occupational group which had anything to do with the labelling and treatment of anti-social behaviour. *Social Science and Social Pathology* was not a popular book, but that is a later part of the story. In many ways the story – of the Nuffield project, the book, and key aspects of the last decades of Barbara's life – begins in 1942 with a meeting between Barbara and a barmaid from London's East End at an evening class in economics.

Vera Seal was actually working at the time as a shorthand typist for a firm that made gas mantels in the Farringdon Road when she enrolled in one of the extra-mural classes Barbara Wootton was running in general economics. It was in the evenings and at weekends that Vera helped out in the family pub – The Arundel Arms in Stoke Newington – doing the heavy cellar work and reading books behind the bar when custom was slow. Vera, born in 1916, when Barbara was nineteen, was an only child; her mother had been in service before marrying Vera's father, who died in his twenties during the First World War, not from war wounds but from some condition that failed to be treated because the doctors were at a party and, by the

time they saw him, he was dead. As a result, Vera's mother went back into service, this time with her three-year-old daughter. They lived 'below stairs' in a grand house in Regent's Park. Then Vera's mother met and married a window cleaner, and they bought and ran a series of greengrocers' shops, followed by the pub. Vera's father had said to her mother that, if he died, she was to see to it that Vera had a good education. Vera's mother and her stepfather worked hard and bettered themselves and saved, and sent Vera to a cheap private school where she learnt nothing – no English grammar, no history, no Latin (which she particularly wanted to learn) – and then to Clark's College in Stamford Hill to qualify as a shorthand typist. When she worked for the gas mantel firm, Vera bought books at twopence a time from the stalls in Farringdon Road. 'I used to sit with a dictionary on one knee and the book I was reading on the left.' Although she knew nothing of libraries or universities, she had a passion to learn. One of the men in the office said she ought to go to Toynbee Hall, a university settlement where education courses of various kinds were available. She started with a three-year course of evening lectures in psychology. And then she thought, 'Well, I'd learnt a little about what makes men [sic] tick but I didn't know the environment that the ticking went on in ... I decided to do economics'.⁹

This was the beginning of Vera's devotion to Barbara: not just the work that went into *Social Science and Social Pathology*, but a role that would extend for more than sixty years as Barbara's research and personal assistant, general helper, and chauffeuse, and then as carer for Barbara in her declining years and for her literary estate after her death. 'I have a vivid memory of her just walking in,' said Vera of that first meeting at the economics class in 1942, 'taking no notice of anybody at all, walking into this class of about fifteen people and saying what she wanted us to do was to tell her our names and what we did. So we went round and did that. And, do you know, she remembered almost everyone without a coach.'¹⁰ Soon Barbara was writing detailed notes in the margins of Vera's essays, encouraging her to speak, lending her books to read, and sending her letters suggesting yet more reading. After each class, a group of students went home on the tube in the same direction as Barbara, and Vera, whose journey home was in the opposite direction, pretended she needed to go the same way, just so she could get more of Barbara. After two exhilarating years thus spent, the blow fell: there would be no third year of the class, since Barbara was leaving adult education and moving to Bedford College. Barbara said she felt 'extraordinarily base' about this, as she knew Vera wanted the class to continue. Perhaps Vera should think about doing a degree? 'Perhaps one should count it as the one and only virtue of the doodlebugs and such like that they slightly break down traditional British reserve,' Barbara noted, with unusual openness, adding that she had made many friends during her years

in adult education, and it was a delight to encounter people, such as Vera, who had 'real intellectual quality and appreciation', although probably Vera underestimated these characteristics in herself.¹¹

While Barbara immersed herself in the unhappy politics of her new job at Bedford College, Vera took a postal course in order to get a formal qualification to register for a degree. She did a two-year Certificate course in Barbara's new department at Bedford College, and then got a Commonwealth Scholarship for a one-year Certificate in Mental Health at the LSE. In 1948, she went to work at the Maudsley Hospital as a psychiatric social worker. In later years, Barbara would claim that her greatest achievement in life was to turn an East End barmaid into a psychiatric social worker.¹² After a few years in the Maudsley job, at about the same time as Hector Hetherington was raising the subject with Barbara of a project on the achievements of social science, Vera felt it was time to move on, and then there was another letter from Barbara telling her about the Nuffield work, which would allow Barbara to devote herself to thinking and thereafter telling the world 'what, if anything, the social sciences add up to'. 'How do you like that?' she asked Vera, excitedly. 'Myself, I like it a lot.'¹³ Vera replied to offer herself as a research assistant. It appears that Barbara's response outlining what the job would require – a mixture of secretarial and research skills – put Vera off, but Barbara sent her a copy of the job advertisement in October, nonetheless. The brief for the job was acting as a private secretary to Barbara as the Nuffield Research Fellow, and typing articles, checking references and preparing material for publication; and, in the other half of the post, 'to assist in research by the preparation of bibliographies and of notes and abstracts on particular subjects'.¹⁴ Having thought about it and having met Barbara to discuss it, Vera decided to apply. At their meeting, they were very honest with each other 'about everything possible ... she said to me, "Well, I'm neurotic", and I said, "Yes, well, so am I, so that's alright". And then she said, "If it doesn't work out, you will lose, because I shall sack you". And I said to myself, "If I work with you, you will not sack me. I shall do exactly what you need". And that was what I planned and what I did.'¹⁵ In the letter Vera wrote to Barbara in support of her application (one of ninety applications Barbara received), she boasted about two qualities not recorded formally on it – her good health, and her tea-making abilities. She went on to reassure Barbara that, should she be appointed, 'all the needs you (and I) feel that you have, would be met in full measure, as far as is humanly possible. And of course I would give you as much of a rock to lean on as exists in me. And I think that, in a quiet way, there is quite a bit of rock there.'¹⁶

Vera was right. Her first day of work was Monday 19 January 1953. Before this (and as a flavour of times to come), Barbara wrote to warn her that her first task

would be to help with her forthcoming paper for the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency on 'Sociological Approaches to the Study of Delinquency', due in March. Then there were various other odd jobs, some connected with Barbara's excursions to the universities of Manchester, Birmingham and Leicester, and Vera would need to arrange for someone to do the routine typing, as there was much of that. The important thing was that they should both feel that they were, 'as the Americans say, "going places"'. I suspect that, for the first time in my life,' admitted Barbara, 'I am what is called "happy in my work": it will be grand if you are too.'¹⁷ She had shared her excitement at acquiring the Nuffield funding with various friends, including the reserved but romantic William Haley, who wrote to congratulate her: 'You can now look forward to a period of doing fully really what you want to do in life. To know this lights my heart in a way I can't explain, it shows that at least somewhere, in some valuable, vital human sector, all can be right with the world.'¹⁸

The Nuffield Foundation was paying Barbara and Vera's salaries (the research assistant and the secretary had become one person – Vera), but the two women needed a physical base for the work. The LSE was explored, but had no space. In the end, Bedford College housed the project in a small flat, ex-servants' quarters known as 'The Bothy', consisting of two rooms, kitchen and bathroom, in one of the houses that formed part of the College in Regent's Park. Vera's first task was to get the lavatory seat varnished. After that, they established a routine: Vera would leave home in Barnet, north London, at seven a.m. on her Lambretta and be at The Bothy by seven-thirty. Barbara would arrive about nine, by which time Vera would have opened and dealt with the post. On the occasions when Barbara had been out of London, Vera would have her breakfast waiting: grapefruit, coffee and toast. The routine was quite unvaried. Once a week Barbara would go out for lunch with a friend or friends; she often talked of joining the nearby zoo, as it would be useful to be able to lunch there. Vera loved the work so much that she used very little of her annual holiday entitlement; Barbara took a month or so a year, very often as a visiting lecturer somewhere or other. They worked pretty much in isolation from the rest of the College, reading and writing all day. The work was demanding: searching for relevant studies; getting copies of papers and books (Vera had to spend a fair amount of time in those pre-internet days touring London libraries); reading and assessing these; and trying to work out what social scientists had done and whether what they had done justified any reliable and general conclusions, and particularly the conclusions that the authors of the studies had themselves drawn. Barbara insisted that Vera should read everything *she* read, and at first Vera could not understand why, but then she realized it was important to have two opinions on the merit of any work.

Vera was later to parody the Nuffield project in an eleven-verse limerick entitled 'Barbara's Saga', which began: 'There was an Old Lady of Bedford / Who wondered if criminals were bred for, / Or if the social situation / Was the main precipitation / Of the deviants we get let in for./ So she took her preoccupation / To the lads of the Nuffield Foundation, / Who gave her their blessing / To a plea to end guessing / And substitute facts for prejudication.'¹⁹ Barbara was, apparently, not much impressed by the poetic turn in her researcher. Rosalind Chambers, the third name on the book's cover, played a subsidiary role. Vera's memory of her contribution to *Social Science and Social Pathology* was that at some stage Barbara decided to spend more of the Nuffield grant, and so she asked Rosalind to write an Appendix. According to Vera, Rosalind would come in from time to time and spend half an hour with Barbara, and after one of these occasions Rosalind came into Vera's room and said that Barbara had suggested that Rosalind look at a copy of one of Vera's reports, so she could see how Barbara liked these done. This was a little insensitive to the nuances of academic stratification – Rosalind a senior university lecturer in the Social Science Department at the LSE, and Vera a 'university nobody',²⁰ although both she and Barbara always protested when people called her Barbara's 'secretary'.²¹ The Appendix Rosalind provided on 'Professionalism in Social Work' is certainly professional but it is a little curious, since it seems to have little to do with the rest of the book. Barbara herself acknowledged that, of her two assistants, it was Vera who carried the heavier load, but she did so 'with such skill and devotion as to create the illusion that no burden existed'. Given these very words to type, Vera thought that was not correct. 'I went into her room and I said "But there was no burden, Barbara". She said, "That's what I mean". It took me a year or two to fathom that out.'²² Should Vera have been an author of the book? Barbara offered this, but Vera declined. She was just doing her job. Although there was rarely a cross word between them, Barbara had exacting standards. One of Vera's tasks was to check the list of Government publications that came in every week: 'If I saw anything I thought we should have I got it, or, if I was in doubt, I would show it to her. And one day – this is typical of Barbara – I said, "Oh, Barbara, what do you think about this?" "Slut!" Walked away. I made a mistake, you see. It was a reprint, we would have had it if it was useful. You had to be a hundred per cent.'²³ On other occasions, Vera scored. 'People used to visit us ... And one day she had an academic from somewhere in America, and I was in my room, the bell rang, I went in and she said, "Vera, do we know about so-and-so?" And I said, "Oh yes, we've got their latest report", and I went over to the bookcase, picked up this report and gave it to her, and I said to her, "It's on your next reading list". I knew she was never going to read it, it was only peripheral to our interests. And she looked at me, "Thank you,

Vera". To think that he had come from America and she knew all about it!"²⁴ (Of course, the knower was Vera, not Barbara.)

Social Science and Social Pathology was an achievement much ahead of its time in insisting that social science work must respect canons widely accepted in the broader scientific community as to what counts as knowledge. Barbara's starting point was the facts of recorded social pathologies, rather than opinions about them. What she found (as she always tended to do when she took a close look at anything) was a good deal of muddle. Because of bewildering variations in how crimes are defined, recorded and treated, there were only three features of the crime statistics sufficiently marked and persistent to provide reasonable grounds for saying anything definite. The first was the predominance of offences committed by motorists: 'In half a century, the invention of the internal combustion engine has completely revolutionized the business of our criminal courts. The typical criminal of to-day is certainly not the thief, nor the thug who hits an old lady on the head in order to possess himself of her handbag or to ransack her house: the typical criminal of to-day is the motorist.'²⁵ She worked it out: almost half of those convicted of criminal offences in England and Wales in 1955 were motorists. How striking, then, that this revolution had completely escaped the attention of the public and the professional criminologists. The second consistent feature of crime was age: it is the young who offend most (or who are caught for so doing). Thirdly, crime was mainly a problem of masculine behaviour, with male rates seven times those of women (and eleven times as high for the peak age of fourteen to seventeen years). Like the prevalence of motoring crimes, the gender imbalance had been mostly ignored, the 'habitual reaction' of sociologists and criminologists being simply to eliminate females from their studies on the grounds that numbers were too small to permit any valid conclusions. Clearly, pronounced Barbara, 'In scale and consistency, the sex difference far outweighs any other factor which we have yet been able to associate with delinquent behaviour. No one seems to have any idea why; but hardly anyone seems to have thought it worthwhile to try to find out.'²⁶ These observations led to her much-quoted statement that, 'if men behaved like women, the courts would be idle and the prisons empty'.²⁷

The overview of current crime and delinquency statistics (Part I) in *Social Science and Social Pathology* is followed by a review of what is known about the socio-economic factors associated with anti-social behaviour, and by a discussion of whether existing work can adequately predict who will engage in it. Part II hosts a penetrating analysis of the relationship between concepts of mental ill-health and criminality, and a tough critique of what would later be called the 'medicalization' of anti-social behaviour. It was this section of the book that earned Barbara the most hostility – from those professional groups whose claims to knowledge she exposed as resting

on the doubly insecure base of subjective values and unreliable evidence. In Part III we are returned to the underlying constants: what can we say we *really* know about the causes of misbehaviour; and what *practical* lessons are there for reducing or preventing it? At the core of the book is what today would be called a 'systematic review': an attempt to locate, assess and synthesize as much of the existing literature as possible relating to some clearly defined research, practice or policy question. Unlike conventional literature reviews, which present the results of a selective trawl through studies in an area – the ones the author knows about, can find easily, or particularly likes or dislikes – systematic reviews are more comprehensive: they use transparent and pre-specified criteria for which studies to include and are clear about methods for judging how reliable these are.²⁸ Such reviews are essentially ways of extracting dependable policy and practice lessons from huge amounts of information – the very task that confronted Barbara and her helpers in the Nuffield project. Systematic reviews of social research were very rarely undertaken when Barbara and Vera began their work in *The Bothy*, and they did not use that term in the book. They were explicit about the criteria they used to find the studies they looked at, but not about where they had looked for them (a necessary element in systematic reviews today). Despite this qualification, they were methodological pioneers in developing the tools for what would later be called evidence-based public policy.

The question tackled by their systematic review arose from Barbara's concern about the causes of the anti-social behaviour that greeted her in her role as a magistrate in the Juvenile Courts. 'Every day magistrates and judges are obliged to pass sentences, quite unaware whether similar decisions in the past have turned out well or badly.'²⁹ It troubled her. Her own record of cases (a sample of which was included as Appendix I of the book) showed the kinds of problems on which she was required to pronounce: 'Stole seven bottles of lemonade from a warehouse' (male, aged 10); 'Took and drove car, collided with a bus, which was slightly damaged, and struck a passer-by' (male, aged 15); 'Rail fraud' (female, aged 13).³⁰ What did social science research have to say about what might be causing these patterns of delinquency? In particular, what light could it throw on popular ideas then current about twelve possibly relevant factors: family size; the presence of other criminals in the family; club membership; church attendance; employment record; social status; poverty; maternal employment; school truancy; broken homes; health; and educational attainment? The criteria used to select studies for the review were that each should have a sample size of at least two hundred; should contain data on 'not less than half, or nearly half'³¹ the twelve popular hypotheses; and should present not only findings but methods. They ended up with twenty-one studies spanning the period 1915–1955, relating to a population of some 23,300 adults or young

people labelled as having committed some anti-social offence, and a further 3,330 'controls' who had not. Eleven of the studies were British, one was Swedish, and nine were from the USA.

The results of this review were 'strikingly negative', in the sense that they neither proved nor disproved any of the fashionable theories.³² Offenders tended to come from large families, and sometimes other family members had been in trouble with the law. Church-going was not common and employment patterns tended to be erratic. Many offenders came from poor families, but there was no evidence of any association with maternal employment. Their health seemed average, although many had been labelled as problematic by their teachers and were quite likely to have truanted. Some studies showed an association with 'broken' homes; others not. The reasons for these inconclusive findings were largely methodological: a wide range of ages and definitions of criminality meant that no two studies dealt with similar material, so differences in findings, which were common, could not be resolved. This applied also to many of the factors investigated: even something as apparently simple as family size, for instance, was defined and measured differently (all family members living together? Number of children born alive? Step- or half-siblings included or not?³³). Tests of this and that, for example of personality characteristics associated with crime, were numerous and inconclusive: a review in 1950 of such tests conducted in the USA over the preceding 25 years found an unbelievable 30 different tests employed 113 times with very little consistency or cross-referencing.³⁴

These limitations of research meant that *Social Science and Social Pathology* effectively became 'a treatise on methodology', which was not what Barbara had intended.³⁵ However, in this, too, it was ahead of its time. Later social scientists would complain about the inability of methodologically flawed social research to make any useful contribution to policy-making.³⁶ *Social Science and Social Pathology* was also an innovative text in viewing concepts of criminality, delinquency and anti-sociality within a very broad cultural perspective. There are inherent problems of language and moral values in the whole discourse about 'deviation', 'pathology', or 'social problems'; the issue of how crime and other misbehaviours are defined must come first, as the thing to be explained, before we can sensibly understand why some people and not others find themselves thus classified. When people offend, they do so against particular laws or standards of conduct. These are differently set at different times, in different places and among different social groups. For example, the distinction in Britain between 'indictable' and 'non-indictable' offences is not a rational device for distinguishing 'real' crimes from technical or minor offences; it is arbitrary – a 'monument to British tradition or to historical accident'. Thus, for instance, 'The boy who removes a pump from

a schoolfellow's bicycle and is unable to establish his intention to put this back figures among the indictable offenders; yet the brothel keeper and the dangerous driver are omitted'.³⁷ For these reasons, the focus of *Social Science and Social Pathology* was pragmatically on those behaviours *in the prevention of which public money is spent*.³⁸ At every point, Barbara and her assistants needed to be conscious of the 'difficulty of extracting the social investigator from the shackles imposed by the assumptions and prejudices of his time'.³⁹

And it was a time marked by a number of significant shackles. Two in particular get a good deal of attention in the book. The first of these is the idea that anti-social behaviour is primarily caused by a failure of mothering. This notion occupied an enormous amount of academic, policy and political attention at the time, and is one with a long history, reflecting the ways in which women's position and the social construction of mothering have interacted to shape public policy.⁴⁰ As the author of *Social Science and Social Pathology* tangentially remarked, 'Even the maternal deprivation hypothesis, it has been whispered, may not be unconnected with the desire to see women safely confined to domestic occupations'.⁴¹ The original architect of 'maternal separation' or 'deprivation' theory was the medically-trained British psychoanalyst John Bowlby, who had a lifelong interest in the effects of early childhood separations from mothers or mother-figures, and in the nature of these early ties. They fascinated and puzzled him; he was 'a man who felt he had a mission' to convince people how important these early relationship experiences were in shaping people's lives.⁴² By the time the work for *Social Science and Social Pathology* was under way, Bowlby had become well-known as the expert in the area. He had been commissioned by the World Health Organization to write a report on *Maternal Care and Mental Health*; this report, published in 1951, argued that 'the deprivation of mother-love in early childhood' can have far-reaching effects on children's mental health and personality development. Such deprivation 'almost always' results in retarded physical, intellectual and social development, and these adverse effects include delinquency.⁴³ The report sold 400,000 copies and was translated into fourteen languages; its popular version, *Child Care and the Growth of Love*, published by Penguin two years later, made Bowlby both famous and notorious. Although he only hinted at it, his concern with deficits in maternal love may have reflected his own childhood in a professional upper-middle-class family where he and his five siblings were largely reared by 'Nanny Friend', a caregiver who was sometimes far from friendly, and by a succession of nursemaids.⁴⁴ Bowlby appears to have had a less satisfactory relationship with his mother-substitute than did Barbara with The Pie. But whatever its origins, his work had enormous influence on the policy front. Nurseries and residential homes for children were

closed.⁴⁵ Policies of placing looked-after children in the care of foster families, and of emphasizing the responsibility of mothers to stay at home with their children, replaced the kind of judicious review of the evidence called for by the author of *Social Science and Social Pathology*.

One of his own children once asked Bowlby's wife whether Daddy was a burglar, since he came home after dark and never talked about his work.⁴⁶ Among the studies Bowlby drew on in his World Health Organization report was his own, of *Forty Four Juvenile Thieves*, a study which suffered the ignominy of being excluded from the systematic review in *Social Science and Social Pathology* on methodological grounds (its sample was considered too small). However, because the influence of the 'maternal deprivation' hypothesis was so strong, a separate chapter of the book needed to be given over to discussing it. Barbara was in the habit of handing over major tasks to Vera before going away on one of her lecture tours or holidays. 'One day she said, "I want you to look at the evidence for Bowlby's belief".'⁴⁷ Vera was impatient for Barbara to disappear, so she could get absorbed in this task. When Barbara returned, Vera handed her a thick foolscap typescript of the results. This typescript formed the basis of the chapter in the book which identifies many methodological, theoretical and conceptual problems associated with the notion that deprivation of maternal care in childhood causes people to behave badly. The main ones have a resonance with the lessons of other sections of the book: the 'grave breakdown in logic' that underlies investigators' failure to consider how many maternally deprived children do *not* become anti-social; the slippage between mere statistics and meaningful ones; the almost wilfully careless use of terms such as 'separation' and 'deprivation' to cover a multitude of situations, from appalling long-term institutional care to less damaging short-term family separations; the failure to interrogate the notion that it may not be disruption of relationships that damages people so much as conditions such as poverty, unemployment and homelessness; the prevalence of small case-studies with no adequate 'controls' of well-behaved people; and the substitution of dogmatic personal opinions for conclusions based on reliable evidence. Barbara and Vera's own critique is evidenced and thoughtful, and also characteristically pithy: they compare, for example, the problem of deriving conclusions about the deleterious effects of maternal separation from only the badly behaved as 'on a par with trying to calculate the insurance premiums to be charged for fire risks by reference only to those houses which have actually caught fire'.⁴⁸ John Bowlby was purportedly very angry about the treatment meted out to his ideas in *Social Science and Social Pathology*.⁴⁹ Elsewhere, Barbara noted that presuming the roots of criminal behaviour to lie in some early failure of mothering is spectacularly unhelpful to those such as magistrates, whose public duty is to do something effective about

crime. In practice, it is difficult to believe that a tough young man of sixteen years has come before the Court because he was snatched from his mother's breast as an infant.⁵⁰ When the World Health Organization published an assessment of Bowlby's *Maternal Care and Mental Health* in 1962, a decade after its original publication, Barbara contributed one of six chapters. Hers, 'A Social Scientist's Approach to Maternal Deprivation', noted that little new research into theories about the effects of maternal separation appeared to have been published since she wrote her own book, and the research that had been done had not advanced the argument at all. Thus, all one could still say was that lifelong, irreversible damage or criminal behaviour as results of 'maternal deprivation' were unproven hypotheses.⁵¹

The notion of the 'problem family' was a second major shackle imposed on social investigators by the assumptions and prejudices of the time when *Social Science and Social Pathology* was written. Classifying certain kinds of families as 'problem families' is another habit with a lengthy history, this one irretrievably linked to eugenic notions of class and subnormality. The Medical Officer of Health for Bristol, R.C. Wofinden, created a colourful, moralizing and much quoted 'definition' of 'the problem family' in 1944: 'Often it is a large family, some of the children being dull or feeble-minded. From their appearance they are strangers to soap and water, toothbrush and comb; the clothing is dirty and torn and the footwear absent or totally inadequate. Often they are verminous and have scabies and impetigo ... The mother is frequently substandard mentally ... Nauseating odours assail one's nostrils on entry [to the home] ... the amount of housework done by the mother is negligible ... the general standard of hygiene is lower than that of the animal world.'⁵² Early in its history, the 'problem family' was viewed as the key to much delinquency and criminality, though evidence for such assertions was always sparse.⁵³ More realistically, problem families could be seen as those that occupied an undue amount of social work attention without yielding much in the way of results.⁵⁴ Of course, the very presence of hierarchy means that anti-sociality is likely to be defined in such a way that the lower classes excel in it: middle-class crimes, like motoring when drunk, are not 'real' crimes, while those associated with poverty, such as stealing food or other material resources, are more likely to be. Careful investigation of the characteristics of families identified as problems (a task carried out for the book by Rosalind Chambers) showed that poverty and size (large) were really the only two that united them. This, in other words, was yet another area where prejudice masqueraded as knowledge.

Throughout her life, Barbara had a sceptical eye for the way in which professionals of many different kinds claim to know what in fact they do not; the critique embedded in *Social Science and Social Pathology* of medicine, psychiatry and

social work's colonization of the field of social distress and anti-social behaviour is particularly trenchant, and yet another aspect of the book's pioneering (and hence unpopular) status. Her arguments about the way in which 'science' was deposing traditional morality as the arbiter of the difference between the sinful and the sick were being put by Thomas Szasz, the radical Hungarian-American psychiatrist, at around the same time.⁵⁵ Barbara referred to Szasz's views, expounded in his *The Myth of Mental Illness*, that it was a serious mistake to classify many psychological conditions and problems as forms of illness.⁵⁶ She paid tribute to his arguments with some cogency as early as 1962 in a House of Lords debate on the working of the Mental Health Act.⁵⁷

Barbara summarized her own case against the medicalization of distress in a lecture she gave to the British Medical Association in 1963: 'In the world in which I grew up,' she observed, 'the child who stole was a problem for the family, the school-master, or the police ... it would have been considered highly eccentric to refer him to a doctor. To-day, personal problems, moral problems, marital problems, problems of deviant behaviour, are constantly brought to the doctor's consulting-room, while social workers, with their "casework" and their "diagnostic" and "therapeutic" techniques, adopt medical poses and express themselves in medical language.'⁵⁸ Speaking at a lecture in Canada some years later on the role of psychiatry, she remembered 'a relative of mine' (her brother Neil), in those dark days of the First World War, suffering a totally disabling two-year depression, being cured by a conversion to Christian Science, and living a mentally healthy life thereafter (the point being not the religious salvation but the existence of successful cultural alternatives to medical treatment).⁵⁹ The rise of psychiatry, she pointed out, had led more people to be diagnosed as mentally ill; and, while some of this had undoubtedly had a humanitarian effect, it had also detracted from a focus on the *social* causes of mental and social distress. Further, deciding who is mentally ill and who is simply criminal imposes an impossible burden on the penal system. There is no objective definition of mental health; we cannot rely on psychiatrists, doctors or social workers to define the 'good life'.⁶⁰ So long as concepts of mental health are entangled with ideas about socially approved behaviour, which they are, it is inevitable that certain kinds of people will find themselves more likely than others both to be seen as mentally ill and to commit crime. Barbara is despairing: so much of the literature dealing with these issues is so confused that the wood and trees are constantly mistaken for one another. The Szasz-Wootton argument against the professional invasion of mental distress was expanded in the 1970s in a substantial literature on medicalization and social control, becoming a key plank in the newly emerging sub-discipline of the sociology of health and illness.⁶¹

But it was the chapter of *Social Science and Social Pathology* on 'Contemporary Attitudes to Social Work' that got its author into the most trouble. Thinking perhaps of Vera, Barbara opened the chapter with a comment that, according to the latest census, England and Wales now had slightly more than one social worker for every two barmen or barmaids. But, whereas the function of the latter was clear, that of the former was considerably more vague. Many behaved like amateur psychotherapists trying to delve into the backgrounds and personality conflicts of their clients; it is here that we meet Barbara's famous remark that it appears the best way for the social worker to understand her client is to marry him.⁶² The copy of *Social Science and Social Pathology* owned by Richard Titmuss, who was running a department training social workers at the LSE when the book came out, is stuffed with notes of indignation inscribed by some of the senior staff in his department at 'Mrs Wootton's' apparent lack of respect for their profession. Staff were particularly upset at her concentration on the American casework literature, whose excesses, they claimed, were not repeated in Britain. British social workers were much more interested in material needs and helping people in the kind of practical way of which Mrs Wootton would have approved.⁶³ Barbara wrote to Richard Titmuss saying that various people had mentioned the problem of the literature, but no-one had told her what to read instead, so could he please supply some references?⁶⁴ (He did, with some help, but Mrs Wootton already knew them all.) As a relatively new and young recruit to the LSE staff when *Social Science and Social Pathology* was published, David Donnison recalls being asked to review Barbara's book for the professional journal *The Almoner*, because his more senior colleagues were reluctant to register their anger in print. Donnison took exception, on their behalf, to the way in which Barbara had aligned the therapeutic intentions of British social workers with the much more strongly psychoanalytically-oriented disposition of the Americans. His review, said Barbara, nicely, was the rudest anyone had ever written of any of her books.⁶⁵

Social Science and Social Pathology fell like a rock causing a tidal wave in what had been a fairly fetid lake of much-loved hypotheses and cherished claims to expertise about the causes and treatment of anti-social behaviour. Criminologist David Downes, then at the start of his own career, recalled his reaction to the book's publication: 'Hot, indeed blistering, from the presses of 1959, it was both an exhilarating and a dismaying experience. It exhilarated because it conveyed a sense of urgency, a biting scorn for waffle, and a clear sense of direction. It dismayed because it laid bare the general poverty of criminology, showing it to be a set of rusty clichés and sloppy generalizations.'⁶⁶ 'Criminological research has never looked quite the same since Barbara Wootton's cruelly deflating *Social Science and*

Social Pathology’, announced one professional commentator in 1974.⁶⁷ Even those who were offended by the book gave in to grudging admiration. Barbara had put the subject of criminology, then a very small affair, on the map, ‘even if she was scathing about it’.⁶⁸ She had a mastery of the literature: ‘Were there things she hadn’t read? Well, I don’t know,’ said Professor Sir Michael Rutter, a leading figure in child psychiatry, in 2009, ‘but I doubt that any were key issues she didn’t know about. She was very thorough. And it *was* challenging.’ The book had changed Rutter’s own view of the subject when he first read it, making him think about things that had not occurred to him before.⁶⁹

Some reviews of the book in the press followed Donnison in defensively arguing that Mrs Wootton really did not understand how complex the social worker’s job was.⁷⁰ The medical profession’s response was a long review in the pages of *The Lancet* entitled ‘Medicine Versus Morals’. While the tone of the review was generally approving – the book was ‘penetrating’, ‘remarkable’, ‘a delight to read’ – it did note that Lady Wootton’s attitude to doctors was rather ambivalent, and perhaps had tilted her impartiality here and there.⁷¹ *The Lancet*’s sister publication, the *British Medical Journal*, considered that on the whole she had managed to keep fact and opinion separate, but, ‘Although the main purpose of the book is not destructive, the author is not able to conceal her talents in this direction’. Commenting on her dismissal of problem-family studies, this reviewer revealed that Barbara had resigned from the Eugenics Society shortly before the book’s publication, after a long membership.⁷² The British Eugenics Society, established in 1907, reflected a very widespread interest in the relationship between heredity and environment among middle-class intellectuals and campaigners of varying political persuasions: ‘the problem family’ was one of the British eugenic movement’s signal themes, and its position on this is not one with which Barbara would have had any sympathy.⁷³

Many of the more academic reviews of *Social Science and Social Pathology* were complimentary: ‘This is a work of great significance’,⁷⁴ ‘a sociological study of exceptional interest and distinction’,⁷⁵ and a treatise ‘entirely free of that peculiarly nauseating jargon which obscures so much of the meaning of social science literature’.⁷⁶ People commented on the book’s lucidity and wit,⁷⁷ and on its ‘fine intellectual stimulus’;⁷⁸ they called it ‘forthright’ and ‘hard-hitting’,⁷⁹ ‘iconoclastic’, ‘awe-inspiring’ ‘informative’ and ‘thought-provoking’;⁸⁰ though some reiterated the theme of ‘excessive partisanship’.⁸¹ Two reviews to which Barbara herself probably paid the most attention were those by the man who pipped her to the post of the LSE job, Tom Marshall, and by her LSE social administration colleague, Richard Titmuss. Marshall thought this ‘an important book by an eminent scholar, which should be read by everyone who has a serious interest in the subject’, but

he considered it not sociological enough; he wanted more of 'the kind of social science which is concerned with quality, and process, rather than with quantity and correlation', and he complained that the whole book was 'deeply coloured by her personal viewpoint'.⁸² Perhaps Marshall, like Titmuss, had been talking to the LSE social workers. In his appraisal of her book, Titmuss admired the book's clarity and clear structure, and Lady Wootton's style, which combined 'the smooth perfection of Swift with the limped ease of Trevelyan'. He enjoyed her 'delicious romp with the medical officers and their elephantine attempts to define and classify "problem families"'. But he, too, took sides with the beleaguered social workers, and especially with those in his own department, quotations from whose work in the book he painstakingly corrected.⁸³ Other friends did her proud: Lord Longford was delighted with 'the flashes of purest alpha on page after page of this, her *magnum opus*. It will long remain,' he predicted, 'an admired if provocative monument of academic study and reflection.'⁸⁴ W.J.H. Sprott of Nottingham University opened his salvo with a remark about how Barbara had resigned her Chair at Bedford College in order to write this book, but since its general effects were devastating, some people would doubtless feel that she would have been more safely occupied had she had stayed where she was. He personally found her treatment of social work 'riotously funny', although he also saw that it would cause 'considerable pain'. All in all, she had performed 'a major service to social science' and her book should be read by everyone interested in it and in criminology and social work particularly. 'It is a chastening experience and will bring a blush to many a cheek, as it has done, I confess, to mine. We all claim to welcome a little fresh air, but a blasting wind makes us rather uncomfortable, and yet – there can be no doubt about it – that is just what we need.'⁸⁵

Creators of blasting winds need some time off, and Barbara certainly managed that during the Nuffield years. She spent several holidays in France and Italy (Corsica and Alassio), and visited the USA again for a lecture tour. In 1956, she went to India as a social economist and in 1958 to newly-independent Ghana as an expert on delinquency and the criminal justice system. The Indian trip was made in the company of four (other) economists: Paul Bareau, Roland Bird, Duncan Burn and Andrew Shonfield. Barbara held an informal get-together in her office ('a little obscure to find in the dark,' but 'rather attractive when you actually get there') the month before they went.⁸⁶ In her autobiography, she noted that her companions were all much younger than she was, and prone to arguing with one another, so that during their long travels round India she found herself playing the role of a 'conciliatory aunt'. In the process, she grew attached to all of them, but especially to 'the whimsical and charming' Andrew Shonfield.⁸⁷ He was thirty-nine to her fifty-nine;

years later she confided to friends that he was the last man she had slept with.⁸⁸ The purpose of the Indian expedition is unclear, except that it was at the invitation of the Indian Government, to review its achievements after the completion of its first Five-Year Plan. Barbara was inevitably reminded of her trip to Russia in 1932, which had taken place at about the same stage in that Government's planning process. Like the Russians, the Indians she met were fired with enthusiasm for great enterprises, especially factories, machines, power-stations, and 'all the paraphernalia of industrialism'.⁸⁹ Unlike the Russians, however, the Indians were determined to combine centralized economic planning with democracy. This she thought an experiment of unique importance to the British Labour movement – exactly the kind of experiment she would have liked to have been able to draw on when she wrote her *Freedom Under Planning*. Barbara and the four men, and a merchant banker called Macartney-Filgate and his wife, did the rounds of the Ministries and the cocktail parties; they trudged round many factories, shipyards and dams, but were given sufficient time off to see the Taj Mahal and the Southern temples. Barbara rode on an elephant in the jungle and made the acquaintance of an enthusiastic family planning expert who took her to the villages; the sight of rural women going about their daily chores impressed Barbara with its natural beauty and social cohesion. 'To break the link between wealth and ugliness,' she commented, 'would be one of the greatest gifts that India and Africa could offer to mankind.'⁹⁰ The awful possibility that India might replicate the horrors of Western capitalism much distressed her, and she sent her thoughts about this to President Nehru. She had met him during her stay in India, and he received her thoughts with great interest.⁹¹

To Ghana, Barbara went as Visiting Professor at what was then University College, located outside Accra, a place modelled on an outdated vision of Oxbridge with High Tables and gowns and chapels. She was there to lecture to public service workers and to students taking the external University of London sociology degree. In this latter function, she was aided by an academic colleague, Ilya Neustadt, a sociologist from the University of Leicester. Barbara gave three public lectures under the title 'Reflections of a Sociologically-minded Magistrate', building on some of the material gathered for *Social Science and Social Pathology*. According to the newspaper *West Africa*, her lectures were eagerly attended by a large and diverse audience. There were barristers and social workers and 'one dogged police corporal who, at question time, flatly refused to agree with the Chairman's suggestion that he had finished all he wanted to say'.⁹² Barbara took great pains to deal sympathetically with the many rather inarticulate questioners who attached great importance to her opinion. The Juvenile Court in Ghana was very like her own back in Chelsea; she met President (then Prime Minister) Nkrumah, whom she

considered rather over-impressed by his own success. A feature of the Ghanaian system was the bitter quarrelling engaged in by the political parties, but it was usually unclear what they were actually quarrelling about.⁹³ 'Ghana spells to me,' she wrote, arrestingly, 'black babies dumped on my lap while their mothers danced; it spells the riotous, colourful gaiety of the markets, the clear cool note of the alarm bird by which I was awakened every morning.'⁹⁴

To Vera, back in The Bothy, she sent mixed notes of instruction about things that needed doing (please tell Hillcroft College that she was willing to serve on the Council, could Vera please find an article in the *Eugenics Review* about the physique of delinquents) with glowing accounts of their various excursions:

Friday to a highly anthropological festival across the Volta rapids (by canoe). This was quite beyond my powers of description. Would not have missed it for anything, with the chiefs in gorgeous robes, the sacred stools and sundry other sacred objects (incl. tin boxes) carried in procession to the river for purification. Much dancing and drumming and some people in a state of possession. Then on (160 miles) here where Ilya and I are doing a social welfare tour somewhat as in India: two prisons, 1 youth centre ... two villages, one willing to self-help, one not, preferring to drink and bathe in the same filthy stagnant pool. All this is v. strenuous, and Ilya who rashly ate a kipper (!) for breakfast was violently sick in the afternoon and has retired to bed. The climate is unbelievably oppressive – worse even than in Accra. You cannot ever get clean because merely drying after a bath makes you just as sweaty again. Where it all comes from I do not know ... my driver, regarding me as "wise in the world" has poured out a long story of his troubles, for which my casework skills are totally inadequate.⁹⁵

In Kumasi, they attended a meeting of the Asantamendi Council ('very gorgeous assembly of chiefs'), where they were not allowed to cross their legs (it would have offended the chiefs), which was surprisingly difficult, and where the programme included 'communal labour, professors participating',⁹⁶ but fortunately they arrived too late to do anything.⁹⁷

The experience of advising the United Nations about its pension schemes, the year after Ghana, provided Barbara with another take on cultural diversity: how family dependency is defined differently in the member states and affiliated organizations of the United Nations, which included nearly all the countries of the world. She was taken aback when the Indian representative among them casually acknowledged that he had financial obligations to seventy members of his family; and it was a minor victory on her part to persuade the group that women as well as men have dependants. The United Nations mission allowed her to meet

the inspiring Dag Hammarsköld, then UN Secretary-General, and to sit in the monumental glass structure of the UN building, albeit in a windowless basement.⁹⁸

Back in England, Vera had a punt on the Thames, moored in the Paddington arm of the Grand Union Canal. She spent weekends on the river, and she would often come to work in The Bothy on Monday mornings laden with flowers; Barbara would wear one in her lapel, perhaps a yellow water lily, or something else unusual. They gave two parties for College staff, which included the Principal, a rather stiff botanist called Norah Penston (not to be confused with the historian Lillian Penston, whose antipathy to Barbara had led to the disbanding of her research unit), and Vera softened things up by putting her lilies in a vase with the gardener's balsam poplar twigs. Attempts at joint socializing were not so successful. Sometimes Barbara would invite Vera home to tea, but it would be awkward. 'I absolutely worshipped her, I adored her,' said Vera, 'but what do you talk about with your idol? ... I think she had this feeling that she wanted to be closer to me but she didn't know how to do it.'⁹⁹ They went to hear Billy Graham together, because Barbara wanted to find out what he was like, and on another occasion Vera and a friend of hers invited Barbara to come to the Players' Theatre under the Charing Cross railway arches. But this was a mistake; Barbara was not amused. She was not a person who wasted time, nor who spent much of it in conventional leisure activities. She played tennis with George sometimes, but otherwise is not recorded for any devotion to exercise; she liked music, and of course she read, all the time. She enjoyed eating and drinking with friends, although was herself not an inspired cook. In her autobiography, she records her passion for modern Venetian glass as being so great that it was a reason for not visiting Venice too often.¹⁰⁰

The Nuffield work produced many invitations to talk and write. In her report for the Principal of Bedford College on the first year's work, Barbara noted that she had given a paper on social factors in delinquency to a seminar organized by the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency (the undertaking she had warned Vera about before she started work); and had agreed to give the Josiah Mason Lectures at the University of Birmingham the following year on the theme of 'Social Science and Social Responsibility'. She was reviewing eight reports by European experts on 'Lacunae and Present Trends in Research in the Social Sciences' for the Provisional International Social Science Council, and had been asked to write an introduction for a UNESCO compendium on social science research.¹⁰¹ In this, as in various other outlets around the same time, she reviewed the progress of social science, measuring its strengths and weaknesses. Strengths included the rise in empirical investigations – even among economists, who were at last asking questions about such topics as people's spending and saving habits – and the development of

methodological tools: there had been huge advances since she herself graduated (or would have done, had she been a man): when she left Girton, sample surveys were only beginning to be used, and she had never heard of such things as 'statistical significance' or 'factor analysis'.¹⁰² Other signs of advance were a more delimited role for theory, and the adaptation of social science work to the problems of particular cultures and countries. Among social science's weaknesses were the growth of an obscure technical vocabulary, and the continuing failure for studies to be repeated or for investigators to agree on definitions of key measures and concepts.¹⁰³ Values – of the culture, stemming from the social scientist's own personal location in the social world – continued to generate hypotheses which were then fondly clung to 'by people who *want* them to be true'.¹⁰⁴ However, on the benefit side, people *were* beginning to appreciate the value of social science in undermining popular myths – for example, the widely held, but erroneous, idea that floating voters are middle-class, or that watching television saps initiative and corrupts morals.¹⁰⁵ When the journal *New Society* was launched in the autumn of 1962 as a sister publication to *New Scientist* for the social sciences, Barbara contributed a piece to its first issue called, 'Socrates, Science and Social Problems'. She blamed both the Socratic tradition of discussion-for-discussion's-sake and the invention of broadcasting as slowing the pace at which social science could achieve science. Neither Socrates nor broadcasters were interested in facts, only in stirring up opinionated controversy. Barbara, whom the journal introduced in its pages as 'a leading social scientist and reformer', *was* interested in facts, and especially those uncoverable by social science which are 'the raw material of intelligent social policy'.¹⁰⁶

As the Nuffield work progressed, Barbara developed strands of it in separate papers: the theme of mental illness and anti-social behaviour;¹⁰⁷ the pretentious professional ideology of social workers;¹⁰⁸ and the place of social service in 'the new society' of the post-war welfare state.¹⁰⁹ It was in the latter paper that Barbara advanced another modern argument, that hardly anyone bothers to take into account the views of people who use such services. She noted that the Wolfenden Committee, which had recently pronounced on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, had not interviewed a single prostitute (it could not really have interviewed homosexuals, since homosexuality was illegal); the less notorious Committee on Public Libraries had not thought to seek the opinions of people who might visit them to read books; the Younghusband Report on Social Workers would like to have undertaken a survey of service-users, but had not done so. In several places, Barbara also expanded on her favourite theme of motorists as criminals. She complained that prosecutions for dangerous or careless driving were rare, and drivers exceeding the speed limit, as happened daily on the

thirty-five-mile stretch of road out of London she knew best, were ignored by the police.¹¹⁰ Although there were thousands of convictions annually for illegal parking (90,000 in 1958), this offence was regarded with the same cynical disrespect as drinking alcohol during the era of prohibition in the USA.¹¹¹ She applied the theme of *Social Science and Social Pathology* – that notions of health and adjustment presume a particular cultural framework – to practical problems, such as the new category of ‘maladjusted children’ created by the 1944 Education Act. Just as this legislation referred to the need for every school day to begin with an act of worship, without specifying *what* should be worshipped, so it talked of the need for children to be adjusted without being clear what they should be adjusted *to*.¹¹² For an understanding of the value-systems of schools we would have to wait for systematic research, although the reports on individual cases obtained by JP Mrs Wootton showed how much the premium was on quiet conscientious conformity rather than anything more exciting: “‘Originality’ I do not ever recall having seen mentioned,” she remarked, pointedly.¹¹³

Looking back twenty years later on the furore caused in the social work world by that chapter in *Social Science and Social Pathology*, Barbara was unrepentant. Although the phase of ‘psycho-analytic self-deification’ had mostly passed, what social workers had written about themselves during that period had been ‘almost unmitigated rubbish and arrogant rubbish at that’.¹¹⁴ To underscore her point about the need for social workers to concern themselves with practical problems, she gave herself the task of formulating ‘a philosophy for the social services’, imagining herself as a woman of about forty with three children, suddenly widowed by the death of a husband earning between £2,000 and £3,000 a year, and living in rented accommodation. This was almost exactly the situation that had confronted her own mother in 1907 when her father died, but Adela Adam had not had to confront the task of unravelling the mysteries of welfare benefits, simply because none existed then. In 1974, Barbara takes her imaginary widowed self on an exhausting round of Social Security and Supplementary Benefit and Housing Authority offices, concluding that good communication and simplicity should be the basis of any sound philosophy of the social services. Returning to her real self, she asks the manager of her local Social Security office to give her an up-to-date copy of the *Department of Health and Social Security’s Handbook on Family Benefits and Pensions*, together with a set of explanatory leaflets: the resulting package weighs two pounds. She was always struck, but apparently hardly anybody else was, by the fact that what is exceptional about the personal social services is that those who provide them do not normally expect to use them. This is quite unlike what happens in education and health care: teachers

are taught and doctors seek the attention of their peers when they are ill. The social class gap between social workers and their clients produces a tendency to over-emphasize the importance of professionalism, and to downplay the utility of practical knowledge, particularly about the workings of the services, which 'clients' in the modern world really do need.¹¹⁵

It was in July 1958, a few months after her return from Ghana, that the letter from Downing Street arrived suggesting that Barbara Wootton's name might be submitted to the Queen for a life peerage.¹¹⁶ Once that honour was announced, there was an avalanche of congratulatory letters: from officials at the British Sociological Association, the National Secular Society, the London Probation Service, Hillcroft College, the Ethical Union, the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency, the National Association for Mental Health, the Medico-legal Society, the Home Office, the Workers' Educational Association; and from many women's organizations celebrating this 'first' for women – the Women's Co-operative Guild, the National Women Citizens Association, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Council of Married Women, the Women's Freedom League, the British Federation of University Women. 'The first sociologist in the House of Lords – and a woman at that,' boasted Moya Woodside, psychiatric social worker and research colleague of Eliot Slater, with whom Vera had worked at the Maudsley, 'The Walls of Jericho may well begin to quake'.¹¹⁷ The headmistress of Barbara's school in Cambridge wrote to express her pride, as did the Mistress and Fellows of Girton College; cousin Cicely Ford saw Barbara's photograph in the newspaper: 'Never had I realized you had such a strong look of your family in your face. I almost thought I could see aunt Juliet smiling at me and telling me how proud she & aunt Frances would have been, & your parents too I hope Lizzie [The Pie] will be well enough to take it all in. I know she is so fond of you, & looks upon you as her own child – as I do too, in some measure. When I think how I used to rush in every day, to see you in your bath on my way to lectures.'¹¹⁸ Tom Marshall, rescuing himself from that negative review of her book, told her she should enjoy the thought that her name would appear in all future history books on the British Constitution.¹¹⁹ There were letters from Hugh Gaitskell and Lord Longford, and from Tom and Annie Wootton, Jack's siblings, in Nottingham, with whom Barbara had kept in touch, and from old students, one of whom told Barbara that some of them had prophetically called her Lady Barbara when her back was turned,¹²⁰ and another of whom confessed to having illicitly kept Barbara's copy of Keynes' *Monetary Reform* for many years.¹²¹

On the day of the formal House of Lords proceedings, Sir William Haley wrote affectionately to Barbara from his office at *The Times* in Printing House Square:

Dear Barbara,

I thought the House of Lords ceremony this afternoon very moving. This is the way to make history, and one had all the greater sense of it with Mme Pandit and the Begum Ikramullah in the Ambassadors' Gallery. What thoughts they must have had of how far and how fast women have progressed in their own lands.

But, of course, the chief emotion of the occasion was personal. Seeing you there brought up all kinds of memories, all happy ones, and I was stirred by both past and present ... Exactly what the House of Lords is going to mean in your daily life I do not know. But it will probably be quite demanding. There is much to do there and it really is worthwhile. May it give you a whole range of new interests and some sense of fulfilment, which is surely the truest happiness ...

Yours always, William.¹²²

In her letter of congratulations, Albertine Winner, a doctor and influential medical administrator at the Department of Health, recalled several discussions with Barbara at the Titmusses that could have been continued – would Barbara come to dinner?¹²³ Richard Titmuss and his wife (Ann Oakley's parents) were among the first to express their congratulations. 'Dear Barbara' wrote Kay Titmuss, having just put down either *The News Chronicle*, which she read every day, or *The Times*, which Richard did, 'We are still at the breakfast table – all three of us – so this is an impulsive note sending congratulations to our dear Baroness. Richard, of course, immediately thought of something for you to do – he says he will transfer all his PQs [Parliamentary Questions] for you to handle.'¹²⁴

Barbara's peerage did nothing to change the inhospitable attitude of Bedford College towards her, and the final stages of the Nuffield Foundation work had to be moved elsewhere, to the Foundation's own premises. While Vera laboured on the manuscript of the book, Barbara dealt with a new avalanche of requests to take part in radio and television programmes, to give lectures, write articles, be guest of honour at numerous dinners, and so forth. She found it odd that her reputation should have taken such an abrupt leap. 'The Baroness Wootton of Abinger did not become overnight more knowledgeable, or a more stimulating speaker or in any way more worth hearing than her precursor, Mrs. Barbara Wootton,'¹²⁵ she noted with characteristic forthrightness. But this observation did not prevent her from making fulsome use of her new status, achieved at an age (sixty-one) when most people would have been contemplating a quiet withdrawal into retirement. For her, it was just the beginning of a new golden age.