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Madam Speaker

In the autumn of 1958, when Barbara entered the House of Lords as Baroness Wootton of Abinger, she remembered as a small child being driven with her mother in her aunt's horse-carriage on a visit to London almost half a century earlier. Her mother pointed out to her the House of Commons as the place that was busy destroying the British Constitution; it was then engaged in debating a Bill which was designed to restrict the powers of the Lords.¹ But their Lordships survived, and Adela Adam would have been most surprised to find her daughter among them as one of the first four women life peers. Barbara's peerage, accepted when she was sixty-one, marked the beginning of the last distinctive phase of her working life, one that lasted for almost thirty years. Now she was in the world of public policy-making full-time, not as an ordinary MP, but in that much more ambiguous and elastic role as a member of the second chamber, an institution with a long and chequered history and a politically uncertain future. 'I'm in the corridors of the corridors that lead to the corridors of power,' she said.² Unlike many of her colleagues in those corridors, she took her new job very seriously; it *was* a job to her.³ She had an office and a desk, and she attended the House regularly – three days a week when it was sitting – although the environment was not at all like an ordinary office: 'a riot of unrestrained Victorian gothic, with vaulted ceilings, dark elaborate pinnacles of carved wood, extravagant entanglements of brass'.⁴

Despite her youthful proclamations to the effect that no serious democracy would host an institution called the House of Lords, there is no sign that Barbara Wootton hesitated before agreeing to become a peer. She took the view that it was an institution that ought to be abolished, but, if it continued to exist, it should not just be 'the almost exclusive preserve of male Tory Christians'.⁵ 'No-one in his senses would invent the present House if it did not already exist,' she declared. 'But there it is, tremendously seductive in its venerable charm.'⁶ As a gentleman's club, it offered many advantages. When the social policy activist and entrepreneur Michael Young was offered a life peerage in 1978, he had run out of money for

his regular journeys to and from London, and the peerage offered free rail travel as well as attendance allowances; Barbara Wootton advised him to accept, and so he did.⁷ To an academic colleague she replied, when asked how she reconciled accepting a peerage with her belief in equality, 'My dear, if *you* are ever offered a peerage, accept it. You will always have a parking place in central London, and when you make a speech it will always be reported.'⁸ The *social* advantages of the House of Lords – good conversation in a civilized atmosphere – were greater in Barbara's estimation than the *political* ones: a compact, unitary democracy does not really need two chambers, and the revisions imposed on legislation by a group of supposedly high-minded persons acting in the public interest are often only minor alterations effected by people who are influenced just as much as anyone else by their personal political philosophies.⁹

The consensus of Barbara's friends was that her decision to accept a peerage was a rational move for someone with her gifts. Criminologist Terry Morris considered it an 'absolutely brilliant idea ... The institutions of British politics and British society at that time, if not literally a kind of Augean stable, were certainly replete with attitudes of intolerance, illiberalism, and resistance to change. The hereditary peers who turned up from their retreats in the shires to vote for the status quo were openly referred to as the "backwoodsmen". The ever rational Barbara was ready and able to get in there with her broom ... I think she was a very powerful member of the Lords. And I also think that she was a very powerful influence on some of the women who joined the House of Lords, like, for example, Bea Serota [Baroness Serota of Hampstead, a life peer from 1967, like Barbara originally an economist, a BBC Governor and interested in crime] who very much took her cues from Barbara ... That period of the later sixties and very early seventies there was quite a strong radical movement inside the Lords ... particularly over issues like capital punishment and so forth.'¹⁰ According to Nellie McGregor, widow of Professor O.R. McGregor, and their son Ross, Barbara revelled in the House of Lords; it was the pinnacle of the judicial system to which she had devoted all those years of her life as a magistrate and as an academic thinker: 'She would certainly not have been in the House of Lords unless she had a utilitarian reason for being there ... Barbara genuinely thought that this was an extension of her attempts to reform society.' She related 'very well' to her fellow members of the House of Lords, including the aristocracy. Perhaps 'there was something atavistic about it – there she was sitting on a bench next to some chap whose ancestor shagged Elizabeth the First's butler'.¹¹ There was definitely a side to Barbara that enjoyed the status and could even have dubbed her a snob;¹² the 336 letters and 12 telegrams congratulating her on the peerage are carefully preserved in her Girton College Archives.

She was not alone in being seduced by the gentlemen's club. Her friend, the journalist Kingsley Martin, did as Leonard Woolf told him to do and refused a peerage on socialist grounds, but wrote to Woolf to say that he did not necessarily feel contempt for people who did accept. When Barbara Wootton, a woman 'for whom neither of us feels contempt', accepted, it occurred to Kingsley that she might be right and Leonard might be wrong.¹³ Barbara wanted Kingsley in the House, because he would look so nice there, but unfortunately no-one she suggested was ever asked.¹⁴ Another of her friends, Francis Williams, who used to regard the House of Lords as the silliest of institutions, changed his mind sufficiently to become Baron Francis-Williams of Abinger in 1962, although he recognized that the charms of the House might lessen if he attended more often, as he would then be unable to escape the feeling that what happened there was an elaborate charade.¹⁵ As one reads the debates in Hansard – the many hundreds of debates in which the name 'Wootton' appears – there is an overwhelming sense of almost obsequious politeness ('the noble Baroness', 'the noble Lord', 'my noble friend'), but there is also the possibility that it is not quite obsequious, that it is merely a very formal mode of address which allows uncompromising things to be said with courtesy so that those who are not asleep are more likely to hear them.

When the Queen opened Parliament in October 1958, that first year when women peers were there, Baroness Wootton arrived early to sit in a chamber crammed with colourfully-robed bodies. The bronze barons of Runnymede between the tall windows looked down on 'a triumph of excess' as the Queen stuck to the traditional formula and addressed them all as 'My Lords', not 'My Lords and Ladies'.¹⁶ It was some time before Barbara found a suitable occasion to treat the noble Lords and Ladies to her maiden speech. Three and a half months after she entered the House, there was a lengthy debate – it ran for more than six and a half hours – on the Youth Services. It was the first time that this topic had received a full discussion in the House, and many of their Lordships were anxious to speak on what they saw as an important and troubling subject. Lord Longford's introduction to the debate signalled their main concern about rising rates of juvenile crime; but he also quoted Macaulay on 'grace and female loveliness, wit and learning' in anticipation of the fact that their Lordships were about to hear the maiden speeches of two lady peers, the Baronesses Ravensdale and Wootton.¹⁷ Two and a half hours later came Barbara's chance to speak. First, and predictably, she put them right on the statistical front: the proportion of indictable offences committed by young people was actually fractionally *less* now than before the War. What had increased were crimes of violence, which were up seven-fold, though most of these were relatively minor in nature. Just as the previous speaker, Baroness Ravensdale,

had drawn on her experience of running clubs for young people to lambast parents for their negligence and neglect of moral teaching, so Baroness Wootton referred to her experience as a magistrate as a source of a rather different picture, one in which young people were reacting to a world of unequal life chances and a culture of acquisitiveness. It was, she said, so much easier for the policy response to be the provision of more clubs or clinics, rather than the elimination of slums and extended secondary education, which would address the fundamental material basis of young people's discontent.¹⁸

Her speech took twenty-two minutes. The Earl of Feversham responded: it was 'a most eloquent speech', testimony to the fact that the noble lady would bring 'wisdom, knowledge and, indeed, humour' to many such debates in future; the House was enriched by her presence.¹⁹ Later in the debate, the Earl of Dundee remarked that, if any of their Lordships were ever guilty of a crime of violence, they would want to be sentenced by Magistrate Lady Wootton. He hoped that they would all hear the Ladies speak much in future, and felt that their contribution put the House a few points ahead of the Other Place (the House of Commons), which had been bi-sexual for so much longer.²⁰ Lord Longford could not help remarking that Baroness Wootton's speech exceeded in brilliancy even the expectations of those, such as himself, who had sponsored or introduced her to the House, and he, too, picked up on her humour, which proved reassuringly that this was 'not a commodity in which the other sex are behind us'.²¹ Flattering though these remarks were, they managed to lay on one side the essence of Barbara's argument, which was that bad behaviour in the young is caused by a bad society. Their Lordships were not used to socialism, even laced with humour.

The overwhelming impression to an observer looking down on their Lordships' Chamber was that most heads were bald, many had shut eyes, and there were plenty of those special hearing aids that looked like miniature telephones.²² As *The Observer* had noted when the names of the first four women life peers were first announced, the only one of them who was likely to be the 'excited hornet' capable of stirring the 'drowsy flies' of the Lords was Barbara Wootton.²³ She definitely lived up to this promise, and she did so through a period which saw four changes of Government – two transfers of power from the Conservatives to Labour, and two from Labour to the Conservatives. During this time, there were multiple transformations in the British way of life: a decline in Britain's traditional pre-eminence as a world power; new patterns of economic instability; and a supposedly affluent society bringing better living standards for many citizens, and certainly vastly more material consumption, but no diminution of underlying inequalities of wealth. Barbara's performances in the House of Lord throughout these changes of fortune were

notoriously spirited and provocative. For example, early in her career as a baroness, she caused the largest division of the 1958–9 session in her unsuccessful attempt to delete the words ‘common prostitute’ from the Street Offences Bill. She pointed out that this was a term quite without statutory definition. If common prostitutes were defined as people who already had convictions, then this was contrary to the basic principle of English justice, which was that people were innocent until proved guilty.²⁴ Her trademark cutting edge of witty radicalism was apparent in the speeches and remarks she made in many debates, including those about secondary schools and the training of social workers. The debate on secondary education in 1959, which focused on the selection of children at the age of eleven into different types of schools, provided a ready platform for the airing of many prejudiced views from men who had been selected into a type of education beyond the reach of most British children. After three hours of listening to such attitudes, Barbara was moved to criticize the convenient and habitual assumption that different types of secondary schools (from the secondary modern to the one that ‘lies under the shadow of Windsor Castle’²⁵) were equally valued and equally valuable. They clearly were not. If they were, ninety per cent of young people attending secondary moderns would not leave at fifteen, whereas forty per cent of those at grammar schools stayed on beyond the age of sixteen. Barbara informed their Lordships that the eleven-plus examination ‘broods like a monster’ over every home in England with a young child in it. It is ‘an extraordinary educational theory’ that children should be separated from one another on grounds of measured intelligence. We all have to live together, so what is wrong with comprehensive schools? Barbara’s speech was interrupted several times by Viscount Hailsham, who did not agree with her; most graciously, she thanked him for the ‘gymnastic exercise’ he had given her in constantly rising and sitting, but she was not going to change her mind.²⁶

The following year, their Lordships discussed the Report of the Working Party on Social Workers in Local Authority Health and Welfare Services, chaired by Eileen Younghusband, a respected teacher of social work at the LSE. The Earl of Feversham, introducing the discussion, made an early reference to the well-known views of the noble Baroness Wootton on social workers acting improperly as ‘the poor man’s psychiatrist’.²⁷ Barbara’s riposte observed that criticizing the practice and philosophy of social work was not the same thing as suggesting that social workers were not needed – they were, but they should liberate themselves from the tendency, imported from American social work ideology, to focus on personal disturbance rather than on practical material need. She wanted their Lordships to understand that people could not be counselled out of poverty. Economic matters were a matter of economics. How would their Lordships feel if the accountants they

employed to reduce the taxes they paid – a reasonable exercise which she herself engaged in, not wishing to contribute more than she needed to a Government of which she did not approve – subjected them to interrogation about their private lives instead of their financial ones, and proceeded on the assumption that any chaos in the financial arena was due to sexual tension and conflict.²⁸ There is no record of laughter, but perhaps the question had some impact.

‘A fine-looking woman with impressive white hair and stylish spectacles,’ noted Lord Longford, of Barbara’s physical presence: ‘She was a formidable figure but soon much loved in the House’.²⁹ They loved her caustic and perceptive questions, her unique combination of theoretical and practical knowledge, and her ‘remarkable tenderness for the individual human being’.³⁰ According to Lena Jeger, Barbara gained great respect ‘mainly because she tended to concentrate on the subjects she knew best – on sociology and penal reform – and always spoke with authority and concern. More than one old peer had been heard to say that he wished he had been taught by her’³¹ – their Lordships do appear to have engaged in several fantasies about the Ladies in their midst. The Labour peer Lord McCarthy, speaking about economic policy in 1976, complained that he was put off by the sudden appearance beside him of the noble Baroness, Lady Wootton, ‘because, as noble Lords will know, she has been the doyenne of academic experts on this subject since her path-making publication *The Social Foundations of Incomes* [sic] *Policy* in the early ’fifties. I felt like giving her my notes ... asking her to mark them, and if she did not give me a beta plus, I would not have risen to my feet.’³²

Barbara Wootton’s commitment to the House of Lords included becoming a member of its Offices Committee (in 1959) and its Procedure of the House Committee (in 1965). Just as she had been introduced to the House by two established peers (the Lords Longford and Burden), so she introduced others: Elaine Burton, ex-Labour MP for Coventry South in 1962; Bea Serota in 1967; economist John Vaizey and engineer Paul Wilson in 1976; and O.R. McGregor on his re-recreation as Baron McGregor of Durris in 1978. In between her first speech on 4 February 1959, and her last on 4 July 1985, she is recorded as having made 1,790 ‘contributions’ to House of Lords debates – a surprising total for someone who did not regard herself as a good Parliamentarian. Although people said she was good at it, she disliked public speaking.³³ Her most significant contributions to the House of Lords, discussed in Chapter 14, were in the areas of crime and drugs. Her most participatory years were 1961–2 and 1971–4.

In 1961, most of her time was taken up with penal issues or with mental health and health care, but she also contributed to debates about broadcasting, road traffic, and sickness relief for sub-postmasters. A decade later, the stop-and-search rule and

firearms were major preoccupations, but other topics were wage settlements, the proposed abolition of the waterways board, and pensions. Barbara's contributions to these debates reflected concerns she had long held: about the dangers of power; about the need for central economic planning and an equitable income policy; and about the importance of clear thinking in deciding public policy. She was vocal in the debate about the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill in 1962, expressing concern that immigration officers would have the power to exclude people they considered might be mentally disordered without seeking any independent evidence.³⁴ In her attack in 1979 on the economic policy of Callaghan's Labour government, Barbara declared, 'It has not done very much in particular, and it has done it very badly'. There was no anti-inflation policy. The Government spoke of 'the inflation rate' as though it were a fact of nature 'or what the insurance companies would call an "act of God", which, by the way, is very unflattering to God'. She drew their Lordships' attention to Lord Kaldor's letter putting forward in *The Times* that morning the very system which she herself had proposed years ago – an income gains tax.³⁵

In the 1970s, she was appalled to discover that boys (though not girls) learnt how to use guns in cadet forces at school and in borstal institutions: 'It is madness to train young men in borstals in the use of firearms, and then be surprised at the number of crimes involving shooting incidents'.³⁶ 'Row Over Gun Training for Boys in Borstals', reported *The Daily Mirror*.³⁷ She pestered the Home Office for information about who was allowed a firearm certificate and why, and about the use of guns in murder and manslaughter cases. Guns had been involved in 23 deaths in England, Wales and Scotland in 1971, and, of the 18 offenders responsible for these deaths, 10 held valid certificates and eight did not. It took the civil servants quite a long time to put this evidence together.³⁸ Questions about the use of firearms dragged on and on. In 1982, the weary eighty-five-year-old Baroness was driven to remark that, 'The Government takes great trouble to stop people from possessing cannabis, but apparently firearms don't matter'.³⁹

Cars fell in rather the same category. Motoring offences were crimes, although the penal system and public attitudes persisted in not treating them as such. For example, men convicted of serious motoring offences were not removed from their posts as magistrates. Shortly after joining the House of Lords, Barbara informed their Lordships that many of them were regular users of 'lethal weapons' – the ones they daily parked in Old Palace Yard.⁴⁰ She compared the sentences for 3,000 or so offenders found guilty of drink-driving with a similar number convicted of offences against property without violence: only five per cent of the former but over fifty per cent of the latter got prison sentences.⁴¹ Lords who liked cars did not like Barbara Wootton, who held faithfully to her public anti-car agenda throughout

her time in the House. She argued in favour of heavier penalties for most motoring offences, from a baseline position that a driving licence ought not to be regarded as a civic right but rather as a privilege which some capable, qualified people could obtain.⁴² Her vehicular disputations were often peppered with graphic statistics. In 1961, more than five times as many people were convicted of causing death by dangerous driving than were convicted of murder; this was a 'recurring slaughter' with its counterpart in all 'developed' countries;⁴³ a year's victims, if positioned in the gigantic Royal Albert Hall in London, would fill ninety-two per cent of the seats.⁴⁴ The Pedestrians' Association was founded as a campaigning group in 1929 (in 2010, it is known as 'Living Streets'), and it counted Barbara Wootton, along with its own Graham Page, as 'by far the most important and influential road safety campaigner' of her day.⁴⁵

The political landscape experienced another earthquake when Barbara Wootton was appointed as the first woman Deputy Speaker of the House of Lords in 1965. The proceedings of the House of Lords are presided over by the Lord Chancellor, but, until the Constitutional Reform Act of 2005, it was the Deputy Chairman of Committees, the role to which Barbara was appointed in December 1965, who took over as Deputy Speaker in his absence.⁴⁶ By the time she became Deputy Speaker, Barbara knew thoroughly how the House worked. As Frank Field put it, 'She wasn't somebody who floated along just turning up for the odd vote and all the rest of it. She knew the procedures and how to do things; that's why she was elected as a woman Deputy Speaker.'⁴⁷ 'First Woman to Sit on the Woolsack' announced *The Times*;⁴⁸ of course it was a splendid thing, observed Lena Jeger in *The Guardian*, to have a woman there, and all the more so because it was Barbara, a woman 'whose wisdom, eloquence, and authority prevail even over the inelegant discomfort of the most unfunctionally designed seat in the Palace of Westminster'.⁴⁹ Barbara agreed: the Woolsack, from where the proceedings of the House are directed, was not a very comfortable place.⁵⁰ It is a large ceremonial cushion covered with red cloth with no back or arms, and stuffed with wool, a reminder of the trade that once underpinned national prosperity, and it is the focal point of the House, facing the throne. When, in 1973, the House's heating system broke down, the discomfort of the Woolsack escalated as the ventilation grid in the centre of the floor in front of it threw up an Arctic gale; Barbara had to put on trousers in self-defence.⁵¹ But the first time she sat on it, the first time any woman had sat on it, was on 16 February 1966, when she took the place of the Lord Chancellor who had left for dinner.⁵² The topic of the debate she had to preside over then was not one she warmed to – road transport and the expansion of the motorway network. As Deputy Speaker, she had to chair debates on an enormous disparity of topics: local government, housing finance,

the protection of children, parliamentary pensions, patents, industrial relations, slaughterhouses, rabies, social security, the countryside, water charges,crofting reform, the shipbuilding industry, and race relations.

The year after she was invited to experience the discomfort of the Woolsack, the members of both Houses of Parliament were confronted with a Bill that would change the lives of women in Britain forever. 'Procuring' a miscarriage had been illegal since the Offences Against the Person Act of 1861, although the Act did not prevent the many thousands of abortion-related deaths that occurred every year. The legendary action of the gynaecologist Aleck Bourne in 1938, in inviting police to prosecute him for aborting the fetus of a fourteen-year-old who had been raped, established the preservation of women's health as a legitimate ground for abortion, and opened the doors for what, by the 1960s, had become a lucrative private sector medical industry. Middle-class women could buy their abortions, but working-class women could afford only the cheap services of the illegal practitioners. The abortion law reformer, Diane Munday, recalled with horror doctors telling her in the early 1960s how, in the big London hospitals, wards were put aside every Friday and Saturday night for women, bleeding, often septic and sometimes dying, who were brought in as a result of backstreet abortions – Friday being pay day.⁵³ The Abortion Law Reform Association (ALRA) was set up in 1936 to campaign for changes which would resolve this appalling situation, but it proved a discouragingly long struggle before Liberal MP David Steel succeeded with his Abortion Law Act of 1967.⁵⁴

Barbara Wootton supported most of the liberalizing initiatives of the period from the 1950s to the 1980s. She had, for example, agreed with the conclusions of her Surrey neighbour Jack Wolfenden's Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, that private homosexual acts between consenting adults should be decriminalized,⁵⁵ and she was a founder member of the Homosexual Law Reform Society in 1958.⁵⁶ With this background, and her history of concern for issues relating to women, it was not surprising that she was widely expected to be enthusiastic about abortion law reform. When the ALRA was set up in 1936 to campaign for legal changes, she had, indeed, written a letter of support to the new organization: 'How glad I am to know,' she said, 'that the Association is attempting to put a stop to the enormous damage to women's health and happiness caused by the present state of affairs'.⁵⁷ In the House of Lords, she campaigned for the removal of the class barrier which was responsible for dangerous backstreet abortions.⁵⁸ Her views about abortion came to the attention of abortion law reformers when two pre-Steel versions of an abortion Bill progressed through the House of Lords in 1965–6. Their champion was a seventy-six-year-old solicitor, Baron Silkin of Dulwich, a solid, tactical, but somewhat pedantic, supporter of

abortion law reform.⁵⁹ At the second reading of the first Silkin Bill in November 1965, when Parliament entered into its first proper debate on abortion – a five-and-a-half-hour marathon – Baroness Wootton voiced her disquiet about a clause in the Bill which was known as the ‘inadequate mother’ clause. This called on doctors to make decisions on grounds of health and/or social conditions about the suitability of women to continue with, or terminate, their pregnancies. Since this was a provision which made women’s access to abortion clearly dependent on the subjective opinions of doctors, Barbara felt it was unsatisfactory; she wanted amendments which would restrict the grounds on which doctors could sanction termination of pregnancy.⁶⁰ It was, she said, ‘a very profound decision for anybody to make about anybody else’. Among the arguments used to persuade their Lordships, she put to them a ‘by no means unlikely case’: ‘Suppose there is a husband who is selfish – and there are selfish husbands – who does not wish to be bothered with children, who does not wish to have the expense of providing for children. And suppose that, when he finds that his wife has become pregnant, he sees the family doctor and tells him that his wife is extremely neurotic, is not fit to be a mother ... The doctor may feel that there are great tensions in the marriage, and that the fact of the pregnancy is going to aggravate those tensions, and that, in the interests of the marriage, it might be better to terminate the pregnancy ... This is not an improbable situation. It is perhaps a situation which we have all known in our personal experience.’⁶¹ Was this something she knew about from her own personal experience with George? Frank Field remembers Barbara telling him that George ‘forced’ her to have an abortion.⁶² On many occasions Barbara voiced her regret at not having children: ‘It has always been a grief to me’.⁶³

The substance of Barbara Wootton’s objection to the ‘inadequacy’ clause in the Abortion Bill had a history. It went back to all those debates about ‘problem families’ with which she had tangled in *Social Science and Social Pathology*: the middle-class idea that certain kinds of families are inadequate or dysfunctional because they do not meet certain standards of material and social behaviour. Therefore, to suggest, as the ‘inadequacy’ clause by implication did, that women living in poor circumstances might not be fit to be mothers by virtue of these circumstances was a form of ‘pseudo-eugenics’.⁶⁴ In a letter to Silkin, Barbara referred to the dangers of ‘Nazi racialism’.⁶⁵ The problem was not the birth of children to mothers living in slums but the slums themselves. The moral issue was the liberty of the individual: what the Bill proposed to do was ‘to say that people of whom we do not approve are not to propagate, and to lay upon the medical profession the responsibility of deciding of whom we do approve and of whom we do not approve ... It is not for us, and it is not for the doctors, in the present state of knowledge – perhaps not

in any state of knowledge – to say who is to have the right to propagate children and who has not.’⁶⁶

Barbara’s wrangle with the ‘inadequacy’ clause disappointed abortion law reform campaigners, who saw it as undermining the whole of their campaign. As one prominent campaigner, Madeleine Simms, pointed out, Barbara’s opposition to this clause lacked rationality, as abortion would only ever be considered if the mother herself asked for it.⁶⁷ While the reformers appreciated her reluctance to cede doctors powers over women’s lives, Barbara had occupied a position in the abortion debates alongside right-wing religious figures, such as the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Tory Catholic politician Norman St John-Stevas. This suggested that she harboured some underlying objection to abortion, aside from her contentions about abuse of medical power.⁶⁸ In a television interview conducted in 1968 with the Canadian journalist Bernard Braden, Barbara did admit a principled opposition to abortion. It followed from her position on killing: nobody had the right to kill anyone else; thus, women had no basic right to abortion. Life begins at conception and life, because there is nothing else, is precious: had she been religious, she told Braden, and had she thus believed that aborted fetuses went straight to heaven, she might be more in favour of abortion.⁶⁹ There had, though, to be a few exceptions to these absolute moral stands, so she agreed with abortion after rape and when there was a serious threat to the mother’s physical or mental health.

It was the thalidomide disaster in the late 1950s and early 1960s that had reinvigorated the whole campaign for reform of the abortion law; this disaster saw the births in 46 countries of more than 10,000 babies severely deformed because of a drug prescribed for their mothers in pregnancy.⁷⁰ In the highest-profile legal case, a Belgian mother had been charged in 1962 with murdering her seven-day-old very severely deformed daughter, and after a sensational trial she had been acquitted.⁷¹ In another television interview with Robin Day for a ‘Panorama’ programme in January 1962, Barbara was asked what she would have done in the Belgian case; she said she would have agreed with the not-guilty verdict, but would not have gone as far as the Belgian jury in dismissing the case as not one of homicide. It *was* homicide, yet in situations such as that faced by the Belgian mother, when there was no prospect of any quality of life, it was rational to regard death as a humane release.⁷² Once the ‘inadequate mother’ clause in the British legislation had been re-worded, Barbara announced her support for it, and she continued to voice her concern that, whatever legal and medical provision there was for abortion, all women should have equal access to it. For example, in a rather tetchy House of Lords debate in 1972 she argued that women living on supplementary benefit should have the same rights to abortion as any other women, even when this meant that the Supplementary

Benefits Commission itself should pay the costs of abortions arranged by private charities.⁷³ Still, three years after the 1967 Act was passed, Barbara added her name to St John-Stewas's in a parliamentary delegation calling for an enquiry into the way the Act was working.⁷⁴ This anti-reformist move backfired when the results of the enquiry unanimously supported the Act in its original form.⁷⁵

Whatever her real motives and feelings – and abortion *is* a subject that tends to involve deep emotion – the disagreement over abortion legislation had considerable consequences for Barbara. It led to her detachment from the organized humanist movement. She had belonged to this, in one way or another, since the halcyon days of the Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals with H.G. Wells and others in the 1930s. The separation of moral purposes from religious doctrines in a rationalist humanist philosophy was absolutely central to her approach, both to life and to those domains of public policy she tried to influence. Indeed, she wrote in her Voltaire lectures, given in 1970 under the auspices of the British Humanist Association and published as *Contemporary Britain*, that the loss of a guiding morality, such as could be supplied by a humanist framework, lay behind many contemporary social problems. However, of equal importance to her was another facet of humanism: its reliance on the logic and methodology of science to identify the best route for promoting 'the good life'.⁷⁶ She was a member of three organizations – the British Humanist Association (BHA), the Rationalist Press Association (RPA) and the Ethical Union (EU) – which shared the kind of complex conjoined history and overlapping memberships that characterized humanist / ethical / secular activities.⁷⁷ In 1950, she had become an Honorary Associate of the RPA, originally created as a book club publishing affordable non-Christian 'liberal' literature; she was Vice-President during Bertrand Russell's term of office as President in 1962–1970, and she took over from him as President in 1970.⁷⁸ She was also a Vice-President of the Ethical Union, an umbrella name for a number of small ethical societies, from 1956 to 1969,⁷⁹ and she had a close association with the International Humanist and Ethical Union, a worldwide organization set up by the leading humanist Harold Blackman and the Dutch humanist philosopher Jaap van Praag.⁸⁰ As a founder member of the BHA, she spoke at its inaugural dinner in the House of Commons in May 1963.⁸¹ In the House of Lords, she belonged to the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group. Freethinkers were notoriously promiscuous in their occupation of different committees and associations, and Barbara Wootton was one of the most so.⁸² As one of her obituarists put it, she was 'no closet unbeliever. She publicly supported virtually every organisation within the secularist-humanist movement.'⁸³

Despite her impressive pedigree as a humanist, the BHA decided at their annual general meeting in April 1966, to remove her as a Vice-President. The

reason was their perception of her position vis-à-vis the Abortion Bill: she had been 'instrumental in securing the defeat of the clause relating to abortion in the case of the inadequacy of the mother'. According to Diane Munday, who argued for Barbara's suspension, Barbara had been warned by telegram before the House of Lords debate that her position meant she was not toeing the humanist party line.⁸⁴ By no means all the BHA supporters were happy about this, pointing out that Barbara was not opposed to the Abortion Law Reform Bill as a whole, and that 'heresy-hunting' is contrary to the very principles of humanism.⁸⁵ The BHA's decision perplexed and upset Barbara. During the House of Lords debates on the Abortion Bill, she found herself at odds with those whose views she normally shared, and she was concerned to spell out why. The first reason was the importance of human life. The second was her concern that the widespread availability of abortion might make people discard contraception as the lesser of two evils, or even not an evil at all.⁸⁶ Barbara also parted from the RPA several years later, in 1972, over the issue of what supporting the right to abortion really means, although she did maintain a close and friendly relationship with the organization and was on the Editorial Advisory Board of its journal, *Question*.⁸⁷

In these circles, Barbara was seen as having a more positive view of adoption as an alternative than others in the pro-abortion movement,⁸⁸ and there is other evidence to support this. In her disagreement with the BHA, she argued that its members lobbied almost exclusively on abortion, when they ought to develop the Humanist Counselling Service and focus on helping the Agnostics Adoption Society.⁸⁹ She left money in her will to an organization called the International Adoption Service. This began life in 1963 as the Agnostics Adoption Bureau through the efforts of the pioneer epidemiologist Richard Doll, and his wife Joan, who wanted to adopt children, but, as agnostics, found themselves shunned by the mainstream adoption agencies. Turning to the BHA for advice, they set up an adoption agency for non-believers in their own home, paying for its first social worker themselves.⁹⁰ Barbara was one of this organization's sponsors when it acquired charitable status in 1965, and she made various public appeals on its behalf.⁹¹

Throughout the decades from 1958 to 1988 when she worked in the House of Lords, the proportion of new life peers who were female remained stable at eleven to twelve per cent.⁹² As a bastion of masculinity, their Lordships' House was not severely challenged by the presence of the Ladies. Nonetheless, during her time there, she was part of a marked transformation of the Upper House from an institution that was (almost literally) 'dying in its sleep' – only some 60 peers attending regularly, short sittings on only about 90 days a year – to a much more appropriately modern role as 'something approaching a Council of State – a forum and focus of expert

opinions and a dedicated revising assembly'.⁹³ The House of Lords' transition to a more modern institution gathered momentum when Harold Wilson's 1964 Labour Government used life peerages as a strategy for increasing Labour's representation there. By the mid-1980s, when Barbara was still an active working peer, more than two-thirds of peers were registered as attending, and a substantially higher proportion actually spoke in debates; sittings were longer, and on more days of the year. This greater activity had a measurable effect: by 1989, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's Bills had been amended by the House of Lords against her wishes on no fewer than 125 occasions.⁹⁴ Many 'lifers' were experienced in public speaking and politics, and they came to dominate debates and committee work, introducing generally more 'liberal' values.⁹⁵ Women lifers tended to be more active than their male counterparts; for example, in the 1979–80 session, more than twice as many women life peers as male life peers managed an attendance rate of ninety per cent or higher.⁹⁶ As with some other areas of her life, Barbara Wootton held to a degree of ambiguity in relation to her own official political affiliation. She was a cross-bencher,⁹⁷ preserving that independence of voice she valued so highly, but she defined herself staunchly as a 'Labour peer';⁹⁸ she was very much a member of the left-wing of the Labour Party,⁹⁹ a 'democratic socialist without any initial caps'.¹⁰⁰

She had a sharp tongue for some of the House of Lords' patriarchal customs. The criminologist Philip Bean remembers dining with her at the House one evening: 'We sat at this long table and, at the end, one of the waiters, I don't know what you call them, went past with cigars, and she waited until he'd gone past, and she called him back because he walked past her, you see, without offering her one. And she called him back. "Are you offering me a cigar?" "Oh yes, Madam, of course." "Well, I don't want one," she said. I said to her, "What did you do that for?" "He shouldn't assume." She was a delight really.'¹⁰¹ Despite being thoroughly entrenched in the furniture and procedures of the House, Barbara continued to argue for its abolition, although with the proviso that, first, the House of Commons needed to do its work properly.¹⁰² She criticized the House of Lords' 'archaic constitution' and the 'ritual dance' of its legislative powers in relation to Government bills,¹⁰³ even in the House of Lords itself.¹⁰⁴

After seven years in the House, she confided to her friend, Shena Simon, that she was rather fed up with it. They had so many new MPs among the Labour Lords that the place was becoming an inferior imitation of the Commons – inferior because the good MP stuck to the Commons. 'It has certainly ceased to be any distinction to be a Lord, especially for a woman,' she muttered, 'all the recent additions – Dora Gaitskell, Norah Phillips, Barbara Brooks, Lady Plummer – are there by virtue of their husbands', not their own, achievements.'¹⁰⁵ The saga of

why on earth she and the other Ladies who had earned their titles should be called 'peeresses' like the wives of Lords, who were called 'peeress' as a courtesy title, but had earned nothing themselves, was one that went on and on. Barbara and her disgruntled female colleagues had a meeting with the Lord Chancellor in March 1970, in a further attempt to get the practice corrected. They were evidently seen as rather a nuisance; the Lord Chancellor recorded that he had noted the wishes of 'the militant women peers', and hoped these would be passed onto the lobby correspondent so that the press would reform its habits of nomenclature, although there was 'absolutely no guarantee that it would have the smallest effect'.¹⁰⁶ Barbara never relinquished her objection to the term 'peeress', penning a letter to *The Times* about it as late as 1983, and regretting that the newspaper refused to publish it.¹⁰⁷ One of her last interventions in the House of Lords was during a debate about the Government's ratification of the United Nations Convention on Sex Discrimination in 1984, when she inquired as to whether her husband George might now posthumously be granted the title 'peeress'.¹⁰⁸

She must have been a constant irritation with her campaign against illogical injustices. In 1970, she provoked a headline in *The Daily Mirror*, 'Row Over Jail Curb Study', when she asked a question in the House about the Home Office's refusal to allow a prisoner, Walter 'Angel Face' Probyn, to be visited by a University of Essex lecturer in order to study sociology.¹⁰⁹ Probyn was serving a twelve-year sentence for shooting at police during one of his many escapes from prison; as Britain's most notorious criminal escapologist, by 1964 he had notched up seventeen escapes from the approved schools and prisons in which he had spent most of his life.¹¹⁰ Barbara Wootton's interest in Probyn was that she had sentenced him in the Juvenile Courts at the start of his criminal career. Then there was her unexpected defence of the errant Lord Lambton. In 1973, the British press had a field day with the peccadilloes of this fifty-year-old Air Force Minister, whose liaisons with prostitutes had come to light when the husband of one of them had tried to sell to a tabloid a photograph of Lambton and someone else's wife in bed together.¹¹¹ Questions were asked about Lambton's possible indiscretions with State secrets during these liaisons, but he protested that he had never taken his red State boxes of Government with him, and it was the futility of his job as a junior minister and wrangles about his title that had caused him to engage in activities such as gardening and debauchery in the first place.¹¹² Barbara Wootton wrote to *The Times*, as was her wont, noting that, 'If impeccable marital fidelity is to be made a condition of political office, this should be explicitly stated at the time that such office is offered', but, in that case, public life would surely be deprived of the services of many valuable people.¹¹³

In 1977, Barbara found herself embarking on a new political campaign, one that would leave her ultimately disillusioned. She received a letter from a man called John Dare in Ashford, Kent; twenty-six years earlier, his wife had died, leaving him with two children and a nineteen-year-old-step-daughter. This young woman, Gill, had kept house for all of them, and she and John Dare had fallen in love; the children had since grown up and left home, and John Dare and his step-daughter now wished to marry, as a mark of their mutual devotion, and in order for her to get a pension and inherit his property. The problem was that their relationship fell in the category of proscribed ones according to the marriage laws. Could not – should not – this be changed?¹¹⁴ A number of other such cases had arrived in Barbara's postbag, and she was sufficiently charged with indignation to sponsor a Marriage Enabling Bill. This aimed to tidy things up, so that the laws determining who could marry whom were based purely on the prohibition of blood relationships.¹¹⁵ Public opinion, Barbara knew, was in favour of sorting out these anomalies, but she also knew that their Lordships harboured a variety of spurious objections to her proposal, mainly that such a change in the law would threaten the stability of family life by encouraging men to lust after their step-daughters and get rid of their wives. 'While I have lived long enough to know that there are people who will do anything for sex or money,' she said, probably giving her audience one of her famously reprimanding looks, 'a family in which the husband casts lustful eyes upon his step-daughter while he is still married to her mother is not exactly a stable family anyhow'.¹¹⁶

The attention of journalists was caught by this spectacle of an eighty-one-year-old Baroness arguing the case of 'Forbidden Love' with all the vigour of a sixth-former.¹¹⁷ She was right about the objections; she once heard two peers refer to her modest proposal as 'that filthy little bill'.¹¹⁸ The day the Lords finally threw out her Bill in May 1981, Barbara left the Chamber with a sense of disgust that she had done so badly, and went for a drink with John and Gill Dare, who had become friends, and others of her supporters. She had arranged to stay that night in the Grosvenor Hotel in Victoria, but, once there, found she had nothing to read. She went out and bought Ronnie Biggs' biography, read half of it and felt better.¹¹⁹ 'We hated leaving you alone at that rather dreary hotel,' wrote John to her later. It had been a valiant battle, they were aware of how much work and nervous strain it had caused her, they marvelled at her courage and stamina, and were tremendously grateful.¹²⁰ The Dares put forward a successful personal Bill in March 1982; Barbara introduced it in the House of Lords, expressing great admiration for their patience.¹²¹ They married in the summer, with Barbara in attendance and her name as witness on their marriage certificate. The law was eventually changed (with some restrictions) in 1986.

Barbara Wootton remained uncorrupted by the conformist traditions of her role as a peer. “‘Worst Blemish’ of Welfare State” said *The Times* of her lecture topic at Columbia University in New York in 1962, which focused on the continuing phenomenon of poverty. She told her audience that, on the morning she received the invitation to give the lecture, she had seen a sad sight at Victoria station: ‘an old lady in a paper-thin mackintosh, worn-down house slippers, and no stockings fumbling in an apparently empty purse for the penny necessary for use of the toilet’.¹²² In 1965, she devoted herself to the arguments of the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), writing a letter, together with Tom Simey, a social scientist at Liverpool University, to Prime Minister Harold Wilson, which pointed out that at least half a million British children still lived in poverty, and the Government needed to take urgent action.¹²³ When the CPAG’s co-founder, Peter Townsend, later published his survey, *Poverty in the United Kingdom*, Barbara wrote to him to observe that, ‘William Beveridge would turn in his grave if he knew that nearly forty years after publication of his report you could write 1,200 pages on Poverty in the UK’.¹²⁴ Her book *Contemporary Britain* contained an uncompromising analysis of the static nature of inequality and the failure of the Wilson Government to do anything about it. She railed perpetually at the ‘appalling tangle’ of the benefits system and the unappealing attempts of governments to claw money back from it, these sins adding two new giants to Beveridge’s original five – the Giant of Complexity and the Giant of Government Parsimony.¹²⁵ In 1975, she published a Fabian pamphlet, *In Pursuit of Equality*, with its opening sentence, ‘I seem to have been pursuing an ideal of equality all my life but have been singularly unsuccessful in catching my prey’. It had been suggested to her that, instead of writing a new prolegomenon on inequality, she might simply have republished the 1941 booklet she wrote for Francis Williams’ post-war reconstruction series, *End Social Inequality*. Inequality had not ended, and its abolition had been markedly absent from most recent Labour Party programmes.¹²⁶ This was a particularly significant comment for one who had co-authored the Labour Party’s policy statement, *Towards Equality: Labour’s Policy for Social Justice*, back in 1956.¹²⁷ *The Guardian* reported Barbara’s 1975 pamphlet under the headline ‘Inherited Wealth “Should be Taxed Out of Existence”’, noting that its author did not shrink from mentioning her anomalous ownership of a life peerage and occupation of the role of Deputy Speaker in the House of Lords.¹²⁸

Three months after her maiden speech in the House of Lords, Barbara Wootton helped to sponsor a public meeting held at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester: ‘The Hydrogen Bomb: What is Happening?’¹²⁹ The idea of a campaigning organization in favour of unilateral disarmament and tighter global arms regulation was for her a natural progression from the politics of federalism which she had helped to

promote in the 1930s and 1940s, and it was entirely consistent with the values of pacifism and opposition to violence which had been her constant companions ever since her personal experiences of death during the First World War. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) was formed in 1957 in the Amen Court rooms of Canon John Collins, Canon of St Paul's Cathedral, and a well-known political crusader. Kingsley Martin, the *New Statesman's* editor, called the meeting; Collins was chosen to chair the new organization and Bertrand Russell to act as its first President. Barbara Wootton was a member of its Executive Group. Its inaugural public meeting at Central Hall, Westminster, in February 1958, was attended by some 5,000 people; Barbara was there as a sponsor, in the company of friends and co-thinkers – Victor Gollancz, Julian Huxley, Francis Meynell, Ernest Simon – and many other prominent scientists, academics, writers and artists.¹³⁰ In 1960, along with fifty-seven other 'prominent Britons', and on behalf of CND, she signed an appeal to the United States Government to renew its suspension of nuclear weapons testing; Joseph Rotblat, the nuclear physicist who had worked on the atomic bomb project at Los Alamos during the Second World War, was a co-signatory.¹³¹ On the 26th anniversary of the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima in the summer of 1971, her name appeared on a large CND advertisement in *The Guardian* calling on the British Government to renounce unilaterally all nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.¹³² In the 'Ban the Bomb' demonstrations of the late 1960s in Britain, she was a source of great irritation to the police because she took the side of the protesters. Philip Bean was a probation officer at the time: 'What she would do, is she would have these people up before her who'd committed an affray or something like that, listen to the evidence and say, "I'm not qualified to deal with this, I'm biased", and withdraw. So the police had to do it all again ... you could see she enjoyed it hugely.'¹³³

Barbara's involvement in the politics of nuclear disarmament got her into trouble with the Labour Party. In 1962, she added her support to that of other prominent names for the World Congress for General Disarmament and Peace, which was to be held in Moscow. The Congress was convened by the World Council of Peace to promote total disarmament, including the destruction of all nuclear weapons, as 'the most urgent need of our time'.¹³⁴ When Barbara's support of the Moscow Congress became public, she was written to sternly from Transport House by the General Secretary, A.L. Williams.¹³⁵ The World Council for Peace had been on the Labour Party's list of proscribed organizations since 1953 as an 'instrument of Communist propaganda'; support of these bodies was regarded by the National Executive Committee as incompatible with membership of the Labour Party. Barbara's reply challenged Williams to provide the relevant conference resolutions

or executive minutes. She argued that joining an organization was very different from supporting a proposal sponsored by it, and observed that putting an end to the arms race was far and away the most important issue facing the world.¹³⁶ Williams sent the relevant clauses, and stood his ground, inviting her to be interviewed. She refused. In this fracas, she was in the distinguished company of three others – the Lords Chorley and Russell, and Canon Collins. Lord Chorley and Canon Collins both agreed to meet the National Executive; the former said he did not understand what he was doing when he allowed his name to be associated with the Congress, and the latter refused to withdraw his sponsorship or his intention to go to Moscow as a speaker. Lord Russell said his views were well-known and he was not bothered whether the Labour Party expelled him or not.¹³⁷ After much to-ing and fro-ing, the National Executive decided to take no action, but to attempt to amend the constitution so that association with, as well as membership of, communist organizations would not be allowed in future.

Barbara did not write much directly about war and her attitudes to it, although her moral opposition to violence is referred to in many of her writings. Her article ‘When is a War Not a War?’, published in *New Society* in 1981, dissects the notion of a ‘proper war’ and asks what is different about killing in such a situation from killing in ‘non-war hostilities’, guerrilla actions, terrorism and crime. The answer is, very little, and certainly not enough to bear ‘the profound moral implications ascribed to them in practice’. Exceptionally wicked killings can occur in all these categories, as can mitigating circumstances. Admitting that her personal difficulty in accepting the notion of a ‘proper war’ was sharpened by being ‘the widow of a soldier killed in the first world war, and subsequently of a conscientious objector who served as a London ambulance driver in the second’, she argues that continued acceptance of institutionalized warfare means ever-increasing poverty because all our skills and resources are wasted ‘in competitive stockpiling of ever more deadly devices in the paradoxical hope that this alone would guarantee that they would never be used’. Such a *reductio ad absurdum* makes a dose of ‘naïve morality’ – that war, like all violence, is simply wrong – look a much better option.¹³⁸

Contentious in a different way, but linked to the position of non-violence, was Barbara’s campaign to protect the environment. In 1966, she became Chairman of the National Parks (later the Countryside) Commission. Moving to Abinger had restored the sense she had enjoyed as a child in the flat Cambridgeshire fens and under their open skies, and in all those family holidays by the sea and at Abinger Hall with its wild woodlands, which were perfect for childhood games, of the rural landscape as an essential tonic for the stressed human spirit. Although her friends teased her about her concern for footpaths and rights of way – ‘She never actually

walked anywhere so far as I know'¹³⁹ – Barbara knew what the countryside meant. She very much wanted the Commission to head a new environmental concern for the preservation of rural Britain, particularly once the 1968 Countryside Act had been passed with its rather buried clause requiring every government department and public authority to have due regard for amenity. Her Commission wrote to another Commission convened under Justice Roskill in 1968 to consider where to locate London's third airport – not *whether* there should be one, but *where* it should be – to remind them of their obligation to consider environmental impact.¹⁴⁰ The Roskill Commission's recommendation that the third airport should be at Foulness on the Essex coast was eventually overturned on environmental grounds. The defeat of the Government's air transport plans signalled a new alliance between environmentalists and economists.¹⁴¹ This was not a period when many people shared Barbara's belief that 'our abject reverence for technological ingenuity' was a 'characteristic menace of our time'.¹⁴² She admired the Labour Government's 1970 White Paper on the Protection of the Environment, a statement of intent which, unfortunately, proved to be one of the Government's dying acts, so, 'it did not live to reap the discredit of opening a motorway that runs on stilts within twenty feet of people's bedrooms. At least we can say that in regard to the prevention of environmental pollution we have not tried and failed,' she observed acerbically, 'We have never yet seriously tried.'¹⁴³ She took the Countryside Commission through a difficult transitional phase to become a more socially aware organization, oversaw its drive to create country parks and picnic sites, and was fearless in sticking to conservation principles.¹⁴⁴ But she found it a very heavy assignment, and a frustrating one, as the Government was not prepared to allow the Commission the money, staff and powers it needed, so she resigned at the end of 1969.¹⁴⁵

The world was changing, and Barbara Wootton felt an obligation to be an active participant in at least some of these changes. The first successful kidney transplant had taken place in 1954 in the USA, with the first in the UK six years later. The use of organs from one human body to preserve the life of another triggered a wave of ethical and practical disputes, familiar to Barbara, about medical power and the public interest. In 1969, Wilson's Government set up a multidisciplinary Advisory Group on Transplantation Problems. The group was chaired by an eminent doctor, Sir Hector MacLennan, and Barbara was one of its other ten members. They produced a Report in June 1969 which established what are now widely accepted rules for organ transplantation: that two doctors independent of the transplant team should determine death in the donor body; that donors should not be transported between hospitals purely to facilitate transplantation; and that the public should be provided with information, but should not be unduly pressured to

become donors.¹⁴⁶ The Group was divided as to just how informed consent should be implemented so as to increase the supply of donor organs. Six members, including Barbara, recommended a system of contracting out, which was already in place in Denmark, France, Israel, Italy and Sweden. But their advice suffered the same fate as that of other such exercises with which Barbara had been involved: the Government did not like it and refused to publish it as a White Paper.¹⁴⁷ Nonetheless, the high standards of ethical conduct the Report recommended had an undoubted and enduring impact on medical practice.¹⁴⁸

Beyond these campaigns and responsibilities inside and outside the House of Lords, these were for Baroness Wootton the years of multiple honours. By 1985, she had acquired no fewer than thirteen honorary degrees: from the universities of Columbia in New York, and in the UK from Aberdeen, Aston, Bath, Cambridge, Essex, Hull, Liverpool, London, Nottingham, Southampton, Warwick and York. The Columbia degree had arrived in 1954, before her entry to the House of Lords; in the ceremonial procession, two of the other Britons similarly honoured were fellow economists with whom she had not always agreed – Lionel Robbins from the LSE and Dennis Robertson from Cambridge. Barbara ‘brought up the rear after the Queen Mother and Mr Dulles’.¹⁴⁹ She would, indeed, have had little in common with many of those with whom she processed in whatever colourful assemblage of robes and hats marked that particular university’s tradition. At Liverpool, where she became an honorary doctor of laws in 1960, she was in the company of the art historian Sir Kenneth Clark and the writer Sir C.P. Snow, and four male scientists and engineers; at Aberdeen in 1969, her honourable companions were the American political theorist Professor Robert MacIver and the President of Iceland. Barbara signalled the dominance of men in these ceremonies in the speech she made at the Golden Jubilee dinner of the Cambridge branch of the National Council of Women in 1962: ‘My very distinguished friend and old school fellow Dorothy Russell,’ she observed, ‘was going to get an honorary degree across the Atlantic and when the list of graduates was provided, believe it or not, one of the people concerned on the other side looked down the list and said – “I didn’t know Dorothy was a man’s Christian name”’.¹⁵⁰ The Cambridge honorary degree was the one that meant the most of all to Barbara. ‘It is difficult for me to find adequate expression of the value to me of a reward so far outside any legitimate expectation,’ she wrote, unusually clumsily for her, to Professor Sir John Butterfield, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, before the ceremony there in 1985.¹⁵¹ This honour, she said, far outdistanced all its predecessors, even including her American example, and there was a ‘special delight’ in re-establishing links with her original *alma mater* in the city in which she had been born, educated

and married – married, of course, only for the first time, but it was *this* time, like *this* honorary degree, that really counted.

‘Barbaram Francesam, Baronissam Wootton de Abinger’ – Latin was the language of these ceremonies – had truly made it in a man’s world. The degree-less Mrs Wootton, who had endured the insult of having to lecture under a male name in Cambridge in 1921, now seemed to have passed beyond the stage of notoriety to a level of widespread public recognition. ‘I have never quite got used to the idea that I can have a degree at all,’ she admitted at the University of York presentation ceremony in 1966.¹⁵² In 1969, Girton College made her an Honorary Fellow; in 1970, Bedford College, which had not particularly respected her work in the 1950s, made her both an Honorary Fellow and a Governor. The election to the Bedford College fellowship came at the instigation of her protégé and academic colleague, Professor O.R. McGregor, who sent pointed comments to Dame Mary Smieton, Chair of the Bedford College Council, in December 1968, to the effect that the College’s failure to confer any recognition on Barbara Wootton as ‘its most distinguished retired Professor’ might soon become a matter for unfavourable comment in view of all the other honours being piled on her.¹⁵³ The psychiatrists whom Barbara had so robustly criticized on so many occasions decided they would recognize her ‘outstanding service to psychiatry’ and they made her an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in 1979; she was presented with her certificate when she delivered the prestigious Maudsley Lecture on ‘Psychiatry, Ethics and the Criminal Law’ in December of that year. In 1985 she was asked to be a Patron of the Institute of Psychiatry. Some years before, in 1967, the American Psychopathological Association had presented her with an award and a medal for distinguished services – though not all psychopathologists had thought her services distinguished when she had offered them in her *Social Science and Social Pathology*. Then, in the Queen’s Birthday Honours List in June 1977, her name appeared alongside that of Sir John Gielgud under the title ‘Companion of Honour’, entitling her to put the initials CH after her name. Gielgud became one for services to the theatre; she, simply, for ‘public services’.¹⁵⁴ Frank Field had lobbied Prime Minister James Callaghan to set this honour in motion.¹⁵⁵ The Order of the Companions of Honour is a curious distinction, being awarded for outstanding achievements in the arts, music, science, politics, industry or religion, and to a wider range of people than most other such honours. *The London Gazette* list available on Wikipedia of all those so honoured since 1917 has 238 names on it, 215 of them men.¹⁵⁶ Barbara’s name is missing. Twenty-one faces were picked by *The Times* to illustrate the 1977 sample of honours: Barbara, and Doris Speed, the landlady of the Rovers Return in ‘Coronation Street’, and nineteen men.¹⁵⁷

The Wootton Society was formed in the same year. This was a student initiative based in the Law Faculty at King's College, London, intended to 'encourage a greater understanding of crime, criminality and the treatment of offenders', through a programme of lectures, visits and voluntary work. Barbara agreed to be its Honorary Patron, although she never managed to attend any of its functions.¹⁵⁸ Despite her altercation with the humanists over abortion law reform, she was made a Humanist Laureate by the international humanist movement in 1983, and her work for world peace was recognized in a Diploma of Honour from the International Order of Volunteers for Peace in 1982.¹⁵⁹ Barbara's receipt of a letter from HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, at Buckingham Palace in 1975 was a less conventional honour.¹⁶⁰ She had given a lecture on 'Fair Pay, Relativities and a Policy for Incomes' at the University of Southampton the previous year, one of a series called the Fawley Foundation Lectures. In it, she had updated the arguments of her book *The Social Foundations of Wage Policy* that the distribution and differentials in wages and incomes in Britain were 'the deposits of a long historical process' featuring social conventions and economic pressures rather than any notion of fairness.¹⁶¹ What was 'fair' could never be defined in a vacuum. Justice was a matter of clear criteria. En route to the reiteration of her earlier proposal for an Income Gains Tax as a fiscal strategy for reducing income inequality, Barbara took what Prince Philip regarded as an 'unfair and inaccurate swipe at The Queen'. As a previous Fawley lecturer himself, he had been sent a copy of her text and he noted on pages six and seven a reference to a survey of take-home pay of a sample of forty people. The biggest earner was the Queen, followed by the chairman of the Green Shield Stamp Company. Prince Philip's point was that the Queen's Civil List income included her expenses as Head of State.

In 1961, Madam Speaker undertook what she thought then would be her last lecturing tour ('I have become somewhat tired of hearing myself',¹⁶²) to Australia. Her sponsor was Sir John Barry, the 'handsome and imposing', but also progressively-minded, judge of Victoria's Supreme Court.¹⁶³ Barry had written a nice review of Barbara's *Social Science and Social Pathology*, and sent it to her before he came to London for a conference in the summer of 1960, suggesting that they meet. The meeting never happened because Barbara could not make it, but in her reply she mentioned she had never visited Australia, but would like to do so.¹⁶⁴ Barry informed the Vice-Chancellor of Melbourne University in November 1960 that Lady Wootton of Abinger was willing to consider an invitation to visit Australia.¹⁶⁵ There followed prolonged negotiations between the universities of Melbourne, Adelaide, New South Wales and Sydney, and the Australian National University in Canberra, about the funding of Barbara's visit, on the principle that her time had to be purchased and therefore paid for (and on her side there was

the consideration that being a member of the House of Lords was 'not a very remunerative occupation'¹⁶⁶). She was pleased that Barry himself would meet her off the flight from England, and wrote to advise him that 'for purposes of easy identification I have a lot of rather frothy white hair', and would probably be wearing a green suit with a light overcoat, and no hat, or only a minimal one.¹⁶⁷

'I am 64,' she told one of her negotiators, Stan Johnston at the Melbourne Criminology Department, 'and I lead a very strenuous life, and though I have so far enjoyed magnificent health I should not wish to work myself to a frazzle.'¹⁶⁸ Unfortunately, some of the Australians did wish to work her to a frazzle, with evening public lectures piled upon daytime seminars and discussions with politicians and civil servants and lawyers and sociologists and visits to judicial institutions. By the time she climbed off the plane at Adelaide on the last lap of her voyage, Barbara looked 'very tired'.¹⁶⁹ She was due to spend the morning in the Juvenile Courts, and give a public lecture that evening: 'A Social Scientist's Reflections on Law and Justice'. She was in Australia for seven weeks altogether, and she went to Canberra, Sydney and Hobart, as well as Adelaide and Melbourne. She found Tasmania particularly exhausting and it was something of a strain to stay at Government House, being waited on by eleven servants.¹⁷⁰ In Canberra she talked to the Research Students' Association about 'The Future of the Social Sciences'; and in Melbourne she gave lectures to criminology students and women's organizations, and was appointed a special magistrate in the Melbourne Children's Court, so she could observe how they handed out juvenile justice in Australia compared with the UK. Both there and in the Juvenile Court at Alice Springs (where she fitted in some sightseeing), she was impressed by the time taken over individual cases: an hour and a quarter per case as against perhaps ten minutes back home. In this respect, Australian justice was advanced, although it was not so in its treatment of aboriginal people, who were regarded as 'wards of the state'; at the time of Barbara's visit, selling alcohol to or having sexual intercourse with a 'ward of the state' were punishable with a prison sentence.¹⁷¹

One very definite benefit of Barbara's Australian trip was getting to know Judge Barry and his family. The two criminologists shared many similar beliefs about the role of the law, especially about the insanity of capital punishment and the importance of alternatives to prison – Barry was an expert on the parole system – and the failure of the law to take motoring offences seriously.¹⁷² Although Barbara did not preserve Barry's letters to her, there is a warm correspondence in his Canberra archives. When Barry died prematurely in 1969, Barbara wrote his obituary in *The Times*. She expressed her admiration for this 'maverick judge', picking out especially two characteristics which could also be descriptions of herself: being 'a constant critic of

the judicial process which he had to administer' and being 'acutely sensitive to the relations of law and social conditions, on which he lectured and wrote untiringly'.¹⁷³

The Australian journey did not, however, prove to be the last of Barbara's international tours. In 1963, she went to Liberia; in 1969, she spent a longer period in Japan as a visiting lecturer; and the same year she also went to South Africa. The Liberian trip was at the invitation of the Liberian legislature and in the company of five other (male) members of the British Parliament.¹⁷⁴ Her co-travellers were the Welsh Labour Party politician Ifor Davies, the Conservative Party politician Harold Gurden, the British company director and Conservative Party politician Sir Kenneth Thompson, the Labour MP Edward Milne, and John Cordle, the Conservative MP who was later to achieve media fame through his association with the corrupt businessman John Poulson. Cordle was alleged to have profited financially by promoting Poulson's interests in West Africa, and this was an activity that appears to have started some months after the parliamentary visit to Liberia.¹⁷⁵ The point of the trip was to encourage personal contact between Parliamentarians worldwide (an aim that John Cordle may have interpreted quite literally). Barbara found Liberia quite the strangest country she had ever visited: a mixture of Western progressiveness, Soviet-style repression, and reprobate capitalism. Liberia, meaning 'liberty', had been founded by freed American slaves; a large concession had been granted in 1926 to the American-owned Firestone Plantation Company. Barbara decided that work for the company as a rubber tapper might be an agreeable way to pass one's old age. 'The tapper rises at dawn, which is easy enough in the tropics, and proceeds to score his trees in the plantation. About midday, he collects the juice that has dripped into his bucket, hands it in and is paid, and then his day's work is done. For this he gets a free house, subsidized food and the right to medical care in as up-to-date a hospital as I have seen anywhere.'¹⁷⁶ After they returned from Liberia, Kenneth Thompson wrote to thank her for everything she had done to make the trip pleasurable and successful: 'We all owed you a lot for your tolerance of the manners of five men and/or the splendid examples you repeatedly gave of understanding and harmonising our group'.¹⁷⁷

The purpose of Barbara's South African trip in 1969 was to give a lecture on academic freedom. This was a topic on which she had kept a keen eye over the years. The year of the South Africa visit was also the year of the Guildford School of Art affair: forty teachers had lost their jobs, allegedly for supporting a 1968 sit-in by students protesting at the poor quality of teaching; *The Guardian* ran an advertisement – signed by 330 leading educationalists, artists, authors, and others, including Barbara Wootton – calling for an public inquiry.¹⁷⁸ In a letter to Shena Simon about her South African invitation, Barbara explained that, 'This lecture is

the University's retaliation for being forbidden to be multi-racial. I only stayed five days, but saw enough to be much distressed.'¹⁷⁹ In 1958–60, she had been a signatory of various published appeals by the Defence and Aid Fund of Christian Action against the South African Government's policy of apartheid,¹⁸⁰ and she would later also sign public statements supporting the release of Nelson Mandela and all South African political prisoners.¹⁸¹ Her South African lecture, 'Universities and Their Problems in the Contemporary World', was published in 1969 by the Academic Freedom Committee of the Students' Representative Council at the University of the Witwatersrand. It is a sensitive combination of general commentary on the role of universities in a modern world, with topics of particular urgency in the South African context – for example, 'racial' discrimination in student selection. She also talked about the relationship between universities and the community. There ought to be one – both links with the local community and a responsibility for the broader one. The latter would embrace a concern for the human effects of the 'worship' of technology and 'the ruthless destruction of the natural environment' which was often a consequence of it. Here Barbara inserted a reference to a new menace of recent concern to her: supersonic air travel – 'enormous sums are now being spent on the production of supersonic passenger aircraft, the only advantage of which will be the subtraction of a few hours from the time required to circumnavigate the globe; and for this the price paid includes not only vast sums of money, but also risks to health from radiation, as well as frequent and extensive exposure of both human and animal populations to deafening noises'.¹⁸²

On the subject of both noise and the impact on the balance of trade, Barbara was about to conduct a personal correspondence with Hugh Conway, the Director of Rolls Royce responsible for the development of Concorde.¹⁸³ She had already publicized her role as a patron of the Anti-Concorde project. This had been mounted in 1966 by the environmental campaigner Richard Wiggs, and was affiliated to the Citizens' League Against the Sonic Boom in the USA and the delightfully-named Association Nationale Anti-Bangs of France.¹⁸⁴ Full-page advertisements appeared in *The Times* in January 1968 and *The Guardian* in February 1969,¹⁸⁵ both signed by Barbara, among others, arguing that Concorde should be stopped on grounds of cost and environmental, human and animal damage. Sonic booms gave people heart attacks, caused buildings to shake or collapse, and upset sheep and cattle. The costs of developing Concorde were mounting at about £2 million a week, and there were reports of a design fault in the tail unit.¹⁸⁶ The House of Lords was treated to several corrosive interventions by Barbara on the theme of how on earth a sufficient number of 'these machines' would ever be sold to recoup such an astronomical level of expenditure, and whether anyone would seriously be able to

afford to travel on them.¹⁸⁷ Some of Concorde's effects may have been exaggerations, and the topic was of doubtful relevance to Barbara's South African audience, but the Anti-Concorde Project which she supported was instrumental in limiting the development of supersonic air travel and bringing about its ultimate demise, and it stands as an early example of the organized promotion of environmental issues.¹⁸⁸

Barbara's attack on air travel was a little disingenuous in the light of her own use of it. The same comment might be made of her use of cars, but then rationalism and fun are not always congenial bedfellows. Japan Airlines' inaugural flight from London to Tokyo over the North Pole took place on a Douglas DC8 in the summer of 1961, and Barbara Wootton was on it. Her friend William Haley, remembering her long-term ambition to see more of the Far East, had planted in the head of the Japanese Ambassador the purely frivolous idea of inviting Barbara. Her companions on the DC8 were not academics, but travel officers and aeronautical journalists. Barbara was the token woman before they were joined by three beauty queens from Denmark, Iceland and Norway: Barbara liked Miss Denmark the best, because she was the most intelligent.¹⁸⁹ They had a week of the customary tourist exposure to a menu of temples, gardens, tea ceremonies and Geisha girls, before flying over the North Pole again. Then, at the end of 1968, the Japanese Minister of Justice, Kichinosuke Saigo, wrote with an invitation to be a visiting lecturer at the Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders in Tokyo,¹⁹⁰ an organization that had been set up in 1962 by agreement between the United Nations and the Japanese Government to promote 'the sound development of criminal justice systems' – an aim close to Barbara Wootton's own heart – in Asia and the Pacific Region. Her mission in 1969 was to teach on a training course for twenty women working in 'correctional services'. It was the first such course the Institute had ever run solely for women. The students came from Ceylon, East Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Nepal, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. They were all, reported Barbara in a letter to Shena Simon, pioneers in their own penal services 'but not all battle-axes like our feminist pioneers!'.¹⁹¹ 'Each is more beautiful than the last', she told Vera Seal in a chatty letter, 'and they are all pioneering in destroying the image of the repressed oriental woman'.¹⁹² She was particularly impressed by one from Saigon who had a husband and five children, and was trying to set up a social work service for abandoned children in a war zone. During her month-long stay in Tokyo, Barbara was provided with travel and living expenses, and a small furnished cottage in the Institute's grounds. She was followed everywhere by a shadow who had very little English and would not allow her to walk anywhere unaccompanied. 'So I spend a good deal of ingenuity in trying to give her the slip. I even got to the supermarket on my own and bought her some

sweets as she had given me a pair of Japanese slippers. But alas one cannot win; she immediately bought some more chocolates for me. Most conversation seems to consist of exchange of compliments and I find it difficult to keep up.¹⁹³ Barbara looks very stern and wise in the formal photographs of her visit, a redoubtable middle-aged woman (actually she was seventy-two) with pearls and a lifetime of experience. She fitted in some sightseeing to the Old Imperial Palace and the Karyn Ji Temple in Kyoto. There were a few social occasions, but alcohol did not flow freely. She discovered that the Institute's Director served whisky in his private residence, so, 'I plucked up courage to ask where I could buy a bottle. Unfortunately this resulted in his insisting on giving me one. As he gets them duty free at about 25/- and they are nearly £6 in the shops perhaps it was as well, but how will I make it last three weeks.'¹⁹⁴ She also much regretted her inability to accompany the students on their visits to various penal institutions; it was not considered appropriate for her to go, and instead she had to have lunch and go to the theatre with the British Ambassador.

In 1971, she decided that animals would be a nice change from their Lordships – 'at least they wouldn't be able to talk about the Common Market'¹⁹⁵ – and she undertook a safari in East Africa. It was a great success: 'Lying on my bed,' boasted her postcard to Vera Seal, 'I can see elephants and cranes drinking in a nearby pool'.¹⁹⁶ Her month-long tourist trip to China the following year was less restful. The trip was organized by the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding; Barbara and her twenty co-travellers paid for themselves. One of her co-travellers was the painter and peace campaigner Vera Delf, who somewhere in China saved her from an episode of serious scalding.¹⁹⁷ Barbara came back with 174 photographs. There are several of her: drinking Jasmine tea (perhaps the source of the scalding?); washing her hands in an enamel bowl ('reception ablutions'); one with a Chinese guide against the splendid panorama of the Great Wall; in another, she reposes on the 'forest of pillars' in Sian with her hands resting on a stone animal – 'tortoise the symbol of longevity' she wrote against this one in the meticulous list she kept. They went to Nanking, Peking, Shanghai, Tsinan and Wusih as well as Sian, seeing all the usual tourist sites: pagodas, monasteries, gardens, markets, tombs; in Peking, the Great Hall of the People, 'Tien an Men' Square, the Ming tombs, the Temple of Heaven, the Summer Palace. But they also fitted in four operas and concerts, nine factories, four educational institutions, two museums, a prison, a hospital, the Shanghai docks, a housing estate, a tree nursery, a Neolithic site, and a number of communes. Barbara saw children learning acupuncture, people doing callisthenics in the parks, and women mending shoes, picking cotton, spinning silk and unloading stones. She thought that most of the Chinese she met were so thoroughly immersed in the ideology of Marxist-Leninism, a phenomenon

'comparable only to a massive religious conversion', that their knowledge of, and interest in, the world outside China was minimal. The key question was whether China's young men and women, nourished on a diet of 'stale opiates', would be able to avoid the excesses of the West: the hideous cities, the choking pollution, and the degrading social and economic inequalities.¹⁹⁸ Barbara took notes on wages and prices, the working conditions, and the retirement ages and relative statuses of men and women. She noted approvingly that the income hierarchy of the West seemed almost totally absent in China; that the University Library in Peking contained a copy of her Hamlyn lectures; that there seemed to be fewer military guards around than in the USSR, and the soldiers were not visibly armed; that the animals (including the donkeys) appeared well-kept, and the people generally well-fed; and that there was very little litter, though there were flies, quite a lot of spitting, and, of course, a multitude of bicycles.¹⁹⁹ Most impressively for someone with her interest in the harms that could be wreaked by patronising experts, there were no professional social workers. 'Street Committees' composed mainly of retired women ran childcare centres, taught domestic hygiene, supported families in trouble, and disciplined the misbehaving young: 'Thus it is the grandmother, rich in experience of life, who replaces the college-trained social worker'.²⁰⁰

Few seventy-five-year-olds would have been able to manage such a trip, although she did come back from it very exhausted.²⁰¹ Barbara's energy reminds one of the travels of her mother, Adela, and her aunts, Juliet and Fanny, in their old age. Fanny had visited South Africa at the age of seventy-five, travelling 2,000 miles on her own up country. Adela had taken in Russia, a dozen other countries and a solo Amazon cruise, all well beyond the age when women were expected to have settled down to a safely domestic retirement. The concept of retirement was quite alien to Barbara. It was also rather frightening: in 1981, she confessed to a reporter from *The Guardian* her dread of being idle after a long life of influence and action.²⁰² There was not much chance of that. As well as her travels, and her House of Lords work, and a continued stream of publications and correspondence, she retained her role on the Advisory Council of the Cambridge Institute of Criminology until 1985, when she was eighty-eight; she took on the Vice-Presidency of the Policy Studies Institute, aged eighty-one in 1978; and in the late 1970s, she joined businessman Campbell Adamson in various family policy initiatives. Her lecturing timetable remained full and eclectic in its range: from the normal university and public lectures to attendance at an anachronistic outfit called the Lunchtime Comment Club. The Club, which still exists, is intended to allow 'professional, business and retired people' to talk four or five times a year over 'a congenial meal'; in 1973, when Barbara was a guest speaker, its meetings were held at the

Connaught Rooms in Piccadilly.²⁰³ The list of names on the Club's website leans in the Tory direction, and, although the website declares that 'ladies are especially welcome', Barbara Wootton's name is not on its list of past speakers.²⁰⁴

As well as continuing to speak, Barbara went on writing, of course. Aside from the books – *Social Science and Social Pathology* (1959), *Crime and the Criminal Law* (1964), *In a World I Never Made* (1967), *Contemporary Britain* (1971), *Incomes Policy* (1974) and *Crime and Penal Policy* (1978) – there were many articles on crime and justice, economic policy and social welfare. She was a regular contributor to the weekly journal *New Society*, pouring out articles and book reviews, including a long appraisal of a new book by her opponent in the 1930s debate about economic planning, Frederick Hayek.²⁰⁵ Her favourite topic – the need for a sensible incomes and pay policy – continued to appear in different formats until she was well into her eighties.²⁰⁶ She wrote introductions to other people's books: to the published version of a doctoral thesis she had been involved in guiding over many years on *Salaries in the Public Services in England and Wales*, the first 'systematic review' of the topic;²⁰⁷ to Margery Spring-Rice's classic *Working-Class Wives*, first published in 1939: 'Contemporary social reformers' she observed in that new Introduction, 'will reflect whether this book merely portrays the Dark Ages from which we have now happily emerged, or whether ... our descendants will be equally shocked by a corresponding chronicle of a working woman's life today'.²⁰⁸

Her media career continued. She took part in a number of 'Panorama' television programmes – on thalidomide, on the death penalty, and in 1978 the one on prison, which had led her to question the use the BBC made of evidence.²⁰⁹ London Weekend Television interviewed her with Lord Soper for a programme in 1972, 'People with a Purpose', and for another, 'Conscience Without God', in 1975. She had a series of encounters with the broadcaster Robin Day. In 1977, she appeared in one of his 'These Twenty-five Years' programmes, discussing crime with Sir David Napley, the Tory solicitor with an interest in miscarriages of justice; and, in 1980 and 1982, there were two episodes of Day's 'Question Time', the first with William Rees-Mogg, William Waldegrave and Tessa Jowell, the second with Norman Fowler, Ken Livingstone and Becky Tinsley. Audrey Bradley, who worked for the BBC on 'Question Time', remembered Day and Wootton's interaction: 'Robin was very hard to please when it came to women on the programme, but when it came to Barbara, that was absolutely fine ... He had a great deal of respect for her'. Audrey was a neighbour of Barbara's in Surrey: 'When Barbara was coming on the programme I told them I knew her and the first time she came, and the subject of crime obviously came up and money and so forth, and she told the entire nation that she kept money hidden in her books in

her quite extensive bookcases, and I remember coming back in the car and saying, "Barbara, I don't think that's a very good idea".²¹⁰

Barbara enjoyed her media appearances and she minded when they began to dry up. She had actually solicited the invitation to appear on 'Question Time' by writing to Robin Day and reminding him that she had on several occasions taken part in the radio programme 'Any Questions?'. They had quite an exchange about it. 'Your name was certainly on our list of possible participants,' Day said in answer to Barbara's enquiry, 'but I think it was felt that this programme, which unlike "Any Questions?" includes vigorous audience participation, might involve too much hurly-burly for a person of your eminence.'²¹¹ Barbara's reply was firm: 'I don't think any problems should arise. What you generously called my "eminence" (which I take to be a euphemism for age) is hardly relevant to possible "hurly-burly", as I generally prefer discussion with an audience to my own monologues, and you have already had several people more eminent than myself.'²¹²

The last decades of Barbara's life were a time of mixed achievement and loss: not just the loss of old affiliations, but of people she loved. The trio of deaths that had shaken her as a teenager was repeated in the years 1959–1966 when her nanny, the faithful Pie; George; and the Other Barbara all died. Of these three, only The Pie's death was not premature: she died at the age of ninety-one, in Lynchfield Hospital in Somerset, grateful for the plant Barbara had given her, which lasted a long time in flower before new little leaves started shooting up, and for the gift of money: 'I am,' said The Pie in her last letter to Barbara, 'nicely comfortable & do very well. It is better for me.'²¹³ The Pie was buried the same day as John Foster Dulles, with whom Barbara had ceremonially processed at Columbia University in 1954 – 'a coincidence which provoked much reflection as to the sources of human fame and the quality of human greatness'.²¹⁴ Barbara and her brother, Neil, placed a moving announcement of The Pie's death in *The Times*: 'On 22nd May, 1959, Elizabeth Haynes ('the Pie') aged 91, once the nanny and for over 60 years the beloved friend of Neil Adam and Barbara Wootton'.²¹⁵ George, whose departure from Barbara's life had been kept a secret from The Pie, developed cancer of the larynx in 1962 and he died, aged sixty, in January 1964. Barbara helped to care for him, and it is her name that appears on the death certificate as the person registering the death. When she told friends of George's illness, she observed that there were practical and emotional complications in the situation because they had not lived together for some years, although they remained close.²¹⁶ Terry Morris remembers Barbara coming to dinner one night during the period when George was ill: 'My youngest daughter wanted to sit up to meet her, and George was dying and she had just come straight from the hospital, and I remember her taking Catherine on her knee

and just weeping silently ... she had a side to her and a gentleness to her which wasn't often on public show'.²¹⁷

Her letter to Shena Simon about George's illness ended on the positive note that in Abinger, 'everything is sunny, calm and beautiful' and that she was glad to be living with her friend and neighbour, Barbara Kyle, whom Shena had met there.²¹⁸ But, during the long months of George's dying, Barbara Kyle was herself diagnosed with breast cancer. She had surgery in 1963, when the outlook was considered hopeful. However, further operations proved necessary, and in 1965 she spent two months in hospital twenty miles away, so all Barbara Wootton's spare time was consumed in journeys there and back. 'Now she is home,' wrote Barbara Wootton to Shena Simon in May 1965, 'but wholly confined to a wheelchair, with only one good leg and one good arm, and as we have no help, I am still much tied. Everyone says the outlook for her is "quite unpredictable", but she is rather wretched and depressed – understandably enough! – though in less pain than before her latest (fifth) operation.'²¹⁹ According to friends and neighbours, Barbara Wootton looked after Barbara Kyle 'most wonderfully'.²²⁰ For six months during this unhappy time, she journeyed from one hospital – the one in London George was in – to the other, in Surrey, where Barbara Kyle was. When Barbara Kyle died, aged fifty-six, in a private nursing home, Barbara Wootton was the sole executor and inheritor of her will. She had lost someone she cared for deeply, someone who had for nearly a decade been a most congenial companion in the business of daily living. Ironically, she had always supposed that it would be the other way round, and it would be Barbara Kyle who looked after *her* in her declining years. Barbara Wootton's experience as a carer for the dying led to her remarks, at the RPA annual dinner in 1968, about the unwelcome interventions of religion in the whole process. 'I have suffered very much in recent years from seeing people to whom I am deeply attached, very ill, and in fact, dying in hospitals. And I have been infuriated by the intrusions of the clergy. I have been reduced to saying, "Excuse me, but I don't think I know you."'²²¹

'For four consecutive years therefore,' wrote the bereaved Barbara in her autobiography, 'I have watched the two people who have meant most to me in the second half of my life fight long-drawn-out, losing battles against incurable disease'.²²² The result of these losses was to thin her attachment to life: she developed a feeling that she was now merely a spectator. The green loneliness of High Barn started to oppress her. She did not like being there on her own. As she confided to her friend William Haley: 'Neither do I now feel that there is anything left that I really want to work for: I don't in fact look forward at all and am still liable to violent depressions. How people survive who are widowed and have nothing but their family life I can't imagine.'²²³ She herself had chosen to live without much of

a connection to her family of origin. 'She almost never spoke about her family'.²²⁴ The only relatives she saw regularly were her cousin's son Arthur Hetherington, who had been a page at her wedding to Jack Wootton, and his wife Margaret. Arthur was the first chairman of the British Gas Corporation, a man of left-wing views with whom Barbara enjoyed a good argument. The Hetheringtons' flat in Connaught Square was a convenient respite for Baroness Wootton on days when the House of Lords sat late, and it was also sufficiently warm (the gas connection?). Barbara hated the cold. Her brother Neil died in 1973, closely followed by his eccentric wife, Winifred. It was a truncated family – James and Adela's union producing three children but only two grandchildren. Nonetheless, there was a great-niece and a great-nephew and their children whom Barbara Wootton could have claimed as in some sense her own family. She did not: these were people whom, as she confessed to a journalist in 1977, she did not know at all.²²⁵

Had she known them, she would have discovered at least one story to gladden her heart. Neil's son Arthur had married, late in life, a teacher called Maggie, and they sustained a quietly eccentric life by the coast in Essex. Having no children themselves, they chose to sponsor the education of various African children through the Canon Collins Educational Trust. Since Barbara knew Collins via the CND connection, it seems possible that Arthur consulted her about this. But she apparently did not follow the amazing story of one of Arthur and Maggie's sponsored children, Elliott Lushaba. One of six children, he was the son of a poor Swazi farm worker family. His secondary education and subsequent training in electrical and electronic engineering, including a two-year teaching course in Germany and an advanced course in the UK, was funded by Arthur and Maggie. When Elliott married, Arthur and Maggie sent gifts, and when his first child, Nombulelo, was born, they paid for a family visit to the UK. The two families stayed in touch throughout the births of three more children. In 1991 Arthur and Maggie visited Africa and stayed in the Lushabas' home. When Arthur died in 2006, both the Lushabas and the Canon Collins Educational Trust were left money in his will. 'I was like their beloved son', said Elliott.²²⁶ Why Barbara chose to remove herself from the possibility of knowing this inspiring story is a mystery.

The same year in which she became entitled to put the letters CH (for Companion of Honour) after her name, Barbara's friends held a very grand eightieth birthday party for her. The event was formally given by Gordon Brunton, Director of Times Newspapers – allowing the use of Thomson House in central London. It was orchestrated by 'Mac', Professor McGregor, from his office as Chairman of the Royal Commission on the Press, who by then had become Lord McGregor of Durris, sharing Barbara's lordly robes – the cheap

version, with synthetic ermine.²²⁷ The party was presided over by Prime Minister James Callaghan, he who had so cavalierly rejected Barbara's words of wisdom on cannabis in 1968, and was held a few days before her actual birthday, because Callaghan had to do something with the Queen on that date.²²⁸ In the photographs of the party which are preserved in a big red book, Callaghan gazes almost fondly down at Barbara as they grasp their wineglasses and she holds forth on some important matter. She looks in her element, adorned in a red and black lace dress, with a choker round her neck, and her white hair well-coiffed. On the rostrum, with her arms folded, thanking them all, she appears very serious; cutting the elaborate birthday cake needed a large knife and much concentration, but in the other photographs she is smiling and animated. Here is a woman who feels she has got somewhere and has done something, and that the world which has not always welcomed her with open arms has finally realized the error of its ways. 'Growing Old Successfully' ran *The Observer* report of the party.²²⁹ The birthday and the party were announced in *The Times*, and there was a sizeable tranche of congratulatory letters, cards and telegrams, including from George Wright's sister-in-law Florrie, and from Richard Titmuss's wife, Kay.

The celebrants at Thomson House were a motley crew, reflecting the breadth of Barbara's work as a social scientist, magistrate, BBC Governor, writer and politician. Present were eight Right Honourables and/or Lords, four Sirs or Ladies, three Professors, one QC and fourteen plain Mr's, Mrs's or Miss's (though one Mrs was the Prime Minister's wife). Len Murray, the Labour politician and union leader was there, as was Lord Hunt, who had led the 1953 British expedition to Mount Everest, but was better known to Barbara as the first Chairman of the Parole Board. Among the guests were Charles Hill, the doctor and television executive who had negotiated an independent role for GPs at the start of the NHS in 1948; the Earl of Listowel, a colourful Labour member of the House of Lords, the first Governor-General of Ghana at the time of Barbara's visit there; barrister Elwyn Jones, who prosecuted the Moors murderers and became Harold Wilson's Attorney-General; the British writer Anthony Sampson, most famous for his *Anatomy of Britain*, a best-selling exposé of the country's class structure, a man who claimed to have been pushed by Barbara Wootton in his pram;²³⁰ her publisher, Charles Furth of Allen & Unwin; Louis Blom-Cooper from the days of her work for the Advisory Council on the Penal System; Peter Townsend, champion of Barbara's position on poverty and inequality; and her friend Campbell Adamson and his wife, Mimi. The young Frank Field came, being notable in the photographs for the quantity of his hair compared with that of the other male attendees. The women included Margot Jefferys, by then a professor, who had headed Barbara's shortlived Social

Research Unit at Bedford College in the early 1950s. Reg Hookway, who took over from Barbara as head of the Countryside Commission, was on the list, with his wife Ethel, and, Vera Seal, of course, despite her dislike of social occasions, and two of Barbara's Surrey neighbours, Bridget and David Trotter. We do not know what they all talked about, but there certainly was a lot they *could* have talked about. The talking was helped by the wining and dining: the Puligny-Montrachet and Château Giscours wines, the Moët et Chandon champagne, and the brandy; consommé, coquilles St Jacques, filet de boeuf with courgettes and new potatoes, and a soufflé Grand Marnier to finish. It was a fitting establishment recognition of a woman who never ceased to challenge the establishment both from within – always a solid revolutionary strategy – and from the hinterland of a truly critical life.

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