Oakley, Ann. "A Cat Called Plato." *A Critical Woman: Barbara Wootton, Social Science and Public Policy in the Twentieth Century*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011. 23–38. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781849664769.ch-002>>.

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A Cat Called Plato

Cambridge in 1897, the year of Barbara Wootton's birth, was a small rural town in which the trappings of modern life were arriving slowly; few homes had electricity, coal was used for cooking, and middle-class houses listened to the hissing of the old unshaded gas-burners. Cattle were still driven to the weekly market, and retired Newmarket racehorses drew hansom cabs with bells. The town was the place where farmers and small traders from villages as much as fifteen miles away brought their goods to sell; but it was also the home of The University. The University was the business of Barbara's parents, James and Adela Adam, both classical scholars, both devoted to the study of earlier civilizations, and both determined to wrestle from such study habits that would mould the childhoods and characters of their three children: Neil, Arthur and Barbara. Barbara enjoyed her brothers, who were six and three years older than her; she made slaves of them whenever she could and later concluded that this type of family pattern yielded a most useful training in the development of feminine wiles.¹

She was named 'Barbara Frances' after a favourite aunt on each side of the family. These two sides provided contrasting inheritances. James Adam's origins lay in the austere soil of Aberdeenshire, where his family had been farmers for generations; Adela was the daughter of a well-off family based originally in the Channel island of Jersey, where her ancestors had played important roles in island politics since the thirteenth century. Most of what we know about Barbara Wootton's childhood comes from her own autobiographical account, published when she was seventy, and from the records assembled by Adela, following the premature deaths of her husband at the age of forty-seven and of her younger son, Arthur, at the age of twenty-two. It seems clear that, for Adela, the men in the family were the most important figures.

The year after James Adam died, Adela published a fifty-five page memoir of his life. The memoir was the Preface to a volume he had not finished called *The Religious Teachers of Greece*, and which she finished for him. In the memoir, she describes the

hamlet of Kinmuck, in the parish of Keithhall, where the Adam family came from: 'To the north and east the country is very bare and featureless: nothing is to be seen but an expanse of rolling hillside, divided with pitiless regularity by "dykes" (stone walls) into fields of grass, oats, or "neeps" (turnips) ... for miles around there is an absence of any collection of houses compact enough to be called a village.'² Into this uncompromising landscape, Barbara's father, James Adam, was born on 7 April 1860, the second child and only son of a family of seven. His father, also called James (like *his* father before him), worked first as a farm-servant but 'had ambitions beyond his calling' and was given to studying Latin while following the plough. James Adam senior went away in his twenties to learn the art of village trading, and on his return started a small grocer's shop in Kinmuck. This prospered, providing a sound base for his marriage, at the age of thirty-one, to the twenty-one-year-old daughter of another farming family in the nearby parish of Clatt. Barbara Anderson, Barbara Wootton's paternal grandmother, was the youngest of ten: in a popular tradition, the boys went to school, but the girls did not, and this family was so poor that all the children were sent away to earn their own living as soon as they were able to work.

After the birth of James Adam junior, Barbara Wootton's father, the family moved to bigger premises in Kinmuck: a good-sized shop, a house and a large garden, and a smaller house with a tailor's workshop. James Adam senior was determined that his children should have the best education possible. He got together with a few local farmers and built a small schoolhouse. They hired a schoolmistress whose upkeep, James, with his canny business sense, subsidized by taking her in as a boarder at the low rate of five shillings a week. He bought maps for the school and was in every way 'a leading man in the neighbourhood'.³ Unfortunately for the neighbourhood and for his family, he died at forty-three in a local epidemic of typhoid fever. His widow carried on the shop business with splendid determination for a further thirty-seven years, retiring at the age of seventy. Her exceptional efforts ensured a successful start in life for James and his five sisters – Barbara, Mary, Jeanie, Jessie and Isabella (one sister had died in infancy). Mrs Adam had special ambitions for her only son. At ten, he went to the parish school of Keithhall, a mile away, marching off every morning with a flask of milk and a piece of bread and syrup. A school inspector there was heard to remark, 'That's a boy who'll go far',⁴ but the rough boys gave him a hard time, so at twelve he was sent with his elder sister to live with an aunt in Aberdeen, where he attended a more congenial school. James and this sister, Barbara, after whom Barbara Wootton was named, must have had a special relationship on account of being sent away together, but, as the only boy in a family of girls, he was much adored by all of them.⁵ It was at school in Aberdeen that James Adam discovered the capacity for academic excellence which would drive him for the rest

of his life. He particularly fell in love with Greek: 'The letters looked so nice,' he would say.⁶ From time to time he helped in the family shop, reading his books in between customers, as his father had while out ploughing, and his mother therefore determined that he should go to university. He won a bursary to the University of Aberdeen, where he studied, not only Greek and Latin, but mathematics, zoology, geology, English, physics, logic and metaphysics 'according to the system of that day',⁷ adding Sanskrit and German, just for his own satisfaction.

By this time, the pattern of mood swings between exhilaration and depression which marked Barbara Wootton's father's adult life had become established. At nineteen, he wrote to his sister back in Kinmuck, 'With my weighty head burdened with care and anxiety as to what I am to do when I leave College, and wretched discomfort and corroding disgust and general debility and what not, I'm afraid I'm going to sink I think it is all very good to boast about the pleasures and nobilities of knowledge and all that, but where is the practical use of it all?'⁸ This question was one his daughter, Barbara, would ask in her turn, but her answer would be different from his. James Adam thought about becoming a country parson, because the peace of the countryside seemed so attractive when he was under such stress, or perhaps a bishop, but his tutors at Aberdeen thought he should go to Cambridge, and so, in the end, did he. With first class classical Honours and an array of prizes from Aberdeen, and no less than three scholarships (necessary for financial reasons), he proceeded to Cambridge in 1880 at the age of twenty. There he enjoyed the food and the architecture, but, like many others, not the climate: 'A stranger would think it fairyland; but if he had to attend morning-chapel in these freezing mornings he would very soon change his opinion ... this low-lying place – not a hill is visible all round ... seems very congenial to frost. So it is to rain.'⁹ James Adam was the best classical scholar of his year, and he talked endlessly with his friends of religion, Platonism, philosophy and poetry: it was all about ideas, not, according to Adela's account, about feelings, or about the practical elements of life. He did, however, have a playful side; he enjoyed the company of friends' children, and he learnt to waltz. Then, at twenty-four, with a second brilliant degree under his belt, he was offered the post of Junior Fellow at Emmanuel College, a smallish institution that had just embarked on a growth spurt towards becoming one of the wealthiest of all the Cambridge colleges. The new Fellow looked young for his age, with his pink-and-white complexion and fair hair, and his slight figure; he was simply dressed, and very Scottish in appearance, manner and accent. He lectured on Plato, Cicero and Pindar, Aristotle's *Ethics* and the Greek Lyric Poets, and rapidly became a most entertaining performer, learning how to insert humorous anecdotes in appropriate places, and communicating to his students, above all, how classical study could be

(despite his earlier doubts) such *fun*. In 1903, when the Classical Tripos was altered to emphasize the importance of classical philosophy, the lecture hall was hardly big enough to hold all those who came to hear James Adam's thoughts on Plato and Aristotle.¹⁰ He formed a close friendship with the classical scholar and orientalist, Robert Alexander Neil, of Pembroke College, another ex-Aberdonian, after whom he would name his first son. The two men lunched together every Sunday for sixteen years until Robert Neil died, their lunches continuing irrespective of anything else that was going on, including James's marriage to Adela Marion Kensington.

James and Adela met in 1885 when he added the task of lecturing to the young ladies of Girton College to his duties at Emmanuel College. Girton at the time was still fighting for equality with the Cambridge men's colleges, and it was an effort for the College to provide any kind of parallel education. James was rather worried about meeting the young ladies, but in the event he found them very industrious 'even when they are not clever'.¹¹ However, one or two *were* clever, and one of these was Adela. She was in her first year as a student at Girton, having come from Bedford College, her first experience of formal education at the age of sixteen. Under the tutelage of James and others at Girton, she gained two first classes and a special distinction in philosophy in the Classical Tripos examination. This success did not result in a degree, however, as women were not allowed to have degrees at Cambridge then – an absurdity from which her daughter, Barbara, would also suffer. By this time, Adela and James were in regular correspondence. He contrived with a couple of his Cambridge friends to join her and her sister, Juliet, in Greece at Easter, 1890. The party embarked on a trip through the Peloponnesus and to Delphi and Thebes. James sat with the driver of the carriage practising his modern Greek, and the other four sat inside. They ate oranges, read Herodotus and discussed the Platonic theory of education. When they reached the middle of Arcadia, James proposed marriage to Adela. 'This is the day that J. Adam and A.M. Kensington were engaged to be married,' wrote James in his diary on 30 April 1890. Hers for the same day recorded only that the two of them 'walked up a hill'.¹² According to family legend, the hill was the Parthenon.¹³

He was thirty, she was twenty-four. They were married the following summer at St Mary's, the parish church in Paddington, with Adela's mother, Rebecca Kensington, and her niece, Cicely Ford, as witnesses, and James's friend, Robert Neil, as best man. After the wedding, James and Adela had to go straight to Kinmuck, as his favourite sister Barbara had sadly just died of tuberculosis aged twenty-six. James registered her death the day after his wedding. The newly-weds returned to Cambridge where they took a furnished house owned by Millicent Fawcett of suffragist fame.¹⁴ Soon, however, they moved to St Giles' House,

Chesterton Lane, a large semi-detached establishment conveniently and pleasantly situated in a street facing the River Cam, with the agreeable aspect of Jesus Green on the other side. Here, Barbara and her two brothers were born: Neil on 5 November 1891, Arthur on 25 April 1894, and Barbara on 14 April 1897, three proficiently-spaced offspring who were expected to meet their parents' high expectations for them without too much trouble.

A photograph of Adela about this time shows her as an attractive young woman with a straight-backed Victorian posture, a high forehead, and a level, no-nonsense expression. This was definitely a woman with whom you would not wish to tangle. She came from an even larger family than her husband: born in 1866, she was the tenth child of Arthur Kensington, and the eighth of Rebecca. Arthur, whose occupation was described on Adela's birth certificate as 'gentleman', was first married to a woman called Eleanor Belfield, who bore him two sons, Edgar and Theodore, before dying of typhoid fever. Arthur was the son of a banker, John Pooley Kensington of Lime Grove, Putney, who went bankrupt when his firm, Kensington and Company of Lombard Street, collapsed.¹⁵ In her autobiography, Barbara says of her maternal grandfather that he 'had something to do with banking in the days before this had become the giant joint-stock enterprise that it is now'.¹⁶ He was certainly sufficiently well-off to maintain ten children and homes in both Jersey and England. Jersey was an attractive place to live due to the absence of taxes and duties, as all the nineteenth-century guide books were at pains to point out.¹⁷ For a time in the late 1830s and early 1840s, Arthur Kensington was also a fellow of Trinity College, Oxford, where he had earlier taken a degree in mathematics. For two years, he lectured to Trinity undergraduates on classical literature and philosophy. He also served as a most efficient Dean, leaving for his successors twelve practical 'rules', which included providing information to all new students about chapel and exercise regulations, locking the garden gate at 10.30 pm in summer, and never omitting to send 'for men if they have done anything wrong'.¹⁸ The rules governing College appointments at the time did not allow Fellows to marry, which is probably why Arthur resigned from his Trinity post sometime in the early 1840s.¹⁹

Arthur's second marriage, in 1848, was to Rebecca Le Geyt, Barbara Wootton's maternal grandmother. The name 'Le Geyt' takes us back to a long line of distinguished Jersey ancestors, a history that is recorded as early as 1274.²⁰ In 2008 there were still eleven Le Geyts listed in the Jersey telephone directory; in 1891, the year after Rebecca's daughter, Adela, married James Adam, there were forty-seven. Barbara may not have known a great deal about her Jersey ancestry, or she may not have been very interested in it, but she knew enough to remark many years later (in 1981, when she was eighty-four) to her friend Sir William Haley,

ex-Director-General of the BBC, that a portrait of one of her ancestors hung on the walls of Elizabeth Castle in St Helier. Haley, brought up in Jersey himself, was pleased to know this, and remarked that, 'It is still a good Jersey name ... When I was a child our family doctor was a Le Geyt'.²¹

The said portrait may actually never have decorated the walls of Elizabeth Castle, an unappetising building stuck on a rock which can be reached from the Jersey mainland only at high water. In 2009, Charles William Le Geyt (1733–1827), Barbara Wootton's great-great-great uncle, resplendent in his red, gold and blue regimentary Captain's uniform, gazed out with a piercing blue-eyed clarity, not unlike Barbara's own, from the walls of the Jersey Museum in St Helier. Charles William distinguished himself when young quelling a riot in Bristol, and leading his regiment most successfully at the battle of Minden in Germany in 1759 during the Seven Years' War.²² What most Jersey residents knew Charles William Le Geyt best for, however, was his energetic defence of their rights to stand up against the autocrats who governed them. Jersey was run by a few rich old Norman-French landowning families, whose habits of intermarriage ensured a concentration of surnames, interests and inherited power.²³ In 1769, the island had its own little revolution with themes not dissimilar from those that sparked the more famous American and French ones: the impotence of the poor under a despotic political system; and the imposition on their labour of duties and revenues which reduced them literally to starvation. Charles William Le Geyt was on the side of the islanders, several hundreds of whom gathered in St Helier to protest and request a reasonable list of rights.²⁴ A few years later, his political skills were even more famously deployed in resisting a new set of Acts which proposed duties, not favoured by many islanders, on 'wines and liquors'. They got up another petition and dispatched Charles William with it to London, where he won the argument. On his return, he was hailed as a champion: bonfires were lit in the town and on the sands, and the cries 'Vive Le Geyt!' and 'Le Geyt for ever!' 'resounded everywhere throughout the country'.²⁵

Although the face of Charles William Le Geyt looks at us today from the walls of the Jersey Museum, the portrait of his wife, Elisabeth, daughter of 'the notorious pamphleteer' John Shebbeare, whose extravagant political writings *Letters to the People of England* (1755–8) landed him in Newgate prison,²⁶ is hidden in an inland storeroom, along with a lithograph of a sour-looking man with an elaborate mane of dark hair. The dour figure is another of Barbara's ancestors, Philippe Le Geyt (1635–1716), who was a judge and a lawyer, educated in Caen and Paris, and the author of careful and important works on Jersey law which are together known as the 'Code Le Geyt', and which are still used in Jersey today whenever it is necessary to understand the background of Norman customary law.²⁷

Adela's childhood and the experiences of the Kensington and Le Geyt families were populated by multiple aunts, uncles and cousins. George and Rose Marie Le Geyt, Adela's maternal grandparents, had a child every year or every other year from 1813 to 1833, except for one four-year gap (perhaps a miscarriage). In such families, children were often dispatched to live with other relatives for a while. When she was fifteen, Barbara's grandmother, Rebecca Le Geyt, was living in Devon, together with her younger sister, Frances Maria, in the home of her aunt, her mother's sister, the memorably named Angel Heath, and it was from Angel Heath's home that Rebecca married Arthur Kensington. Angel was something of a 'kin-keeper' in this family, recording a dense four-page memoir of her parents which was printed in a private publication in 1882. *Heathiana*,²⁸ as it is called, packages affectionately, though a little chaotically, many details of this branch of the family history. It includes the delightful story of Rose Marie and her parentage, which has the ingredients of all the best family tales: huge and unmanageable passion in a wild landscape ending in ultimate tragedy. Today George and Rose Marie Le Geyt rest in a solid ivy-covered tomb in St Helier's Green Street cemetery. The Le Geyt tomb is imposing, standing on its own, away from the simpler leaning gravestones of other less well-to-do families. Barbara must surely have been taken here as a child, on one of her visits to Jersey. In 1861, when George died, the family was living at 55 Colomberie, in a house big enough to accommodate four adults and two servants. The house was rented by the Le Geyts, not owned, and they seem to have moved around St Helier a fair amount; as the years pass, the servants disappear from the Census records, and at least one of the St Helier Le Geyt descendants ends up in penury.²⁹

Adela Marion Kensington, Barbara's mother, and the daughter of a Le Geyt, was born near Hyde Park in London. Of *her* seven brothers and sisters, Laura (1850–1926) was the only other London birth; Arthur Hayes (1859–1886) and Harry Rawlins (1861–1890) were both born in Devon; Fanny (Frances, 1851–1931) was born in Hastings, and three children – Alfred (1855–1918), Juliet (1853–1923) and Gertrude Rose (1856–1899) – were born in Jersey. The house in St Helier where Alfred and Gertrude were born is still standing: a long squat building with eight windows and a slate roof, now divided into flats, and facing a pub and a corner shop. The geographical distribution of births suggests a close extended family with branches in both Jersey and England, though based mainly in England. In her autobiography, Barbara calls it 'a cultivated, reasonably prosperous, but not rich, middle-class family'.³⁰ Of her seven maternal aunts and uncles, it was two in particular, Aunt Fanny and Aunt Juliet, who played the most important roles in Barbara's life. Adela was closest to her sister, Fanny, who was fifteen years her senior;

and the obituary Adela wrote on Fanny's death is the closest we have to an account of her own childhood.³¹ The family was based in London with long sojourns in Devon (at the home of Angel Heath) and Jersey. The girls did not go to school, but engaged in quite wide reading: Virgil, Homer and other Greek texts; *Pride and Prejudice*, *Tales of the Alhambra*, Charles Lamb's *Letters*, and the *Waverley* novels; and *Beauty and the Beast* in French. They did a lot of English-French translations. Laura and Fanny went to French and to German classes for a time, but two girls were the most the family could afford to pay for. The eldest ones became Sunday school teachers. Their father took them to see Shakespeare, and they would always read the play first. In Devon they enjoyed three donkeys, and consuming quantities of wild fruit.

As a child, Barbara benefited from the resource of these multiple kinships. She recalled family holidays in the summer spent with various combinations of aunts, uncles and cousins 'in some country rectory rented for the purpose while the incumbent was on holiday'.³² The holidays were not always in Britain; in 1905 they went to France, to look at the Loire chateaux and at Christmas the following year (this was something of a special event), they travelled with two aunts and two cousins to Morocco on S.S. *Sweena* of the Forwood Line. Long holidays, in which extended families gathered together and enjoyed each other's company, were a common upper-middle-class habit at the time, and seem uniformly remembered by the young as delightful.³³ The houses rented by the Adams were always chosen carefully by Aunt Juliet, and they had to have a study for James, who did most of his writing during the summer vacations. Barbara remembered the large hampers packed with his books that had to accompany them. 'He liked to stir up children to a high pitch of excitement, and would then suddenly decamp to his work,' recalled Adela. They used a system of 'danger signals': 'One handkerchief was hung out from the window, and another outside the door: while these were visible (usually about eight hours a day), no sound must be heard.'³⁴ Despite this discipline, Barbara and her brothers enjoyed considerable freedom in these summer interludes to swim or explore the countryside instead of reciting Greek verbs. The atmosphere at home the rest of the time was quite unrelenting: Adela took the view that 'the irregular verbs and similar monstrosities of Greek and Latin' were best learnt by the very young, instead of nursery rhymes that did no-one any good at all. Even the cat was called Plato.³⁵ Ann Ashford, the great grand-daughter of Adela's oldest sister Laura, remembers how Adela's childrearing habits were disapproved of by other members of the family: Adela was regarded as 'this incredible intellectual snob' and as much too harsh in refusing her children any playtime whatsoever.³⁶ While Adela's banishment of childish amusements was probably unusual, in university households at the time the emphasis on Greek and Latin was not: writer Rosamund

Essex read Latin and Greek before she could spell English;³⁷ the Postgate children (one of whom, Raymond, later became famous as the editor of the *Good Food Guide*, while the other, Margaret, was a well-known socialist writer and wife of the political theorist and historian G.D.H. Cole) had to speak Latin at dinner on Sundays, under the stern eye of their father, a Classics don at Trinity. Any failure on their part to find the Latin equivalents for 'roast beef and Yorkshire pudding' resulted in hunger.³⁸

When James Adam became Senior Tutor at Emmanuel College, the family moved into a spacious house in the College grounds with their three children and four servants (an average number for the period). This was the first generation of married dons in Oxbridge; the rule under which Arthur Kensington had to resign his Fellowship at Trinity in order to marry was not changed in Cambridge until 1878. The Adam family was therefore an early specimen of a new breed – what the economist J.M. Keynes called 'the first age of married society in Cambridge'.³⁹ Brought up, like Barbara, in such a family, Keynes recalled the propensity of the first married dons to choose as wives students at the women's colleges, a habit which infused the domestic atmosphere with the added spice of an intellectual bond. Among such 'a peculiar self-conscious and very talented élite', the Adams were, apparently, 'a legend'.⁴⁰ Their new Cambridge home, Emmanuel House, was ornate and matronly, a brooding red-brick three-storied and bay-windowed edifice looking out over a paddock where the undergraduates played tennis in summer; an enormous horse-chestnut tree swept the second-floor windows of the house. There was a large fish pond, home to a colony of Mallard ducks, and a little wooden bridge which led to an uncultivated island, where a pair of breeding swans generated an annual display of fluffy cygnets. James Adam enjoyed nightly walks around the gardens, watching the moonlight and the yellow light of the College windows captured in the pond, and admiring the symmetrical elegance of the Emmanuel front court crowned with its Christopher Wren chapel. His depressions continued – the rapid alternations from horrible misery to vitality and back again. Adela put it down to his inability to relax, to his habit of driving himself too hard. In 1902, when Barbara was five, he published his two-volume edition of Plato's *Republic* which became a classic undergraduate text in every English-speaking country in the world. This was preceded by translations of other Platonic dialogues: *Apology*, *Crito*, *Protagoras* and *Euthyphro* (the latter, jointly with Adela). In 1902 also, he achieved the honour of being nominated Gifford Lecturer at Aberdeen, choosing as his subject 'The Religious Teachers of Greece', and delivering the lectures in 1904 and 1905; these are the lectures that Adela would later edit for him.

The reality of James Adam's world was that of masculine classical scholarship. It was a closed world, allowing few concessions to any reality other than that

spoken by the classical Greek and Roman philosophers. His own philosophy, which very much shaped his children's childhoods, distinguished a 'liberal' from a 'professional' education: while the aim of the former was to develop mental and moral qualities, the latter merely enabled people to earn their living. A liberal education, which means the study of classical literature and life, implied the power of intellectual sympathy, the faculty of 'entering into another man's thoughts', but it was also most importantly about the training of a man's will and character.⁴¹ James Adam regarded the study of Greek as an essential element in a university education, and at Cambridge he resisted all attempts to make it optional.⁴²

Barbara was an obedient daughter; by the age of ten she had been reading the New Testament proficiently in Greek aloud to her father on Sunday evenings for some time. Among the few photographs remaining of her childhood, there is one of her in a white dress and curls aged about two or three with her hand raised and her finger pointed as though expounding a lecture. In a second, she is a few years older with longer hair tied neatly in a bow; and she sits on one leg with a large book open on her lap; she has obviously been told to smile at the camera. Barbara was fond of her father, and she saw his playful, as well as his austere, side, but they had relatively little contact: 'Every morning he used to come into the nursery and issue a warning to each of us three children to try to keep clear of whatever at the moment was thought to be our besetting fault; but this was a cheerful, almost jovial, performance.' He was, she said, a brilliant teacher, warm-hearted towards his pupils, even if sometimes over-critical, and any success she herself had enjoyed in public speaking she was sure must have come from these qualities of his.⁴³

Her relationship with her mother was much more complex. 'Mother', she said, 'was an extremely intellectual woman, as well as what is what is commonly called a strong character'. She was known as 'the Boss', and Barbara was in no doubt that Adela ran her husband and the marriage.⁴⁴ She was also formidably accomplished: a first-rate classical scholar, Adela spoke French, German and Italian well; she was a distinguished pianist, she played in an orchestra in her Girton student days at a time when it was thought 'scarcely proper' for a woman to do so,⁴⁵ and for many years she sang in the Cambridge University Musical Society (which she could not abide being called 'CUMS'⁴⁶). Her politics were what most people today would regard as an odd mixture of radicalism and conservatism, though it was not odd at the time, when 'votes for women' attracted the commitment of women across the political spectrum. Conservative associations as well as socialist ones spawned Women's Franchise associations, and Adela was on the Executive Committee of the Cambridge branch. She was a 'fervent feminist'⁴⁷ about the suffrage, and about women's rights to an equal education. She was active in the Cambridge branch of

the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, sitting on the platform with speakers such as the notable suffragist Clara Rackham, who proclaimed: 'We are tired of always working for men and through men. We want to work as voters, side by side with men.'⁴⁸

Clara Rackham remembered, soon after her move to Cambridge in 1901, being called on by Adela who told her she was the secretary of a small Women's Suffrage Society: the subscription was a shilling a year. Would Mrs Rackham care to join? The members campaigned for women police officers and for women magistrates; they started schools for delicate and for sub-normal children, and a women's luncheon club.⁴⁹ Florence Keynes, mother of J.M. Keynes, pursued changing the law so women could stand for election to the local town council; she herself became the first woman councillor in Cambridge and one of the first woman magistrates.⁵⁰ Much effort was put into penal reform, which would become one of Barbara Wootton's abiding interests. As a child Barbara recalled women gathering in their drawing room, she supposed to agitate for the vote, and to pass resolutions for their MPs and so forth, though all in a very ladylike manner.⁵¹ But Adela was not afraid of speaking out: in 1917, she was the leading signatory of a letter in the local Cambridge press headed 'Women's Suffrage' protesting about the Electoral Reform Committee's assent to the continued disenfranchisement of women. The position of British women vis-à-vis the franchise was worse than that prevailing in many countries of the Empire.⁵² But in other respects, Barbara's mother was a 'very traditional Anglican',⁵³ a 'high-and-dry conservative'.⁵⁴ She despaired at the invention of Old Age Pensions, and found the stamping of insurance cards for her servants really too much. Barbara was especially incensed by her mother's treatment of the servants; for example, when Adela thought she had discovered that they were smoking cigarettes, she threatened to cut their wages. Barbara's passion for social equality was ignited by these domestic politics, which provided an intimate and early acquaintance with the evidence of class discrimination.

Whenever Barbara spoke about her mother in later life, she defined their relationship as difficult: 'I never felt any affection for my mother. She wanted to achieve through her children';⁵⁵ 'I was no lover of my own family ... I had a very hostile relationship with my mother';⁵⁶ 'My earliest recollection – it's a sad thing to say it, I know – is tiptoeing past the door she was in so as not to be called in. I *detested* my mother, and if I have modelled myself, I *have* modelled myself. ... I've modelled myself by reaction *against*. I've tried not to get like her.'⁵⁷ Interviewed by MP Ann Clwyd in 1983, Barbara described Adela as 'a great slave-driver intellectually': 'I found her very pressing. What are you reading? What are you reading next? It was like that.'⁵⁸ Barbara was driven to reading books way beyond

the interests and competence appropriate to her age. Yet perhaps, despite herself, she did slightly have her mother in mind as a role model when she declared at the age of ten that she wanted to be 'an organizing female with a briefcase'.⁵⁹

Adela taught all her children at home, the boys until they were ten, Barbara until she was thirteen. Neil and Arthur went on to a small preparatory school and then, with scholarships, to boarding school, Winchester. Barbara was dispatched to a drawing class, which she hated; to a 'formidable Alsatian lady' for French and German; to a class in Swedish gymnastics; and to a dancing class. She liked and was good at both of the last two. The dancing class was run by a 'Miss Ratcliffe', and it was the same class as had been attended by little Gwen Darwin, Charles Darwin's granddaughter, and several of Gwen's cousins; but, whereas Gwen hid under the nursery table and prayed for Miss Ratcliffe's death,⁶⁰ Barbara liked Miss Ratcliffe so much she attended the class for fourteen years.⁶¹

Barbara and Gwen shared two experiences which were common among girls of their class at the time: between them and the world (including their parents) stood the ever-present figure of a nanny. Of course she stood there for boys as well, but boys went to school, and girls did not; so the other thing that Barbara and Gwen had in common was a burning desire to be *allowed* to go to school. Barbara wanted to go to boarding school, like her brothers, and any childish faith she had in the Almighty was sorely tested because she knelt down and prayed for this every time she went to the lavatory, but it never happened – perhaps, she later wondered, because the Almighty did not consider the lavatory a fitting place for such requests.⁶²

Barbara's nanny, Elizabeth Haynes, came to the Adam household from another elite academic household – that of the future economist John Maynard Keynes. Mrs Keynes and Mrs Adam probably shared information about reliable domestic staff at their women's suffrage meetings. Barbara remembered her nanny taking her to see the Keynes' cook, Jenny, with whom she maintained a friendship, and the latter berating 'Mr Maynard' for his lazy habits (staying in bed until all hours).⁶³ This was Barbara's first impression of a man whose ideas about economics would transform the management of capitalist economic systems, and would have considerable resonance with her own.⁶⁴ In later life, she was fond of attributing the commonalities in the Keynes and Wootton philosophies of economics to their shared nannying.⁶⁵

Elizabeth Haynes joined the Adam household when Neil was a month old and she stayed for fifty years. Although no letters from Adela are preserved in Barbara's Girton College Archives, there are ninety-five from her nanny. In later life, Barbara made no secret of the fact that the 'mutual devotion' between herself and her nanny largely compensated for the lack of affection she felt for her mother.⁶⁶ Barbara and Neil both supported their nanny financially in her old age, and Barbara sustained a regular

correspondence with her, and visited her often until she died at ninety-one. She was always known as 'The Pie', though no-one could remember why. The Pie was born in 1868 (so she was twenty-three when she joined the Adam household), the daughter of a Huntingdonshire farm labourer and his wife, Ebenezer and Margaret Haynes, the only one of their ten children who never married. She went into service young, to a family in Bedford, followed by the Keynes' household, and then to the Adams to provide for Barbara and her brothers the kind of steadfast warmth and ordinary kindness that it seems was lacking from their parents. A photograph shows The Pie, a pretty young woman, dressed in the starched white apron and cap of a nanny, looking tenderly down into the face of a baby, who was, perhaps, Barbara. The Pie expected high standards of behaviour from her charges, was a devout Baptist and went about her business singing hymns. She made dresses and chair-covers, and, despite having no education to speak of, wrote admirably clear and direct English. From time to time she would take offence at something that had been said or done, and would be virtually silent for two or three days; these and other episodes of temporary rejection at The Pie's hand afforded Barbara an experience of trauma which she claimed stood her in good stead in her later work as a juvenile court magistrate.⁶⁷

Barbara called The Pie 'a remarkable specimen of that remarkable but now nearly extinct race'.⁶⁸ The habit of handing the daily care of one's children over to a paid servant who lived in the house but came from a very different echelon of society is peculiarly British: 'a unique and curious way of bringing up children'.⁶⁹ The central character of Winston Churchill's only novel, *Savrola*, is still tended by his nanny in her old age: Savrola comments: 'It is a strange thing, the love of these women. Perhaps it is the only disinterested affection in the world.'⁷⁰ Churchill himself enjoyed such affection from his nanny, Nanny Everest, until she died when he was twenty, and for all those years she was effectively his carer, his confidante, and his friend. Gwen Darwin, who shared the experience of Barbara's dancing-class teacher, observed of her nanny that: 'I can never remember being bathed by my mother, or even having my hair brushed by her, and I should not at all have liked if she had done anything of the kind. We did not feel it was her place to do such things'.⁷¹ Social reformer Eva Hubback, born eleven years before Barbara, was closer to her nanny than to her parents: this nanny stayed with the family for thirty-two years, but, unlike The Pie, she preferred the two boys in her charge.⁷²

There is no sign of such a preference in the records that exist of Barbara's relationship with The Pie. The warmth of those ninety-five letters burns out of the direct but difficult-to-decipher handwriting like a living flame: 'My Own Dear,' writes The Pie to the fifty-seven-year-old Barbara, from her hospital bed in May 1954, 'Your letter was brought to me today while I was having my dinner

My word you do have a busy time what with one thing & another. But I believe you enjoy a good deal of it ... I do congratulate you on your lift up but I think you deserve it.⁷³ The letters are infused with unwavering affection: Barbara is called 'Missie', so most of the letters begin 'My Own Dear Missie'. But the style is also very proper: there is much attention to detail – what Barbara is doing; the clothes she is buying; the mentions of her achievements The Pie has read in the newspapers; the socks The Pie is knitting for Barbara's second husband; the state of the weather; the temperaments of the staff in the hospital and in the nursing home which Barbara's kindness, and that of 'Mr Neil' – he is always called 'Mr Neil' – has made possible. Among all this detail are flashes of emotion. As she grows older, The Pie thinks about the old days a lot. 'I did love looking after you all three very much when you were little & we I think had a happy time.'⁷⁴

Despite The Pie's devoted care, Barbara said she did not enjoy her childhood.⁷⁵ This was also despite the beauty and ease of Cambridge, which was then a good place to be a child in: a town small enough for children to know well, with a colourful street market and many open spaces; 'Coe Fen still wild, with no great road running across it. The water ran sluggishly through it; water beetles danced endlessly in the sun on the river's surface; a child could lose himself there quietly for a whole day through.'⁷⁶ There was the charm of the Backs and the Bridges, the huge weeping willows, the sun shining through the great windows of King's College Chapel.⁷⁷ What did seep into Barbara Wootton's soul was the East Anglian countryside: 'the flat loneliness, the delicate light and the wide skies of the fen country'.⁷⁸ Perhaps she played down in her remembrances the easy pleasure that is often obtained from being one of several siblings. Her brothers were clever and industrious as she was, but also thoughtful and humorous companions. One of Adela's letters (in James Adam's Emmanuel College papers) recalls the eight-year-old Barbara being much occupied, together with her brother Neil, 'with glass-blowing at the Balfour laboratory, & extensive carpentering & photographic works'.⁷⁹ One day Barbara lay down on the nursery floor and proposed to Neil and Arthur that the three of them should invent their own language as a protection from adult interference; they should pronounce all words as though they were spelt backwards; recalling this years later, she noted that 'backslang' was also a habit of the 'criminal classes'.⁸⁰ The three of them became very proficient at backslang, finding ways round the more awful tongue-twisters, and realising that 'dog' backwards would be no good, so their knowledge of Latin came in handy ('sinac'). They carried this proficiency into adulthood. Arthur, who died in the First World War, used some of this language in his letters to his family, and Neil and Barbara were both able to carry on a conversation in it for the rest of their adult lives.

There is little record of Neil's relationship with the sister who was six years younger than him, but, after Arthur died in the war, Adela put together a memoir based on Arthur's letters. In 1904, aged ten, he wrote, with childish honesty, 'Barbara is getting on well with her Two Scale Studies. She plays the first one quite nicely but she does not play the second so well.' Later, he observed rather pompously that, 'We are doing William and Mary now in our history. Sometimes Barbara forgets the most important things and remembers the things of lesser importance. But that is by no means always the case. In fact, I think she is making a lot of progress and I am quite satisfied with her.'⁸¹ According to Adela, Barbara remembered vividly the pains he took to teach her the big towns of England on the nursery floor in Emmanuel House, which was the scene of most indoor occupations. Adela must have been proud of Arthur when she found a self-congratulatory missive he had written to the twelve-year-old Barbara about her progress in Greek: 'You appear to be becoming an advanced scholar in the Greek tongue, as you quote Greek in your letter to Mother which I saw yesterday: still I have no doubt you are yet ignorant of when you may use [certain letters], which interesting facts are to be discovered in my notes on Homeric Grammar taken from the information imparted to me by Frank Carter Esq. M.A. I should also think you may be unaware of the principles of Stem Variation and Root Gradation.'⁸² This was an intensely and highly traditional hothouse atmosphere, one in which the language of learning and communication was emblematic of exactly those devotions and differences which turned Barbara Wootton into one of the most important social scientists of the twentieth century.

The particular constellation of pleasures and difficulties that made up the Adam children's childhoods was unalterably affected when their father died suddenly at the age of forty-seven. Barbara was ten, the boys thirteen and sixteen. James had been depressed again, and afraid that his mental power was failing; the only thing that cheered him up was listening to little Barbara reading the Bible in Greek. In the summer of 1907, he gave his last lecture of the season at Cambridge, and set off to see his mother in Scotland, planning to join Adela, the children and the extended family in North Wales later. While in Scotland, he consulted a doctor about what he thought 'a slight local complaint' unconnected with his depression and insomnia, and general mental misery. Carcinoma of the rectum was diagnosed; he went into hospital for an operation, but died four hours later with Adela at his side. For the young Barbara, this was the first of a series of deaths that would introduce her to the notion, which possessed her for the rest of her life, that absolutely nothing could ever be counted on, that whatever comfort and certainty you thought you had was always liable to crumble away at a moment's notice.

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