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Cambridge Distinctions

The First World War changed the world and Barbara Wootton's life. For women in general, it proved a combustious mixture of liberation and repression. It issued in a modern age of revamped social habits in which traditional forms of exploitation – of one social class by another, of women by men – emerged from their cultural hiding places and began openly to be challenged. Over these quiet and unquiet revolutions hovered the mass reality of death and bereavement. People were immersed in the paradox that something as terrible as a war that killed millions could also be a unique cultural moment offering up new possibilities for personal transformation and social change.

Some changes happened more suddenly than others. Economically, the War had a major destabilizing effect; it had cost Britain thirteen per cent of its national wealth, and immense war debts to the USA permanently transformed the country's economic position.¹ Higher wages and people's willingness to pay for goods and services that had been in short supply led to a rise of over a hundred per cent in the cost of living; the decline of traditional industries combined with other dislocations produced the creeping growth of mass unemployment.² 'With national indebtedness mounting up, the birth rate at its lowest, the death rate at its highest, unemployment increasing day by day, one wonders when the crash will come,' wrote Beatrice Webb morbidly, but presciently, in her diary for March 1919.³ Across the land, fortune-telling became hugely popular.⁴ The December 1918 election returned a victory for the Coalition Government with its ambitious programme of reconstruction. It also, importantly, transformed the Labour Party into the official opposition for the first time.

During the War, women's work had become more and more essential, and this included increasing demand for the services of university-educated women. 'Past students of the women's colleges, beginning as scrubbers in hospitals or waitresses in canteens, were found to be valuable as scientific investigators, chemists, clerks in government offices, or teachers in boys' schools.'⁵ Suffrage for women arrived in

1918, over half a century since it had first been proposed in the British Parliament. Women had been 'given' the vote 'rather like a chocolate is given to a child who has behaved unexpectedly well under trying circumstances'.⁶ This treat was reserved for women over thirty on the presumption that they would be less given to radicalism than younger women, and also disinclined to register, for surely many women of that age would not want openly to admit to it?⁷ But what was given with one hand was taken away with the other. By the autumn of 1919, nearly three-quarters of a million women had lost their jobs, and by 1921 the percentage of women in the labour force had fallen below its 1911 level.⁸ 'It was back to the kitchen sink for bus conductors, insurance clerks, landgirls and electricians alike.'⁹ The problem of finding jobs for former servicemen forced the government to create 'the dole' – originally an out-of-work donation for discharged soldiers – but there was no such provision for unemployed women.¹⁰

A series of changes in the law allowed women to claim their status as morally responsible persons for the first time. For example, the 1920 Larceny Act disposed of the rule that a woman living with her husband could not be accused of stealing from him; and the 1925 Criminal Justice Act abolished the presumption that a woman who committed a crime in her husband's presence could do so only because he made her. But, at the same time, doors that had been opened were slammed shut: Barbara's friend from school and university, Dorothy Russell, left Girton to study medicine at the London Hospital Medical College in 1919 when it decided to admit women students, but this decision was rescinded in 1922.¹¹ The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919 theoretically enabled women to exercise most public functions, judicial offices and professions, and to serve as jurors. Years later, Barbara Wootton reflected that she and other young women at the time had mistakenly believed that the Act had meant what it said.¹² And looking back on it all in 1982 at the age of eighty-five, she observed that young women would be staggered to realize how recent were the gains on which a new feminist movement could build.¹³

As Barbara returned to her studies at Girton in the autumn of 1918, she had other things on her mind. The disgrace of her *aegrotat* degree confirmed the pre-war agreement she had reached with her mother – that, after three years of Classics, if she still disliked the subject, she could change to economics. Jack's death was the final blow to any interest in extinct civilizations she might once have pretended. Margaret Cole, who read Classics at Girton from 1911 to 1914, observed that, 'if you have leisure to think about Roman society and Greek society, it is improbable that your thinking will stop there'.¹⁴ Vera Brittain, back in Oxford after her fiancé's death, gave up English in favour of History for similar reasons – the preference for a

subject that might offer a greater chance of yielding an understanding of the modern world.¹⁵ Girton awarded Barbara a fourth-year College Scholarship of £20, and she put away her Classics texts forever. Out came the economics books she had read in the fallow time between leaving school and entering Girton: the enlivening *World of Labour* by G.D.H. Cole, and the works of Alfred Marshall. Marshall dominated Cambridge economics for many years, inheriting the Chair of Political Economy from Henry Fawcett, the husband of suffragist Millicent Fawcett, from whom Barbara's newly-married parents had rented a house. Keynes called Marshall 'the father of economic science' as it existed in England in the 1920s;¹⁶ it was Marshall's combination of mathematical approaches and acknowledgement of complex human motives for economic behaviour that produced the enduring term 'neoclassical economics'.¹⁷ This structure of thought was one which Barbara would later dissect and decisively reject. As a new economics student, she must have realized that Marshall's vehement opposition to women's participation in university work was not to his credit. He conducted a long-drawn out private war against it, believing that women's characters would be damaged if they lectured to male audiences, and that the feminization of the University would cause immediate degeneration.¹⁸ Married himself to an economist, Mary Paley (one of Newnham College's first five students), Marshall relegated her to a subordinate role as wife and assistant, even reissuing under his own name the book, *The Economics of Industry*, that had originally been *her* book. In a life merged with Alfred's, Mary Paley Marshall suffered from her husband's belief, referred to with sensitive outrage by Keynes in his obituary of Mary, 'that there was nothing useful to be made of women's intellects'.¹⁹

Cambridge University's only concession to the enhanced public contribution of women during the War was to allow them, from 1916, and initially as a War emergency measure only, to sit for the first and second M.B. (Bachelor of Medicine) examinations in order to speed up the process of qualifying as doctors. Otherwise, the University tried very hard to stand still or even to walk backwards. There was an organized campaign by Cambridge women, including Adela Adam, to remove the many absurdities of women's position: the fact that their attendance at lectures was up to the 'courtesy' of the individual lecturer, not a right; they could sit for university examinations but not be awarded degrees; they were eligible for only five of the 145 available university scholarships, studentships and prizes; staff of the two women's colleges could take no part in decisions about syllabuses and examinations; and women staff and students were admitted to the University Library only on the same terms as the general public. A syndicate appointed by the University, reporting in May 1920, reflected Marshallian conservatism in iterating a litany of ambivalence and prejudice – for example, that it was not desirable for

women to become full members of the University since they lacked originality and the capacity for high standards of scholarship, and were capable of routine work only. All three proposals put to the Senate in December – to admit women as equal members, to establish a separate university for them, and to let them in under restricted conditions – were decisively rejected.²⁰ When Girton's founder, Emily Davies, died in 1921, the position of women at Cambridge was (with the exception of the M.B. examinations) exactly as it had been in 1881.

But Cambridge was not exempt from other changes in the position of women and gender relations. Many of the old taboos had worn thin: 'Smoking, swearing, and playing tennis in shorts became inalienable feminine rights';²¹ short skirts, originally a war economy measure, lived on; and the 'pull-over', the first gender-neutral garment, was born. Some of the women dons even acquired sports cars.²² A quarter of the male students who went off to fight never came back, and those that did were older and less inclined to put up with traditional protocols separating the sexes.²³ Chaperones as a breed died out and dance clubs and love poems flourished. In the Michaelmas Term of 1918, Girton held the first dance to which men could be invited. It was a good time to be poor and intellectual, as Oliver Postgate, Margaret Cole's nephew, remembered his parents' lives in the 1920s: there were still servants to be had; motor cars were arriving; wine and chickens were cheap; and there were ideals – love, life and liberty were all new and all their own invention.²⁴ Life for middle-class young women lapsed into fun as a relief from the seriousness of war: "'Ain't we got fun?" was a line in a popular song,' recalled writer Ethel Mannin. 'It was a sardonic song, to be sure, but still we liked it, we sang it, we danced to it, kicking up our heels.'²⁵ The big towns nurtured dancing, jazz, cocktail parties and nightclubs. Seaside holidays overwhelmed towns such as Great Yarmouth and Clacton; Sunday picnics in cars deprived the churches of their custom; commercial flying started, albeit slowly, at only 100 miles an hour; and the first wireless broadcasts by the Marconi company entertained people with weather forecasts and time signals.²⁶

Barbara Wootton's raw widowhood fostered a temporary immunity to these social and technical revolutions. She threw herself into her work, and the pastimes she chose were more serious ones. Although, after Jack's death, she never returned to live in Girton College, she did take part in various College Debating Society debates with motions such as 'Strikes are essential to progress', 'Modern inventions do not tend to increase human happiness', and 'The party system is unnecessary'; she opposed the first two and spoke in favour of the third.²⁷ It must have been with a real sense of pride that she achieved the outcome recorded in *The Girton Review* for the May Term of 1919: 'B.F. Wootton' had 'passed with special distinction' the Economics Tripos Part II, Class I: 'This distinction has not been conferred

on any man or woman candidate before, since the foundation of the Economics Tripos', announced *The Review* with a blast of collegiate pride.²⁸ Female economics students generally did well at Cambridge. At Newnham in 1908, Eva Spielman, later the social reformer Eva Hubback, had gained a first class in Part II of the Economics Tripos, as had Lynda Grier, and both had achieved higher honours than any of the men reading economics in that year.²⁹ After her own success, Girton awarded Barbara a J.E. Cairnes Scholarship (for £60) and the Therese Montefiore prize (worth 'about £66'³⁰). She hoped her distinctive first in the Economics Tripos would make up for her mother's disappointment at the *aegrotat* episode, although there is little sign that this happened. Dorothy Russell unkindly, but perhaps truthfully, observed that Adela, 'an unmaternal and undomesticated woman whose whole heart and soul seemed bound to the chariot wheel of academic life' would never relinquish the loss of the vicarious glory of her daughter's abandoned first in Classics.³¹ But of course daughter, like mother, left Cambridge without being entitled to put the letters 'B.A.' after her name.

What to do next, after Cambridge? The inhospitality of Cambridge towards women, particularly in economics, suggested the alternative of a more sympathetic and democratic institution, the London School of Economics (LSE).³² In this path, Barbara followed other eminent students, such as Alice Clark, Ellen McArthur, Lilian Knowles, Ivy Pinchbeck and Eileen Power. She secured a research scholarship there, although the LSE today has no record of Barbara's sojourn as a postgraduate student,³³ perhaps because it was one of the few enterprises in her life that came to nothing. She was vague about what she wanted to research, and the 'eminent economist' appointed as her supervisor was even vaguer about his obligations to her. No-one at the LSE, she said, ever tried to find out what had happened to her.³⁴ By the summer of 1921, Barbara had resigned her scholarship, and so had another Girtonian, a Miss Welsby, who had gone to the LSE at the same time, although nothing was officially said about the reasons why either of these young women had chosen to desert their new academic home.³⁵

Before she abandoned the LSE, Barbara had taken on part-time teaching duties at another institution with a significant place in the history of women's education. Westfield College in north London had been opened in 1882, four years after the progressive London University first admitted women. Its founder, Constance Maynard, had herself been one of Girton's first students in 1872. She was a devout proponent of education for women, religious, overworked and lonely, and given to complex relationships with favoured students and colleagues.³⁶ Her ambition had been to establish a small residential college for women in London, which would be like the early Oxbridge women's colleges, but would be run on avowedly

Christian principles and would provide a protected environment affordable by the kind of middle-class parents whose means would not stretch to Oxbridge. In 1891, Westfield College moved to a site on the south-west corner of Hampstead Heath, whose 'bracing air' provided the students with most of their leisure-time entertainment. (They did also venture as far as the shops in Golders Green, but central London was out of bounds.)

The Westfield College staff were young, the first generation of university-educated women, and they taught traditionally female subjects, such as art, history, Greek and Latin, but also stretched the boundaries by adding mathematics and botany and, then, economics. Nearly a quarter of the regular tuition was given by visiting lecturers, in a system of 'piecemeal teaching arrangements',³⁷ and it was under this scheme that Barbara Wootton joined the staff. By that time, Maynard had retired, and Westfield's Principal was Bertha Surtees Phillpotts, another ex-Girtonian, a cousin of the better known Sophia Jex-Blake, one of the first woman doctors, and aunt of Katharine Jex-Blake who had been Mistress and Director of Studies in Classics at Girton when Barbara had studied there. Phillpotts was a 'brilliant scholar',³⁸ 'absolutely charming',³⁹ and evidently an extraordinary woman: she was the first woman to enter the male realm of Scandinavian studies as a specialist in Icelandic literature, and she much impressed the Icelanders with her journeys across their harsh landscape, especially in 1909 when she wore out several pairs of shoes, clocking up 500 miles.⁴⁰ When Phillpotts first went to Westfield, she offered a prize for the best entry in an examination testing students on their first-hand knowledge of Hampstead Heath,⁴¹ but, more seriously, it was under her leadership that Westfield became an official part of London University, with a grant from the London County Council; salaries were raised to university levels and staff became eligible for the university pension scheme. After her spell at Westfield, Phillpotts returned to Cambridge as Mistress of Girton and later as Director of Scandinavian Studies. It was a closed circle, this world of the first university women; most of them knew, or were related to, one another.

Like other institutions for women's higher education, Westfield College experienced a considerable rise in demand after the War. In 1919, when Barbara Wootton became a part-time Visiting Lecturer, there were 110 students, and much needed extensions to the buildings were in progress. The student intake reflected Maynard's original aspirations for an affordable education: of the thirty-three students entering the year Barbara went, only three had fathers of independent means; other fathers included a commercial traveller; a manufacturer of sports goods; managers of a building society and a steel and tinplate factory; a mill cashier; a lighterman; a tailor; and a book-keeper. Some of the students Barbara taught were close to her in

age: six of the thirty-three were the same age or older.⁴² Her lectures, 'Elementary Principles of Economics', one per week, were part of a two-year Citizenship Diploma Course intended to provide a broad educational base for social work 'and also to fit those who may not intend to become professional workers to gain a knowledge of the foundations of modern life and to take their part in civic affairs'.⁴³ The majority of Westfield graduates went into charity work or became teachers. 'What I put into my Westfield lectures, I now tremble to think', wrote Barbara forty-eight years later. Most of the students were not aiming to be professional social workers but were young 'do-gooders' with independent means and leisure, who 'came in their cars and their pearls and their elegant clothes to hear what I and others had to say; and I for my part dutifully tried to teach them what I had myself been taught, and not to be put off by the fact that they appeared to be so much more sophisticated and worldly-wise than I was myself'.⁴⁴ This admission in her autobiography drew a sarcastic letter from one ex-student, Eileen Wicksteed: 'Dear Lady Wootton, Ever since, dripping with pearls and in my elegant clothes and car, I attended your lectures at Westfield College, I have followed your subsequent career with interest'. She wished to point out that at the time she had owned no pearls and had walked everywhere, and had been puzzled when Barbara noted of her essay that 'for her age' (more or less the same as Barbara's) she had 'an unusually wide vocabulary'.⁴⁵

Westfield College provided Barbara with lodgings, which she used for part of the week, returning to Barton Road in Cambridge for the rest of it. Although she took her teaching duties in London seriously, there was little intellectual stimulation. The job was clearly just a filler. She was rescued from it when, in 1920, Girton invited her back to become Director of Studies in Economics. It was an invitation she felt she could not refuse. No alternative full-time job had presented itself, and she had not come up with any other ideas about what to do.⁴⁶ The model of enforced and unhappy spinsterhood for bereaved war widows such as Barbara dominated the cultural imagery of the time. It robbed women in this position of an alternative reality: that they might anyway, in the presence of new freedoms for women, actually have chosen to do something with their lives other than (or as well as) marriage and motherhood.⁴⁷ One problem was that there were very limited opportunities for women in the 1920s. The good posts were reserved for the men who had survived the War, and great persistence was required to negotiate this obstacle.⁴⁸

The complexity of the financial terms Girton proposed definitely merited someone with expertise in economics. The College offered Barbara a salary made up of four components: first a '£40 Directing Fee for ten or more students, or for less than ten students, £3.3.0 for the first student and £1.1.0 for each additional student'; second, a 'guarantee for teaching' fee of £120; thirdly, a 'retaining fee' of

£40 rising by increments of £5 a year to £120; and fourthly, board and lodging throughout the year.⁴⁹ Quite what this added up to financially is not clear, but Barbara regarded herself as well-paid by the standards of the time.⁵⁰ As Dora Russell, who also became a junior don at Girton in 1918, noted, a small income did not matter so much when combined with the perks of free accommodation and subsidized board at the College.⁵¹ The College Council formally appointed Barbara in June 1920; her reply to the letter announcing this was delayed owing to her 'absence touring the rivers of England in a canoe'.⁵² Experiencing the peace of the English countryside from the perspective of its waterways was a favourite escape for Barbara during this period. She went with a friend, Diana Rhodes, and they took no tent or other protection from the weather, preferring to sleep in the cramped canoe, and enjoying many incidents involving water rats, weirs and irate swans.⁵³

In the process of memory people use to construct a linear story of their lives, there are often episodes or events which acquire emblematic status. One such in Barbara Wootton's life was her experience of being asked to lecture outside Girton to other university undergraduates in Part II of the Economics Tripos. 'People don't any longer believe the stories (though they are true) of what used to be,' she said of this. 'We all know the days when we couldn't take our degrees perhaps, but stories of things like the first lectures that I ever gave in Cambridge when the Economics Board, who were unusually progressive, asked me if I would give some compulsory lectures – lectures for compulsory subjects for the Economics Tripos, and very nervously I said "Yes", and the General Board of Studies said – "We can't prevent this person from lecturing, but since she is not a Member of the University we cannot advertise her lectures in the University Reporter" ... Well now, things are very different today, nobody believes this; I sometimes wonder if I made it up myself.'⁵⁴ *The Cambridge University Reporter* for 12 January 1921 listed under 'Lectures proposed by the Special Board for Economics and Politics' a series by a Mr Henderson on 'Economic Functions of Government'. A footnote added, 'This course will be delivered during the Lent term by Mrs Wootton in the Girton Lecture Room, St Edward's Passage, on Tuesdays and Saturdays at 9'.⁵⁵ Barbara did not remember feeling any resentment at the time: 'I suppose women in my position were so accustomed to what we would now regard as outrageous insults that we took them as all in a day's work'.⁵⁶ However, her disguise as Mr Henderson was cited as quite 'disgraceful' by the famous Keynes in the case he put against the humbug of the Cambridge opposition to women: it was disgraceful, he said, that Barbara Wootton's name appeared only in a footnote to the lecture list, and that the male teachers were debarred from electing their women colleagues to Boards of Studies, 'however useful we may deem the assistance of particular individuals to be'.⁵⁷ Hubert Henderson, the kindly liberal economist who lent his name to the

arrangement whereby Mrs Wootton was permitted to render her assistance, was a brilliant lecturer on his own account, and author of a famous textbook on *Supply and Demand*; he subsequently led a distinguished career as an Oxbridge academic and as economics advisor to various governments.⁵⁸

It was the first time a woman had given university lectures at Cambridge. Barbara was only twenty-four, and her sole previous experience of teaching had been the do-gooders at Westfield. When she first started giving the Cambridge lectures, she was terribly nervous. She wore a green suit she had made herself. 'The skirt had an elastic band round the waist and I was so worried that it might break, that I made two skirts and wore one on top of the other.'⁵⁹ Perhaps the experience of lecturing to men altered her character forever, as Alfred Marshall predicted. The economist Austin Robinson took the Economics Tripos in 1922 (having, like Barbara, deserted Classics) and he sat at her feet when she gave the lectures; he was grateful to her for helping him to defeat in the Tripos one of his examiners 'who, I understand, wrote the paper on that subject – a young London School of Economics Lecturer called Hugh Dalton'⁶⁰ – a man who would subsequently become a leading Labour politician and a friend of Barbara's. Robinson was lectured to by many clever economists of that generation – Keynes, Arthur Pigou, Dennis Robertson, Frederick Lavington, Gerald Shove, Hubert Henderson himself – but Barbara was the best of the lot: 'Tall, smartly turned out, and always immensely audible and clear'. Only later did Robinson realize she was exactly the same age as himself, and that it must have been quite a challenge lecturing to an audience mostly made up of men who were her exact contemporaries or older.⁶¹ Unlike them, and all male lecturers, Mrs Wootton did not wear an academic gown when she lectured; she was not entitled to, being a woman with no official degree.⁶² Another of Barbara's students, Kingsley Martin, the future editor of the *New Statesman*, remembered her 'as a slim, dark, intense woman' when he arrived in Cambridge as an undergraduate in 1919. 'She had the reputation of being a first-rate classical scholar.' He admitted to finding her 'extremely attractive' but was too immature and too interested in other things to do anything about it – one gains the sense of a mutually missed opportunity here.⁶³ They thought of her as a war widow, and she was much respected. It was probably around this time that the liquid-eyed, long-haired (though the hair is arranged 'up') photographs of Barbara give way to the much more serviceable ones. In all the photographs, she is a strikingly handsome woman, but in none of them is she smiling.

The other thing Kingsley Martin remembered was Barbara's close involvement in Cambridge socialist politics through the University Labour Club. She remembered this as the chief source of her intellectual stimulation at the time. The Cambridge

socialists met and argued and enjoyed one another's company, and not incidentally designed the future. There were the Cambridge dons Maurice Dobb and R.B. Braithwaite, scientists Pat Blackett and J.D. Bernal, and Kingsley Martin. It was through the University Labour Club that Barbara first met Beatrice and Sidney Webb at a country house in Sussex in the company of Kingsley Martin, Bertrand and Dora Russell, Harold and Frida Laski, Eileen Power and others. Barbara heard heated arguments about Guild socialism, and about events in China and Japan, and she listened to Bertrand Russell accusing Beatrice Webb of only liking the Japanese because they were efficient and sanitary, and of disliking the Chinese because they had no urinals at their railway stations.⁶⁴

Giving lectures disguised as Hubert Henderson proved to have hidden advantages. Because Barbara was not a member of the University, the fees that students had to pay for the course could not go to her College, which was the normal arrangement. Instead she was told to bill all the students individually (except the first, who was quaintly always treated as a 'free sample'). She waited until the second lecture to assess how much money she might earn from this source, and, when most of the first considerable audience reappeared, she went to the shop round the corner and bought her first typewriter.⁶⁵ It would be nice to think that it was on this machine that she typed her first full-length academic paper, 'Classical Principles and Modern Views of Labour', which appeared in *The Economic Journal* in March 1920,⁶⁶ a month before her twenty-third birthday, but the timing is wrong – the paper came before the typewriter. This first academic publication was a dense fourteen-page engagement with the implications of the clause contained in the 1919 Versailles Peace Treaty stipulating that 'labour should not be regarded merely as a commodity or article of commerce'.⁶⁷ Barbara argued that the only way in which this could happen was through the introduction of socialism, which would organize the labour of human beings on moral principles very different from the profit motive underscoring capitalism. She doubted whether the authors of the phrase which headed the Labour Charter of the Peace Treaty had adequately realized what a 'radical reconstruction of industry' their dictum implied.⁶⁸ Margaret Cole called it 'cloud-cuckooland economics'.⁶⁹

The style of Barbara's early papers was designed to appeal to a conventional academic audience, and they lacked the accessibility of her later writings on economics. At this stage in her life, she was still concerned to impress other economists with her ability in the subject, and the path of her later detachment from the unreal world of neoclassical economics was only beginning to loom mistily ahead. In 1921, she gave a paper at the British Association Meeting in Edinburgh in the prestigious company of names such as William Beveridge, Josiah Stamp, and Edwin Cannan. Lynda Grier,

the economist whose advice Barbara had taken on the reading of economics texts, talked about vocational training and the labour of women; Barbara's paper had the impressively long title of 'Self-supporting Industries; An Inquiry Into the Principle of Regulating Wages and Provision against Unemployment in Accordance with Industrial Capacity'.⁷⁰ The reviews of economics books she was commissioned to write for *The Economic Journal* by Keynes, its editor from 1911 to 1944, address the interests of academic economists too, although signs of the older Barbara's irritation with misprints and, more seriously, with the extreme tendency of many economists to dress up common-sense as 'laws' of this and that, do become increasingly evident.⁷¹ Her objection to the reverence for Marshallian economics and other outdated pre-war treatises begins to emerge: students of economics, she declared in a review of one 1920 economics textbook, are unfortunately apt 'to assume with sublime academicism that the conditions described in these volumes are as eternal as the principles predicated of them ... The economist is rightly sensitive to the charge of unreality'.⁷² Another early article gives rein to a rather impenetrable set of reflections about the moral values of contemporary civilization in relation to 'the theistic hypothesis'. 'Is Progress an Illusion?' was published in *The Hibbert Journal* – a quarterly review of religion, theology and philosophy – in 1920.⁷³ It is a very clever piece, laced with Greek and Latin quotations (a sense of Adela's approbation lurks in the background), and it is quite impossible to tell from it whether the author, a 'Mrs J.W. Wootton', is or is not a believer. She would later acknowledge in her autobiography that these were the years in which she disposed of religion, became to all intents and purposes a pacifist, and developed an analytical and political rejection of the class system.

Despite the unfriendly treatment of women at Cambridge, life as a lecturer at Girton was very comfortable. Barbara had no domestic responsibilities, and the bath water was always hot. She was lucky enough to be given the most attractive set of rooms in the College, with a 'charming polygonal window seat overlooking the garden'.⁷⁴ Nestled in the Girton archives is a watercolour sketch of Barbara's sitting-room, probably painted by the historian Helen Maud Cam, who became a Fellow at Girton in 1921.⁷⁵ The painting shows part of the window, the tall trees outside, and a cushioned window seat in front, with a small table and a vase of tulips. The exterior view is hardly altered today, though the window seat has become an extension of a modern desk, the columns and architraves in front of the window have been repainted yellow, and the curtains have also changed their colour.

When not engaged in nervously teaching male undergraduates, Barbara took some part in the non-academic life of the College. In the Lent term of 1921, she followed a performance by staff for the students of Molière's *Les Femmes Savantes* given by the Modern Languages Club with another amusing entertainment in aid

of the Imperial War Relief Fund.⁷⁶ However, the emotional devastation of Jack's death restrained her. She recommended life as a don in an Oxbridge women's college as one of the 'most sheltered lives' available to an unmarried woman.⁷⁷ The trouble was, Barbara did not really want to be sheltered. The Girton job did not occupy all her time, a fact she admitted to the College Secretary when negotiating her resignation. It was not where her heart lay. Her heart lay in the real world of socialist public policy.⁷⁸ She may also have felt that she needed to leave Cambridge in order to separate herself from her family, particularly her mother. When Barbara's appointment to Girton had been announced in *The Girton Review*, the news was followed in its pages by a piece entitled 'Women at Cambridge' by Adela Adam.⁷⁹ Barbara needed to become a woman *not* at Cambridge, and the socialist fervour which now increasingly gripped her drove her to seek more appropriate and overtly democratic outlets in London: extra-mural classes, the Workers' Educational Association and other such bodies. After a day thus spent she would return on the last train to Cambridge, exhausted but far more satisfied than after a day in the comfortable life of a Cambridge don.⁸⁰