CHAPTER THE TENTH

LADY HARMAN COMES OUT

§1

The treaty between Lady Harman and her husband which was to be her Great Charter, the constitutional basis of her freedoms throughout the rest of her married life, had many practical defects. The chief of these was that it was largely undocumented; it had been made piecemeal, in various ways, at different times and for the most part indirectly through diverse intermediaries. Charterson had introduced large vaguenesses by simply displaying more of his teeth at crucial moments, Mrs. Harman had conveyed things by hugging and weeping that were afterwards discovered to be indistinct; Sir Isaac writing from a bed of sickness had frequently been totally illegible. One cannot therefore detail the clauses of this agreement or give its provisions with any great precision; one can simply intimate the kind of understanding that had had an air of being arrived at. The working interpretations were still to come.

Before anything else it was manifestly conceded by Lady Harman that she would not run away again, and still more manifest that she undertook to break no more windows or do anything that might lead to a second police court scandal. And she was to be a true and faithful wife and comfort,

as a wife should be, to Sir Isaac. In return for that consideration and to ensure its continuance Sir Isaac came great distances from his former assumption of a matrimonial absolutism. She was to be granted all sorts of small autonomies,--the word autonomy was carefully avoided throughout but its spirit was omnipresent.

She was in particular to have a banking account for her dress and personal expenditure into which Sir Isaac would cause to be paid a hundred pounds monthly and it was to be private to herself alone until he chose to go through the cashed cheques and counterfoils. She was to be free to come and go as she saw fit, subject to a punctual appearance at meals, the comfort and dignity of Sir Isaac and such specific engagements as she might make with him. She might have her own friends, but there the contract became a little misty; a time was to come when Sir Isaac was to betray a conviction that the only proper friends that a woman can have are women. There were also non-corroborated assurances as to the privacy of her correspondence. The second Rolls-Royce car was to be entirely at her service, and Clarence was to be immediately supplemented by a new and more deferential man, and as soon as possible assisted to another situation and replaced. She was to have a voice in the further furnishing of Black Strand and in the arrangement of its garden. She was to read what she chose and think what she liked within her head without too minute or suspicious an examination by Sir Isaac, and short of flat contradiction at his own table she was to be free to express her own opinions in any manner becoming a lady. But more particularly if she found her ideas infringing upon the management or

influence of the International Bread and Cake Stores, she was to convey her objections and ideas in the first instance privately and confidentially to Sir Isaac.

Upon this point he displayed a remarkable and creditable sensitiveness. His pride in that organization was if possible greater than his original pride in his wife, and probably nothing in all the jarring of their relationship had hurt him more than her accessibility to hostile criticism and the dinner-table conversation with Charterson and Blenker that had betrayed this fact. He began to talk about it directly she returned to him. His protestations and explanations were copious and heart-felt. It was perhaps the chief discovery made by Lady Harman at this period of reconstruction that her husband's business side was not to be explained completely as a highly energetic and elaborate avarice. He was no doubt acquisitive and retentive and mean-spirited, but these were merely the ugly aspects of a disposition that involved many other factors. He was also incurably a schemer. He liked to fit things together, to dove-tail arrangements, to devise economies, to spread ingeniously into new fields, he had a love of organization and contrivance as disinterested as an artist's love for the possibilities of his medium. He would rather have made a profit of ten per cent. out of a subtly planned shop than thirty by an unforeseen accident. He wouldn't have cheated to get money for the world. He knew he was better at figuring out expenditures and receipts than most people and he was as touchy about his reputation for this kind of cleverness as any poet or painter for his fame. Now that he had awakened to the idea that his wife

was capable of looking into and possibly even understanding his business, he was passionately anxious to show her just how wonderfully he had done it all, and when he perceived she was in her large, unskilled, helpless way, intensely concerned for all the vast multitude of incompetent or partially competent young women who floundered about in badly paid employment in our great cities, he grasped at once at the opportunity of recovering her lost interest and respect by doing some brilliant feats of contrivance in that direction. Why shouldn't he? He had long observed with a certain envy the admirable advertisement such firms as Lever and Cadbury and Burroughs & Wellcome gained from their ostentatiously able and generous treatment of their workpeople, and it seemed to him conceivable that in the end it might not be at all detrimental to his prosperity to put his hand to this long neglected piece of social work. The Babs Wheeler business had been a real injury in every way to the International Bread and Cake Stores and even if he didn't ultimately go to all the lengths his wife seemed to contemplate, he was resolved at any rate that an affair of that kind should not occur again. The expedition to Marienbad took with it a secretary who was also a stenographer. A particularly smart young inspector and Graper, the staff manager, had brisk four-day holidays once or twice for consultation purposes; Sir Isaac's rabbit-like architect was in attendance for a week and the Harmans returned to Putney with the first vivid greens of late March,--for the Putney Hill house was to be reopened and Black Strand reserved now for week-end and summer use--with plans already drawn out for four residential Hostels in London primarily for the girl waitresses of the International Stores who might have no

homes or homes at an inconvenient distance, and, secondarily, if any vacant accommodation remained over, for any other employed young women of the same class....

§2

Lady Harman came back to England from the pine-woods and bright order and regimen and foreign novelty of their Bohemian Kur-Ort, in a state of renewed perplexity. Already that undocumented Magna Charta was manifestly not working upon the lines she had anticipated. The glosses Sir Isaac put upon it were extensive and remarkable and invariably in the direction of restricting her liberties and resuming controls she had supposed abandoned.

Marienbad had done wonders for him; his slight limp had disappeared, his nervous energy was all restored; except for a certain increase in his natural irritability and occasional panting fits, he seemed as well as he had ever been. At the end of their time at the Kur he was even going for walks. Once he went halfway up the Podhorn on foot. And with every increment in his strength his aggressiveness increased, his recognition of her new freedoms was less cordial and her sense of contrition and responsibility diminished. Moreover, as the scheme of those Hostels, which had played so large a part in her conception of their reconciliation, grew more and more definite, she perceived more and more that it was not certainly that fine and humanizing thing she had

presumed it would be. She began to feel more and more that it might be merely an extension of Harman methods to cheap boarding-houses for young people. But faced with a mass of detailed concrete projects and invited to suggest modifications she was able to realize for the first time how vague, how ignorant and incompetent her wishes had been, how much she had to understand and how much she had to discover before she could meet Sir Isaac with his "I'm doing it all for you, Elly. If you don't like it, you tell me what you don't like and I'll alter it. But just vague doubting! One can't do anything with vague doubting."

She felt that once back in England out of this picturesque toylike German world she would be able to grasp realities again and deal with these things. She wanted advice, she wanted to hear what people said of her ideas. She would also, she imagined, begin to avail herself of those conceded liberties which their isolation together abroad and her husband's constant need of her presence had so far prevented her from tasting. She had an idea that Susan Burnet might prove suggestive about the Hostels.

And moreover, if now and then she could have a good talk with someone understanding and intelligent, someone she could trust, someone who cared enough for her to think with her and for her....

§3

We have traced thus far the emergence of Lady Harman from that state of dutiful subjection and social irresponsibility which was the lot of woman in the past to that limited, ill-defined and quite unsecured freedom which is her present condition. And now we have to give an outline of the ideas of herself and her uses and what she had to do, which were forming themselves in her mind. She had made a determination of herself, which carried her along the lines of her natural predisposition, to duty, to service. There she displayed that acceptance of responsibility which is so much more often a feminine than a masculine habit of thinking. But she brought to the achievement of this determination a discriminating integrity of mind that is more frequently masculine than feminine. She wanted to know clearly what she was undertaking and how far its consequences would reach and how it was related to other things.

Her confused reading during the last few years and her own observation and such leakages of fact into her life as the talk of Susan Burnet, had all contributed to her realization that the world was full of needless discomfort and hardships and failure, due to great imperfectly apprehended injustices and maladjustments in the social system, and recently it had been borne in upon her, upon the barbed point of the London Lion and the quick tongue of Susan, that if any particular class of people was more answerable than any other for these evils, it was the people of leisure and freedom like herself, who had time to think, and the directing organizing people like her husband, who had power to change. She was called upon to do something, at times the call

became urgent, and she could not feel any assurance which it was of the many vague and conflicting suggestions that came drifting to her that she had to do. Her idea of Hostels for the International waitresses had been wrung out of her prematurely during her earlier discussions with her husband. She did not feel that it was anything more than a partial remedy for a special evil. She wanted something more general than that, something comprehensive enough to answer completely so wide a question as "What ought I to be doing with all my life?" In the honest simplicity of her nature she wanted to find an answer to that. Out of the confusion of voices about us she hoped to be able to disentangle directions for her life. Already she had been reading voraciously: while she was still at Marienbad she had written to Mr. Brumley and he had sent her books and papers, advanced and radical in many cases, that she might know, "What are people thinking?"

Many phrases from her earlier discussions with Sir Isaac stuck in her mind in a curiously stimulating way and came back to her as she read. She recalled him, for instance, with his face white and his eyes red and his flat hand sawing at her, saying: "I dessay I'm all wrong, I dessay I don't know anything about anything and all those chaps you read, Bernud Shaw, and Gosworthy, and all the rest of them are wonderfully clever; but you tell me, Elly, what they say we've got to do! You tell me that. You go and ask some of those chaps just what they want a man like me to do.... They'll ask me to endow a theatre or run a club for novelists or advertise the lot of them in the windows of my International Stores or something. And that's about all it comes to. You go and see if I'm not

right. They grumble and they grumble; I don't say there's not a lot to grumble at, but give me something they'll back themselves for all they're worth as good to get done.... That's where I don't agree with all these idees. They're Wind, Elly, Weak wind at that."

It is distressing to record how difficult it was for Lady Harman to form even the beginnings of a disproof of that. Her life through all this second phase of mitigated autonomy was an intermittent pilgrimage in search of that disproof. She could not believe that things as they were, this mass of hardships, cruelties, insufficiencies and heartburnings were the ultimate wisdom and possibility of human life, yet when she went from them to the projects that would replace or change them she seemed to pass from things of overwhelming solidity to matters more thin and flimsy than the twittering of sparrows on the gutter. So soon as she returned to London she started upon her search for a solution; she supplemented Mr. Brumley's hunt for books with her own efforts, she went to meetings--sometimes Sir Isaac took her, once or twice she was escorted by Mr. Brumley, and presently her grave interest and her personal charm had gathered about her a circle of companionable friends. She tried to talk to people and made great efforts to hear people who seemed authoritative and wise and leaderlike, talking.

There were many interruptions to this research, but she persevered. Quite early she had an illness that ended in a miscarriage, an accident for which she was by no means inconsolable, and before she had completely recovered from that Sir Isaac fell ill again, the first of a

series of relapses that necessitated further foreign travel--always in elaborately comfortable trains with maid, courier, valet, and secretary, to some warm and indolent southward place. And few people knew how uncertain her liberties were. Sir Isaac was the victim of an increasing irritability, at times he had irrational outbursts of distrust that would culminate in passionate outbreaks and scenes that were truncated by an almost suffocating breathlessness. On several occasions he was on the verge of quarrelling violently with her visitors, and he would suddenly oblige her to break engagements, pour abuse upon her and bring matters back to the very verge of her first revolt. And then he would break her down by pitiful appeals. The cylinders of oxygen would be resorted to, and he would emerge from the crisis, rather rueful, tamed and quiet for the time.

He was her chief disturbance. Her children were healthy children and fell in with the routines of governess and tutor that their wealth provided. She saw them often, she noted their increasing resemblance to their father, she did her best to soften the natural secretiveness and aggressiveness of their manners, she watched their teachers and intervened whenever the influences about them seemed to her to need intervention, she dressed them and gave them presents and tried to believe she loved them, and as Sir Isaac's illness increased she took a larger and larger share in the direction of the household....

Through all these occupations and interruptions and immediacies she went trying to comprehend and at times almost believing she comprehended

life, and then the whole spectacle of this modern world of which she was a part would seem to break up again into a multitude of warring and discordant fragments having no conceivable common aim or solution. Those moments of unifying faith and confidence, that glowed so bravely and never endured, were at once tantalizing and sustaining. She could never believe but that ultimately she would not grasp and hold--something....

Many people met her and liked her and sought to know more of her; Lady Beach-Mandarin and Lady Viping were happy to be her social sponsors, the Blenkers and the Chartersons met her out and woke up cautiously to this new possibility; her emergence was rapid in spite of the various delays and interruptions I have mentioned and she was soon in a position to realize just how little one meets when one meets a number of people and how little one hears when one has much conversation. Her mind was presently crowded with confused impressions of pleasant men evading her agreeably and making out of her gravities an opportunity for bright sayings, and of women being vaguely solemn and quite indefinite.

She went into the circle of movements, was tried over by Mrs. Hubert Plessington, she questioned this and that promoter of constructive schemes, and instead of mental meat she was asked to come upon committees and sounded for subscriptions. On several occasions, escorted by Mr. Brumley--some instinct made her conceal or minimize his share in these expeditions to her husband--she went as inconspicuously as possible to the backs of public meetings in which she understood great

questions were being discussed or great changes inaugurated. Some public figures she even followed up for a time, distrusting her first impressions.

She became familiar with the manners and bearing of our platform class, with the solemn dummy-like chairman or chairwoman, saying a few words, the alert secretary or organizer, the prominent figures sitting with an air of grave responsibility, generously acting an intelligent attention to others until the moment came for them themselves to deliver. Then with an ill-concealed relief some would come to the footlights, some leap up in their places with a tenoring eagerness, some would be facetious and some speak with neuralgic effort, some were impertinent, some propitiatory, some dull, but all were--disappointing, disappointing. God was not in any of them. A platform is no setting for the shy processes of an honest human mind,--we are all strained to artificiality in the excessive glare of attention that beats upon us there. One does not exhibit opinions at a meeting, one acts them, the very truth must rouge its cheeks and blacken its eyebrows to tell, and to Lady Harman it was the acting chiefly and the make-up that was visible. They didn't grip her, they didn't lift her, they failed to convince her even of their own belief in what they supported.

§4

But occasionally among the multitude of conversations that gave her

nothing, there would come some talk that illuminated and for the time almost reconciled her to the effort and the loss of time and distraction her social expeditions involved. One evening at one of Lady Tarvrille's carelessly compiled parties she encountered Edgar Wilkins the novelist and got the most suggestive glimpses of his attitude towards himself and towards the world of intellectual ferment to which he belonged. She had been taken down by an amiable but entirely uninteresting permanent official who when the time came turned his stereotyped talk over to the other side of him with a quiet mechanical indifference, and she was left for a little while in silence until Wilkins had disengaged himself.

He was a flushed man with untidy hair, and he opened at once with an appeal to her sympathies.

"Oh! Bother!" he said. "I say,--I've eaten that mutton. I didn't notice. One eats too much at these affairs. One doesn't notice at the time and then afterwards one finds out."

She was a little surprised at his gambit and could think of nothing but a kindly murmur.

"Detestable thing," he said; "my body."

"But surely not," she tried and felt as she said it that was a trifle bold.

"You're all right," he said making her aware he saw her. "But I've this thing that wheezes and fattens at the slightest excuse and--it encumbers me--bothers me to take exercise.... But I can hardly expect you to be interested in my troubles, can I?"

He made an all too manifest attempt to read her name on the slip of card that lay before her among the flowers and as manifestly succeeded. "We people who write and paint and all that sort of thing are a breed of insatiable egotists, Lady Harman. With the least excuse. Don't you think so?"

"Not--not exceptionally," she said.

"Exceptionally," he insisted.

"It isn't my impression," she said. "You're--franker."

"But someone was telling me--you've been taking impressions of us lately. I mean all of us people who go flapping ideas about in the air. Somebody--was it Lady Beach-Mandarin?--was saying you'd come out looking for Intellectual Heroes--and found Bernard Shaw.... But what could you have expected?"

"I've been trying to find out and understand what people are thinking. I want ideas."

"It's disheartening, isn't it?"

"It's--perplexing sometimes."

"You go to meetings, and try to get to the bottom of Movements, and you want to meet and know the people who write the wonderful things? Get at the wonderful core of it?"

"One feels there are things going on."

"Great illuminating things."

"Well--yes."

"And when you see those great Thinkers and Teachers and Guides and Brave Spirits and High Brows generally----"

He laughed and stopped just in time on the very verge of taking pheasant.

"Oh, take it away," he cried sharply.

"We've all been through that illusion, Lady Harman," he went on.

"But I don't like to think----Aren't Great Men after all--great?"

"In their ways, in their places--Yes. But not if you go up to them and look at them. Not at the dinner table, not in their beds.... What a time of disillusionment you must have had!

"You see, Lady Harman," he said, leaning back from his empty plate, inclining himself confidentially to her ear and speaking in a privy tone; "it's in the very nature of things that we--if I may put myself into the list--we ideologists, should be rather exceptionally loose and untrustworthy and disappointing men. Rotters--to speak plain contemporary English. If you come to think of it, it has to be so."

"But----" she protested.

He met her eye firmly. "It has to be."

"Why?"

"The very qualities that make literature entertaining, vigorous, inspiring, revealing, wonderful, beautiful and--all that sort of thing, make its producers--if you will forgive the word again--rotters."

She smiled and lifted her eyebrows protestingly.

"Sensitive nervous tissue," he said with a finger up to emphasize his words. "Quick responsiveness to stimulus, a vivid, almost uncontrollable, expressiveness; that's what you want in your literary

man."

"Yes," said Lady Harman following cautiously. "Yes, I suppose it is."

"Can you suppose for a moment that these things conduce to self-control, to reserve, to consistency, to any of the qualities of a trustworthy man?... Of course you can't. And so we aren't trustworthy, we aren't consistent. Our virtues are our vices.... My life," said Mr. Wilkins still more confidentially, "won't bear examination. But that's by the way. It need not concern us now."

"But Mr. Brumley?" she asked on the spur of the moment.

"I'm not talking of him," said Wilkins with careless cruelty. "He's restrained. I mean the really imaginative people, the people with vision, the people who let themselves go. You see now why they are rotten, why they must be rotten. (No! No! take it away. I'm talking.) I feel so strongly about this, about the natural and necessary disreputableness of everybody who produces reputable writing--and for the matter of that, art generally--that I set my face steadily against all these attempts that keep on cropping up to make Figures of us. We aren't Figures, Lady Harman; it isn't our line. Of all the detestable aspects of the Victorian period surely that disposition to make Figures of its artists and literary men was the most detestable. Respectable Figures--Examples to the young. The suppressions, the coverings up that had to go on, the white-washing of Dickens,--who was more than a bit of

a rip, you know, the concealment of Thackeray's mistresses. Did you know he had mistresses? Oh rather! And so on. It's like that bust of Jove--or Bacchus was it?--they pass off as Plato, who probably looked like any other literary Grub. That's why I won't have anything to do with these Academic developments that my friend Brumley--Do you know him by the way?--goes in for. He's the third man down----You do know him. And he's giving up the Academic Committee, is he? I'm glad he's seen it at last. What is the good of trying to have an Academy and all that, and put us in uniform and make out we are Somebodies, and respectable enough to be shaken hands with by George and Mary, when as a matter of fact we are, by our very nature, a collection of miscellaneous scandals----We must be. Bacon, Shakespear, Byron, Shelley--all the stars.... No, Johnson wasn't a star, he was a character by Boswell.... Oh! great things come out of us, no doubt, our arts are the vehicles of wonder and hope, the world is dead without these things we produce, but that's no reason why--why the mushroom-bed should follow the mushrooms into the soup, is it? Perfectly fair image. (No, take it away.)"

He paused and then jumped in again as she was on the point of speaking.

"And you see even if our temperaments didn't lead inevitably to our--dipping rather, we should still have to--dip. Asking a writer or a poet to be seemly and Academic and so on, is like asking an eminent surgeon to be stringently decent. It's--you see, it's incompatible. Now a king or a butler or a family solicitor--if you like."

He paused again.

Lady Harman had been following him with an attentive reluctance.

"But what are we to do," she asked, "we people who are puzzled by life, who want guidance and ideas and--help, if--if all the people we look to for ideas are----"

"Bad characters."

"Well,--it's your theory, you know--bad characters?"

Wilkins answered with the air of one who carefully disentangles a complex but quite solvable problem. "It doesn't follow," he said, "that because a man is a bad character he's not to be trusted in matters where character--as we commonly use the word--doesn't come in. These sensitives, these--would you mind if I were to call myself an Æolian Harp?--these Æolian Harps; they can't help responding to the winds of heaven. Well,--listen to them. Don't follow them, don't worship them, don't even honour them, but listen to them. Don't let anyone stop them from saying and painting and writing and singing what they want to. Freedom, canvas and attention, those are the proper honours for the artist, the poet and the philosopher. Listen to the noise they make, watch the stuff they produce, and presently you will find certain things among the multitude of things that are said and shown and put out and published, something--light in your darkness--a writer for you,

something for you. Nobody can have a greater contempt for artists and writers and poets and philosophers than I, oh! a squalid crew they are, mean, jealous, pugnacious, disgraceful in love, disgraceful--but out of it all comes the greatest serenest thing, the mind of the world, Literature. Nasty little midges, yes,--but fireflies--carrying light for the darkness."

His face was suddenly lit by enthusiasm and she wondered that she could have thought it rather heavy and commonplace. He stopped abruptly and glanced beyond her at her other neighbour who seemed on the verge of turning to them again. "If I go on," he said with a voice suddenly dropped, "I shall talk loud."

"You know," said Lady Harman, in a halty undertone, "you--you are too hard upon--upon clever people, but it is true. I mean it is true in a way...."

"Go on, I understand exactly what you are saying."

"I mean, there are ideas. It's just that, that is so--so----I mean they seem never to be just there and always to be present."

"Like God. Never in the flesh--now. A spirit everywhere. You think exactly as I do, Lady Harman. It is just that. This is a great time, so great that there is no chance for great men. Every chance for great work. And we're doing it. There is a wind--blowing out of heaven. And

when beautiful people like yourself come into things----"

"I try to understand," she said. "I want to understand. I want--I want not to miss life."

He was on the verge of saying something further and then his eyes wandered down the table and he stopped short.

He ended his talk as he had begun it with "Bother! Lady Tarvrille, Lady Harman, is trying to catch your eye."

Lady Harman turned her face to her hostess and answered her smile. Wilkins caught at his chair and stood up.

"It would have been jolly to have talked some more," he said.

"I hope we shall."

"Well!" said Wilkins, with a sudden hardness in his eyes and she was swept away from him.

She found no chance of talking to him upstairs, Sir Isaac came for her early; but she went in hope of another meeting.

It did not come. For a time that expectation gave dinners and luncheon parties a quite appreciable attraction. Then she told Agatha Alimony.

"I've never met him but that once," she said.

"One doesn't meet him now," said Agatha, deeply.

"But why?"

Deep significance came into Miss Alimony's eyes. "My dear," she whispered, and glanced about them. "Don't you know?"

Lady Harman was a radiant innocence.

And then Miss Alimony began in impressive undertones, with awful omissions like pits of darkness and with such richly embroidered details as serious spinsters enjoy, adding, indeed, two quite new things that came to her mind as the tale unfolded, and, naming no names and giving no chances of verification or reply, handed on the fearful and at that time extremely popular story of the awful wickedness of Wilkins the author.

Upon reflection Lady Harman perceived that this explained all sorts of things in their conversation and particularly the flash of hardness at the end.

Even then, things must have been hanging over him....

§5

And while Lady Harman was making these meritorious and industrious attempts to grasp the significance of life and to get some clear idea of her social duty, the developments of those Hostels she had started--she now felt so prematurely--was going on. There were times when she tried not to think of them, turned her back on them, fled from them, and times when they and what she ought to do about them and what they ought to be and what they ought not to be, filled her mind to the exclusion of every other topic. Rigorously and persistently Sir Isaac insisted they were hers, asked her counsel, demanded her appreciation, presented as it were his recurring bill for them.

Five of them were being built, not four but five. There was to be one, the largest, in a conspicuous position in Bloomsbury near the British Museum, one in a conspicuous position looking out upon Parliament Hill, one conspicuously placed upon the Waterloo Road near St. George's Circus, one at Sydenham, and one in the Kensington Road which was designed to catch the eye of people going to and fro to the various exhibitions at Olympia.

In Sir Isaac's study at Putney there was a huge and rather splendid-looking morocco portfolio on a stand, and this portfolio bore in excellent gold lettering the words, International Bread and Cake Hostels. It was her husband's peculiar pleasure after dinner to take her to turn over this with him; he would sit pencil in hand, while she,

poised at his request upon the arm of his chair, would endorse a multitude of admirable modifications and suggestions. These hostels were to be done--indeed they were being done--by Sir Isaac's tame architect, and the interlacing yellow and mauve tiles, and the Doulton ware mouldings that were already familiar to the public as the uniform of the Stores, were to be used upon the façades of the new institutions. They were to be boldly labelled

INTERNATIONAL HOSTELS

right across the front.

The plans revealed in every case a site depth as great as the frontage, and the utmost ingenuity had been used to utilize as much space as possible.

"Every room we get in," said Sir Isaac, "adds one to the denominator in the cost;" and carried his wife back to her schooldays. At last she had found sense in fractions. There was to be a series of convenient and spacious rooms on the ground floor, a refectory, which might be cleared and used for meetings--"dances," said Lady Harman. "Hardly the sort of thing we want 'em to get up to," said Sir Isaac--various offices, the matron's apartments--"We ought to begin thinking about matrons," said Sir Isaac;--a bureau, a reading-room and a library--"We can pick good, serious stuff for them," said Sir Isaac, "instead of their filling their heads with trash"--one or two workrooms with tables for cutting out and

sewing; this last was an idea of Susan Burnet's. Upstairs there was to be a beehive of bedrooms, floor above floor, and each floor as low as the building regulations permitted. There were to be long dormitories with cubicles at three-and-sixpence a week--make your own beds--and separate rooms at prices ranging from four-and-sixpence to seven-and-sixpence. Every three cubicles and every bedroom had lavatory basins with hot and cold water; there were pull-out drawers under the beds and a built-in chest of drawers, a hanging cupboard, a looking-glass and a radiator in each cubicle, and each floor had a box-room. It was ship-shape.

"A girl can get this cubicle for three-and-six a week," said Sir Isaac, tapping the drawing before him with his pencil. "She can get her breakfast with a bit of bacon or a sausage for two shillings a week, and she can get her high tea, with cold meat, good potted salmon, shrimp paste, jam and cetera, for three-and-six a week. Say her bus fares and lunch out mean another four shillings. That means she can get along on about twelve-and-six a week, comfortable, read the papers, have a book out of the library.... There's nothing like it to be got now for twice the money. The sort of thing they have now is one room, dingy, badly fitted, extra for coals.

"That's the answer to your problem, Elly," he said. "There we are. Every girl who doesn't live at home can live here--with a matron to keep her eye on her.... And properly run, Elly, properly run the thing's going to pay two or three per cent,--let alone the advertisement for the Stores.

"We can easily make these Hostels obligatory on all our girls who don't live at their own homes," he said. "That ought to keep them off the streets, if anything can. I don't see how even Miss Babs Wheeler can have the face to strike against that.

"And then we can arrange with some of the big firms, drapers' shops and all that sort of thing near each hostel, to take over most of our other cubicle space. A lot of them--overflow.

"Of course we'll have to make sure the girls get in at night." He reached out for a ground floor plan of the Bloomsbury establishment which was to be the first built. "If," he said, "we were to have a sort of porter's lodge with a book--and make 'em ring a bell after eleven say--just here...."

He took out a silver pencil case and got to work.

Lady Harman's expression as she leant over him became thoughtful.

There were points about this project that gave her the greatest misgivings; that matron, keeping her eye on the girls, that carefully selected library, the porter's bell, these casual allusions to "discipline" that set her thinking of scraps of the Babs Wheeler controversy. There was a regularity, an austerity about this project that chilled her, she hardly knew why. Her own vague intentions had been

an amiable, hospitable, agreeably cheap establishment to which the homeless feminine employees in London could resort freely and cheerfully, and it was only very slowly that she perceived that her husband was by no means convinced of the spontaneity of their coming. He seemed always glancing at methods for compelling them to come in and oppressions when that compulsion had succeeded. There had already hovered over several of these anticipatory evenings, his very manifest intention to have very carefully planned "Rules." She felt there lay ahead of them much possibility for divergence of opinion about these "Rules." She foresaw a certain narrowness and hardness. She herself had made her fight against the characteristics of Sir Isaac and--perhaps she was lacking in that aristocratic feeling which comes so naturally to most successful middle-class people in England--she could not believe that what she had found bad and suffocating for herself could be agreeable and helpful for her poorer sisters.

It occurred to her to try the effect of the scheme upon Susan Burnet. Susan had such a knack of seeing things from unexpected angles. She contrived certain operations upon the study blinds, and then broached the business to Susan casually in the course of an enquiry into the welfare of the Burnet family.

Susan was evidently prejudiced against the idea.

"Yes," said Susan after various explanations and exhibitions, "but where's the home in it?"

"The whole thing is a home."

"Barracks I call it," said Susan. "Nobody ever felt at home in a room coloured up like that--and no curtains, nor vallances, nor toilet covers, nor anywhere where a girl can hang a photograph or anything. What girl's going to feel at home in a strange place like that?"

"They ought to be able to hang up photographs," said Lady Harman, making a mental note of it.

"And of course there'll be all sorts of Rules."

"Some rules."

"Homes, real homes don't have Rules. And I daresay--Fines."

"No, there shan't be any Fines," said Lady Harman quickly. "I'll see to that."

"You got to back up rules somehow--once you got 'em," said Susan. "And when you get a crowd, and no father and mother, and no proper family feeling, I suppose there's got to be Rules."

Lady Harman pointed out various advantages of the project.

"I'm not saying it isn't cheap and healthy and social," said Susan, "and if it isn't too strict I expect you'll get plenty of girls to come to it, but at the best it's an Institution, Lady Harman. It's going to be an Institution. That's what it's going to be."

She held the front elevation of the Bloomsbury Hostel in her hand and reflected.

"Of course for my part, I'd rather lodge with nice struggling believing Christian people anywhere than go into a place like that. It's the feeling of freedom, of being yourself and on your own. Even if the water wasn't laid on and I had to fetch it myself.... If girls were paid properly there wouldn't be any need of such places, none at all. It's the poverty makes 'em what they are.... And after all, somebody's got to lose the lodgers if this place gets them. Suppose this sort of thing grows up all over the place, it'll just be the story of the little bakers and little grocers and all those people over again. Why in London there are thousands of people just keep a home together by letting two or three rooms or boarding someone--and it stands to reason, they'll have to take less or lose the lodgers if this kind of thing's going to be done. Nobody isn't going to build a Hostel for them."

"No," said Lady Harman, "I never thought of them."

"Lots of 'em haven't anything in the world but their bits of furniture and their lease and there they are stuck and tied. There's Aunt Hannah,

Father's sister, she's like that. Sleeps in the basement and works and slaves, and often I've had to lend her ten shillings to pay the rent with, through her not being full. This sort of place isn't going to do much good to her."

Lady Harman surveyed the plan rather blankly. "I suppose it isn't."

"And then if you manage this sort of place easy and attractive, it's going to draw girls away from their homes. There's girls like Alice who'd do anything to get a bit of extra money to put on their backs and seem to think of nothing but chattering and laughing and going about. Such a place like this would be fine fun for Alice; in when she liked and out when she liked, and none of us to ask her questions. She'd be just the sort to go, and mother, who's had the upbringing of her, how's she to make up for Alice's ten shillings what she pays in every week? There's lots like Alice. She's not bad isn't Alice, she's a good girl and a good-hearted girl; I will say that for her, but she's shallow, say what you like she's shallow, she's got no thought and she's wild for pleasure, and sometimes it seems to me that that's as bad as being bad for all the good it does to anyone else in the world, and so I tell her. But of course she hasn't seen things as I've seen them and doesn't feel as I do about all these things...."

Thus Susan.

Her discourse so puzzled Lady Harman that she bethought herself of Mr.

Brumley and called in his only too readily accorded advice. She asked him to tea on a day when she knew unofficially that Sir Isaac would be away, she showed him the plans and sketched their probable development. Then with that charming confidence of hers in his knowledge and ability she put her doubts and fears before him. What did he really think of these places? What did he think of Susan Burnet's idea of ruined lodging-house keepers? "I used to think our stores were good things," she said. "Is this likely to be a good thing at all?"

Mr. Brumley said "Um" a great number of times and realized that he was a humbug. He fenced with her and affected sagacity for a time and suddenly he threw down his defences and confessed he knew as little of the business as she did. "But I see it is a complex question and--it's an interesting one too. May I enquire into it for you? I think I might be able to hunt up a few particulars...."

He went away in a glow of resolution.

Georgina was about the only intimate who regarded the new development without misgiving.

"You think you're going to do all sorts of things with these Hostels, Ella," she said, "but as a matter of fact they're bound to become just exactly what we've always wanted."

"And what may that be?" asked Mrs. Sawbridge over her macramé work.

"Strongholds for a garrison of suffragettes," said Georgina with the light of the Great Insane Movement in her eyes and a ringing note in her voice. "Fort Chabrols for women."

§6

For some months in a negative and occasionally almost negligent fashion Mr. Brumley had been living up to his impassioned resolve to be an unselfish lover of Lady Harman. He had been rather at loose ends intellectually, deprived of his old assumptions and habitual attitudes and rather chaotic in the matter of his new convictions. He had given most of his productive hours to the writing of a novel which was to be an entire departure from the Euphemia tradition. The more he got on with this, the more clearly he realized that it was essentially insignificant. When he re-read what he had written he was surprised by crudities where he had intended sincerities and rhetoric where the scheme had demanded passion. What was the matter with him? He was stirred that Lady Harman should send for him, and his inability to deal with her perplexities deepened his realization of the ignorance and superficiality he had so long masked even from himself beneath the tricks and pretensions of a gay scepticism. He went away fully resolved to grapple with the entire Hostel question, and he put the patched and tortured manuscript of the new novel aside with a certain satisfaction to do this.

The more he reflected upon the nature of this study he proposed for himself the more it attracted him. It was some such reality as this he had been wanting. He could presently doubt whether he would ever go back to his novel-writing again, or at least to the sort of novel-writing he had been doing hitherto. To invent stories to save middle-aged prosperous middle-class people from the distresses of thinking, is surely no work for a self-respecting man. Stevenson in the very deeps of that dishonourable traffic had realized as much and likened himself to a fille de joie, and Haggard, of the same school and period, had abandoned blood and thunder at the climax of his success for the honest study of agricultural conditions. The newer successes were turning out work, less and less conventional and agreeable and more and more stiffened with facts and sincerities.... He would show Lady Harman that a certain debonair quality he had always affected, wasn't incompatible with a powerful grasp of general conditions.... And she wanted this done. Suppose he did it in a way that made him necessary to her. Suppose he did it very well.

He set to work, and understanding as you do a certain quality of the chameleon in Mr. Brumley's moral nature, you will understand that he worked through a considerable variety of moods. Sometimes he worked with disinterested passion and sometimes he was greatly sustained by this thought that here was something that would weave him in with the gravities of her life and give him perhaps a new inlet to intimacy. And presently a third thing came to his help, and that was the discovery

that the questions arising out of this attempt to realize the importance of those Hostels, were in themselves very fascinating questions for an intelligent person.

Because before you have done with the business of the modern employé, you must, if you are an intelligent person, have taken a view of the whole vast process of social reorganization that began with the development of factory labour and big towns, and which is even now scarcely advanced enough for us to see its general trend. For a time Mr. Brumley did not realize the magnitude of the thing he was looking at; when he did, theories sprouted in his mind like mushrooms and he babbled with mental excitement. He came in a state of the utmost lucidity to explain his theories to Lady Harman, and they struck that lady at the time as being the most illuminating suggestions she had ever encountered. They threw an appearance of order, of process, over a world of trade and employment and competition that had hitherto seemed too complex and mysterious for any understanding.

"You see," said Mr. Brumley--they had met that day in Kensington Gardens and they were sitting side by side upon green chairs near the frozen writings of Physical Energy--"You see, if I may lecture a little, putting the thing as simply as possible, the world has been filling up new spaces ever since the discovery of America; all the period from then to about 1870, let us say, was a period of rapid increase of population in response to new opportunities of living and new fulnesses of life in every direction. During that time, four hundred years of it roughly,

there was a huge development of family life; to marry and rear a quite considerable family became the chief business of everybody, celibacy grew rare, monasteries and nunneries which had abounded vanished like things dissolving in a flood and even the priests became Protestant against celibacy and took unto themselves wives and had huge families. The natural checks upon increase, famine and pestilence, were lifted by more systematized communication and by scientific discovery; and altogether and as a consequence the world now has probably three or four times the human population it ever carried before. Everywhere in that period the family prevailed again, the prospering multiplying household; it was a return to the family, to the reproductive social grouping of early barbaric life, and naturally all the thought of the modern world which has emerged since the fifteenth century falls into this form. So I see it, Lady Harman. The generation of our grandfathers in the opening nineteenth century had two shaping ideas, two forms of thought, the family and progress, not realizing that that very progress which had suddenly reopened the doors of opportunity for the family that had revived the ancient injunction to increase and multiply and replenish the earth, might presently close that door again and declare the world was filled. But that is what is happening now. The doors close. That immense swarming and multiplying of little people is over, and the forces of social organization have been coming into play now, more and more for a century and a half, to produce new wholesale ways of doing things, new great organizations, organizations that invade the autonomous family more and more, and are perhaps destined ultimately to destroy it altogether and supersede it. At least it is so I make my

reading of history in these matters."

"Yes," said Lady Harman, with knitted brows, "Yes," and wondered privately whether it would be possible to get from that opening to the matter of her Hostels before it was time for her to return for Sir Isaac's tea.

Mr. Brumley continued to talk with his eyes fixed as it were upon his thoughts. "These things, Lady Harman, go on at different paces in different regions. I will not trouble you with a discussion of that, or of emigration, of any of the details of the vast proliferation that preceded the present phase. Suffice it, that now all the tendency is back towards restraints upon increase, to an increasing celibacy, to a fall in the birth-rate and in the average size of families, to--to a release of women from an entire devotion to a numerous offspring, and so at last to the supersession of those little family units that for four centuries have made up the substance of social life and determined nearly all our moral and sentimental attitudes. The autonomy of the family is being steadily destroyed, and it is being replaced by the autonomy of the individual in relation to some syndicated economic effort."

"I think," said Lady Harman slowly, arresting him by a gesture, "if you could make that about autonomy a little clearer...."

Mr. Brumley did. He went on to point out with the lucidity of a

University Extension lecturer what he meant by these singular phrases. She listened intelligently but with effort. He was much too intent upon getting the thing expressed to his own satisfaction to notice any absurdity in his preoccupation with these theories about the population of the world in the face of her immediate practical difficulties. He declared that the onset of this new phase in human life, the modern phase, wherein there was apparently to be no more "proliferating," but instead a settling down of population towards a stable equilibrium, became apparent first with the expropriation of the English peasantry and the birth of the factory system and machine production. "Since that time one can trace a steady substitution of wholesale and collective methods for household and family methods. It has gone far with us now. Instead of the woman drawing water from a well, the pipes and taps of the water company. Instead of the home-made rushlight, the electric lamp. Instead of home-spun, ready-made clothes. Instead of home-brewed, the brewer's cask. Instead of home-baked, first the little baker and then, clean and punctual, the International Bread and Cake Stores. Instead of the child learning at its mother's knee, the compulsory elementary school. Flats take the place of separate houses. Instead of the little holding, the big farm, and instead of the children working at home, the factory. Everywhere synthesis. Everywhere the little independent proprietor gives place to the company and the company to the trust. You follow all this, Lady Harman?"

"Go on," she said, encouraged by that transitory glimpse of the Stores in his discourse.

"Now London--and England generally--had its period of expansion and got on to the beginnings at least of this period of synthesis that is following it, sooner than any other country in the world; and because it was the first to reach the new stage it developed the characteristics of the new stage with a stronger flavour of the old than did such later growths of civilization as New York or Bombay or Berlin. That is why London and our British big cities generally are congestions of little houses, little homes, while the newer great cities run to apartments and flats. We hadn't grasped the logical consequences of what we were in for so completely as the people abroad did who caught it later, and that is why, as we began to develop our new floating population of mainly celibate employees and childless people, they had mostly to go into lodgings, they went into the homes that were intended for families as accessories to the family, and they were able to go in because the families were no longer so numerous as they used to be. London is still largely a city of landladies and lodgings, and in no other part of the world is there so big a population of lodgers. And this business of your Hostels is nothing more nor less than the beginning of the end of that. Just as the great refreshment caterers have mopped up the ancient multitude of coffee-houses and squalid little special feeding arrangements of the days of Tittlebat Titmouse and Dick Swiveller, so now your Hostels are going to mop up the lodging-house system of London. Of course there are other and kindred movements. Naturally. The Y.W.C.A., the Y.M.C.A., the London Girls Club Union and so forth are all doing kindred work."

"But what, Mr. Brumley, what is to become of the landladies?" asked Lady Harman.

Mr. Brumley was checked in mid theory.

"I hadn't thought of the landladies," he said, after a short pause.

"They worry me," said Lady Harman.

"Um," said Mr. Brumley, thrown out.

"Do you know the other day I went into Chelsea, where there are whole streets of lodgings, and--I suppose it was wrong of me, but I went and pretended to be looking for rooms for a girl clerk I knew, and I saw--Oh! no end of rooms. And such poor old women, such dingy, worked-out, broken old women, with a kind of fearful sharpness, so eager, so dreadfully eager to get that girl clerk who didn't exist...."

She looked at him with an expression of pained enquiry.

"That," said Mr. Brumley, "that I think is a question, so to speak, for the social ambulance. If perhaps I might go on----That particular difficulty we might consider later. I think I was talking of the general synthesis."

"Yes," said Lady Harman. "And what is it exactly that is to take the place of these isolated little homes and these dreary little lodgings? Here are we, my husband and I, rushing in with this new thing, just as he rushed in with his stores thirty years ago and overset little bakers and confectioners and refreshment dealers by the hundred. Some of them--poor dears--they----I don't like to think. And it wasn't a good thing he made after all,--only a hard sort of thing. He made all those shops of his--with the girls who strike and say they are sweated and driven.... And now here we are making a kind of barrack place for people to live in!"

She expressed the rest of her ideas with a gesture of the hands.

"I admit the process has its dangers," said Mr. Brumley. "It's like the supersession of the small holdings by the latifundia in Italy. But that's just where our great opportunity comes in. These synthetic phases have occurred before in the world's history and their history is a history of lost opportunities.... But need ours be?"

She had a feeling as though something had slipped through her fingers.

"I feel," she said, "that it is more important to me than anything else in life, that these Hostels, anyhow, which are springing so rapidly from a chance suggestion of mine, shouldn't be lost opportunities."

"Exactly," said Mr. Brumley, with the gesture of one who recovers a

thread. "That is just what I am driving at."

The fingers of his extended hand felt in the warm afternoon air for a moment, and then he said "Ah!" in a tone of recovery while she waited respectfully for the resumed thread.

"You see," he said, "I regard this process of synthesis, this substitution of wholesale and collective methods for homely and individual ones as, under existing conditions, inevitable--inevitable. It's the phase we live in, it's to this we have to adapt ourselves. It is as little under your control or mine as the movement of the sun through the zodiac. Practically, that is. And what we have to do is not, I think, to sigh for lost homes and the age of gold and spade husbandry, and pigs and hens in the home, and so on, but to make this new synthetic life tolerable for the mass of men and women, hopeful for the mass of men and women, a thing developing and ascending. That's where your Hostels come in, Lady Harman; that's where they're so important. They're a pioneer movement. If they succeed--and things in Sir Isaac's hands have a way of succeeding at any rate to the paying point--then there'll be a headlong rush of imitations, imitating your good features, imitating your bad features, deepening a groove.... You see my point?"

"Yes," she said. "It makes me--more afraid than ever."

"But hopeful," said Mr. Brumley, presuming to lay his hand for an instant on her arm. "It's big enough to be inspiring."

"But I'm afraid," she said.

"It's laying down the lines of a new social life--no less. And what makes it so strange, so typical, too, of the way social forces work nowadays, is that your husband, who has all the instinctive insistence upon every right and restriction of the family relation in his private life, who is narrowly, passionately for the home in his own case, who hates all books and discussion that seem to touch it, should in his business activities be striking this tremendous new blow at the ancient organization. For that, you see, is what it amounts to."

"Yes," said Lady Harman slowly. "Yes. Of course, he doesn't know...."

Mr. Brumley was silent for a little while. "You see," he resumed, "at the worst this new social life may become a sort of slavery in barracks; at the best--it might become something very wonderful. My mind's been busy now for days thinking just how wonderful the new life might be. Instead of the old bickering, crowded family home, a new home of comrades...."

He made another pause, and his thoughts ran off upon a fresh track.

"In looking up all these things I came upon a queer little literature of pamphlets and so forth, dealing with the case of the shop assistants. They have a great grievance in what they call the living-in system. The

employers herd them in dormitories over the shops, and usually feed them by gaslight in the basements; they fine them and keep an almost intolerable grip upon them; make them go to bed at half-past ten, make them go to church on Sundays,--all sorts of petty tyrannies. The assistants are passionately against this, but they've got no power to strike. Where could they go if they struck? Into the street. Only people who live out and have homes of their own to sulk in can strike. Naturally, therefore, as a preliminary to any other improvement in the shop assistant's life, these young people want to live out. Practically that's an impossible demand at present, because they couldn't get lodgings and live out with any decency at all on what it costs their employers to lodge and feed them in. Well, here you see a curious possibility for your Hostels. You open the prospect of a living-out system for shop assistants. But just in the degree in which you choose to interfere with them, regulate them, bully and deal with them wholesale through their employers, do you make the new living-out method approximate to the living-in. That's a curious side development, isn't it?"

Lady Harman appreciated that.

"That's only the beginning of the business. There's something more these Hostels might touch...."

Mr. Brumley gathered himself together for the new aspect. "There's marriage," he said.

"One of the most interesting and unsatisfactory aspects of the life of the employee to-day--and you know the employee is now in the majority in the adult population--is this. You see, we hold them celibate. We hold them celibate for a longer and longer period; the average age at marriage rises steadily; and so long as they remain celibate we are prepared with some sort of ideas about the future development of their social life, clubs, hostels, living-in, and so forth. But at present we haven't any ideas at all about the adaptation of the natural pairing instinct to the new state of affairs. Ultimately the employee marries; they hold out as long as they possibly can, but ultimately they have to. They have to, even in the face of an economic system that holds out no prospects of anything but insecurity and an increasing chance of trouble and disaster to the employee's family group. What happens is that they drop back into a distressful, crippled, insecure imitation of the old family life as one had it in what I might call the multiplying periods of history. They start a home,--they dream of a cottage, but they drift to a lodging, and usually it isn't the best sort of lodging, for landladies hate wives and the other lodgers detest babies. Often the young couple doesn't have babies. You see, they are more intelligent than peasants, and intelligence and fecundity vary reciprocally," said Mr. Brumley.

"You mean?" interrupted Lady Harman softly.

"There is a world-wide fall in the birth-rate. People don't have the

families they did."

"Yes," said Lady Harman. "I understand now."

"And the more prosperous or the more sanguine take these suburban little houses, these hutches that make such places as Hendon nightmares of monotony, or go into ridiculous jerry-built sham cottages in some Garden Suburb, where each young wife does her own housework and pretends to like it. They have a sort of happiness for a time, I suppose; the woman stops all outside work, the man, very much handicapped, goes on competing against single men. Then--nothing more happens. Except difficulties. The world goes dull and grey for them. They look about for a lodger, perhaps. Have you read Gissing's Paying Guest?..."

"I suppose," said Lady Harman, "I suppose it is like that. One tries not to think it is so."

"One needn't let oneself believe that dullness is unhappiness," said Mr. Brumley. "I don't want to paint things sadder than they are. But it's not a fine life, it's not a full life, that life in a Neo-Malthusian suburban hutch."

"Neo----?" asked Lady Harman.

"A mere phrase," said Mr. Brumley hastily. "The extraordinary thing is that, until you set me looking into these things with your questions,

I've always taken this sort of thing for granted, as though it couldn't be otherwise. Now I seem to see with a kind of freshness. I'm astounded at the muddle of it, the waste and aimlessness of it. And here again it is, Lady Harman, that I think your opportunity comes in. With these Hostels as they might be projected now, you seem to have the possibility of a modernized, more collective and civilized family life than the old close congestion of the single home, and I see no reason at all why you shouldn't carry that collective life on to the married stage. As things are now these little communities don't go beyond the pairing--and out they drift to find the homestead they will never possess. What has been borne in upon me more and more forcibly as I have gone through your--your nest of problems, is the idea that the new social--association, that has so extensively replaced the old family group, might be carried on right through life, that it might work in with all sorts of other discontents and bad adjustments.... The life of the women in these little childless or one-or-two-child homes is more unsatisfactory even than the man's."

Mr. Brumley's face flushed with enthusiasm and he wagged a finger to emphasize his words. "Why not make Hostels, Lady Harman, for married couples? Why not try that experiment so many people have talked about of the conjoint kitchen and refectory, the conjoint nursery, the collective social life, so that the children who are single children or at best children in small families of two or three, may have the advantages of playfellows, and the young mothers still, if they choose, continue to have a social existence and go on with their professional or business,

work? That's the next step your Hostels might take ... Incidentally you see this opens a way to a life of relative freedom for the woman who is married.... I don't know if you have read Mrs. Stetson. Yes, Charlotte Perkins Gilman Stetson.... Yes, Woman and Economics, that's the book.

"I know," Mr. Brumley went on, "I seem to be opening out your project like a concertina, but I want you to see just how my thoughts have been going about all this. I want you to realize I haven't been idle during these last few weeks. I know it's a far cry from what the Hostels are to all these ideas of what they might begin to be, I know the difficulties in your way--all sorts of difficulties. But when I think just how you stand at the very centre of the moulding forces in these changes...."

He dropped into an eloquent silence.

Lady Harman looked thoughtfully at the sunlight under the trees.

"You think," she said, "that it comes to as much as all this."

"More," said Mr. Brumley.

"I was frightened before. Now----You make me feel as though someone had put the wheel of a motor car in my hand, started it and told me to steer...."

§7

Lady Harman went home from that talk in a taxi, and on the way she passed the building operations in Kensington Road. A few weeks ago it had been a mere dusty field of operation for the house-wreckers; now its walls were already rising to the second storey. She realized how swiftly nowadays the search for wisdom can be outstripped by reinforced concrete.

§8

It was only by slow degrees and rather in the absence of a more commanding interest than through any invincible quality in their appeal to her mind that these Hostels became in the next three years the grave occupation of Lady Harman's thoughts and energies. She yielded to them reluctantly. For a long time she wanted to look over them and past them and discover something--she did not know what--something high and domineering to which it would be easy to give herself. It was difficult to give herself to the Hostels. In that Mr. Brumley, actuated by a mixture of more or less admirable motives, did his best to assist her. These Hostels alone he thought could give them something upon which they could meet, give them a common interest and him a method of service and companionship. It threw the qualities of duty and justification over their more or less furtive meetings, their little expeditions together, their quiet frequent association.

Together they made studies of the Girls' Clubs which are scattered about London, supplementary homes that have in such places as Walworth and Soho worked small miracles of civilization. These institutions appealed to a lower social level than the one their Hostels were to touch, but they had been organized by capable and understanding minds and Lady Harman found in one or two of their evening dances and in the lunch she shared one morning with a row of cheerful young factory girls from Soho just that quality of concrete realization for which her mind hungered. Then Mr. Brumley took her once or twice for evening walks, just when the stream of workers is going home; he battled his way with her along the footpath of Charing Cross Railway Bridge from the Waterloo side, they swam in the mild evening sunshine of September against a trampling torrent of bobbing heads, and afterwards they had tea together in one of the International Stores near the Strand, where Mr. Brumley made an unsuccessful attempt to draw out the waitress on the subject of Babs Wheeler and the recent strike. The young woman might have talked freely to a man alone or freely to Lady Harman alone but the combination of the two made her shy. The bridge experience led to several other expeditions, to see home-going on the tube, at the big railway termini, on the train--and once they followed up the process to Streatham and saw how the people pour out of the train at last and scatter--until at last they are just isolated individuals running up steps, diving into basements. And then it occurred to Mr. Brumley that he knew someone who would take them over "Gerrard," that huge telephone exchange, and there Lady Harman saw how the National Telephone Company, as it was in those

days, had a care for its staff, the pleasant club rooms, the rest room, and stood in that queer rendez-vous of messages, where the "Hello" girl sits all day, wearing a strange metallic apparatus over ear and mouth, watching small lights that wink significantly at her and perpetually pulling out and slipping in and releasing little flexible strings that seem to have a resilient volition of their own. They hunted out Mrs. Barnet and heard her ideas about conjoint homes for spinsters in the Garden Suburb. And then they went over a Training College for elementary teachers and visited the Post Office and then came back to more unobtrusive contemplation, from the customer's little table, of the ministering personalities of the International Stores.

There were times when all these things seen, seemed to fall into an entirely explicable system under Mr. Brumley's exposition, when they seemed to be giving and most generously giving the clearest indications of what kind of thing the Hostels had to be, and times when this all vanished again and her mind became confused and perplexed. She tried to express just what it was she missed to Mr. Brumley. "One doesn't," she said, "see all of them and what one sees isn't what we have to do with. I mean we see them dressed up and respectable and busy and then they go home and the door shuts. It's the home that we are going to alter and replace--and what is it like?" Mr. Brumley took her for walks in Highbury and the newer parts of Hendon and over to Clapham. "I want to go inside those doors," she said.

"That's just what they won't let you do," said Mr. Brumley. "Nobody

visits but relations--and prospective relations, and the only other social intercourse is over the garden wall. Perhaps I can find books----"

He got her novels by Edwin Pugh and Pett Ridge and Frank Swinnerton and George Gissing. They didn't seem to be attractive homes. And it seemed remarkable to her that no woman had ever given the woman's view of the small London home from the inside....

She overcame her own finer scruples and invaded the Burnet household. Apart from fresh aspects of Susan's character in the capacity of a hostess she gained little light from that. She had never felt so completely outside a home in her life as she did when she was in the Burnets' parlour. The very tablecloth on which the tea was spread had an air of being new and protective of familiar things; the tea was manifestly quite unlike their customary tea, it was no more intimate than the confectioner's shop window from which it mostly came; the whole room was full of the muffled cries of things hastily covered up and specially put away. Vivid oblongs on the faded wallpaper betrayed even a rearrangement of the pictures. Susan's mother was a little dingy woman, wearing a very smart new cap to the best of her ability; she had an air of having been severely shaken up and admonished, and her general bearing confessed only too plainly how shattered those preparations had left her. She watched her capable daughter for cues. Susan's sisters displayed a disposition to keep their backs against something and at the earliest opportunity to get into the passage and leave Susan and her

tremendous visitor alone but within earshot. They started convulsively when they were addressed and insisted on "your ladyship." Susan had told them not to but they would. When they supposed themselves to be unobserved they gave themselves up to the impassioned inspection of Lady Harman's costume. Luke had fled into the street, and in spite of various messages conveyed to him by the youngest sister he refused to enter until Lady Harman had gone again and was well out of the way. And Susan was no longer garrulous and at her ease; she had no pins in her mouth and that perhaps hampered her speech; she presided flushed and bright-eyed in a state of infectious nervous tension. Her politeness was awful. Never in all her life had Lady Harman felt her own lack of real conversational power so acutely. She couldn't think of a thing that mightn't be construed as an impertinence and that didn't remind her of district visiting. Yet perhaps she succeeded better than she supposed.

"What a family you have had!" she said to Mrs. Burnet. "I have four little girls, and I find them as much as we can manage."

"You're young yet, my ladyship," said Mrs. Burnet, "and they aren't always the blessings they seem to be. It's the rearing's the difficulty."

"They're all such healthy-looking--people."

"I wish we could get hold of Luke, my ladyship, and show you 'im. He's that sturdy. And yet when 'e was a little feller----"

She was launched for a time on those details that were always so dear to the mothers of the past order of things. Her little spate of reminiscences was the only interlude of naturalness in an afternoon of painfully constrained behaviour....

Lady Harman returned a trifle shamefacedly from this abortive dip into realities to Mr. Brumley's speculative assurance.

§9

While Lady Harman was slowly accustoming her mind to this idea that the development of those Hostels was her appointed career in life, so far as a wife may have a career outside her connubial duties, and while she was getting insensibly to believe in Mr. Brumley's theory of their exemplary social importance, the Hostels themselves with a haste that she felt constantly was premature, were achieving a concrete existence. They were developing upon lines that here and there disregarded Mr. Brumley's ideas very widely; they gained in practicality what perhaps they lost in social value, through the entirely indirect relations between Mr. Brumley on the one hand and Sir Isaac on the other. For Sir Isaac manifestly did not consider and would have been altogether indisposed to consider Mr. Brumley as entitled to plan or suggest anything of the slightest importance in this affair, and whatever of Mr. Brumley reached that gentleman reached him in a very carefully transmitted form as Lady

Harman's own unaided idea. Sir Isaac had sound Victorian ideas about the place of literature in life. If anyone had suggested to him that literature could supply ideas to practical men he would have had a choking fit, and he regarded Mr. Brumley's sedulous attentions to these hostel schemes with feelings, the kindlier elements of whose admixture was a belief that ultimately he would write some elegant and respectful approval of the established undertaking.

The entire admixture of Sir Isaac's feelings towards Mr. Brumley was by no means kindly. He disliked any man to come near Lady Harman, any man at all; he had a faint uneasiness even about waiters and hotel porters and the clergy. Of course he had agreed she should have friends of her own and he couldn't very well rescind that without something definite to go upon. But still this persistent follower kept him uneasy. He kept this uneasiness within bounds by reassuring himself upon the point of Lady Harman's virtuous obedience, and so reassured he was able to temper his distrust with a certain contempt. The man was in love with his wife; that was manifest enough, and dangled after her.... Let him dangle. What after all did he get for it?...

But occasionally he broke through this complacency, betrayed a fitful ingenious jealousy, interfered so that she missed appointments and had to break engagements. He was now more and more a being of pathological moods. The subtle changes of secretion that were hardening his arteries, tightening his breath and poisoning his blood, reflected themselves upon his spirit in an uncertainty of temper and exasperating fatigues and led

to startling outbreaks. Then for a time he would readjust himself, become in his manner reasonable again, become accessible.

He was the medium through which this vision that was growing up in her mind of a reorganized social life, had to translate itself, as much as it could ever translate itself, into reality. He called these hostels her hostels, made her the approver of all he did, but he kept every particle of control in his own hands. All her ideas and desires had to be realized by him. And his attitudes varied with his moods; sometimes he was keenly interested in the work of organization and then he terrified her by his bias towards acute economies, sometimes he was resentful at the burthen of the whole thing, sometimes he seemed to scent Brumley or at least some moral influence behind her mind and met her suggestions with a bitter resentment as though any suggestion must needs be a disloyalty to him. There was a remarkable outbreak upon her first tentative proposal that the hostel system might ultimately be extended to married couples.

He heard her with his lips pressing tighter and tighter together until they were yellow white and creased with a hundred wicked little horizontal creases. Then he interrupted her with silent gesticulations. Then words came.

"I never did, Elly," he said. "I never did. Reely--there are times when you ain't rational. Married couples who're assistants in shops and places!"

For a little while he sought some adequate expression of his point of view.

"Nice thing to go keeping a place for these chaps to have their cheap bits of skirt in," he said at last.

Then further: "If a man wants a girl let him work himself up until he can keep her. Married couples indeed!"

He began to expand the possibilities of the case with a quite unusual vividness. "Double beds in each cubicle, I suppose," he said, and played for a time about this fancy.... "Well, to hear such an idea from you of all people, Elly. I never did."

He couldn't leave it alone. He had to go on to the bitter end with the vision she had evoked in his mind. He was jealous, passionately jealous, it was only too manifest, of the possible happinesses of these young people. He was possessed by that instinctive hatred for the realized love of others which lies at the base of so much of our moral legislation. The bare thought--whole corridors of bridal chambers!--made his face white and his hand quiver. His young men and young women! The fires of a hundred Vigilance Committees blazed suddenly in his reddened eyes. He might have been a concentrated society for preventing the rapid multiplication of the unfit. The idea of facilitating early marriages was manifestly shameful to him, a disgraceful service to render, a job

for Pandarus. What was she thinking of? Elly of all people! Elly who had been as innocent as driven snow before Georgina came interfering!

It ended in a fit of abuse and a panting seizure, and for a day or so he was too ill to resume the discussion, to do more than indicate a disgusted aloofness....

And then it may be the obscure chemicals at work within him changed their phase of reaction. At any rate he mended, became gentler, was more loving to his wife than he had been for some time and astonished her by saying that if she wanted Hostels for married couples, it wasn't perhaps so entirely unreasonable. Selected cases, he stipulated, it would have to be and above a certain age limit, sober people. "It might even be a check on immorality," he said, "properly managed...."

But that was as far as his acquiescence went and Lady Harman was destined to be a widow before she saw the foundation of any Hostel for young married couples in London.

§10

The reinforced concrete rose steadily amidst Lady Harman's questionings and Mr. Brumley's speculations. The Harmans returned from a recuperative visit to Kissingen, to which Sir Isaac had gone because of a suspicion that his Marienbad specialist had failed to cure him completely in order

to get him back again, to find the first of the five hostels nearly ripe for its opening. There had to be a manageress and a staff organized and neither Lady Harman nor Mr. Brumley were prepared for that sort of business. A number of abler people however had become aware of the opportunities of the new development and Mrs. Hubert Plessington, that busy publicist, got the Harmans to a helpful little dinner, before Lady Harman had the slightest suspicion of the needs that were now so urgent. There shone a neat compact widow, a Mrs. Pembrose, who had buried her husband some eighteen months ago after studying social questions with him with great éclat for ten happy years, and she had done settlement work and Girls' Club work and had perhaps more power of organization--given a suitable director to provide for her lack of creativeness, Mrs. Plessington told Sir Isaac, than any other woman in London. Afterwards Sir Isaac had an opportunity of talking to her; he discussed the suffrage movement with her and was pleased to find her views remarkably sympathetic with his own. She was, he declared, a sensible woman, anxious to hear a man out and capable, it was evident, of a detachment from feminist particularism rare in her sex at the present time. Lady Harman had seen less of the lady that evening, she was chiefly struck by her pallor, by a kind of animated silence about her, and by the deep impression her capabilities had made on Mr. Plessington, who had hitherto seemed to her to be altogether too overworked in admiring his wife to perceive the points of any other human being. Afterwards Lady Harman was surprised to hear from one or two quite separate people that Mrs. Pembrose was the only possible person to act as general director of the new hostels. Lady

Beach-Mandarin was so enthusiastic in the matter that she made a special call. "You've known her a long time?" said Lady Harman.

"Long enough to see what a chance she is!" said Lady Beach-Mandarin.

Lady Harman perceived equivocation. "Now how long is that really?" she said.

"Count not in years, nor yet in moments on a dial," said Lady Beach-Mandarin with a fine air of quotation. "I'm thinking of her quiet strength of character. Mrs. Plessington brought her round to see me the other afternoon."

"Did she talk to you?"

"I saw, my dear, I saw."

A vague aversion from Mrs. Pembrose was in some mysterious way strengthened in Lady Harman by this extraordinary convergence of testimony. When Sir Isaac mentioned the lady with a kind of forced casualness at breakfast as the only conceivable person for the work of initiation and organization that lay before them, Lady Harman determined to see more of her. With a quickened subtlety she asked her to tea. "I have heard so much of your knowledge of social questions and I want you to advise me about my work," she wrote, and then scribbled a note to Mr. Brumley to call and help her judgments.

Mrs. Pembrose appeared dressed in dove colour with a near bonnetesque straw hat to match. She had a pale slightly freckled complexion, little hard blue-grey eyes with that sort of nose which redeems a squarish shape by a certain delicacy of structure; her chin was long and protruding and her voice had a wooden resonance and a ghost of a lisp. Her talk had a false consecutiveness due to the frequent use of the word "Yes." Her bearing was erect and her manner guardedly alert.

From the first she betrayed a conviction that Mr. Brumley was incidental and unnecessary and that her real interest lay with Sir Isaac. She might almost have been in possession of special information upon that point.

"Yes," she said, "I'm rather specially up in this sort of question. I worked side by side with my poor Frederick all his life, we were collaborators, and this question of the urban distributive employee was one of his special studies. Yes, he would have been tremendously interested in Sir Isaac's project."

"You know what we are doing?"

"Every one is interested in Sir Isaac's enterprise. Naturally. Yes, I think I have a fairly good idea of what you mean to do. It's a great experiment."

"You think it is likely to answer?" said Mr. Brumley.

"In Sir Isaac's hands it is very likely to answer," said Mrs. Pembrose with her eye steadily on Lady Harman.

There was a little pause. "Yes, now you wrote of difficulties and drawing upon my experience. Of course just now I'm quite at Sir Isaac's disposal."

Lady Harman found herself thrust perforce into the rôle of her husband's spokeswoman. She asked Mrs. Pembrose if she knew the exact nature of the experiment they contemplated.

Mrs. Pembrose hadn't a doubt she knew. Of course for a long time and more especially in the Metropolis where the distances were so great and increasing so rapidly, there had been a gathering feeling not only in the catering trade, but in very many factory industries, against the daily journey to employment and home again. It was irksome and wasteful to everyone concerned, there was a great loss in control, later hours of beginning, uncertain service. "Yes, my husband calculated the hours lost in London every week, hours that are neither work nor play, mere tiresome stuffy journeying. It made an enormous sum. It worked out at hundreds of working lives per week." Sir Isaac's project was to abolish all that, to bring his staff into line with the drapers and grocers who kept their assistants on the living-in system....

"I thought people objected to the living-in system," said Mr. Brumley.

"There's an agitation against it on the part of a small Trade Union of Shop Assistants," said Mrs. Pembrose. "But they have no real alternative to propose."

"And this isn't Living In," said Mr. Brumley.

"Yes, I think you'll find it is," said Mrs. Pembrose with a nice little expert smile.

"Living-in isn't quite what we want," said Lady Harman slowly and with knitted brows, seeking a method of saying just what the difference was to be.

"Yes, not perhaps in the strictest sense," said Mrs. Pembrose giving her no chance, and went on to make fine distinctions. Strictly speaking, living-in meant sleeping over the shop and eating underneath it, and this hostel idea was an affair of a separate house and of occupants who would be assistants from a number of shops. "Yes, collectivism, if you like," said Mrs. Pembrose. But the word collectivism, she assured them, wouldn't frighten her, she was a collectivist, a socialist, as her husband had always been. The day was past when socialist could be used as a term of reproach. "Yes, instead of the individual employer of labour, we already begin to have the collective employer of labour, with a labour bureau--and so on. We share them. We no longer compete for them. It's the keynote of the time."

Mr. Brumley followed this with a lifted eyebrow. He was still new to these modern developments of collectivist ideas, this socialism of the employer.

The whole thing Mrs. Pembrose declared was a step forward in civilization, it was a step in the organization and discipline of labour. Of course the unruly and the insubordinate would cry out. But the benefits were plain enough, space, light, baths, association, reasonable recreations, opportunities for improvement----

"But freedom?" said Mr. Brumley.

Mrs. Pembrose inclined her head a little on one side, looked at him this time and smiled the expert smile again. "If you knew as much as I do of the difficulties of social work," she said, "you wouldn't be very much in love with freedom."

"But--it's the very substance of the soul!"

"You must permit me to differ," said Mrs. Pembrose, and for weeks afterwards Mr. Brumley was still seeking a proper polite retort to that difficult counterstroke. It was such a featureless reply. It was like having your nose punched suddenly by a man without a face.

They descended to a more particular treatment of the problems ahead.

Mrs. Pembrose quoted certain precedents from the Girls' Club Union.

"The people Lady Harman contemplates--entertaining," said Mr. Brumley, "are of a slightly more self-respecting type than those young women."

"It's largely veneer," said Mrs. Pembrose....

"Detestable little wretch," said Mr. Brumley when at last she had departed. He was very uncomfortable. "She's just the quintessence of all one fears and dreads about these new developments, she's perfect--in that way--self-confident, arrogant, instinctively aggressive, with a tremendous class contempt. There's a multitude of such people about who hate the employed classes, who want to see them broken in and subjugated. I suppose that kind of thing is in humanity. Every boy's school has louts of that kind, who love to torment fags for their own good, who spring upon a chance smut on the face of a little boy to scrub him painfully, who have a kind of lust to dominate under the pretence of improving. I remember----But never mind that now. Keep that woman out of things or your hostels work for the devil."

"Yes," said Lady Harman. "Certainly she shall not----. No."

But there she reckoned without her husband.

"I've settled it," he said to her at dinner two nights later.

"What?"

"Mrs. Pembrose."

"You've not made her----?"

"Yes, I have. And I think we're very lucky to get her."

"But--Isaac! I don't want her!"

"You should have told me that before, Elly. I've made an agreement."

She suddenly wanted to cry. "But----You said I should manage these Hostels myself."

"So you shall, Elly. But we must have somebody. When we go abroad and all that and for all the sort of business stuff and looking after things that you can't do. We've got to have her. She's the only thing going of her sort."

"But--I don't like her."

"Well," cried Sir Isaac, "why in goodness couldn't you tell me that before, Elly? I've been and engaged her."

She sat pale-faced staring at him with wide open eyes in which tears of

acute disappointment were shining. She did not dare another word because of her trick of weeping.

"It's all right, Elly," said Sir Isaac. "How touchy you are! Anything you want about these Hostels of yours, you've only got to tell me and it's done."

§11

Lady Harman was still in a state of amazement at the altered prospects of her hostels when the day arrived for the formal opening of the first of these in Bloomsbury. They made a little public ceremony of it in spite of her reluctance, and Mr. Brumley had to witness things from out of the general crowd and realize just how completely he wasn't in it, in spite of all his efforts. Mrs. Pembrose was modestly conspicuous, like the unexpected in all human schemes. There were several reporters present, and Horatio Blenker who was going to make a loyal leader about it, to be followed by one or two special articles for the Old Country Gazette.

Horatio had procured Mrs. Blapton for the opening after some ineffectual angling for the Princess Adeline, and the thing was done at half-past three in the afternoon. In the bright early July sunshine outside the new building there was a crimson carpet down on the pavement and an awning above it, there was a great display of dog-daisies at the windows

and on the steps leading up to the locked portals, an increasing number of invited people lurked shyly in the ground-floor rooms ready to come out by the back way and cluster expectantly when Mrs. Blapton arrived, Graper the staff manager and two assistants in dazzling silk hats seemed everywhere, the rabbit-like architect had tried to look doggish in a huge black silk tie and only looked more like a rabbit than ever, and there was a steady driftage of small boys and girls, nurses with perambulators, cab touts, airing grandfathers and similar unemployed people towards the promise of the awning, the carpet and the flowers. The square building in all its bravery of Doulton ware and yellow and mauve tiles and its great gilt inscription

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above the windows of the second storey seemed typical of all those modern forces that are now invading and dispelling the ancient residential peace of Bloomsbury.

Mrs. Blapton appeared only five minutes late, escorted by Bertie Trevor and her husband's spare secretary. Graper became so active at the sight of her that he seemed more like some beast out of the Apocalypse with seven hands and ten hats than a normal human being; he marshalled the significant figures into their places, the door was unlocked without serious difficulty, and Lady Harman found herself in the main corridor beside Mr. Trevor and a little behind Mrs. Blapton, engaged in being shown over the new creation. Sir Isaac (driven by Graper at his elbow)

was in immediate attendance on the great political lady, and Mrs. Pembrose, already with an air of proprietorship, explained glibly on her other hand. Close behind Lady Harman came Lady Beach-Mandarin, expanding like an appreciative gas in a fine endeavour to nestle happily into the whole big place, and with her were Mrs. Hubert Plessington and Mr. Pope, one of those odd people who are called publicists because one must call them something, and who take chairs and political sides and are vice-presidents of everything and organize philanthropies, write letters to the papers and cannot let the occasion pass without saying a few words and generally prevent the institutions of this country from falling out of human attention. He was a little abstracted in his manner, every now and then his lips moved as he imagined a fresh turn to some classic platitude; anyone who knew him might have foretold the speech into which he presently broke. He did this in the refectory where there was a convenient step up at the end. Beginning with the customary confession of incontinence, "could not let the occasion pass," he declared that he would not detain them long, but he felt that everyone there would agree with him that they shared that day in no slight occasion, no mean enterprise, that here was one of the most promising, one of the most momentous, nay! he would go further and add with due deference to them all, one of the most pregnant of social experiments in modern social work. In the past he had himself--if he might for a moment allow a personal note to creep into his observations, he himself had not been unconnected with industrial development.--(Querulous voice, "Who the devil is that?" and whispered explanations on the part of Horatio Blenker; "Pope--very good man--East Purblow Experiment--Payment in Kind

instead of Wages--Yes.")....

Lady Harman ceased to listen to Mr. Pope's strained but not unhappy tenor. She had heard him before, and she had heard his like endlessly. He was the larger moiety of every public meeting she had ever attended. She had ceased even to marvel at the dull self-satisfaction that possessed him. To-day her capacity for marvelling was entirely taken up by the details of this extraordinary reality which had sprung from her dream of simple, kindly, beautiful homes for distressed and overworked young women; nothing in the whole of life had been so amazing since that lurid occasion when she had been the agonized vehicle for the entry of Miss Millicent Harman upon this terrestrial scene. It was all so entirely what she could never have thought possible. A few words from other speakers followed, Mrs. Blapton, with the young secretary at hand to prompt, said something, and Sir Isaac was poked forwards to say, "Thank you very much. It's all my wife's doing, really.... Oh dash it! Thank you very much." It had the effect of being the last vestige of some more elaborate piece of eloquence that had suddenly disintegrated in his mind.

"And now, Elly," he said, as their landaulette took them home, "you're beginning to have your hostels."

"Then they are my hostels?" she asked abruptly.

"Didn't I say they were?" The satisfaction of his face was qualified by

that fatigued irritability that nowadays always followed any exertion or excitement.

"If I want things done? If I want things altered?"

"Of course you may, of course you may. What's the matter with you, Elly? What's been putting ideers into your head? You got to have a directress to the thing; you must have a woman of education who knows a bit about things to look after the matrons and so on. Very likely she isn't everything you want. She's the only one we could get, and I don't see----. Here I go and work hard for a year and more getting these things together to please you, and then suddenly you don't like 'em. There's a lot of the spoilt child in you, Elly--first and last. There they are...."

They were silent for the rest of the journey to Putney, both being filled with incommunicable things.

§12

And now Lady Harman began to share the trouble of all those who let their minds pass out of the circle of their immediate affections with any other desire save interest and pleasure. Assisted in this unhappy development by the sedulous suggestions of Mr. Brumley she had begun to offend against the most sacred law in our sensible British code, she was

beginning to take herself and her hostels seriously, and think that it mattered how she worked for them and what they became. She tried to give all the attention her children's upbringing, her husband's ailments and the general demands of her household left free, to this complex, elusive, puzzling and worrying matter. Instead of thinking that these hostels were just old hostels and that you start them and put in a Mrs. Pembrose and feel very benevolent and happy and go away, she had come to realize partly by dint of her own conscientious thinking and partly through Mr. Brumley's strenuous resolve that she should not take Sir Isaac's gift horse without the most exhaustive examination of its quality, that this new work, like most new things in human life, was capable not only of admirable but of altogether detestable consequences, and that it rested with her far more than with any other human being to realize the former and avoid the latter. And directly one has got to this critical pose towards things, just as one ceases to be content with things anyhow and to want them precisely somehow, one begins to realize just how intractable, confused and disingenuous are human affairs. Mr. Brumley had made himself see and had made her see how inevitable these big wholesale ways of doing things, these organizations and close social co-operations, have become unless there is to be a social disintegration and set back, and he had also brought himself and her to realize how easily they may develop into a new servitude, how high and difficult is the way towards methods of association that will ensure freedom and permit people to live fine individual lives. Every step towards organization raises a crop of vices peculiar to itself, fresh developments of the egotism and greed and vanity of those into whose

hands there falls control, fresh instances of that hostile pedantry which seems so natural to officials and managers, insurgencies and obstinacies and suspicions on the part of everyone. The poor lady had supposed that when one's intentions were obviously benevolent everyone helped. She only faced the realities of this task that she had not so much set for herself as had happened to her, after dreadful phases of disillusionment and dismay.

"These hostels," said Mr. Brumley in his most prophetic mood, "can be made free, fine things--or no--just as all the world of men we are living in, could be made a free, fine world. And it's our place to see they are that. It's just by being generous and giving ourselves, helping without enslaving, and giving without exacting gratitude, planning and protecting with infinite care, that we bring that world nearer.... Since I've known you I've come to know such things are possible...."

The Bloomsbury hostel started upon its career with an embarrassing difficulty. The young women of the International Stores Refreshment Departments for whom these institutions were primarily intended displayed what looked extremely like a concerted indisposition to come in. They had been circularized and informed that henceforth, to ensure the "good social tone" of the staff, all girls not living at home with their parents or close relations would be expected to reside in the new hostels. There followed an attractive account of the advantages of the new establishment. In drawing up this circular with the advice of Mrs. Pembrose, Sir Isaac had overlooked the fact that his management was very

imperfectly informed just where the girls did live, and that after its issue it was very improbable that it would be possible to find out this very necessary fact. But the girls seemed to be unaware of this ignorance at headquarters, Miss Babs Wheeler was beginning to feel a little bored by good behaviour and crave for those dramatic cessations at the lunch hour, those speeches, with cheers, from a table top, those interviews with reporters, those flushed and eager councils of war and all the rest of that good old crisis feeling that had previously ended so happily. Mr. Graper came to his proprietor headlong, Mrs. Pembrose was summoned and together they contemplated the lamentable possibility of this great social benefit they had done the world being discredited at the outset by a strike of the proposed beneficiaries. Sir Isaac fell into a state of vindictiveness and was with difficulty restrained by Mr. Graper from immediately concluding the negotiations that were pending with three great Oxford Street firms that would have given over the hostels to their employees and closed them against the International girls for ever.

Even Mrs. Pembrose couldn't follow Sir Isaac in that, and remarked: "As I understand it, the whole intention was to provide proper housing for our own people first and foremost."

"And haven't we provided it, damn them?" said Sir Isaac in white desperation....

It was Lady Harman who steered the newly launched institutions through

these first entanglements. It was her first important advantage in the struggle that had hitherto been going relentlessly against her. She now displayed her peculiar gift, a gift that indeed is unhappily all too rare among philanthropists, the gift of not being able to classify the people with whom she was dealing, but of continuing to regard them as a multitude of individualized souls as distinct and considerable as herself. That makes no doubt for slowness and "inefficiency" and complexity in organization, but it does make for understandings. And now, through a little talk with Susan Burnet about her sister's attitude upon the dispute, she was able to take the whole situation in the flank.

Like many people who are not easily clear, Lady Harman when she was clear acted with very considerable decision, which was perhaps none the less effective because of the large softnesses of her manner.

She surprised Sir Isaac by coming of her own accord into his study, where with an altogether novel disfavour he sat contemplating the detailed plans for the Sydenham Hostel. "I think I've found out what the trouble is," she said.

"What trouble?"

"About my hostel."

"How do you know?"

"I've been finding out what the girls are saying."

"They'd say anything."

"I don't think they're clever enough for that," said Lady Harman after consideration. She recovered her thread. "You see, Isaac, they've been frightened by the Rules. I didn't know you had printed a set of Rules."

"One must have rules, Elly."

"In the background," she decided. "But you see these Rules--were made conspicuous. They were printed in two colours on wall cards just exactly like that list of rules and scale of fines you had to withdraw----"

"I know," said Sir Isaac, shortly.

"It reminded the girls. And that circular that seems to threaten them if they don't give up their lodgings and come in. And the way the front is got up to look just exactly like one of the refreshment-room branches--it makes them feel it will be un-homelike, and that there will be a kind of repetition in the evening of all the discipline and regulations they have to put up with during the day."

"Have to put up with!" murmured Sir Isaac.

"I wish that had been thought of sooner. If we had made the places look

a little more ordinary and called them Osborne House or something a little old-fashioned like that, something with a touch of the Old Queen about it and all that kind of thing."

"We can't go to the expense of taking down all those big gilt letters just to please the fancies of Miss Babs Wheeler."

"It's too late now to do that, perhaps. But we could do something, I think, to remove the suspicions ... I want, Isaac----I think----" She pulled herself together to announce her determination. "I think if I were to go to the girls and meet a delegation of them, and just talk to them plainly about what we mean by this hostel."

"You can't go making speeches."

"It would just be talking to them."

"It's such a Come Down," said Sir Isaac, after a momentary contemplation of the possibility.

For some time they talked without getting very far from these positions they had assumed. At last Sir Isaac shifted back upon his expert. "Can't we talk about it to Mrs. Pembrose? She knows more about this sort of business than we do."

"I'm not going to talk to Mrs. Pembrose," said Lady Harman, after a

little interval. Some unusual quality in her quiet voice made Sir Isaac lift his eyes to her face for a moment.

So one Saturday afternoon, Lady Harman had a meeting with a roomful of recalcitrant girls at the Regent Street Refreshment Branch, which looked very odd to her with grey cotton wrappers over everything and its blinds down, and for the first time she came face to face with the people for whom almost in spite of herself she was working. It was a meeting summoned by the International Branch of the National Union of Waitresses and Miss Babs Wheeler and Mr. Graper were so to speak the north and south poles of the little group upon the improvised platform from which Lady Harman was to talk to the gathering. She would have liked the support of Mr. Brumley, but she couldn't contrive any unostentatious way of bringing him into the business without putting it upon a footing that would have involved the appearance of Sir Isaac and Mrs. Pembrose and--everybody. And essentially it wasn't to be everybody. It was to be a little talk.

Lady Harman rather liked the appearance of Miss Babs Wheeler, and met more than an answering approval in that insubordinate young woman's eye. Miss Wheeler was a minute swaggering person, much akimbo, with a little round blue-eyed innocent face that shone with delight at the lark of living. Her three companions who were in the lobby with her to receive and usher in Lady Harman seemed just as young, but they were relatively unilluminated except by their manifest devotion to their leader. They displayed rather than concealed their opinion of her as a "dear" and a

"fair wonder." And the meeting generally it seemed to her was a gathering of very human young women, rather restless, then agog to see her and her clothes, and then somehow allayed by her appearance and quite amiably attentive to what she had to say. A majority were young girls dressed with the cheap smartness of the suburbs, the rest were for the most part older and dingier, and here and there were dotted young ladies of a remarkable and questionable smartness. In the front row, full of shy recognitions and a little disguised by an unfamiliar hat was Susan's sister Alice.

As Lady Harman had made up her mind that she was not going to deliver a speech she felt no diffidence in speaking. She was far too intent on her message to be embarrassed by any thought of the effect she was producing. She talked as she might have talked in one of her easier moods to Mr. Brumley. And as she talked it happened that Miss Babs Wheeler and quite a number of the other girls present watched her face and fell in love with her.

She began with her habitual prelude. "You see," she said, and stopped and began again. She wanted to tell them and with a clumsy simplicity she told them how these Hostels had arisen out of her desire that they should have something better than the uncomfortable lodgings in which they lived. They weren't a business enterprise, but they weren't any sort of charity. "And I wanted them to be the sort of place in which you would feel quite free. I hadn't any sort of intention of having you interfered with. I hate being interfered with myself, and I understand

just as well as anyone can that you don't like it either. I wanted these Hostels to be the sort of place that you might perhaps after a time almost manage and run for yourselves. You might have a committee or something.... Only you know it isn't always easy to do as one wants. Things don't always go in this world as one wants them to go--particularly if one isn't clever." She lost herself for a moment at that point, and then went on to say she didn't like the new rules. They had been drawn up in a hurry and she had only read them after they were printed. All sorts of things in them----

She seemed to be losing her theme again, and Mr. Graper handed her the offending card, a big varnished wall placard, with eyelets and tape complete. She glanced at it. For example, she said, it wasn't her idea to have fines. (Great and long continued applause.) There was something she had always disliked about fines. (Renewed applause.) But these rules could easily be torn up. And as she said this and as the meeting broke into acquiescence again it occurred to her that there was the card of rules in her hands, and nothing could be simpler than to tear it up there and then. It resisted her for a moment, she compressed her lips and then she had it in halves. This tearing was so satisfactory to her that she tore it again and then again. As she tore it, she had a pleasant irrational feeling that she was tearing Mrs. Pembrose. Mr. Graper's face betrayed his shocked feelings, and the meeting which had become charged with a strong desire to show how entirely it approved of her, made a crowning attempt at applause. They hammered umbrellas on the floor, they clapped hands, they rattled chairs and gave a shrill cheer.

A chair was broken.

"I wish," said Lady Harman when that storm had abated, "you'd come and look at the Hostel. Couldn't you come next Saturday afternoon? We could have a stand-up tea and you could see the place and then afterwards your committee and I--and my husband--could make out a real set of rules...."

She went on for some little time longer, she appealed to them with all the strength of her honest purpose to help her to make this possible good thing a real good thing, not to suspect, not to be hard on her--"and my husband"--not to make a difficult thing impossible, it was so easy to do that, and when she finished she was in the happiest possession of her meeting. They came thronging round her with flushed faces and bright eyes, they wanted to come near her, wanted to touch her, wanted to assure her that for her they were quite prepared to live in any kind of place. For her. "You come and talk to us, Lady Harman," said one; "we'll show you."

"Nobody hasn't told us, Lady Harman, how these Hostels were yours."

"You come and talk to us again, Lady Harman." ...

They didn't wait for the following Saturday. On Monday morning Mrs. Pembrose received thirty-seven applications to take up rooms.

§13

For the next few years it was to be a matter of recurrent heart-searching for Lady Harman whether she had been profoundly wise or extremely foolish in tearing up that card of projected rules. At the time it seemed the most natural and obvious little action imaginable; it was long before she realized just how symbolical and determining a few movements of the hand and wrist can be. It fixed her line not so much for herself as for others. It put her definitely, much more definitely than her convictions warranted, on the side of freedom against discipline. For indeed her convictions like most of our convictions kept along a tortuous watershed between these two. It is only a few rare extravagant spirits who are wholly for the warp or wholly for the woof of human affairs.

The girls applauded and loved her. At one stroke she had acquired the terrible liability of partisans. They made her their champion and sanction; she was responsible for an endless succession of difficulties that flowered out of their interpretations of her act. These Hostels that had seemed passing out of her control, suddenly turned back upon her and took possession of her.

And they were never simple difficulties. Right and wrong refused to unravel for her; each side of every issue seemed to be so often in suicidal competition with its antagonist for the inferior case. If the forces of order and discipline showed themselves perennially harsh and

narrow, it did not blind her perplexed eyes to the fact that the girls were frequently extremely naughty. She wished very often, she did so wish--they wouldn't be. They set out with a kind of eagerness for conflict.

Their very loyalty to her expressed itself not so much in any sustained attempt to make the hostels successful as in cheering inconveniently, in embarrassing declarations of a preference, in an ingenious and systematic rudeness to anyone suspected of imperfect devotion to her. The first comers into the Hostels were much more like the swelling inrush of a tide than, as Mrs. Pembrose would have preferred, like something laid on through a pipe, and when this lady wanted to go on with the old rules until Sir Isaac had approved of the new, the new arrivals went into the cutting-out room and manifested. Lady Harman had to be telephoned for to allay the manifestation.

And then arose questions of deportment, trivial in themselves, but of the gravest moment for the welfare of the hostels. There was a phrase about "noisy or improper conduct" in the revised rules. Few people would suspect a corridor, ten feet wide and two hundred feet long, as a temptation to impropriety, but Mrs. Pembrose found it was so. The effect of the corridors upon undisciplined girls quite unaccustomed to corridors was for a time most undesirable. For example they were moved to run along them violently. They ran races along them, when they overtook they jostled, when they were overtaken they squealed. The average velocity in the corridors of the lady occupants of the

Bloomsbury Hostel during the first fortnight of its existence was seven miles an hour. Was that violence? Was that impropriety? The building was all steel construction, but one heard even in the Head Matron's room. And then there was the effect of the rows and rows of windows opening out upon the square. The square had some pleasant old trees and it was attractive to look down into their upper branches, where the sparrows mobbed and chattered perpetually, and over them at the chimneys and turrets and sky signs of the London world. The girls looked. So far they were certainly within their rights. But they did not look modestly, they did not look discreetly. They looked out of wide-open windows, they even sat perilously and protrudingly on the window sills conversing across the façade from window to window, attracting attention, and once to Mrs. Pembrose's certain knowledge a man in the street joined in. It was on a Sunday morning, too, a Bloomsbury Sunday morning!

But graver things were to rouse the preventive prohibitionist in the soul of Mrs. Pembrose. There was the visiting of one another's rooms and cubicles. Most of these young people had never possessed or dreamt of possessing a pretty and presentable apartment to themselves, and the first effect of this was to produce a decorative outbreak, a vigorous framing of photographs and hammering of nails ("dust-gathering litter."--Mrs. Pembrose) and then--visiting. They visited at all hours and in all costumes; they sat in groups of three or four, one on the chair and the rest on the bed conversing into late hours,--entirely uncensored conversations too often accompanied by laughter. When Mrs. Pembrose took this to Lady Harman she found her extraordinarily blind to

the conceivable evils of this free intercourse. "But Lady Harman!" said Mrs. Pembrose, with a note of horror, "some of them--kiss each other!"

"But if they're fond of each other," said Lady Harman. "I'm sure I don't see----"

And when the floor matrons were instructed to make little surprise visits up and down the corridors the girls who occupied rooms took to locking their doors--and Lady Harman seemed inclined to sustain their right to do that. The floor matrons did what they could to exercise authority, one or two were former department manageresses, two were ex-elementary teachers, crowded out by younger and more certificated rivals, one, and the most trustworthy one, Mrs. Pembrose found, was an ex-wardress from Holloway. The natural result of these secret talkings and conferrings in the rooms became apparent presently in some mild ragging and in the concoction of petty campaigns of annoyance designed to soften the manners of the more authoritative floor matrons. Here again were perplexing difficulties. If a particular floor matron has a clear commanding note in her voice, is it or is it not "violent and improper" to say "Haw!" in clear commanding tones whenever you suppose her to be within earshot? As for the door-locking Mrs. Pembrose settled that by carrying off all the keys.

Complaints and incidents drifted towards definite scenes and "situations." Both sides in this continuing conflict of dispositions were so definite, so intolerant, to the mind of the lady with the

perplexed dark eyes who mediated. Her reason was so much with the matrons; her sympathies so much with the girls. She did not like the assured brevity of Mrs. Pembrose's judgments and decisions; she had an instinctive perception of the truth that all compact judgments upon human beings are unjust judgments. The human spirit is but poorly adapted either to rule or to be ruled, and the honesty of all the efforts of Mrs. Pembrose and her staffs--for soon the hostels at Sydenham and West Kensington were open--were marred not merely by arrogance but by an irritability, a real hostility to complexities and difficulties and resisters and troublesome characters. And it did not help the staff to a triumphant achievement of its duties that the girls had an exaggerated perception that Lady Harman's heart was on their side.

And presently the phrase "weeding out" crept into the talk of Mrs. Pembrose. Some of the girls were being marked as ringleaders, foci of mischief, characters it was desirable to "get rid of." Confronted with it Lady Harman perceived she was absolutely opposed to this idea of getting rid of anyone--unless it was Mrs. Pembrose. She liked her various people; she had no desire for a whittled success with a picked remnant of subdued and deferential employees. She put that to Mr. Brumley and Mr. Brumley was indignant and eloquent in his concurrence. A certain Mary Trunk, a dark young woman with a belief that it became her to have a sweet disorder in her hair, and a large blond girl named Lucy Baxandall seemed to be the chief among the bad influences of the Bloomsbury hostel, and they took it upon themselves to appeal to Lady

Harman against Mrs. Pembrose. They couldn't, they complained, "do a Thing right for her...."

So the tangle grew.

Presently Lady Harman had to go to the Riviera with Sir Isaac and when she came back Mary Trunk and Lucy Baxandall had vanished from both the International Hostel and the International Stores. She tried to find out why, and she was confronted by inadequate replies and enigmatical silences. "They decided to go," said Mrs. Pembrose, and dropped "fortunately" after that statement. She disavowed any exact knowledge of their motives. But she feared the worst. Susan Burnet was uninforming. Whatever had happened had failed to reach Alice Burnet's ears. Lady Harman could not very well hold a commission of enquiry into the matter, but she had an uneasy sense of a hidden campaign of dislodgement. And about the corridors and cubicles and club rooms there was she thought a difference, a discretion, a flavour of subjugation....