

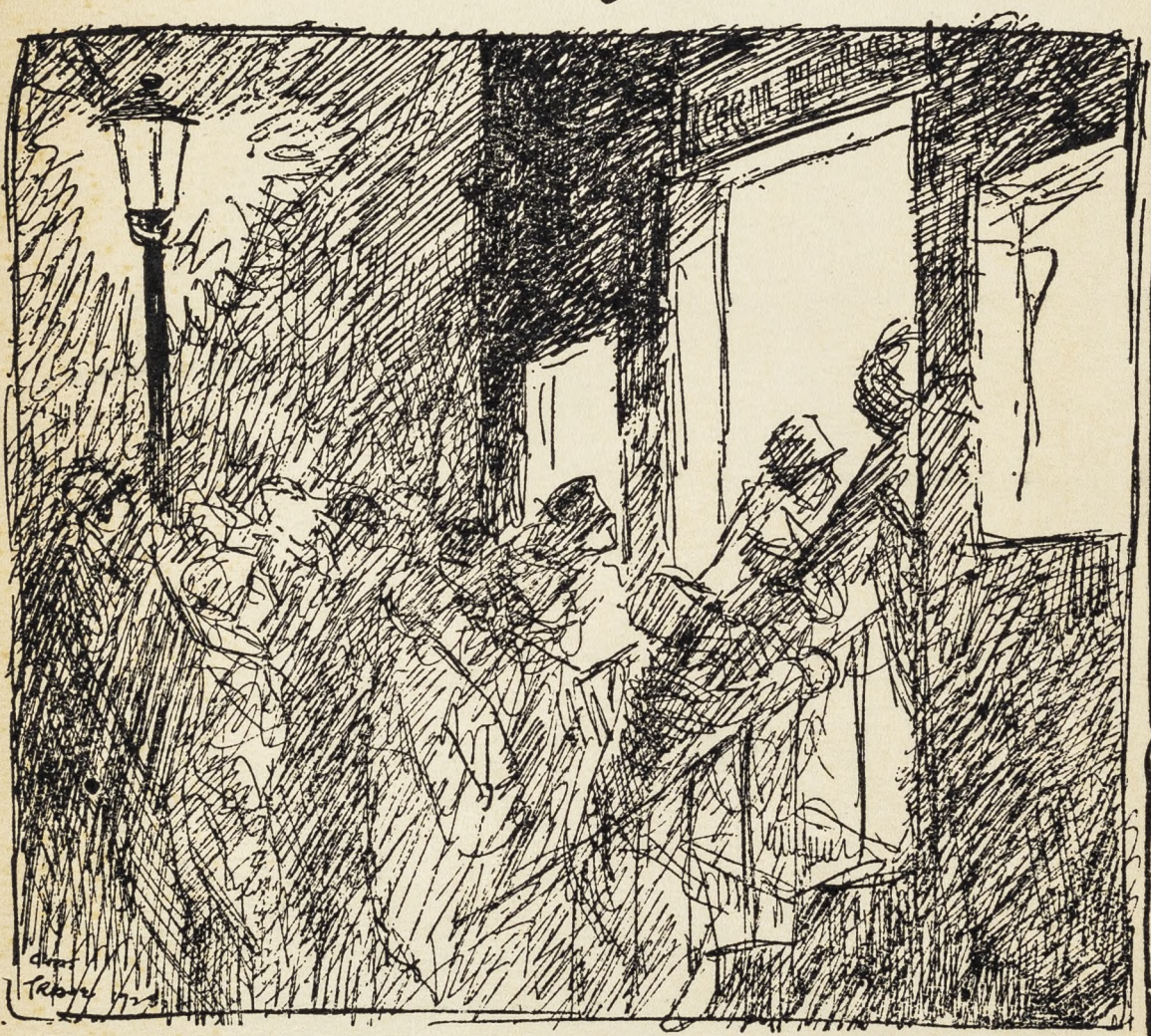
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CECIL HOUSES

[INCORPORATED]

9th REPORT
• 1936-7



YOUR HELP IS
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Pamphlet

CECIL HOUSES

**WOMEN'S PUBLIC LODGING-HOUSE FUND
INCORPORATED UNDER THE BOARD OF TRADE**

**NINTH
REPORT
1936-7**



Offices:
**11 GOLDEN SQUARE
LONDON
W. 1.
TELEPHONE GERRARD 3391**

363-592060421 CEC

CECIL HOUSES

(INCORPORATED)

WOMEN'S PUBLIC LODGING-HOUSE FUND

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 MRS. DENZIL TWENTYMAN.

OFFICE :

11 Golden Square, London, W.1. Telephone No. : Gerrard 3391.

AIMS AND OBJECTS

- (1) To provide suitable premises for Women's Public Lodging Houses.
- (2) To meet at cost price the acute need of clean beds, bathing and washing accommodation for homeless or vagrant women.
- (3) To secure, by public appeals, the capital funds necessary for this purpose. The capital expenditure having been made, each house speedily becomes self-supporting.
- (4) To appeal for donations and annual subscriptions for replenishments and extension of activities, such as establishment of employment bureaux, boot and clothing depôts, etc.
- (5) The Society has been established solely for the purpose of social service, and in no circumstances will any profit be made.
- (6) Cecil Houses are entirely non-sectarian. Women applying for beds will not be called upon to answer any questions whatsoever.

HOUSES

- Nos. 34/35 Devonshire Street, Theobald's Road, W.C.1.
(Re-opening 1937).
- Nos. 47/51 Wharfedale Road, King's Cross, N.1.
Tel. No. : Terminus 6996.
- No. 194 Kensal Road, N. Kensington, W.10.
Tel. No. : Ladbroke 2843.
- No. 179 Harrow Road, W.2.
Tel. No. : Paddington 3973.
- No. 266 Waterloo Road, S.E.1.
Tel. No. : Waterloo 5752.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS AND DONATIONS
 SHOULD BE MADE PAYABLE TO
 D. G. SOMERVILLE, Esq., M.P., HON. TREASURER,
 AT THE OFFICES OF THE FUND,
 11 GOLDEN SQUARE, W.1.

38001717153

OF
LONDON'S PUBLIC LODGING-HOUSE
ACCOMMODATION

87½% IS AVAILABLE FOR MEN
WOMEN STILL HAVE 12½% ONLY

CECIL HOUSES EXIST TO REMEDY THIS DISCREPANCY

AT

47/51 WHARFDALE ROAD, KING'S CROSS, N.1.

194 KENSAL ROAD, N. KENSINGTON, W.10.

179 HARROW ROAD, W.2.

266 WATERLOO ROAD, S.E.1.

AND

34/35 DEVONSHIRE STREET, THEOBALD'S ROAD, W.C.1.

(Re-opening 1937).

All Houses are open to visitors every Thursday from 3.30 to 5 p.m.

Gifts of shoes, coats, skirts, jumpers, underwear, old linen, etc., for free distribution to those who need them most, will be gratefully received at all Houses.

FOR ONE SHILLING A NIGHT A WOMAN CAN GET A GOOD BED, HOT BATH, HOT TEA AND BISCUITS, AND FACILITIES FOR WASHING HER CLOTHES.

OWING TO THE HIGH PRICE OF PROPERTY

A MINIMUM OF £7,000 IS NEEDED

TO FOUND EACH CECIL HOUSE.

After the initial expenditure each House is self-supporting.

"The need of the vagrant women is to my mind infinitely greater than that of the vagrant men, yet the care bestowed upon the men is far, far more than that we have given to the women."
—*The Bishop of Woolwich.*

"It is a curious position that all men of the homeless class are better cared for; they have warmth and food, they have shelter, but the women who want to earn their own keep are living in circumstances of hardship and, maybe, are driven to the shelter of the street."—*The late Mr. J. A. Cairns, Thames Police Court Magistrate.*

"I need not cross my t's or dot my i's. The poorest of the poor, the homeless wanderer, *even if she be a woman, does not* lose, cannot lose, her essential human rights—her right to sleep and shelter. Such is provided by the L.C.C. in the case of men; there is a thousand times more reason for such accommodation being provided for women."—*The Chief Rabbi (Dr. Hertz).*

Ninth Report

1936-7

This Coronation Year of 1937 will see the opening of our Fifth which was our First House in Devonshire Street, W. C. 1. We had hoped to be ready before the issue of this Report but, as explained at our Meeting at the Shaftesbury Theatre in November last—an account of which will be found on pp. 15-33—insurmountable delays held up the work.

Now, however, we are well on the way to completion, and very soon the little lamp once more will shine a welcome and through hospitable doors will pass the tired, the helpless, the lonely and the hopeful to find rest, warmth, companionship and human understanding.

The new premises will be larger than the original Queen Anne dwelling and will accommodate some fifty women and children. Constructed on the most modern lines, light, airy and colourful, the House includes the usual complement of bath, washing and laundry rooms with provision for the clothes, shoes, hats etc., that our friends so kindly send for free distribution.

Our Four Houses continue popular and self-supporting, each attracting individual types. At one it is the old women who seem most at home, while the vigorous independent North country lassie invariably gravitates to another; the more reserved almost unconsciously choose a third—some very poignant human stories are included in its annals.

Waterloo Road seems to attract all ages with its atmosphere of camaraderie and friendship. The Matron has been most fortunate in finding jobs for many who by circumstance or physique might otherwise be square pegs in round holes.

She writes:

"Several of our girls have been successful in obtaining employment at F.'s this week. Two of them I have 'trusted' for their bed money for a week to give them a chance."

Our Matrons are not able to give a reference in the accepted sense of the term but as they all have a long and intimate acquaintance with every form of destitution they are able to select those who are most suitable for the vacancies that occur.

Employers appreciate this. The following is typical of many others:

"May I say that the woman you found to work for me has proved very satisfactory.

"Yours very truly,
"R.O."

WITH THE CO-OPERATION OF FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS WE HAVE BEEN ABLE SINCE WE STARTED, TO FIND EMPLOYMENT FOR 896 WOMEN AND GIRLS AS GENERAL SERVANTS, WAITRESSES, CHAMBERMAIDS, AND DAILY HELPS. THE MAJORITY OF THESE HAVE DONE VERY WELL.

Some of the girls and women who come to us when life is particularly hard, keep in touch with the Matrons when they no longer need the shelter of a common lodging-house. Their letters show the kindly and affectionate relationship between Matron and guest:—

“Dear Matron,

“This letter is just to say how much I appreciated your kindness to me, a stranger. It was a new experience for me to be alone like that, and your hostel was indeed a haven of refuge to me, which I shall always remember. The friendliness of the others there, and that of Miss D. and Mrs. B. and yourself, came as only an unexpected pleasure can, when one is lonely and unhappy.

“If you get the chance, would you thank Miss F. for sending me to you. I would like you to remember me to the middle-aged lady who slept next to me (my bed was No. 15), I don't know her name, and the others too.

“Now, good luck to the house and best wishes for it and yourself.

“Yours sincerely,
“A. W.”

“Ward C, L. Hospital.

“Dear Matron,

“I now take great pleasure in writing you. You will be pleased to hear I had a baby girl on Tuesday morning ten minutes to seven, weighing 6 lbs. 10 ozs. We are both getting on fine. . . . Must thank you very much for your kindness to me whilst in Cecil House, and I wish you every success for your goodness. Will be very pleased to hear from you as it will help to cheer me up, as seeing nobody makes me very downhearted, but I must keep a smiling face as every cloud has a silver lining.

“I will bring baby to show you when I come out if you have no objection to me doing so.

“Thanking you very much again from the bottom of my heart, I will draw to a close.

“Yours sincerely,
“A. L.”

Sometimes things turn out less happily. It is one of the difficulties of life that very often those most terribly in need of help cannot bring themselves to ask for it.

In such cases it is only possible to show an understanding sympathy in the hope that something more tangible may be accomplished. Tragedy is sometimes the sequel:

“Gloucestershire.

“Dear Madam,

“My sister, Miss T—, stayed with you recently, I understand, and left a suitcase at the House. I am writing on behalf of my father, at his request, to say we are grateful to you for the care you have shown her and shall be

glad of any information about her which you can give to me. Please allow my daughter to have the suitcase when she calls to see you or arrange about it as she thinks best on consultation with you.

“My sister may have stayed under another name. She died in G. Hospital last Wednesday.

“Thanking you.

“I am, Yours faithfully,
“N. M.”

On this the Matron says:

“This is a very sad case. The woman stayed with me under the name of J., but did not appear distressed in any way. One could tell she was not the usual lodging-house type; she was refined and kindly in disposition. I felt she might need work and I got her two nights watching duty at the Hospital.

“She left me soon after and I learnt later that she had taken a little room but she could not keep it going. She was too proud to plead, and starved to death.”

Friends who have been with us almost from the first have established personal contacts with the Houses and by their interest keep alive that spirit of reciprocity invaluable to any organization. Occasional treats in the form of teas and suppers are given in this way and these kindly entertainments are regarded as bright spots in lodging-house life:

“Dear Matron,

“I feel I must send a line to thank you very much for your kindness to me, also for the kindness of the other ladies who helped.

“There are some good people in the world, and it is to us lonely ones they appeal most.

“I have not put any address as I do not quite know what it will be after next Saturday.

“With very many thanks.

“I am, Yours truly,
“A. A.”

We have also to thank very specially those who contribute to our Xmas Funds which provide free breakfast, the traditional dinner of beef, pudding and dessert, with tea and supper to follow. A party of professionals give up their own Xmas afternoon to provide a concert and the evening winds up with a free bed.

Thus for this one day in the year the desperate anxiety of finding food and lodging is spared to every lodger.

On Xmas Day last year Queen Mary once again remembered Cecil Houses. Her Majesty sent a number of gifts to the women which were intensely and individually appreciated.

The following from our Matrons show how keenly Xmas Day was enjoyed:

“At the office the Queen's gifts were drawn for. For the women I got sweets, crackers and toys for the children, and for my own use a picture and a cushion.

“Festivities went on until 2 a.m., everyone then feeling tired, after a very happy Xmas Day. The dinner was exceptionally good and an ample

supply. Every lodger had three articles of clothing, this time they picked their own as I arranged them all on a long table. Two concert parties came, one in the afternoon, one in the evening. Both were splendid and, I may say, had a great reception."

"We all had a very jolly Xmas and everything was enjoyed, especially the dinner. One of the lodgers was heard to say that she had never had a better Xmas."

"We have had such a very happy time. The lodgers had everything they could possibly want and everyone enjoyed themselves. The concert party was excellent. Unfortunately, we had two sick folk in bed Xmas Day, but with the day's rest they were both able to follow their occupations next day. In the evening of Xmas Day a new girl was taken ill and admitted to Brook St. Infirmary with very bad pains in her back. She was taken in without a question.

"We received gifts of boiled sweets from Her Majesty Queen Mary, cigarettes, bon-bons, Xmas cake and cheese and cake as extras for a supper during Xmas week."

It is not only at Xmastide that Queen Mary shows a gracious interest in the homeless at Cecil Houses. The Committee are indebted to Her Majesty, not only for her approval of the work, and a generous monetary donation, but for a number of gifts—a large armchair for Devonshire Street, two cots for Wharfdale Road, an overmantel for Kensal Road, a clock for Harrow Road, and a framed portrait of Her Majesty for Waterloo Road.

Queen Mary visited our original house in Devonshire Street before its opening and was most pleased and satisfied with all the arrangements.

Our plans for 1937 include a Coronation celebration at each House, and friends are already suggesting that they would like to give towards the provision of a tea or supper on May 12th, with songs and dancing to follow. Each House now has a piano through the kindness of various donors and there is generally a lodger who can accompany spontaneous community singing.

For the information of new friends it should be pointed out that the Cecil Houses already established are the outcome of the experiences of Mrs. Cecil Chesterton and of the facts as stated by her in her book "IN DARKEST LONDON"* which showed that while municipal bodies supplied ample sleeping room at reasonable charges for men, it was left to private enterprise and philanthropic societies to cater for women.

Up to date Five Houses have been established :

March 28th, 1927—35, Devonshire Street, W.C.1, (opened by the Lord Mayor of London. Closed for rebuilding April 6th, 1936, to be re-opened this year for 50 women and 2 babies).

January 18th, 1928—47/51, Wharfdale Road, King's Cross, N.1, for 58 women and 12 babies (opened by the Lord Mayor of London).

*Copies of the new CHEAP EDITION of "IN DARKEST LONDON" (Price 1/- postage 3d.) can be obtained from Cecil Houses Inc., 11, Golden Square, W.1. Postage free on six copies and over.

March 15th, 1929—194, Kensal Road, N. Kensington, W.10, for 60 women and 18 babies (opened by the Home Secretary).

November 19th, 1930—179, Harrow Road, W.2, for 60 women and 18 babies (opened by the Prime Minister).

March 14th, 1934—266, Waterloo Road, S.E.1, for 49 women and 2 babies (opened by the Lord Mayor of London).

Funds for the establishment of these Houses were raised at Public Meetings held at Sir Philip Sassoon's; the Mansion House; the King's Theatre (Hammersmith); Wyndham's Theatre; the New Theatre; His Majesty's Theatre; the Shaftesbury Theatre; the Piccadilly Theatre; the Cambridge Theatre; Daly's Theatre and Basnett Gallery (Liverpool) when Mr. J. A. Cairns (Thames Police Court Magistrate); Lady Violet Bonham-Carter; The Bishop of Woolwich; Lord Hugh Cecil, M.P.; The Rev. Vincent McNabb, O.P.; The Very Rev. The Chief Rabbi, Dr. Hertz; Mr. St. John Ervine; Lady Barrett, M.D.; Mr. G. Bernard Shaw; Lord Ebbisham; Mr. Robert Hale; Dame Sybil Thorndyke; Mr. W. Clarke Hall; Mr. John Galsworthy; the late Sir Gerald du Maurier; the late Mr. G. K. Chesterton; Miss Margaret Bondfield; the late Mr. John Drinkwater; Miss Gladys Cooper; Mr. Hugh Walpole; Mr. Alfred Short, M.P. (Under Secretary for Home Affairs); Miss Clemence Dane; Mr. Conal O'Riordan; Miss Edith Evans; Lady Moyers; Lt.-Col. Robert Loraine, D.S.O.; Miss Ellen Wilkinson; Miss Marion Lorne; the late Dr. Morton (Governor of Holloway Prison); Mr. R. C. Sherriff; Commdr. Oliver Locker-Lampson, C.M.G., D.S.O., M.P.; Miss Maude Royden; Miss Peggy Ashcroft; Sir Cedric Hardwicke; Mr. Ian Hay; Mr. Adrian Moreing, M.P.; Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith; Miss Helena Pickard; Mr. Louis Golding; Mr. J. B. Priestley; Mr. Ernest Milton; Sir Thomas Beecham, Bart.; Mr. Aldous Huxley; Mr. James Laver; Miss Mary Borden; Miss Margery Pickard; the Lord Mayor of Liverpool; Miss Edith Rose; Mr. Alec Waugh; Miss Helen Simpson; Mr. A. J. Cronin; Mr. L. A. G. Strong; Miss Lesley Wareing and Mr. Robert Nichols spoke of the urgent need of beds for homeless women and in support of the work of Cecil Houses.

Cecil Houses open at 8 o'clock every evening and remain open while there is a bed to let. The women leave by ten o'clock each morning. The Houses are closed during the day, it being impossible otherwise to run them on an economic basis with the same comforts and accommodation at the price charged. For one shilling a night a good bed, hot bath (towel and soap included), facilities for washing clothes, hot tea and biscuits at night and tea and bread and butter in the morning are provided. A charge of 3d. per night is made for a cot.

In every necessitous case Cecil Houses provide a free bed from a Needy Fund subscribed for the purpose by friends and sympathisers; but the homeless and destitute—to their everlasting credit—only apply for free shelter in circumstances of real want.

The police of certain areas always send a woman in emergency to Cecil Houses, and Probation Officers, Missionaries, Welfare Societies and charitable Guilds have an understanding with our Matrons whereby any stranded woman or girl can be put up and the money for her bed sent on at specified intervals.

The Houses are entirely non-sectarian and no question is asked of any applicant who books a bed. No one is interrogated or advised unless help or counsel is asked for. All sorts and conditions of women apply for a lodging, but their past history is not inquired into, nor the reasons why they have come to a common lodging-house. It is sufficient that a bed is wanted. Our lodgers include casual workers, paper sellers, flower sellers, match sellers, itinerant charwomen, unemployed domestics, waitresses and a percentage of women of better education who have fallen on evil times. Others come up from the provinces either to join their husbands who have found work in London, or are looking for it, or in the hope of obtaining employment for themselves. For some of these the Committee have been able to find permanent lodgings.

The gradual change in social and economic conditions has brought us into touch with a number of women outside the usual scope of charitable activities. The police make increasing use of Cecil Houses for stranded strangers and on more than one occasion help has been asked on behalf of girls and women from other countries who find themselves friendless in London and without English currency.

The following acknowledgment from two Danish women, very well dressed but speaking very little English, comes from our Waterloo Road House :

"We thank you for your kind hospitality and send you two shillings in payment of our beds. We are settled now.

"Yours sincerely,
"B. & M."

Another Matron reports :

"I had a German girl staying in the House on Monday last. She could not speak much English and had not been in England long. She was sent to us by the Police, but she obviously wanted to stay at a Club. I 'phoned St. Martin's Hans-Berman Y.W.C.A. and arranged for her to go there. The Secretary said she would help her to find employment."

Sometimes our own countrywomen stranded in London are brought to us.

The following indicate the circumstances :

"Monday night a woman named S—— came in wet through. She had no money and was sent on by the Police. She had had no bed the previous night but expected to go into a place on Tuesday. I gave her food and a complete outfit of dry clothes. She had a hot bath and was ever so thankful. Said she would call and see me to pay back the money when she got her pay but I told her she need not worry over the payment and I could give her a servant's dress. She started off the next day looking quite different."

"Father F——rang up and sent along a mother and young baby for one night until he could get her fixed up with a foster mother, also two more children in for week-end as the mother was stranded."

"My two Irish families have gone—one mother and daughter have gone into service. The other one has gone into a room with her boy and girl. They thanked me very much for what Cecil Houses had done when they were stranded."

"Mother with four children came in Monday night; left their room because the landlord was the worse for drink and quarrelsome. Had we not been able to take them in they would have had to go to the Institution. Since Wednesday two of the children have been taken by friends."

"The young girl I put up and helped from Needy Fund—brought by police—is still with me. She has had three free beds to enable her to get a clear start. She is ever so grateful for kindness shown to her when nowhere to go and without money. I am putting up a mother and girl of 12 and two children temporarily as they have been turned out of their room through overcrowding."

"Sunday night police brought along in their car a mother and girl of twelve from Harlesden that had arrived from Newcastle and were stranded for the night. The mother paid 1s. 6d. for the beds and I took the other 6d. from the Needy Fund to make up the 2s. They were very glad to have found us."

"The police sent me on a woman to put up who had come to London to visit a sick relative in hospital and missed her train back; also they recommended three very nice women on Thursday who were waiting to go into their situations."

Since Cecil Houses opened some 626,648 beds and 38,315 cots have been occupied up to the end of March, 1937.

Inquiries have been received from our supporters as to the matter of endowment. An annual sum of £20 or £14 respectively entitles the donor to name a bed or a cot in perpetuity.

Questions are frequently asked as to what safeguards are adopted to prevent the spread of vermin or infectious disease. The Committee take this opportunity of explaining that a very careful inspection is made every morning of the beds throughout the Houses. If any vermin be discovered or a trace of disease found, the bed and bedding are immediately sent to a disinfecting station. The percentage of such cases is extraordinarily small; but when one occurs, and the occupant of the bed again applies for a night's lodging she is asked, privately, if she would like in the first case to go to a cleansing station, and in the second if she would wish to see the doctor free of charge. If these suggestions are declined, it is explained that in the circumstances she cannot be admitted, as to do so would unjustly expose other lodgers to infection. Such refusals, however, are extremely rare.

Our warmest thanks are due to the doctors who voluntarily visit the Houses and are available in all cases of emergencies. During the last twelve months a professional chiropodist has attended at Waterloo Road and by her skill and devotion has

given unspeakable relief to the weary and calloused feet of those poor wanderers of the stony pavements.

Sometimes spasms of illness seize on the homeless with tragic swiftness. Our Matrons know this all too well :

"A young woman was taken ill on Tuesday night. The Night Portress found her in a fit. I was awakened at 2.20 a.m. and decided immediately to get her to Hospital as it was rather a bad case. Eventually we got her downstairs, a taxi was got and she was taken to the Hospital. She is now in the Institution to be cared for. I may add the taxi driver was very helpful."

"A young girl collapsed Thursday morning and as it appeared rather a bad case of internal trouble I put her in a taxi with the Night Portress in attendance, and within five minutes she was in Hospital."

"Friends of Mrs. F—— (who went into Hospital from here) wish to thank Cecil Houses for sheltering her and providing her with a fresh supply of underclothes to come out of hospital. Several women have been admitted to the Infirmary suffering from 'flu—one collapsed on the doorstep but I got her into hospital by taxi within a few minutes."

"A lodger who has been with me for some weeks was taken ill on Tuesday night. The Night Portress took her to Hospital but I have since heard that she is not expected to recover."

The supervision of each House is in the hands of the House Committee acting with the Matron and the Staff, which includes an assistant, a general help, cleaners and a night portress. The duties of the House Committee, many and arduous, cover the unpacking and distribution of clothes, taking control during the Matron's absence, and the maintenance of general co-operation. The Committee have also to thank a number of voluntary helpers who have deputised for the assistant matrons during their evenings off duty and rendered continuous and unfailing service in very many ways.

The Committee desire to emphasise the point that no questions being asked the confidence of the women is invited, and those who are in mental or emotional distress feel that they will receive sympathy and assistance devoid of curiosity.

The work has been made easier by gifts of clothing, boots, etc., which have been sent to us for free distribution. Many young girls, quite inadequately clothed, have been given a complete outfit, and hundreds of women have found comfort and relief from the shoes and stockings, etc., Cecil Houses have thus been able to supply. The Committee value all possible help in this direction, and it is hardly necessary to emphasise the enhanced worth of any shoes received in a fair state of repair. The need for stockings is, also, an ever-growing one—all sizes and qualities, mended or new, are inexpressibly appreciated.

The Committee have also been able to help unmarried mothers who have arrived quite friendless ; arranging for their reception in maternity homes, infirmaries, etc., and later assisting them to place their children.

To remember
EMILIA H. EVANS
who loved all babies



"HAD WE NOT BEEN ABLE TO TAKE THEM . . ."

We find that Cecil Houses are regarded more and more as the information centre for every kind of social inquiry. A supporter will ask where an old servant can find a home in her declining years; a railway official anxious to trace a woman to whom a widow's pension from the company is due asks the office to look up the records of past lodgers; a widower hopes we may be able to find a good reliable housekeeper to look after his children; social students from abroad wish to find contacts; welfare workers from the provinces want opportunities for investigation; nursing associations and others are anxious to study our methods. One of our most frequent appeals is for the name of a suitable Hostel where a girl in regular employment may find board and lodging at a reasonable rate—alas, this is almost an insuperable difficulty when the inquirer earns but 18s. weekly.

All queries are fully and carefully dealt with though the answering of so many and such diverse points entails patience and resource and presses considerably upon the time of our small but ever-responsive staff.

Cecil Houses are open to visitors every Thursday afternoon, from 3.30 to 5 o'clock (*see page 4*) when the fullest information will gladly be given.

Interest in the work is steadily growing and during the past year many Women's Institutes, Clubs, Toc H gatherings, etc., have asked for someone from the Fund to attend their meetings and give an account of Cecil Houses and how they are run. By this means we have made many new and valued friends. The Committee would like to make it known that they are only too pleased to arrange for speakers at afternoon or evening meetings who will have first-hand knowledge of the Houses, and also to supply literature for distribution, and collecting boxes to those who are good enough to help. Applications for speakers should be made to the office, 11, Golden Square, London, W.1.

The purchase price of the freehold, cost of constructing and equipping each House is raised by public subscription. We have received support from every social grade and sometimes the same post that has brought us a handsome cheque has included a small but equally precious offering from those less financially equipped. The diversity of our supporters is revealed by the following:

"3s. for those unable to pay.

"From a Domestic WITH A REFERENCE."

"In aid of the fund for support of the Cecil Houses. In the name of Him Who said 'I was a stranger and ye took me in, naked and ye clothed me.'

"From yours truly,

"An Old Age Pensioner."

(The letter contained a P.O. for 2/6.)

"Dear Sirs,"

"We have lately learnt about the Cecil Houses, and what a splendid thing it is.

"We enclose £1 to help and will try and send the same every year, while we are in work. We are two domestic servants, and we will try and get the other maids interested in it.

"Yours sincerely,
"N. C. & E. C."

"We are happy to send you a cheque for £100, the amount of the legacy bequeathed to you by the late Miss P——."

Once a Cecil House is open it must stand on its own financial feet, the monies paid by the lodgers meeting the cost of upkeep, salaries of staff, provision of cleaning materials, tea, biscuits, electric light, rates, etc., with allowance for depreciation.

The Committee would urge all those who, more happily placed, have no need to seek shelter in a Public Lodging-House, to contribute what they can. No sum, however small, is too insignificant. **THEY WOULD ESPECIALLY STRESS THE NECESSITY OF SECURING ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS, FOR WHICH THERE IS VITAL NEED.**

The Committee desire to express their gratitude to those retiring members who regretfully find that circumstances prevent them from attending meetings in the future or devoting personal time and attention to the work.

April, 1937.

GIFTS OF SHOES, COATS, SKIRTS, JUMPERS,
UNDERWEAR, OLD LINEN, ETC., FOR FREE
DISTRIBUTION TO THOSE WHO NEED THEM
MOST, WILL BE GRATEFULLY RECEIVED AT

47-51 WHARF DALE ROAD,

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179 HARROW ROAD, W.2.

266 WATERLOO ROAD, S.E.1.

OR AT

11 GOLDEN SQUARE, W.1.

The following are Extracts from Speeches of our Supporters

At the Shaftesbury Theatre, London, November 27th, 1936

ALEC WAUGH GIVES HIS VIEWS

I have noticed that it is customary for the Chairman at a Meeting such as this to open by describing himself as "an unnecessary nuisance", a "tiresome and gratuitous prologue to the real business of the afternoon". If I have heard one Chairman say that a Chairman's function is to speak up and then shut up, I have heard twenty Chairmen say it. But when the audience, so encouraged, has settled down to enjoy the real speakers that it has come to hear, that same Chairman has proceeded to deliver a 25-minute talk. Ladies and Gentlemen, I promise you that I will not do that. As Chairman I have only two jobs to do; and both of them have already been done for me.

The first of them is to introduce to you the subject of Cecil Houses. There is not very much I can tell you that you do not already know. You, who have so largely helped and supported these houses by your generosity and interest, all know their history: of how ten years ago Mrs. Chesterton assigned to herself the job of finding out what happens in London to a woman who is destitute, homeless and without a job. For a fortnight Mrs. Chesterton put herself in the position of such a woman. She scrubbed floors; she washed dishes in restaurants; she sold matches. She spent on herself only so much money as she could earn doing those particular pieces of work.

After a fortnight, she found that there was no place in London where a woman who was without a job, and without a home, could get a decent, clean bed and a hot bath.

She wrote a series of articles subsequently published in a book, that may very truthfully be claimed as one of the most sensational series of articles that have been written during the last fifteen years.

Usually one knows what happens to that kind of article. For 1,500 words or so there is an exposure of conditions somewhere—in slums, in factories, in mining districts. In the last paragraph of the article the writer winds up by saying: "Surely something can be done." But Nothing ever is done; that is where the

difference lies. Here in the case of Mrs. Chesterton's articles and her subsequent book, "In Darkest London", a very great deal was done. There are now five houses in London where a woman who is jobless and destitute can get a clean, comfortable bed, a hot bath and a room to sit in before she retires. A woman who set herself to-day the job that Mrs. Chesterton set herself ten years ago, would find conditions very different; that is due entirely to Cecil Houses. The work of Cecil Houses needs no introduction. My first task is finished before it has been begun.

The second piece of work is also self-effacing—it is to introduce the speakers who are going to describe the impression that they received from Cecil Houses. But there is no need for me to introduce them. They have already by their work introduced themselves.

It would be an impertinence for me to describe in fifty or a hundred words what writers like Dr. A. J. Cronin, Miss Helen Simpson, Mr. L. A. G. Strong, and Mr. Robert Nichols have done and what they are doing in contemporary literature. Nor is there any need to introduce the fifth speaker. Owing to a bad attack of laryngitis, Miss Renee Houston is unable to be here to-day; but Mrs. Chesterton has persuaded Miss Lesley Wareing to take her place. It is a great pleasure to us to have her here. Many of us thought her "Viola" one of the finest pieces of Shakespearean acting we had ever seen; we are now seeing what she can do in a modern play like "Decree Nisi". Consequently, when the time comes for me to introduce the various speakers, I will do no more than call upon each one by name. The first Speaker is Dr. A. J. Cronin.

Alec Waugh.

" . . . IN THE DARKNESS . . . CROUCHING, HUDDLED " . . .

You said a moment ago, Mr. Chairman, that you were not called upon to make a speech. You have made such an admirable speech that it is we who are to follow who might as well shut up and go home. Be that as it may, I would like to begin by telling you about a little incident that happened the other night which is perfectly true.

I was dining at one of the big London hotels with a friend who happened to be staying there. As I left the Hotel, it was very late and very cold. I walked down a little side alley towards the place where I had parked my car; and, as I did so, I saw a row of people in the darkness, some crouching, some huddled, and some standing simply in a kind of silent apathy against the high side wall of the Hotel. Now we are pretty well used to these queues of wretchedness by now: I mean the dole queues, for example, and the queues of anxious, patient people who are hoping against hope to get some

kind of job. And I thought that this must be a kind of bread-line, waiting for scraps at the Hotel kitchen. But no, it was not.

I stopped and spoke to one of the men; and he told me why they were there. They came there, every one of them, because the heat of the Hotel made this particular wall and this particular pavement less freezingly cold than in other districts. They had all come to spend the night there. They were all homeless and destitute; and not one of them had a bed to go to. Well, I might, if I chose, paint to you the very harrowing contrast of this luxury Hotel, full of rich food and wines, where I had, God forgive me, eaten my own dinner, and on the outside these wretched and homeless people. But I do not wish to make a brutal assault on your feelings. I prefer, instead of drawing a moral out of this, to take the simple astounding fact that here were 60 men and women standing in a row who had not got a bed to go to.

Let us just consider for one minute this question of beds, not exactly as many modern novelists would consider it, but in its most elementary and actual sense. Most of us here know that inexpressible feeling of tiredness which comes after a really hard day's work. You are not feeling too good: you feel seedy. Things are not going well with you. It is then that you think with indescribable relief of the charm and comfort of your bed. But suppose, instead of slipping into the calm oblivion of sleep, you had not got a bed to go to; suppose instead of going to bed, you had to go out again and walk the London streets interminably; or suppose you were driven to stretch your tired limbs on a Park bench, or to crouch in the shadow of a wall, like I saw those people doing on a cold pavement, what would you think? Now you may not believe that incident about seeing those men and women; but I assure you that it is perfectly true. Some of you may say: "It is just sentimental twaddle".

I should like to take such people on a tour of London. I should like to take them in the Park very early in the morning and see the men and women, pitiful human creatures, lying on the ground covered with pieces of sacking and sheets of newspaper to keep them warm; pitiful, shapeless creatures, lying there so shapeless and so inert that they look as though they were dead.

It is the women that I am particularly appealing for. Heaven knows it is bad enough for a man not to have a lodging for the night: but when it comes to a woman, the thing is monstrous. I am not going to give you statistics; I leave that to speakers who are better qualified than myself; but I hope I have given you a little picture which will convince you of the necessity of this cause which we are all pleading here.

This work which Mrs. Chesterton is doing is magnificent work. Those of you who have visited the Cecil Houses—and if you have not, I wish you would hurry up and do so—must realize the tremendous processes of rescue and regeneration which are going on

there ; not only on the material plane, but on the spiritual plane, in the best sense of that word, in the case of women who have been homeless or been threatened with homelessness. It is not just physical comfort ; it is something which gives them back their self-respect, which happened there.

The trouble is, as with all good things, there are not enough of these houses—not nearly enough. We want more and more of them : and that is where you come in. I am going to ask you now, and I hope you will not start dropping your umbrellas at this point, to help Mrs. Cecil Chesterton in her great effort to establish more houses in the districts where they are so urgently needed. But really, I am asking you to do more than this : I am asking you to do something deeper, something which matters a great deal to you, to yourselves.

Do you ever think, as I do, that the world has gone mad ? We live on a beautiful and fruitful earth ; and yet all around us we are confronted by the insane spectacle of man arming against man, and man hating and destroying his fellow-man. Weapons of destruction are being forged in millions ; the most frightful poison-gases which corrode and destroy the living body are being manufactured and stored in every country of the globe. Even as I am talking to you now, women and children are being bombed out of existence in Spain ; and lovely historic buildings are being reduced to shapeless, smoking ruins. And poor humanity submits to this ! More than that, the people of some nations profess this mad ideology of mass hatred and mass suicide. If this is not lunacy, I ask you what is ? Now what we can do to-day, you and I, is to take a stand against this lunacy ; and prove that we are truly and gloriously sane. We can make this Theatre a little spot of sanity in a universal Bedlam ; and we can do it by giving our money, not for the annihilation of humanity, but for its salvation.

I know it is not easy to give, even in such a marvellous cause ; but I beg of you to do so, if only to prove yourselves to yourselves. You know, as I grow older I become increasingly convinced of one thing : that the money one spends upon oneself, upon one's pleasure, really brings comparatively little satisfaction—at least, little permanent satisfaction. It is the money that one spends on others that gives one the real warmth of feeling. Long after the self money is spent, you think of the look on some person's face to whom you have given something, and it gives you a warm feeling round your heart. I would like us all to get that warm feeling round our hearts to-day ; and to make sure that you get it, when you give, give generously.

I was talking to a London clergyman last Sunday, and he told me that when he appealed to his well-dressed congregation for a special object, the little envelopes that he sent out came back

some of them with pennies and half-pennies, and some of them with little bits of rolled-up scraps of paper in them. That is a good enough joke to play on a parson ; but do not play it on the poor women and girls who are depending on you, the match-sellers, the flower-sellers, the little waitress who is out of a job, has been chucked out of her lodgings and would not have a roof over her head if it were not for Cecil Houses. Give now and give handsomely, and give while you feel like it.

Do you remember the story of the Scotsman who approached the altar with his bride, looking so uncertain and so glum that the minister said to him : "Ah, Mac, what is the matter ? Have you lost the ring ?" "Nae, nae, Meenster, I have not lost the ring ; but I seem to have lost my enthusiasm." Well, give before you lose your enthusiasm ; and I am sure that there will be many who will thank you and bless you.

A. J. Cronin.

"SEEK LOVE IN THE PITY OF OTHERS' WOE."

Mrs. Chesterton has evidently a very great faith in authors : she has given you four in a row here—and that, you know, is very pleasant for us. We are accustomed to being bullied by Editors and ignored by Film Directors, and to being badly treated by Income Tax collectors, who *will* treat our earnings as if they were income, and not capital, as they are. But you will observe that Mrs. Chesterton, when she wants to get something done, does not fill her platform with Income Tax collectors and with Film Directors. She fills it with authors ; because she knows very well that we have one curious gift of our own to bring. We have imagination to bring to bear upon this problem : and it is imagination, not (as you have been informed—misinformed—by some novelists) love, that makes the world go round.

Well, now, all the others may give you flights of fancy ; but I am not here for that. I am here to give you fact, a record of what I saw and heard when I went, under Mrs. Chesterton's guidance, to visit Cecil Houses last week. I can tell you this. When I went into the first House, the first thing that came to my mind was a text ; and that is very odd, because the Houses themselves are completely non-sectarian. There was no reason at all why I should think of any text. But Mrs. Chesterton had said, as we were going through : "You know, in Cecil Houses we ask no questions. That is our motto : 'No questions asked.'" And I thought of that text from Ecclesiasticus, which runs : "The wound of the sword may be bound up, and argument may be reconciled ; but for him that betrayeth secrets there is no hope." Now, the

Houses do not betray secrets. They do not ask questions: they do not endeavour to find out what secrets there may be: and that, perhaps, is not the least of the blessings for which a woman who frequents the Houses may thank them. All the same, it is a trial, you know, for a Novelist, because we live by asking questions. We are always asking questions. That is our job.

It was hard for a novelist to have to look at the stories, 40 or 50 stories, that I saw sitting round the fire in that first common room we came to and not be allowed to pry into one of them. The first thing I noticed, when I went in past the little wicket gate where you pay your shilling, was the bright, new-looking orange-yellow paint. I said: "Matron,"—because one is not forbidden to ask the Matron questions—"that is awfully nice. How long have you had it?" And she said: "Ever since we opened: it must be about six years. The women like it. They think it is bright. They take a lot of pains not to damage it." That was the first thing that struck me.

Then I went into the common-room, and there was a great big fire, a coal fire, no nonsense about this hygienic heat; a room full of women, the same yellow paint on the wall, pictures, bright posters hung up, not frames. I said: "Why no frames, Matron?" "Well, we have to be a little careful about vermin, not that any of our ladies have vermin, but we just have to take that precaution, so that there are no frames."

Well, there I was: and there in that common-room with the fire and clean paint and posters, Mrs. Chesterton left me alone. I sat down by a handsome coloured woman with greying hair, who was sitting at the end of a long table. I did not speak at once: we were drinking cups of tea—but just sat there. Somebody said to her: "Any luck to-day, dear?" And she said, in that terrific great voice that the coloured races have: "It looks to me as though I shall not get any more work on the films." I thought "Films?" I chipped in and said: "You have been working in Films? So have I. I have been doing work for Gaumont-British." She said, "Oh, you have been doing some work for Gaumont-British?" And then the pair of us got together and blackened the character of every person in Gaumont-British. That was lovely. I enjoyed that very much.

Well, then up to us came a girl limping, a thin dark girl. "Look at my heel," she said. "This is the first day I have been out to work. It is fairly raw"; and sure enough it was. She had got a job in a cinema café that day; and she had worn the whole back off her heel. We all felt—with her in the cinema café, and me doing dialogues for the films, and the nice coloured woman acting in them—we all felt we had something to do with the cinema. We were very matey; and I advised about the bandage—Doctors' wives are used to interfering—and in one way or another we got the bandage on. (As a background to this, there is a piano going



“ . . . EAGERLY WELCOMED GIFTS OF CLOTHES, AND SHOES AND HATS.”

the whole time, without stopping, rather slow dances, because, as we all know, fast dances are rather more difficult to play. There are people singing and one or two people dancing about in the middle of the room, people sitting reading, people sitting having cups of tea and darning. That is the whole thing: full of movement and full of noise.)

The next thing: a girl gets up and somebody says to her "Are you going to see baby, dear?" And she says: "Come and have a look." I say: "Oh, could I come with you?" And she says: "Come along upstairs. She has not been too well."

So up we go. We find a dormitory with the dimmers on, very little light and very quiet. There is a baby looking very clean and very nice asleep, with her bottle half-empty. (She was a pretty baby, and had had a bit of a cough). "What is her name?" I say to the mother; and she tells us: "Daphne Louise." "A nice name," I say, "I like that." She says: "You can keep the 'Louise' part of it."

Now any novelist would at once seize on that and make a story: "You can keep the 'Louise' part of it." She did not like the "Louise" part of it. Probably the husband had insisted that the baby should be called "Louise", after his mother, who had almost certainly made mischief between him and the girl. That is the kind of story which instantly crops up in your mind; and which, because of the Cecil Houses rule about no questions, you cannot check. I shall never know if that baby was called "Louise" after its grandmother.

Well, then, downstairs we go again, and the piano is still going on, playing rather an old-fashioned jazz. Somebody has got to work with a bit more rhythm and people are dancing. I sit down by the coloured woman again. They are deep in talk about fortune-telling, looking in the cup; and she says: "Oh, cups is no good, you cannot tell anything by a cup. What I can tell by is the hand. What is written in the hand must be. That is fate. Of course, when I see something very unpleasant in the hand, like hanging or something of that kind, I always say to the person I am telling, 'There is nothing here would interest you.' But the hand, she says: "that is fate."

With that, a woman sitting next to her, a little quiet woman' suddenly said, in a voice so matter-of-fact that I didn't even realize she was quoting:

" 'Tis all a Chequer-board of Nights and Days
Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays."

And I thought: "That is not the usual Omar Khayyam quatrain." It is not the usual one you get set to music for contraltos for their

piano accompaniment. It is in the middle, where practically no white man has ever gone, of the Rubaiyat; I felt like saying to her: "Dr. Livingstone, I presume." I resisted that and said: "Do you know the rest?" She said, quite simply: "I know that whole poem." I said: "Do you? Let us say it." And there we started across the table, she there and I here, one, two three; she reciting the first quatrain, I the next, and on we went, the piano going all the time, the people in the middle dancing. A girl turned over her shoulder and said: "I went to a Society wedding to-day, St. Margaret's! Ever such a pretty veil she had, of net. I would not have lace—it hangs too heavy. She had a lovely face." The conversation was carried on while this woman absolutely ran me to a standstill with her Omar Khayyam—at about the eleventh quatrain I dropped it. Then she said to me: "Christina Rossetti! Do you ever read anything of her?" And I said: "Goblin Market I know well. I do not like so much the religious poems." And she said: "You may come to those when you are older."

Then Matron comes in and says: "Would you like to see the bath-rooms? There is one free now. There is always a great run on the bath-rooms, isn't there, ladies?" And they all say: "Yes, there is a run on the bath-rooms." Then I go and I see what is a very nice bath-room, turning on the taps to see if the water is hot. (It is, red-hot.) Then we go on into an excellent thing, the drying-room: a place where the women can dry their clothes while they sleep upstairs. How valuable that is to women who must make a good appearance, or who have just their one pair of stockings, it is not easy to assess. Anyhow, there it is; and we meet a woman coming out of it with a nightgown over her arm. The Matron feels it and says: "You are never going to put that on, dear? With your rheumatism you must never do that." And the woman says: "No, I am just going to finish it off under the mattress."

Then we go to the room where a little store of clothes is kept, clothes which are sent by people, and which are given perfectly free to women who happen to need some sort of change, or warm outer garment. The Matron says: "They are pretty, aren't they?" (And they are.) "We often find, if a woman comes in here a bit down in the mouth, it does her a lot of good to have a pretty jumper or a nice dress. It makes for self-respect. It makes all the difference in the world."

Well, we all know that. That seems to me a curious little sidelight on the spirit of Cecil Houses. It is not a charity; not that cold, dead thing. It is a living thing which sees these women as live persons, with as good a right to pretty dresses as the rest of us.

Then we go back to the room; the piano is still going, playing "Keep the Home Fires Burning" now, and everybody is singing;

people still talking all round the room, quite happy; noise absolutely indescribable, going in and out like a concertina, the way voices do. Then we have to say: "Good-bye." It is getting late, and we go out. As we pass the wicket-gate, where you have to pay your shilling—a little hole in the wall—there is a woman there, talking to the Matron. She is saying: "Matron, dear, cannot you make room? I can make do on the floor. I have done that before now." But Matron says: "Sorry, dear; you know we are only licensed for so many. Full up; sorry, dear." Well, the woman does not say anything. She turns away, and she goes off down the street. I say to Mrs. Chesterton: "What will she do? Where will she go?"

"She will go to one of our other houses, I expect."

"Yes, but that is several miles away. They are all two or three miles off, and it is starting to rain."

"Yes, it is."

"And they may be full when she gets there, too."

"Yes, they may."

Now, that is where you and I can come in. Do not think that I am asking for pity for these women that I saw there in that common-room. Pity is a very dangerous emotion. It leads you sometimes astray. You feel truly sorry at the bottom of your heart for somebody; and imagine afterwards that you have done something for that somebody. Keep pity out of this. See these women with their shillings, hundreds of them every night. See them as consumers trying to buy a commodity—shelter—of which there is not enough. See yourselves—in what for me will be certainly a new light—as capitalists; capitalists trying to stimulate the supply of this commodity, shelter. Do not pity these women. Do not allow yourselves to pity them. That will get in the way of doing things; and it is for the purpose of doing things that you and I are here to-day.

Now that I have said that, I must to some extent undo it. As I was leaving the House in Waterloo Road, the woman who had quoted "Omar Khayyam" and Christina Rossetti put a little piece of paper, which she took out of her handbag, into my hand, and we shook hands over it. When I got home I opened it; here it is; it is a verse from Blake:

"Seek love in the pity of others' woe,
In the gentle relief of another's care,
In the darkness of night, in the winter's snow,
In the naked and outcast, seek love there."

Well, after all, perhaps Blake knows best—I leave it at that.

Helen Simpson.

"... NOWHERE FOR A WOMAN TO GO"

I am not going to try to add anything to the perfectly admirable description of Cecil Houses which you have just heard. What I am going to do is to tell you about an incident which first brought home to me the need for these Houses. I ought not to have required anything to bring it home to me; it ought to have been self-evident.

I think that nowadays, when there are so many things to challenge our attention and claim our sympathy, we are apt to grasp things with the surface of our mind instead of with our imagination. We hear and we appreciate the facts which are brought forward and the arguments that are urged in support of this or that. We think we have got hold of them. We may even feel moved by them. But sometimes it is only when a little extra thing happens, something which sticks a pin into us, which kindles our imagination, which gets us where we live, that we realize that hitherto we have not truly grasped the thing at all.

There is all the difference in the world between those two ways of grasping it—all the difference that there is between statistics and life.

Well, the incident that made me for the first time, to my shame, realise what Cecil Houses were and what they mean was this. I went down to spend a day with friends in the country. My hostess was somebody who leads a fairly public life, whose voice and appearance are well-known. I arrived; and we were all sitting round the fire discussing how we were going to spend the day. Suddenly the door opened, and a maid walked in, bringing a large basket, the kind of basket in which animals and birds are transported about. One of the boys said: "Oh, that must be the cat." I said: "What cat?" And then I heard the story.

About ten days before I had come, my hostess had a letter from a stranger. The letter, as well as I remember it, said this: "I am a woman of 55. I have lost my employment and I have no prospect of getting any other employment. My money is exhausted. It is not that I am worrying about, because I have determined to make an end of myself. The only thing that troubles me is what is to become of my little cat. I have seen your face, and I have heard your voice on the Wireless, and I know that you are fond of animals. I feel confident that you can give my cat a good home. Will you please do this one thing for me?"

My hostess wrote back an encouraging letter, and sent some money. A few days later she got another letter thanking her for the money; but saying that this was not what the writer of the letter wanted. She had determined that there was no further place for her in the world. All she wanted was a home for the

cat. And now, while I was there, the cat had arrived. We opened the basket and took out a young cat, sleek, well-fed, with a collar and little bell round its neck, in perfect condition. The basket was lined and spotlessly clean, and in it was a cat's toy. In it also was a further letter, asking my hostess to take charge of the cat; and adding these significant words: "If I were a man, things would be different; but there is nowhere for a woman to go." The cat was taken out of the basket and it sat on my hostess's knee. It was perfectly happy and contented until two dogs, which were perfectly accustomed to their home cats, and regarded cats as friends, came up to talk to it. It not being accustomed to them, was frightened, and jumped up on the top of a cupboard, from whence it had to be rescued. Well, the cat has found its good home, and is enjoying it still. My hostess naturally tried once more to get in touch with the writer of the letter. She succeeded; but too late. The writer had carried out her promise; and was finally traced to a slab in the mortuary.

The operative sentence, as we may call it, in this story is one from the note that was in the basket: "There is nowhere for a woman to go." Of course, there were, and there are, places for women to go: but what the writer of this letter meant was, "there is no place for a woman like me to go without fatal loss of self-respect."

It seems to me that almost the most important thing about the Cecil Houses is that, the moment anyone crosses the door, everything possible is done to restore her self-respect, to encourage her to restore her personal neatness, and to spare her feelings.

It seems to me that it is the duty of us all to see that no more lives are lost, as that life was lost, because "there is nowhere for a woman to go." We have got closer, more ignoble motives for seeing to this. Security and comfort are no longer things about which we can ourselves feel sure. We have only got to look around us to see, in other countries, and in this country, people now destitute and in need, who a short while ago were comfortable and secure. Never before have men and women in need been so really and so closely our brothers and our sisters as they are now. There is so little, but for the grace of God, that divides us. There is self-respect and cleanliness. We have just heard about the hot baths and the plentiful supply of hot water. But even hot water has to be paid for.

I was over in Dublin the other day, and I came upon the story of a Committee that was auditing the accounts of a pub. The various items were read out and passed without difficulty, until at last an item was reached: "Water—£14." The chairman said: "Wather, £14. I move that that be referred back. Sure, that's the price of a bloody canal!"

Let us do our best to see that the water in the accounts of Cecil Houses has not to be referred back.

L. A. G. Strong.

"IN THE PAST TEN YEARS . . ."

I have a confession to make, and that is that I am not an author. I think if I were I should be more accustomed to this limelight which, I must confess, is very disconcerting. I am not an author, but perhaps I am more like one of those *bêtes noires* of Miss Helen Simpson—Tax Collectors. After all, that is what we are here for to-day. We are not really here to listen to these most delightful and remarkable speeches which we have heard. That is only a sort of *hors d'œuvres* to the very solid meal which we on this platform expect to be given. But I think I am better than the ordinary Tax Collector in this respect: You have to fill in your Income Tax forms, and you have to part with a considerably greater part of your income than you like, without knowing in the least where it is going to. I hope to get a good deal of money to-day: but I can tell you, I think, what is going to be done with it.

It is some two years since we had a meeting like this. The reason we did not have it last year was because we had nothing specific in our mind on which to spend the money; and we did not think it right to ask you for money until we did know exactly what we were going to do with it. Since last year something very specific indeed has turned up.

As you know—and I say "as you know" because I know everybody who comes to this meeting has been to every other meeting before it, and is a true friend of Cecil Houses—we started just over ten years ago with a small house, 35 Devonshire Street, off Theobald's Road. That cost us altogether £3,600. It was a cheap house; and it was in the right neighbourhood for us. We were very anxious to go in as soon as we possibly could; and we collected very nearly all that money at a small meeting held at the house of Sir Philip Sassoon, who very kindly lent it to us. That was ten years ago.

That house, which was never when we knew it in its pristine state, has become considerably older. The house next door to it was condemned, and we had an opportunity of buying that house. We also feared that our own house, No. 35, was very likely to be condemned in the near future. So we decided to buy the house next door for £1,500 site value, because the building on it was worth nothing to us—it had to come down. We decided to pull it down, and pull our own house down and rebuild a bigger and, naturally, more modern and up-to-date house on the two sites. That we started to do. Perhaps we had no right to start to do it until we got your permission and practical support to-day; but we were so sure of ourselves, in so far as we have been so well supported by you in the past, that we did start building operations.

We bought the house next door and pulled that down. We have pulled our own house down; and we are now building a new one. That is going to cost us £8,000. £8,000 may seem to you, as it did to me, a large sum of money. But I think I can

honestly say that it cannot be done for less. We put our contract out to tender; and we accepted the lowest tender. If you think that £8,000 is too much—well, the Architect is sitting immediately behind me, and I have no doubt he will be able to make a better case than I can: but I can assure you that it is not an unreasonable price. We want £8,000. We have got a certain amount of money, but we want at least another £3,000 to finish this house. Then we want more money after that to build another house. If you remember, we have said always at these meetings that Mrs. Chesterton's ambition was to have six houses in London. This will make our fifth.

May I just say one word as to the work of the other Houses? We have always told you that once a house was started it was self-supporting. We wanted the money from you for the bricks and mortar, and for the furniture and for the decoration and the plumbing; but when once it was a going concern, it was to be self-supporting. I can assure you that every one of our Houses up to now has been self-supporting. You have only to look at the Balance Sheets to see that every house has a credit balance. We get that credit balance by charging 1s. a head. For that 1s. everything connected with the house is paid for. It pays for its own redecoration; it pays for its own joinery and plumbing, and repairs that have to be done; its own Matron and Staff; its electric light bill; its telephone bill; its rates and taxes, and in fact everything connected with it: and in some cases there is a large balance and in other cases a smaller balance at the end of the year.

We are asked sometimes why, seeing that it does show this credit balance, we must charge a shilling, and could not we charge less? Well, I think the difference between charging 1s. and say 10d., would be just the difference between being on the right side and being on the wrong side. At 1s. we pay our way and show a balance; but at 10d. we would not pay our way, or would show a loss.

Since the 1st January to the 21st November, which is 47 weeks, we have had occupied just over 63,000 beds, which is nearly 192 beds a night. When you think that since April Devonshire Street has been out of use owing to its having been pulled down and rebuilt, so that we have only had four houses going in that time, it means that in those four houses we have had 192 beds occupied every night, and very nearly 60 in a house per night during the whole of that time, you can realise that our work is very well worth doing.

I am hoping that those speakers you have heard, and Mrs. Chesterton whom you are going to hear, will have so wrung your heart-strings that you will give so much money this afternoon as will be in inverse ratio to the distress of your families, when you go home and tell them how much you have given. Apart from lump sums, largish lump sums and smallish lump sums, if you do

not feel inclined to deprive your families too drastically, we welcome very much indeed the promise of an annual subscription of a definite amount. Those annual subscriptions do enable us to budget in some way, and to see exactly how far we can go, and what money per year we can rely on.

The only way we have of raising money is by holding meetings like this; and by sending out our annual report every year to those people we have on our books. We do not attempt to raise money in any other way; we never circularise; we never run stunts; but we just do it in this way.

In the last ten years we have been able to build these four houses, and are on the way towards building a fifth house; which shows that not only is the public still true to us, but that they appreciate the work we are doing; and the fact that these houses are full also shows how very much the women themselves appreciate our work. I thank you very much for having listened to me.

Major J. Brunel Cohen.

THE FIRST AND THE FIFTH

A great many changes have happened in the world of Lodging-houses since we started just on ten years ago; and I think I should like to tell you something about them.

To begin with, the general standard of lodging-house accommodation has improved. Our example of hot water has been followed. Also at the present moment certain lodging-houses provide cots for children. When we opened, we were the only houses which did that: but now I am glad to say more and more are following our example, so that the terrible problem of where a woman is to put her children while she gets a home together is not so acute now as it was.

Also, certain changes have taken place in the psychology of the women who come to our houses. Their standard has also improved. They have changed, according to the environment which we have been able, with your help, to provide for them. Instead of those poor, pathetic little brown-paper parcels that most of them used to bring, they now have cheap, neat cases. Their general appearance is better. A larger number take baths, a larger number wash their clothes, and take advantage of the facilities for mending their clothes: and what is more, there are women and girls who gladly and eagerly welcome gifts of clothes and shoes and hats. That, I think, is rather interesting.

We still have our poor, old match-sellers and our newspaper sellers, and we still have a steady stream of women and girls from the Provinces. Quite recently at one of our Houses a woman arrived with a baby in a perambulator. She and her husband had

walked with that baby and perambulator all the way from Newcastle. He was tired of being unemployed; and felt if he could only get to London he might find a job: and so they walked, sleeping under the hedges, occasionally in a barn and under haystacks, until they got to London. A kindly policeman sent her to one of our houses. She was pretty well done-up when she arrived—she was “all in.” But she stayed with us for a few days, until she got better, and the child perked up. Now I am glad to say that the husband is working, and she has a job; and they have been able to get together a small home, that small home which so very many women long for and so few can win.

Then there was a woman who came to our House in Kensal Road. Her husband had got a job, and she had taken a room in advance for herself, husband and children. When she got there, the tenant of the house, who had let the room, looked at her rather curiously and said: “You’ve two children?” She said, “Yes. Don’t you want them?” He said: “It is not that; but I don’t think they ought to come here. You see, there are rats, and the rats might bite the children; they’re sure to drink the milk. They mustn’t stay here. You had better go to Cecil Houses.” So she brought the children for the night, and stayed with us until she was able to find a room where there were no rats; and in this particular neighbourhood, believe me, that is a very difficult thing to find.

But all these cases do not have the same happy ending. A woman came to us—educated but, spiritually speaking, very down and out. The Matron was able to find a job for her, and she took the job, and she took also a small room. She longed for a home most passionately; and felt that she could keep one going with the money she would earn. But things did not go well. As we afterwards learnt, she lost her job, and could not find another. She paid her last 3s. for rent, and without food or fire, stayed alone. When they found her she was taken to the hospital and there she died of starvation. When they searched her room, they just found a crust of bread and one sardine.

It is sometimes said that nobody in England need starve; but you know, those ideals in which we all believe very often fall far short of what we hope they will fulfil.

At the present time we have an increasing number of girls and women who are suffering from the terrible fall in wages. There is not so much unemployment nowadays; but there is a very low standard of payment. Eighteen shillings a week is the rate for washers-up, for cheap café work, for sweated workers in the tailoring shops, all of them striving to live somehow on that impossibly small sum. You will find many of those girls in underground basements washing up piles and piles of greasy plates, or standing at machines hour after hour. You will see them in the cheaper cinemas, where they have to find their make-up and their silk

stockings and keep up a good appearance. None of them is able to keep the home they all long for ; but, thanks to Cecil Houses, they can find a temporary roof while they look out for something which perhaps may be more permanent.

Since we started ten years ago, a great many official organisations have sprung up. They were founded with the idea of meeting all sorts of human needs and necessities ; and I am sure that those organisations and societies have done a great deal of good, and have helped very many people. But there is a danger, a particular danger expressed by Canon Dick Sheppard quite recently when he said : "There is a risk that in those highly organised schemes for public welfare, the needs of the men, women and children you want to help are lost in a mass of forms and statistics—strangled by red tape."

Now, Cecil Houses in their work come in contact with a great many public bodies and organisations. We work with them very well, and they help us in very many ways, as we help them. The Police bring us stranded women and girls. They know of our work, and appreciate it. Police Court missionaries 'phone up when they are sending a girl whom they want the Matron to keep a kindly eye on. We have been able to establish the most human and the most kindly relations with the local hospitals and infirmaries.

But, as Dick Sheppard says, highly organised schemes sometimes forget the human need.

About ten days ago, the Matron of our House in Waterloo Road, going over the rooms in the morning, found a lodger who was obviously very ill. Our houses close at ten o'clock ; but this woman could not possibly get out of bed—she was distressed and complaining of her throat. The Matron telephoned to the nearest hospital, in Brook Street, for an ambulance. She had telephoned to the hospital before, and they had always sent an ambulance very kindly and very quickly.

But she was told that now new regulations had come into force the ambulance could not be sent and she must get into touch with the Relieving Officer of the area at another dépôt. She did this. The Relieving Officer also said he could not send an ambulance—he must come and see the patient first. He came very much later. He had, of course, other duties to perform, so I do not complain of the delay, though one was very sorry for the woman. He saw the woman and he asked her where she was born ; what her parents were ; if her parents were married ; if she was in work ; how much she got for her work ; was she married ; had she children ; and were these children born in marriage ?

He questioned her in this way—the poor thing fighting for breath, distressed in mind, suffering in body, until at last she called out to the Matron : "I cannot bear any more," and was dreadfully sick.

Even then she did not get the ambulance.

The Official asked if she had ever had a Panel doctor, and learned that some time back she had a Panel doctor at Peckham. So he said to the Matron : "You should have sent to that Panel doctor before you sent for me."

I do not want you to think that I am suggesting for a moment that all Relieving Officers are like that ; any more than Dick Sheppard suggested that all Committees were tied up in red tape. We know they are not. But we must all of us know, however human Committees may be, and however human Relieving Officers may be, that these things occur.

I do not suppose the Relieving Officer knew he was being cruel. He could not have known that to ask a woman in pain and distress, in dreadful anxiety as to what was to become of her, if she were born in wedlock or her children legitimate, would wound her. No, he did not know that. Why ? He did not realise that he was speaking to a woman ; he was only speaking to a case. He suffered from what Dick Sheppard calls "the Committee mind", which does not see suffering as an individual challenge, but as a problem or case to be brought before a Board or a Committee.

The woman finally was taken to the hospital ; and she might have had to wait even longer than she did ; but we are not so highly organised that we cannot help in emergency. The Relieving Officer explained that if a messenger were sent for a form, the patient would get to the hospital sooner ; and the Matron thereupon despatched her cleaner, and the poor sick woman was finally taken away.

If I were ever questioned as to what Cecil Houses, apart from its endeavour to provide beds, warmth and human conditions, stands for, I should say, You and I, all of us, who work for Cecil Houses, set the human need before the organisation !

We do not look on our women as cases : we regard them as sharers in the common lot of life and death, hope and despair, comfort and failure, suffering and betrayal. We know that those who are able to give to-day money or sympathy or thought may very badly want those same gifts to-morrow, and because of that we are able, quite simply and sincerely, to offer a helping hand to those who need it.

So at this season of the year, when all of us think very deeply of home, and all that home means, I am asking you for help. There are many in the Theatre who have been with us from the very first day that we started. Their names are among the earliest letters we received.

I remember with gratitude how Queen Mary helped us then. Her Majesty gave us money and gifts for the little house in Devonshire Street ; and for each house that we have started. There were Christmas presents for the women last year and again this.

I feel that is a happy augury, if I should want an augury, remembering how generous you have always been.

I ask you for help to finish our fifth, which was our first house ; a bridge across the desolate span of homelessness and helplessness—I ask you very gratefully and very hopefully ; and I do not think you will refuse.

Mrs. Cecil Chesterton.

The Chairman : We now come to what is, after all, the real purpose of this Meeting—to appeal for funds for the re-building of the Cecil House in Devonshire Street. This telegram has been received from Mr. Somerville, Hon. Treasurer of Cecil Houses—"Deepest regret cannot attend to-day owing to serious illness—please subscribe your limit to cheer me up—best of luck to my substitute—D. G. Somerville, M.P., Hon. Treasurer." Miss Lesley Wareing and Mr. Robert Nichols will now make the appeal.

"THANK YOU!"

Mrs. Chesterton asked me to make the appeal for the money for the Cecil Houses. Somehow, after hearing the speeches this afternoon, I do not think I shall have to appeal very hard to you. I know you have all little pieces of paper and pencils. Will you please write down on those pieces of paper how much you will give us? Make it as much as possible, please. Mr. Nichols and I had a little meeting before we came this afternoon, and we decided that none of you were to leave the Theatre with more than four-pence in your pockets, which is enough for you to get home with. So will you do your very, very best? If you cannot give very much, we understand, because some of us cannot do so, either. But anything from £500 to 5/- will do. Thank you. Mr. Nichols will now let you know more about it.

Lesley Wareing.

"KEEP THE FIRES BURNING . . ."

I have prepared an enormous amount of eloquence, but it is completely wasted, thank Heaven, because other people have done the job far better than I could ever do it. Therefore, I am going to proceed straight to business. Four-pence has been mentioned. That is all you are going to be allowed to leave this building with, four-pence because it is a nice bus-ride fare. I suggest some of you might leave the four-pence behind you here ; because if you pad it home on your hoofs, you will learn what some of our ladies have been doing week in and week out, day in and day out. Therefore, I suggest that you do not even leave yourselves four-pence.

I am going to begin with suggesting—there is nothing like being bold, because I believe one has got to aim high to get over a haystack at all—first of all a floor for Cecil House. What about that? It will cost you £700—seven people giving £100 each.

Or a bed? A bed would be an excellent idea. I do not know how many of you realise that a bed in some circumstances is heaven. Some of the gentlemen in the audience will do so, because they were in that show, the Great War. I remember in the Great War that all a man wanted was a bed. There were people who were lying in the rain for three days on end. I can assure you I was visited with the kind of vision which I imagine a Polar explorer is visited by, in which the idea of bed seemed absolute heaven. The bed was an acre in extent ; it was as soft as a cloud, and as warm as a fire ; and I slept in it for about six weeks.

We are not asking for a bed of that kind ; but we are asking for the ordinary common or garden bed, such as you can see in Cecil Houses. £20 will endow a bed for a whole year ; which means that for 365 nights a woman who had no hope will get hope, and will get some rest in a bed.

Besides the beds, many of the ladies want baths ; and you can furnish a bathroom for £20. A sink for washing clothes costs £2 2s. ; and an electric point will cost you £1. These ladies like a bath, because they have been out all day, and they get frequently very cold and very wet ; and their shoes are not what they used to be. They would have the pleasure, if you will provide it, of getting into a hot bath ; and I can assure you, because I have been at Cecil Houses, that the water there *is* hot.

Then, of course, chimney-pieces are wanted for the houses, and they cost £15 each. We have to keep the fires burning for the ladies ; and we need chimney-pots for the fires ; and they cost 10/- each. Remember that the ladies like to wash and dry their clothes, because all that sort of thing helps to restore their self-respect. That is a most important point. In order to help in restoring their self-respect, a sink for washing clothes is needed, which costs £2 2s. Then the equipment for a bed, including the mattress and everything connected with it is £11. Now, who will give the first sum?

Robert Nichols.

Mrs. Cecil Chesterton has arranged for Cecil Houses to receive a profit on every copy of her books, "In Darkest London" (1s., postage 3d.), "Women of the Underworld" (2s. 6d., postage 4d.), and "I Lived in a Slum" (6s., postage 4d. or 6d., postage 2d.) bought from the offices of Cecil Houses. Six copies and over post free.

THE CHEERFUL COMPANY OF CECIL HOUSE

By MARGARET LANE.

A piano is tinkling somewhere in the Waterloo Road. It is being played with more spirit than accuracy, but half a dozen voices cover any deficiencies. It is "Lily of Laguna" they are singing. They can't be all young voices, then, to remember that song so well.

A yellow light shines from the window, falling obliquely across the muddy pavement. The door is closed, but the curtains are not quite drawn. We might look in, perhaps. The house has a cheerful air of welcoming visitors.

As I thought . . . the women standing round the piano are mostly middle-aged. The one playing, though, still with her hat and coat on as though she had just come in, is little more than a girl. They are making rather a noise, but nobody seems to mind. The others, sitting at tables round the room, enjoying their "last thing" tea and biscuits, reading, playing patience, doing a bit of sewing, bend their heads a little closer when they want to be heard. Nobody would dream of interrupting the music. It's so cheerful, so restoring, last thing at night.

But that is the thing—that cheerfulness—that strikes one so pleasantly, so surprisingly, immediately one has stepped inside a Cecil House. Founded to supply the desperate need of decent shilling-a-night lodging houses for "homeless and destitute" women, they might reasonably be expected to be a little dreary, a little institutional. You might think the shadow of destitution, of homelessness, would be too much for their courage. You would be wrong. I have never been into any house where cheerful friendliness met me so readily at the door.

All five of the Cecil Houses established in London open at eight in the evening. I arrived at 266 Waterloo Road at nine, when most of the women were already in and the evening's activities in full swing. The Common Room was crowded, noisy, merry. There was a clatter of tea-cups, a mist of cigarette smoke. Those who like to redeem a long day of drudgery (of match-selling, perhaps, of tramping London in search of a job) with an hour or two of social life, were all there. It was rather like the Common Room of a women's college—except that the atmosphere was distinctly jollier.

The quiet ones, the very tired ones, had already gone to bed. A hissing of taps and a cloud of steam came from the bathrooms. The water is always boiling hot, and the long row of bathrooms is used at the rate of twenty a night. There are wash-basins and foot-baths, too; a few of the older women, whom a lifetime of hardship and deprivation has made suspicious of total immersion, prefer these. There is no institution-like compulsion about bathing,

but nearly all the women count the hot baths as one of the favourite luxuries of a Cecil House. Nowadays it is extremely rare for the Matron to have to have a private word with anyone about her cleanliness.

The big, airy dormitories were quiet. Several women had already gone to bed. One was awake, reading. Two or three were already asleep—worn out, perhaps, unconscious with fatigue—under the blue-and-white counterpanes. Not even the cheerful singing of the Common Room could lure these exhausted ones from the luxury of a clean and comfortable bed.

Two or three, though, were neither in bed nor in the Common Room. They were in the wash-room, seeing to a little matter of personal laundry for the morning. One was washing out a blouse, another drying a vest and stockings on the hot drying rails, another waiting her turn for the matron's iron.

People who have homes to go to, laundries to send to, do not realize that one of the greatest problems of a woman who is homeless (but who still has self-respect) is the problem of keeping herself clean. Clothes are soon grubby in London; work is not readily given to a woman in a grimy blouse and filthy stockings. Yet cleanliness, as Mrs. Chesterton discovered during her self-imposed experience of destitution, is, like other luxuries, a question of money.

The women who come to Cecil House have no money for laundries, but the big wash-room, with all its facilities, is for their use, and most of them avail themselves of the opportunity of washing out a garment before they go to bed. Of all the fifty women who were there the night I went, I did not see one whose personal cleanliness could be seriously questioned, and nearly all of them were painstakingly clean and neat. Self-respect dies hard, even though one is homeless and penniless, and the best that one can hope for in the way of a job is scrubbing steps and offices.

What is the story behind most of these women? Why are nearly all of them—almost if not completely—down and out?

A wrecked marriage is the experience of many. Take that girl sitting quietly by the piano, the girl with the thin, rather intellectual face. She is getting a separation from her husband, but until the police court settles the separation allowance she is existing on public relief. "Existing", or very nearly. Public relief gave her the choice of seven-and-six a week or the workhouse. She chose the seven-and-six. She has a baby, too, and she is not strong enough to work. She has the frightening thinness of emaciation.

That bright-faced little woman over by the table has, like so many of them, seen better days. She had a husband once, and five children. All that is over. There are some things, she says, that one can't stand. Some things from which one's pride and integrity have got to be saved. That is why she is earning eighteen shillings a week, scrubbing floors and making beds in an east-end men's lodging-house. It is killing work, she says, and dull, besides. But soon she will get something better, scrape together enough to get a room of her own somewhere. Meanwhile there is Cecil House,

where there are friendly faces, and she can have a good laugh in the evenings. Otherwise she might think too much about those five children. The snapshots she carries in her handbag are getting worn at the edges.

This slight, fair-haired girl, who looks seventeen and is actually twenty-four, is a mother, too. Three weeks ago her two-year-old baby died. At the same time her unemployed husband suddenly got the chance of work in another town, and had to leave her. She found she could not face the loneliness of "the building" where she lives, at night. She is taking refuge in the cheerful company of Cecil House until he returns.

And that old soul over there, the one who has been dancing soundlessly to the music, and now has stopped, breathless, her hand on the table? No one quite knows what she does, for one of the first rules of Cecil House is that no questions are ever asked; but it is believed that she sells matches in the street, and that the best she asks of life is to escape the workhouse. She is old, and her teeth have gone, and her speech with them. She comes back to Cecil House two or three times a year and gratefully rests her bones.

What would have happened to all these women if there were no Cecil Houses to warm and shelter them, to give them back their self-respect and the chance to start again, rested and refreshed, no longer outcasts? They would be on the Embankment, perhaps, or sleeping in City doorways; dozing by day on park benches, walking about, walking about at night. . . . Only 13 per cent of London's public lodging-houses admit women. For those who cannot be crowded into their official (and often gloomy and even dirty) wards, there is always the doorstep, the Embankment, the street.

Cecil House, like other common lodging-houses, charges a shilling a night, but there the resemblance ends. Even the lack of a shilling does not mean that the door will be shut in your face, for the Matron uses her discretion, and no homeless woman is turned away simply for lack of twelve pence. The night I was there two of the women were sleeping "free". "They nearly always pay back the shilling, when they get work," the Matron said.

It is by those shillings, and not by charity, that Cecil Houses are run. They pay for themselves, make no profit but equally make no loss. They stand on their own feet.

But towards the £7,000 which is needed for the starting of each new house gifts are always welcomed and needed, and even so modest a subscription as an old pair of shoes does a necessary duty. Clothes, shoes, stockings, issued from the Cecil House cupboards to those whose clothes, shoes, stockings either drudgery or poverty have destroyed, do almost as much towards restoring hope and self-respect as anything else.

Even your winter-before-last's overcoat, in league with the rest and refreshment of Cecil House, may prove the lucky turning-point of a desolate life.



“ . . . A VERY HAPPY TIME . . . ”

NOTICES FROM THE PRESS

"The Cliff Town Literary and Musical Society began the second half of the winter season, following the Christmas recess, on Wednesday week.

"There was a large audience to hear an unusual and particularly interesting lecture by Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, entitled 'In Darkest London'. The lecturer gave a vivid account of her own self-inflicted poverty and destitution, undertaken in order to discover the conditions of the homeless and derelict 'In Darkest London', an experiment which resulted in the founding of the five Cecil Houses for homeless women which have since been opened."—*Southend Standard*, January 10th, 1936.

"When Mrs. Cecil Chesterton set out to discover (with nothing but her personality between herself and starvation) how the outcast woman lives, she found the acute need of shelter and clean beds, washing accommodation, and food at cost price for homeless or vagrant women. In every big city there is still such acute need, although women probably hide it by sheer instinct more than men."—*Women's Outlook*, January 25th, 1936.

"Architects who are aware of the charm of many of the old Bloomsbury houses in the Devonshire Street and Old Gloucester Street area will hear with regret that No. 35 and 34, Devonshire Street are to be demolished. No. 35 is of particular value as an example of the building practices of the eighteenth century, and it retains a pleasing staircase, some panelled rooms, fireplaces, etc. A correspondent informs us that the proposal is that Cecil Houses (Women's Public Lodging House Fund) are to rebuild on the site."—*Builder*, February 7th, 1936.

"... It was the same with her book, 'In Darkest London', which appeared in 1926. Living amongst destitute women she sold matches in the streets and did charring in order to learn fully how these women lived.

"The direct result of the book was the opening of the first Cecil House, where women can get a decent night's lodging for a shilling—an idea that at once earned the interest and practical sympathy of Queen Mary."—*Daily Mirror*, February 11th, 1936.

"If Mrs. Cecil Chesterton's new book accomplishes only a tithe of the good a former frank record of personal experiences did it will render a great service. Her revelations 'In Darkest London' stirred the hearts of many to assist her in founding the Cecil Houses for Homeless Women. Mr. John Galsworthy was one who said that having read that book he would have felt ashamed not to give the cause his help. Mrs. Cecil Chesterton did her 'slumming' differently; not as done by some society women who condescendingly 'visit' the underworlds. She went with the definite purpose of finding out by personal experience how women in hard circumstances fight their own battles. The result was the provision in London of Cecil Houses, where any woman could obtain good lodging, good food, and 'no questions asked—no tests, religious or other, imposed'. This brave woman has already made London less dark for women, and I fancy the effect of 'I lived in a slum' will be to bring her still more benefactors for the cause near her heart."—*Ipswich Evening Star*, February 19th, 1936.

"Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, for instance, went down amongst the down-and-outs. She sold matches. How concrete was her sympathy can be judged by the chain of Cecil houses now throughout London.

"How wide her humanity in contrast to many of the professionally charitable can be gauged by the fact that no woman, of whatever breed or sect or in whatever stage of degradation, is ever turned away.

"And, contrary to one's conception of charitable institutions, *no questions are asked.*"—*Referee*, February 23rd, 1936.

"The measure of our vaunted civilization may be taken after reading such books as Mrs. Cecil Chesterton's well-known work 'In Darkest London'—now available in a shilling edition (published by Stanley Paul, Ltd.).

"In every capitalist country I know, beggars and prostitutes—victims of the finance system—fill the streets. For every millionaire there must be a million poor.

"As the writer of this book asserts, the poor are not so because they are necessarily lazy, shiftless, careless or worthless. We can find the same characters among the rich; they happen to be 'better off'.

"So Mrs. Chesterton determined to search into darkest London for herself, to be one of the poor (although temporarily) and to contact the conditions of extreme poverty. . . .

"Here is a woman, penniless and alone in London, finding out how she was treated; how she could earn money; where she could find shelter for the night.

"Only those who have walked London, penniless, can realise fully how hard and cruel the city is to the homeless; smaller places have not the same relentless denial of humanity; the same endless hours of misery.

"It was the result of these days that caused the development of the Cecil Houses, organised especially for homeless women in London."—*Town Crier*, April 10th, 1936.

"The plight of homeless and destitute women in London was the theme of an address, intensely human and often humorous, given to members of the Inner Wheel on Saturday afternoon by Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, the famous journalist. A large room at Deller's Café was packed for the meeting and a subsequent conference. . . .

"Mrs. Chesterton spoke of the work being carried out in connection with the Cecil Houses in London, which she was largely instrumental in founding and which bear the name of her late husband.

"Women and girls were still going to London from all parts of the country, she said, under the impression that the city was paved with jobs. Many of them arrived with only the return half of their excursion tickets and a few pence in their pockets. . . .

"Mrs. Chesterton added that she was determined to find out the conditions under which such women lived. She mentioned this to the editor of the Sunday newspaper by which she was then employed and undertook to spend a fortnight under such conditions. Leaving home in shabby clothes and without any money, she arrived at Euston Station, and realised for the first time what it must mean for a stranger to arrive in a big city, friendless and destitute. She told a 'fairy story' to a policeman; that her name was Annie Turner and that she had been employed as a general servant by a family in Liverpool who had gone to America; the only money she had had been stolen in the waiting-room. The policeman directed her to a Salvation Hostel at Hackney, eight miles away, and she arrived there in the early hours of the morning.

"Mrs. Chesterton described visits to Employment Exchanges for odd jobs; how she sold matches in the street and 'washed up' at cheap restaurants. She told of the appalling conditions of lodging-houses, casual wards and 'doss-houses' for women. The majority of destitute and homeless

women in London have not fallen to that condition through crime or drink,' she added: 'It is usually ill-luck and illness. The terrible part of it is that when a woman has got many degrees away from her position in life it is almost impossible for her to get back again. If a man has a shave and a clean collar he looks quite respectable: if a woman is wearing a rain-sodden coat and shapeless hat she feels and looks absolutely depressed. No-one is going to engage such a person. . . . There is a very beautiful sense of comradeship among the homeless. They do not ask questions and they are always ready to help.'

"Concluding, Mrs. Chesterton spoke of the effect of the articles she subsequently wrote on her experiences, which were reprinted in book form under the title 'In Darkest London'. From all parts she received offers of help and financial support towards the formation of a number of houses for destitute women. Beds were provided at a shilling a night and food and other facilities were given. She stressed the urgent need for extending this work and appealed for assistance. . . ."—*Somerset County Herald*, April 11th, 1936.

"Cecil Houses Women's Public Lodging House Fund, 11 Golden Square, W.1, which was created to provide cheap lodging houses for women in need, states that at last the committee, of which Lady Lovat is chairman, is able to announce that the first of their five houses, the one at 35 Devonshire Street, W.C.1, is to be rebuilt on the old site. Adjoining premises have been acquired, but the plans are not yet complete, and the date of demolition preparatory to reconstruction cannot be stated. Efforts during the last year have been directed towards raising the sum required for rebuilding, though the amount so far realised is a considerable way from the requisite total.

"The fifth house at 266 Waterloo Road, S.E.1, has proved very popular during the year to Londoners and to many provincials, who have been directed to it by the police and railway employees familiar with its work. At each of the five houses Jubilee celebrations were held through the help of collections made by a few friends. A Jubilee supper, with cigarettes and sweets, was provided at each house, and every woman lodger was told that her bed that night would be free.

"The Queen, in addition to paying a visit to the house in Devonshire Street and making a donation to the funds, has given an armchair and an umbrella stand for Devonshire Street, two cots for the house at Wharfdale Road, an overmantel for Kensal Road, a clock for Harrow Road, and a framed portrait of herself for Waterloo Road."—*Times*, May 18th, 1936.

"Among many significant points in the report of Cecil Houses Incorporated is one that deserves wide recognition. Many of us are apt to take an unsympathetic attitude towards what used to be called 'the great unwashed'. Surely, we say, even the poorest could keep themselves clean, and we turn from a dirty-looking match-seller while a washed face may make successful appeal to our charity. But apparently cleanliness in modern towns is largely a matter of money. Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, during her experience of voluntary destitution in London, found that few of the lodging-houses provided decent wash-places, hot water or adequate facilities. In the weeks she spent cleaning door-steps and selling matches, she never spent a penny on a bath. Her scanty earnings all went in food to stay perpetual hunger. In the Cecil Houses that resulted from her courageous experiment, her first care was the provision of clean, comfortable beds, plenty of bath-rooms and unlimited hot water and soap. A frequent question asked by women of the matron is: 'Can I have the water up to my neck?'—wistful proof that the comfort of cleanliness is by no means ignored by the destitute, but that all-too-often it proves an unattainable luxury."—*Birmingham Post*, May 28th, 1936.

"The first of the five Cecil Houses in London erected through the crusading zeal of Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, who has lectured on several occasions in Cork, is being rebuilt. An appeal for the necessary £7,000 for the establishment is meeting with marked success. Of the initial Devonshire Street house, the Committee have retained the fine old Georgian staircase, the panellings and the old fire grate which has cheered so many inmates during winter weather. In each of the houses a woman can get a good bed, a hot bath, tea and biscuits at night and in the morning and facilities for washing her clothes for the sum of one shilling. The two mottoes of Cecil Houses are: 'No questions asked' and 'No Sectarianism'. The latter principle in action may be observed on the Executive Committee, which includes the Rev. T. J. Fitzgerald, a genial Tipperary man, who is now parish priest at Willesden Green; Major Brunel Cohen, the Jewish D.S.O., Mr. D. G. Somerville, M.P., a thorough-going Church of England Tory, and Mr. John Cargill, Socialist, who has a fervent admiration for John Knox. They are associated in the Cecil House project like brothers."—*Cork Examiner*, June 1st, 1936.

"I'm glad I did not commit suicide after all."

"So writes one of the multitude of girls befriended in the Cecil Houses, established to provide suitable premises for women's public lodging houses.

"Women desiring beds—they can get a cot for 3d.—are asked no questions. All are welcomed on the common basis of their need.

"In exchange for a shilling anyone can get a good bed, a hot bath, hot tea and biscuits, and facilities for washing her clothes.

"The hot bath is the thing most desired and appreciated by London's homeless women. . . .

"Since Mrs. Cecil Chesterton wrote her book, 'In Darkest London', five houses have been started. After establishment, each contrives to pay its way. . . .

"Two months ago, the original Cecil House in Devonshire Street, Holborn, was closed. It is now being demolished, and efforts are being made to raise £7,000 to defray the cost of a new building.

"At the moment there is no centre in the congested Holborn area where a vagrant or homeless woman can obtain a shelter and a bed—often the only practicable alternative to suicide."—*Reynolds*, June, 7th, 1936.

"The Annual Report of the Cecil Houses Committee avoids the cold impersonality of a formal statement by recounting experiences and quoting from letters. They show how warmly the facilities offered by the five Houses are appreciated and how much good can be done by the supporters of an admirable fund. One House has had to be closed for rebuilding, but will re-open early in 1937. Readers of *G. K.'s Weekly* are urged to contribute gifts of clothing as well as subscriptions and donations. All are badly needed, for the number in London of public lodging houses of suitable character, available for women is very small indeed and a minimum of £7,000 has to be found before a new Cecil House can be opened. . . ."—*G. K.'s Weekly*, June 11th, 1936.

"There is a really excellent and much needed work being done in London by the Cecil Houses, and it is a work which should have an especial appeal to Catholics.

"Before Mrs. Cecil Chesterton wrote of her experiences as a homeless outcast in her book, 'In Darkest London', there was a profound ignorance of the life led by these unfortunate women, without homes, money, employment, or hope. At that time, apart from a few houses run by Catholics, the Salvation Army and the Church Army, nothing was done for the down-and-out women. There were houses for men, where they could get a cheap

night's lodging, but the women were ignored. Mrs. Chesterton determined to know the truth about the life of the homeless woman, and one day, not so many years ago, she left her comfortable flat and joined the army of the hopeless. From 'In Darkest London', we learn of the results of her experiment, and the publication of that book awoke great interest, and out of that interest came the first of the Cecil Houses, so called in memory of Mrs. Cecil Chesterton's husband, who lost his life in the Great War.

"There are five Cecil Houses now, and more are needed. In them, women can get 'company—if she wants it—a fine big fire—company in itself that is!—tea and biscuits, a bath (if she wishes), facilities for washing and ironing her clothes, a clean bed (with a locker beside it), and tea and bread and butter in the morning.' And all for a shilling! 'The hostels open at 8 p.m. and close at 10 a.m.'—we are quoting from the 8th report 1935-36 of Cecil Houses (Incorporated)—'Women can come back as often as they have the shilling. Sometimes they haven't that shilling. The Matron looks them over—but no questions! She uses her judgment. 'I've got sixpence; I'll pay you back in a day or two.' They very seldom fail to repay. Sometimes there isn't even a sixpence. Again the Matron—wise women all of them—uses her judgment.

"There is a tremendous work to be done here, and the men and women who so bravely tackle this vast problem deserve all our support. On the General Council are Mr. and Mrs. G. K. Chesterton, Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith, and Mrs. Belloc Lowndes. Members of the Executive include the Lady Lovat (Chairman) and Rev. T. J. Fitzgerald.

"Owing to the high price of property a minimum of £7,000 is needed to found each Cecil House. After the initial expenditure, each House is self-supporting. Money is needed badly, but also clothes and books and shoes are very welcome. . . ."—*Catholic Times*, June 12th, 1936.

"A woman, I suppose, must, more than a man, *belong* somewhere. It is her first need for happiness that she should belong to someone—that someone should belong to her. She can battle along somehow, even if times are bad and there is little or nothing in the larder, so long as she is not alone. But the world is not a perfectly adjusted place, and 'it's mortal 'ard on women!' There are many who do not belong to anyone, women that nobody seems to want, women who have nothing to do, nowhere to go, no one to talk to. They have nothing to eat, nowhere to sleep, nowhere, even, to wash.

"Our social services are, in the main so good that it may be that we sometimes sit back with a comfortable sense that everyone is well looked after, and that in this enlightened age no one is really in desperate difficulty. But this is a false security; in our public organisation there are still some gaps. Of the public lodging-house accommodation in London 87 per cent. is devoted to men, and only 13 per cent. to women.

"The late Mr. J. A. Cairns, who, as one of our admirable London magistrates, was for many years in close and sympathetic contact with the seamier side of life, said: 'It is a curious position that all men of the homeless class are better cared for; they have warmth and food, they have shelter, but the women who want to earn their own keep are living in circumstances of hardship, and, maybe, are driven to the shelter of the street.'

"The Cecil Houses were founded to meet this situation. Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, the originator of the scheme, knew of the need at first hand, since she set herself to study the problem by actually living for weeks on end as a destitute woman, sleeping in the appalling lodging-houses that are run for profit, selling matches, washing-up in a Soho restaurant, going on the hunt for a job 'without references'. She says: 'I used to think, when I saw women in the street selling matches or begging, "I am sorry for them, but they might at least be clean". Later I realised that they could not be clean unless they had the money to pay for it.'

"At the Cecil Houses a woman can have, for a shilling a night, a good, clean bed, a hot bath, hot tea and biscuits, and facilities for washing her

clothes. More, far more, than that, she can have companionship and a little cheerfulness—somebody playing the piano, somebody singing. She is asked no questions—she is simply taken in and kindly treated. She is given the feeling that there is at least *someone* interested in her—and this is riches!

"The Houses are self-supporting: it is only in their original establishment that they depend on the kindness of the charitable. So there is the pleasant feeling that any gift, instead of being spent and gone, will remain, doing its work of compassion so long as the House shall stand.

"What happens, for instance, to a domestic servant crippled by illness? Here is the answer, from the report of the Cecil Houses: 'Two young girls helped her up the steps. . . they had found her, hardly able to move along. We got her into the sitting room, and told her that if she were ill, our doctor would come along at once and see her "Oh, no!" No beds were vacant on the first floor, and we asked if she could manage to get to the second. "Only let me get my hand on the banister," she said, "and I'll work my way up".'

"The Cecil Houses ask you to help them to help tired, lonely and sad women to 'get their hand on the banister', while they work their way up. . . .

"There are five Houses working now, and more are urgently needed. Please Help!"—*The Tatler*, June 17th, 1936.

"Ex-chorus girls whose luck is less than their courage, circus performers out of a job, unemployed cinema attendants—these are a few of the types of women that Cecil Houses have befriended and sheltered nightly during the past seven years, and the account of the unobtrusively excellent work which is being done is published in their report for 1934-5.

"The starting-point of the enterprise was the discovery by Mrs. Cecil Chesterton that only 13 per cent. of London's public lodging-house accommodation was available for women, and that what did exist was so repulsive and officialised that any clean and uninquisitive door-step was to be preferred.

"Out of this discovery, and Mrs. Chesterton's courageous initiative, there have arisen five unique lodging-houses, where for one shilling any woman can get a good bed, a hot bath, hot tea and biscuits, and ample facilities for washing her clothes, where no questions are ever asked, though confidences are welcomed and respected, and where, in necessitous cases, a free bed is provided for the entirely destitute."—*Era*, June 19th, 1936.

"'Old Kate', a match-seller in Aldwych, or Kate Lucille Foote, as she was once known, has died in an L.C.C. institution. She was familiar to thousands who every day passed her pitch, just where the omnibuses halt at the corner of Aldwych and the Strand. She sat there in sunshine or rain, swathed in clothes, with a red flannel scarf about her neck, her face towards the Gaiety Theatre, the successor of that where once lights had flashed her name, for she had been an actress, and she had also travelled extensively, entertained lavishly, and been well-known in Continental casinos.

"During the 11 years she occupied her pitch she made many friends, and through them gossip of the theatre still filtered through to her. Kate was the daughter of an American colonel. She first went on the stage when she was 20, and from parts in an American three-shows-a-day circuit was soon playing leading rôles in well-known theatres. She was with George Edwardes in London for three or four years.

"Kate was married three times, and each of her husbands left her a fortune. Her last husband left her £25,000. Some time afterwards she went to the Monte Carlo casino with a party of friends, won thousands of pounds, lost them again, and returned to London with little money but the bare fare. She sought work in vain, and, at last, already grey-haired, she became one of London's match-sellers. 'I have been a fool', was how she summed up her life.

"Early this year Kate was ill, but twice she returned to her pitch. The

matron of Cecil House, Waterloo Road, where Kate lived, stated yesterday: 'She was about 70 years of age, and she had been ill for some time. She kept her dignity to the last. From time to time one of her regular customers, knowing that her health was breaking down, would send her home in a taxi, and if any special gifts came our way they would be set aside for Kate.'

"Old Kate left about £2 with instructions that on her death it should be sent to a friend of hers. Other pathetic relics included several boxes of matches and her snuff-box, but there was nothing in her possessions relating to her earlier days. She will be buried at Tooting to-morrow."—*Times*, July 8th, 1936.

"The Report of Cecil Houses is a document well calculated to maintain interest in this admirable undertaking. These houses, as is well known, were started by Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, who, as Eleanor Gordon Phillips points out in the Report, 'to find out for herself just what happens to homeless and destitute women, had left her comfortable flat in Fleet Street to live as a down-and-out, earning what money she could by charring, match selling, or other odd jobs'. As a result of her experiences these homes were founded, where for one shilling a night a woman can get a good bed, a hot bath, hot tea and biscuits, and various other comforts. All these houses are opened to visits from the public on Thursdays from 3.30 to 5 p.m., and there can be few more interesting and encouraging ways of spending an afternoon.

"It is good to know that so deserving an institution is indebted to the sympathy of Queen Mary. Her Majesty has on several occasions presented furniture to the Homes, and last Christmas a royal parcel arrived with this characteristic message: 'Her Majesty is sending you a parcel containing things for the Houses and a few extras for Christmas treats for the inmates and their children. The Queen hopes all these may help to brighten Christmas Day for those who would otherwise have nothing to bring them joy at Christmas, and her Majesty sends them all her best wishes for a happy time. . . .'

"Many people will wish to associate themselves with so necessary and important a work.—*Sunday at Home*, August, 1936.

"'As soon as I got a room to myself, I began to live a life of my own. I was conscious of an inward existence. . . .'

"Those aren't my words, though they express exactly what I feel. They belong to Anatole France, and they suddenly came back into my mind yesterday.

"I was standing in a dormitory of one of the Cecil Houses. There are five of them now, and they can each take in, on an average, sixty lodgers a night.

"They were started by Mrs. Cecil Chesterton after her ghastly experiences in doss-houses which are described in her book, 'In Darkest London'.

"She was determined that those who have only a shilling to spare for their night's lodgings should have a clean bed, a hot bath, and something inside their stomachs.

"The dormitory was empty. On the beds were piled the contents of the lockers that separated one bed from its neighbour.

"Clearing-out day. . . .

"Here in a small heap was all that these women had left—except the courage to go on living. A tattered book of songs. A bathing cap. A cardboard packet of bath crystals.

"They often have a piece of scented soap and things like that,' the superintendent was saying, 'it means so much to them to keep as clean and neat as possible.

"'And it isn't charity, either. They need never feel ashamed. The shilling they pay completely covers the costs of the home.

"'Most of them haven't got much longer to live,' she went on in her

soft, sweet voice. 'They had homes of their own once. A nice bedroom all to themselves—husbands—friends—and children.

"'Now they have nothing except those little piles you see on the bed. Let's make things as easy for them as we can. . . .'

"I tried to say something. But everything seemed so silly—so futile.

"Perhaps it's just as silly what I am going to say now. Let the funny columnists quote it against me if they like.

"But surely from this morass that is miscalled modern civilisation will emerge a new state, in which all citizens, however poor, however alone in the world, will never forfeit their right to a room of their own and enough to eat every day ?

"That doesn't seem to me a question of party politics. It is one of common humanity."—Godfrey Winn, in *Daily Mirror*, August 13th, 1936.

"Glimpses of 'London's underworld' were given by Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, founder of the Cecil Houses for Homeless Women in London, in a talk at Kendal Milne's, Manchester, yesterday.

"Nine years ago, said Mrs. Chesterton, there was no choice for a homeless woman between a doss-house and a cheap hotel accommodation, with the exception of a few lodging-houses run for profit, where the beds were small and often dirty and washing facilities negligible. To test conditions for herself she determined to spend a fortnight without any money except that which she could earn by casual jobs. The first night she had to walk eight miles before she could find shelter. This was at a Salvation Army lodging for destitute women—the only lodging-house where she was provided with hot water for washing. Afterwards she found the adjutant had made an entry against her assumed name: 'Don't believe her story', but added that in the adjutant's opinion she had not been in prison and did not drink!

"Among the jobs the speaker obtained were cleaning steps, washing up in Soho restaurants, charing and selling matches. A discovery she made was that it costs money to be clean, and that if it was a choice between buying a meal and having a wash, she bought a meal. Often after hours of walking she felt and looked dazed. It was a look many destitute women had, a look sometimes mistaken for drunkenness or drug-taking.

"When the Cecil Houses were established it was found that contrary to the expectations of the L.C.C. women lodgers did not steal the sheets or tear up the blankets, and that they lived together without fighting and quarrelling. All Cecil Houses were provided with baths, and although at first some of the older women did not care to have baths it was presently found that in a house of fifty women there was an average of twenty baths each night and another twenty each morning.

"The Cecil Houses, said the speaker, were self-supporting, and she believed all social service was best run on that principle."—*Manchester Guardian*, October 1st, 1936.

"The Monday night meeting in connection with the re-opening of Stratford Conference Hall will long be remembered. True, as Rev. H. M. Yates said, 'many famous people have come here and lifted up their voices on behalf of people in distress. In future we are going to try to live up to this ideal'.

"Rev. Dr. Benjamin Gregory, Editor of *The Methodist Times and Leader*, presided, and Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, author of 'In Darkest London', described some of her remarkable experiences which led up to 'Cecil Houses' being founded for the accommodation of homeless and vagrant women in London.

"Dr. Gregory said that there was one thing particularly that he admired in Mrs. Chesterton's work: of those who came to receive shelter, no questions were asked. . . .

"Mrs. Chesterton said that her work started in a conversation she had with some journalist friends, nine years ago, about the problem of home-



“ . . . RELIEF FOR WEARY AND CALLOUSED FEET.”

less women. Her men friends thought that as there was such an urgent demand for domestic servants the problem could not be a very serious one. But Mrs. Chesterton went to the editor for whom she was working and suggested that she should gain first-hand experience by walking the streets for a fortnight, without money or references.

"Under the guise of 'Ann Turner', who had left Liverpool to find work in London, without money or friends, this plucky young woman entered upon a series of remarkable adventures. One morning a young workman took her into a shop and gave her a cup of coffee. This was not the only case of beautiful chivalry—there were others similar—from 'down-and-outs' and unemployed. She went to a Labour Exchange and tried to get a job as cook, but instead had to be content with cleaning steps in Hackney! She took a tram to the Angel and there bought sausages and onions with the ninepence earned by cleaning steps—and sold matches in the street!

"In common lodging-houses she found all sorts of women recruited from the homeless of London. Some had forgotten what home was like. There were also servant girls 'between jobs'—waitresses, and girls from the country in search of work but finding none. The majority of the women had not come to this dire state of poverty through drink or crime, but through sheer bad luck, illness, loss of savings. The type of lodging-house and doss-house appalled her—1s. 2d. was charged for an uncomfortable bed and dirty clothes and no proper wash-place. She found that it 'cost money to keep clean'—and really the most important thing to do was to get food!

"The story of these and many other adventures were printed in a paper and then in the book, 'In Darkest London', which has had a phenomenal sale. Various meetings have been held in the houses of wealthy and influential people and funds have been raised for the starting of lodging-houses for women, 'to meet at cost price the acute need of clean beds, bathing and washing accommodation for homeless or vagrant women'. Five of these houses have been started, and the first of these is now being rebuilt.

"Dr. Gregory, in thanking Mrs. Chesterton, quoted Sir Robertson Nicoll's rendering of II. Corinthians viii. 9: 'That though He had a home, yet for our sakes became homeless.'

"Mr. Yates made a gesture of goodwill by announcing that, much as they needed money for the re-opening fund, they would give half of the collection towards Mrs. Chesterton's work, known as the Cecil Houses.

"Rev. F. Leslie Henry is to be congratulated upon this fine meeting. He said he would like to arrange a special meeting to help the Cecil Houses."—*The Methodist Times, October 8th, 1936.*

"'I know that the people in the Royal Borough of Kensington are doing all they can with the slum problem, but they have only commenced to nibble at the edge of the question,' said Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, founder of the Cecil Houses, speaking at the weekly literary lecture at Harrod's, Brompton Road, on Wednesday last week.

"The Cecil Houses, one of which is in Kensal Road, North Kensington, are women's public lodging-houses, where for one shilling a woman can obtain a bed, hot bath, hot tea and biscuits and facilities for washing clothes. The houses are non-sectarian and women applying for beds are not called upon to answer any questions whatever.

"In her talk on Wednesday, Mrs. Chesterton described the circumstances that led to the founding of the Cecil Houses. Some years ago she set out to discover, for the purpose of writing a book and newspaper articles, just what happened to the continual stream of women and girls who came up to London from the provinces practically penniless in search of work. Wearing some old clothes and without a penny in her pockets, she left home and went to Euston station; she mingled with the crowd and finally asked a policeman where she could get shelter for the night. She was directed to a Salvation Army hostel, but they were unable to accommodate her and recommended her to another of their hostels in Hackney. She tramped the eight miles to

Hackney through the sleety rain, and when she arrived there she was dead cold. She was admitted into this hostel without questions, and given a bed in a room where numbers of other destitute women were sleeping.

"The following morning she set out to look for work. She obtained several jobs of charing, but she found the cold intense and she grew very hungry. She spent the few coppers she had earned in buying food and some boxes of matches, which she started to sell. That night it began to rain again, and she was forced to trudge about seeking a bed and shelter. She discovered from a policeman that there was a scarcity of lodging-houses for women; only 9 per cent. of London's public lodging-house accommodation was available for women. On this policeman's advice she went to a lodging-house near Holborn; there she paid 1s. 2d. for a night's lodging. The bed was dirty and there was nowhere to wash but in a corrugated iron hut where a jug of cold water was provided.

"One of the most surprising things that this experience taught her, Mrs. Chesterton stated, was that it cost money to be clean. There was not any place in London where a free bath could be obtained, and any amount of washing in cold water would not remove the dirt that resulted from spending the day in the street.

"'Believe me, when you see a woman looking dirty, she does not want to look dirty; she simply has not enough money to pay to be clean', the speaker added.

"Mrs. Chesterton further described how a policeman, of whom she was enquiring the best place for a night's lodging, had told her that she could not expect respectability for half-a-crown. On another occasion when she was walking along a street after dark an elderly woman ran after her and spoke to her, saying she was also destitute and had not spoken to anyone all day. 'It's hard when you don't belong,' she said.

"After living for two weeks as a destitute woman Mrs. Chesterton returned to her home and wrote a series of articles describing her experiences: when these were published public interest was aroused, and the fund for the foundation of the first Cecil House was inaugurated. At present there are five Cecil Houses, and it is hoped to found still more. It is slums such as those in Kensington and Westminster, Mrs. Chesterton said, that are indirectly responsible for these hundreds of homeless women, and the terrible conditions in which they lived."—*Kensington News*, October 23rd, 1936.

"The great need for public lodging-houses for women was stressed in an address by Mrs. Denston Fennelle to the Cheltenham Inner Wheel at the Queen's Hotel yesterday. The subject of the address was 'The Cecil Houses (Inc.)' of which Mrs. Fennelle is a member of the executive council.

"... The lodging-houses, of which there were now five, Mrs. Fennelle explained, were founded by Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, the journalist and novelist, in 1927. It was in that year that she was commissioned by her paper to find out what would be the position of a woman seeking work without credentials. To do this she assumed the name of Annie Turner, turned out penniless in an old ulster, disreputable hat and proceeded to earn her livelihood for a fortnight cleaning steps and selling matches. She found that though she was able to live on what she earned she had great difficulty in discovering sleeping accommodation. In the whole of London there was only one casualty ward for women, and she was forced to join the many women who spend the night in the crypt of St. Martin's.

"With a committee consisting of two journalists, a young man about town, a Jew, and a Roman Catholic chaplain, Mrs. Chesterton started the first of the chain of Cecil Houses for homeless women in Devonshire Street. She found help in high places and four more soon followed.

"They had all sorts and conditions of women among the lodgers, flower-sellers, match-sellers, unemployed secretaries, housekeepers and domestic servants. Some had never kept a job in their lives and never would because they were gipsy by nature. The houses were not in any sense hostels. Most

of the women spent the night there and passed on. Nevertheless, since the establishment of the first house they had been successful in finding employment for over 800 women."—*Gloucester Echo*, Cheltenham, November, 11th, 1936.

"On Friday afternoon at the Shaftesbury Theatre, Miss Helen Simpson, and Mr. L. A. G. Strong will speak on behalf of the Cecil Houses for homeless women and girls. Mr. Alec Waugh will be in the chair.

"Mrs. Cecil Chesterton will also speak. She is the founder of these self-supporting houses, where for one shilling a good bed, hot bath, and hot tea and biscuits at night and in the morning are supplied.

"She will talk on the psychology of the homeless and the types who nowadays have to seek the shelter of a common lodging-house.

"There are girls in Cecil Houses who earn from 15s. to £1 a week, but find it impossible to get other decent accommodation at a reasonable charge."—*Manchester Dispatch*, November 24th, 1936.

"As I was walking along a crowded street the other day, in a great hurry, I dropped a small parcel without noticing. A passer-by who was going in the opposite direction, and in as big a hurry as myself, picked it up. She ran after me and handed it to me with a bright smile, then hurried on her way again.

"Only a little thing, you say? Maybe, but what a nice world it would be if everyone went out of their way to do just such small kindnesses as that, instead of being engrossed in pushing their way to the front of the crowd! And so many of the people who do kind things have a smug self-righteous air that makes their good turns ungracious and without the spontaneous warmth that I met with in that busy street.

"A remarkable woman visited the North last week, who has given an example to us all in real kindness of heart.

"She is Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, sister-in-law of the late G. K. Chesterton. A few years ago she dressed herself in rags and went out penniless into the streets of London to investigate the lot of friendless and homeless women and girls. She found that of the public lodging-houses provided by the London County Council to give cheap nights' lodgings, less than a third were for women; the late-comers who could not find a place in these were condemned to wander the streets through the dark hours, without any means of keeping warm, weak with hunger and their dreadful loneliness.

"Mrs. Chesterton was so appalled with all this that she determined that something must be done about it. She wrote a book, 'In Darkest London', and with the response from people who were as shocked as she had been, she was able to build the first Cecil House in a poor part of London. Since then the good work has gone on, and more have been bought and equipped of these, lodging-houses for women.

"The houses are open to inspection by the general public each Thursday and to visit one of them is an education. They are bright, friendly places with none of that harsh air of charity about them. For a shilling the women have hot tea and food, a hot bath and a comfortable bed, and they are able to wash their clothes, too. It is rather a shock, isn't it, to think that these are things that human beings are denied?

"No questions are asked, there is none of that prying which kills the last vestige of self-respect. Some of the women have come to London hoping to find work, and been stranded without money, others are old and friendless, others again have known better days. None are turned away (unless, sadly enough, there is no room for them).

"Mrs. Chesterton and her committee of helpers have not only worked hard, they have thought hard too, tempering their charity with tact. That is something, I think for us all to aim at.

"... And the greatest of these is charity."—Marjorie Cooke, in *Macclesfield Courier*, October 9th, 1936.

“ . . . The time is three o'clock. The place is Shaftesbury Theatre. There is no admission fee. And you will hear Miss Helen Simpson and Mr. L. A. G. Strong speak on behalf of the Cecil Houses which provide shelter for homeless women and children.

“It is a magnificent work that Mrs. Cecil Chesterton is doing. For a shilling a night anyone can secure a roof over her head, a hot bath, some supper. And no questions are asked.

“This is the true spirit of Christianity. Next time that you are changing the decorations of your own house, next time you are giving a house warming, next time you return home thankful for the comfort of your own possessions, the privacy of your room, think of these poor women who do not know what it is to have even a bed of their own.”—Godfrey Winn, in *Daily Mirror* November 26th, 1936.

“Some idea of what the Cecil Houses mean to destitute women was given by Mrs. Denston Fennelle, of the Executive Committee of Cecil Houses Incorporated, when she addressed the Woolwich Lunch Club on Wednesday.

“She related how Mrs. Cecil Chesterton wrote her book ‘In Darkest London’ after she had wandered from place to place, suffering the same hardships as the poorest destitute women. So revealing was the book that the Cecil Houses were established. They have now been in existence for ten years, the fifth one being opened two years ago at Waterloo Road.

“Mrs. Fennelle mentioned that the aims and objects of the society were to provide suitable premises for women’s public lodging-houses and to meet at cost price the acute need of beds, bathing and washing accommodation for homeless or vagrant women. Cecil Houses were non-sectarian and women applying for beds were not called upon to answer any questions whatsoever.

“The society did not have among its aims the finding of employment for women, but nevertheless it had been instrumental in securing jobs for several hundred women during the ten years it had been in existence.

“‘I am overcome by the gallantry and gaiety of the women who come to our Houses,’ said Mrs. Fennelle.

“Referring to publicity and finance, Mrs. Fennelle said the society never made appeals in the Press, but during the years they had been in existence they had had £50,000 given to them. People gave willingly, because they were so interested in the work done by the houses. No profits were made. If there was a surplus the money was devoted to the houses.

“The society was paying its way admirably and in due course similar houses to those in Central London would be opened in the suburbs. Eventually it was hoped to launch out into the provinces.”—*Kentish Independent*, January 15th, 1937.

“Don’t you love those enormous, fat peppermints which bulge your cheeks and make talking difficult, but which send a warm glow through a cold body? Queen Mary has sent an enormous glass jar of those comforting sweets, known as ‘humbugs’, to one of the Cecil Houses for Women, and aren’t they highly appreciated?”—*Home Notes*, January 30th, 1937.

“There was an exceptionally large gathering at the Town Hall, Sutton Coldfield, on Thursday of last week to hear what should have been an address by Mrs. Cecil Chesterton (president of the Sutton Coldfield Women’s Citizens’ Association) on the conditions of women in London generally, both from the point of view of those in the slums and the homeless. Unfortunately, however, Mrs. Chesterton was unable to attend owing to illness and her place was taken by Mrs. Denston Fennelle, one of her fellow workers, who, instead of giving a presidential address, talked about the work of the Cecil Houses and what they had done. . . .

“At the commencement of her address Mrs. Fennelle apologised for the absence of their President and said that she really was very ill. Mrs.

Fennelle went on to say that she did not propose to give a presidential address, but she wanted to tell them something about their work and what they had done.

“‘The Cecil Houses are not hostels,’ said Mrs. Fennelle. ‘They are places where one may sojourn for the night and then pass on. Such houses in London are very few, but the men folk are fairly well provided for, though only 13 per cent. of the lodging-houses are available for women.’

“Mrs. Fennelle went on to describe how Mrs. Chesterton, in order to get information for her book, went out without any money to experience the hardships which the poor women had to deal with. It was in February, 1925, that she started out. After walking for some miles she reached a Salvation Army home, where she found a bed for the night. She was brought before the supervisor, who asked what her occupation was; she replied that she was a cook. She was told to come in again the next night and they would try to find her a bed. But Mrs. Chesterton did not return; instead she sold matches in the street. She always found some food, but at night the question was always, ‘Where was she to sleep?’ There were plenty of places for the gay young women, but nowhere for the homeless, despondent woman.

“Experiences in London.

“The next place that Mrs. Chesterton went to was a lodging-house. Lodging-houses in London are licensed and therefore are inspected from time to time. Some of them, however, received very scanty inspection, and the one which Mrs. Chesterton went to was a terrible place. Although she paid 1s. 2d. for the night there was nothing decent in the place; there was no hot water to wash with, no facilities for drying clothes, or for warming the hands and feet. The beds were filthy. . . .

“Mrs. Chesterton wrote a book called ‘In Darkest London’, but the price of 5s. was ridiculous, although it was now on sale at 1s. However, even this costly edition aroused a great deal of interest, and as a result several people sent large sums of money to help the fund.

“‘At the end of the year,’ went on the speaker, ‘our first house was ready. In this house was embodied everything that Mrs. Chesterton never saw during her wanderings. There was hot water, comfortable beds, sitting rooms, and nurseries for the children. At the head of each bed there was a locker. This does not seem much, yet it is.’

“Mrs. Fennelle went on to relate how the Queen paid a visit to the house before it was opened, and how the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs of London and their ladies announced it open. In the house they had no texts, but they had beautiful posters, and plenty of looking-glasses, for they all knew how women loved looking-glasses; and above all they asked no questions of the women who stayed. On admittance to the house the women were given tea and biscuits, and in the cold winter months they were given soup. If a woman could not pay the shilling she was never sent away; she was their guest, for they had special resources for the people who were really down and out.

“Second Home Opened.

“The speaker went on to tell how in the following year they opened their second house, and in the next two years two more houses were opened, the fourth being opened by Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. The fifth house was built over Waterloo Bridge and was opened two years later. . . . It cost them about £7,000 to put the houses in working order, and the shillings paid for the rest. In these houses they had all kinds of women—governesses out of jobs, secretaries who had fallen on the wayside, waitresses, ex-chorus girls, and many others. They had placed over 800 women in jobs, but they did not guarantee them, if people liked to take the risk of employing such women

they had them, but there were very few failures and they nearly always made good.

" 'When we went into the Cecil Houses,' continued the speaker, 'none of us had done any social work of any kind. We had to ask the advice of women who had had experience, and we were told that a matron mattered more than anything else. If she was a success, then we should be successful. We were fortunate in obtaining for our first matron a woman who had been in charge of the Crypt of St. Martin-in-the-Fields Church.'

"The speaker said how kind various people had been, both in subscribing to the fund and in lending theatres and other buildings for meetings, etc., and she thought that the public realised that they did try to run their houses in the best possible way. Above all, they could never make any profit; they were forbidden to do that. Whatever money they made had to go to another house. They had now five houses, and another would be built this year on the site of the first house, which had become dilapidated. They wanted to have twelve houses in the suburbs, and then go into the provinces, particularly Liverpool, where there was a great need for them.

" 'As I said before,' continued Mrs. Fennelle, 'we ask no questions of the women. We have very few rules, and we do not turn women away if they have "had one over the eight." No woman is refused admission, except if she comes along with arms akimbo and threatens to blacken someone's eye if she is not taken in.'

" 'We have never had any infectious disease—perhaps this is because the women are always moving about in the open air. If we do get any such cases they are sent away to be treated and the beds and clothes are burnt.'

" 'We have women with children and husbands with jobs, and the reason why they are homeless is because it is so extraordinarily difficult to get lodgings. We sometimes have the women for months, before they are able to get lodgings.'

"The speaker went on to say that the rooms which one got in London years ago it was impossible to get now. She had a girl in her service who had paid twelve shillings a week for a back room. So that when such a girl lost her job and was unable to pay her board, she was sent away and became a homeless woman.

"Mrs. Fennelle concluded by asking the gathering to do all they could to help them in their work and to help these poor women to spend their latter days in the best possible way.—*Lichfield Mercury, February 26th, 1937.*

"The Park Ward (Hendon) Conservative and Unionist Association (Women's Branch) had a luncheon at Brent Bridge Hotel, Hendon, on Monday. . . .

"After lunch, Mrs. Arter (chairman) introduced Mrs. Fennelle, who presented a wonderful case for the Cecil Houses and the women for whom they catered.

"She told her listeners about Mrs. Cecil Chesterton who, in 1925, set out without money, home, friends or references to find out for herself how a woman so placed would get on in London. Her story of Mrs. Chesterton's search for work and the various means she employed of finding a living, including washing steps, charing and selling matches, was most interesting and held her listeners spellbound. The greatest difficulty, it appeared, was not finding work, but at the end of each day finding a bed. This led to the birth of Cecil Houses. . . .

"Mrs. Chesterton slept in all kinds of places, including the Embankment, doss houses, institutions, lodging-houses, the crypt of St. Martin's and the casual ward. She slept in these places and wrote of her experiences in a book which enjoyed a great deal of sympathy, and Mrs. Chesterton was asked what she was going to do about the matter. This led to a meeting and the commencement of Cecil Houses.

"These houses embody everything that was lacking in the various houses that Mrs. Chesterton slept in. They had light and colour, and there were no texts to greet the women as they came in. For a moderate sum they were given a night's lodging and food. If they could not pay, then it was

given free. No questions were asked; it was enough that a woman needed her bed. Clothes were given to those who needed them, but the idea of institution, patronage or charity was never allowed to enter the homes.

"The public had responded in a most wonderful manner, and already they had five houses in London, but they wanted many more and several in the suburbs and the provinces.

"Mrs. Fennelle asked everyone to help in any way they could, and said that gifts of clothing would be particularly welcome. . . ."—*Hendon Times, March 13th, 1937.*

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CECIL HOUSES

Combined Houses Income and Expenditure Account

EXPENDITURE

	Devonshire Street.	Wharfdale Road.	Kensal Road.	Harrow Road.	Waterloo Road.	Total.
	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
To Salaries and Insurances	113 9 7	407 6 5	225 6 8	378 6 3	336 17 11	1,461 6 10
„ Relief Duty	1 7 6	8 9 6	9 18 4	7 2 0	16 11 0	43 8 4
„ Printing and Stationery	—	—	1 1 6	1 9	1 6	1 4 9
„ Postage	2 0	8 11	12 0	16 0	8 0	2 6 11
„ Telephone	3 14 11	8 16 4	11 3 8	12 9 10	13 3 5	49 8 2
„ Gas	5 13 5	14 1 4	14 12 10	13 10 11	20 2 5	68 0 11
„ Electricity	7 8 7	19 11 6	24 18 6	20 5 11	23 13 10	95 18 4
„ Insurance	—	10 16 4	6 4 0	7 14 4	10 15 11	35 10 7
„ Cleaning	1 13 0	17 1 3	10 7 10	20 6 6	15 3 1	64 11 8
„ Repairs	2 17 9	118 16 9	63 3 2	160 0 2	64 0 4	408 18 2
„ Replacements	5 18 1	9 13 8	8 19 7	35 17 2	7 3 6	67 12 0
„ Laundry	16 11 0	39 11 4	40 1 0	60 13 0	49 2 8	205 19 0
„ Coal and Coke	4 16 4	27 10 6	15 8 0	33 2 10	27 16 0	108 13 8
„ General Rates	11 0	73 0 6	48 8 3	105 10 8	91 14 2	319 4 7
„ Water Rate	3 8 8	15 13 0	11 5 0	19 7 0	20 8 2	70 1 10
„ Travelling Expenses	2 2	14 0	1 1 4	2 18 6	1 0	4 17 0
„ Milk	2 7 6	12 13 4	11 3 8	11 9 5	21 15 4	59 9 3
„ Bread	1 10 8	10 0 2	8 10 0	8 6 10	12 11 1	40 18 9
„ Provisions	4 8 11	23 14 0	22 15 7	24 17 11	31 18 10	107 15 3
„ General Charges	1 1 2	19 3 0	6 3 2	4 19 10	4 3 2	35 10 4
„ Balance, being Excess of Income over Expenditure for the year ended 31st December 1936, transferred to Balance Sheet	59 7 11	168 9 6	30 9 2	70 17 8	123 16 9	453 1 0
	£ 236 10 2	1,005 11 4	571 13 3	998 14 6	891 8 1	3,703 17 4

NOTE : The Devonshire Street House was closed from 4th April, 1936, for rebuilding.

(INCORPORATED).

for the year ended 31st December, 1936.

INCOME

	Devonshire Street.	Wharfdale Road.	Kensal Road.	Harrow Road.	Waterloo Road.	Total.
	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
By Revenue from beds and cots	170 16 6	975 11 6	539 7 0	976 14 6	870 11 6	3,533 1 0
„ Endowments for beds	40 0 0	—	29 0 0	15 5 0	20 0 0	104 5 0
„ Interest on Investments and Deposit Account	25 13 8	29 19 10	3 6 3	6 15 0	16 7	66 11 4
	£ 236 10 2	1,005 11 4	571 13 3	998 14 6	891 8 1	3,703 17 4

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