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CECIL HOUSES

[INCORPORATED]

8th REPORT
1935-6



YOUR HELP IS
WANTED NOW

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Pamphlet

CECIL HOUSES

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

**EIGHTH
REPORT
1935-6**



Offices:
**11 GOLDEN SQUARE
LONDON
W. 1.**

TELEPHONE GERRARD 3391

CECIL HOUSES

(INCORPORATED)

WOMEN'S PUBLIC LODGING-HOUSE FUND

GENERAL COUNCIL :

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DR. A. BALDIE.	MISS SHEILA KAYE-SMITH.
ROBERT BLATCHFORD, ESQ.	REV. A. MANBY LLOYD.
MISS M. BORTHWICK, O.B.E.	MISS MARIE LOHR.
MRS. A. BUCK.	MRS. BELLOC LOWNDES.
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THE MARCHIONESS OF CHOLMONDELEY.	MADAME GERTRUDE PEPPERCORN.
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MISS MARGARET WARRE CORNISH.	MRS. URSULA ROBERTS.
SIDNEY DARK, ESQ.	DR. WEMYSS C. ROBINSON.
MRS. K. ATHERTON EARP.	THE COUNTESS OF ROSSLYN.
MRS. J. WESTON EDWARDS.	DAME SYBIL THORNDIKE.
DR. ENID EVANS.	W. WYATT TILBY, ESQ.
DR. MARY HELLIER.	MISS IRENE VANBRUGH.
MRS. A. HUGH-JACKSON.	ALFRED WAREING, ESQ.
MISS VIOLET HUNT.	THE COUNTESS OF WESTMORLAND.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE :

THE LADY LOVAT, *Chairman.*
 D. G. SOMERVILLE, ESQ., M.P., *Hon. Treasurer.*
 MRS. CECIL CHESTERTON, *Hon. Organising Secretary.*
 THE HON. MARGARET BIGGE.
 JOHN CARGILL, ESQ.
 MAJOR J. BRUNEL COHEN.
 MRS. DENSTON FENNELLE.
 REV. T. J. FITZGERALD.
 MISS HELEN HOPE.
Asst. Organiser : MRS. E. GORDON PHILLIPS.
Consulting Architects : MESSRS. KNOTT & COLLINS, FF.R.I.B.A.
Hon. Physician : HAROLD SINGTON, ESQ., M.D.
Hon. Solicitors : MESSRS. STONES, MORRIS & STONE.
Auditors : MESSRS. BAKER, SUTTON & Co.
Bankers : MESSRS. BARCLAYS, 366 STRAND, W.C.2.

HOUSE COMMITTEE :

THE HON. MARGARET BIGGE, *Chairman.*
 MRS. K. E. BOUGHEY.
 MRS. CECIL CHESTERTON.
 MRS. O. CHICHESTER.
 MRS. J. BRUNEL COHEN.
 MRS. KATHLEEN MURRAY.
 MRS. S. T. T. JAMES.
 MRS. HUGH MARTIN.
 MRS. C. SMITHER.
 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

- No. 35 Devonshire Street, Theobald's Road, W.C.1.
(Re-opening early in 1937).
- Nos. 47/51 Wharfdale Road, King's Cross, N.1.
Tel. No. : Terminus 6996.
- No. 194 Kensal Road, N. Kensington, W.10.
Tel. No. : Park 8917.
- 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.

OF
LONDON'S PUBLIC LODGING-HOUSE
ACCOMMODATION

87% IS AVAILABLE FOR MEN
WOMEN STILL HAVE 13% 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

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

(Re-opening early in 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).*

Eighth Report

1935-6

On April 3rd, 1936, after nine years of full and varied life, No. 35 Devonshire Street, W.C.1, closed its doors. At the time of writing the old house is in process of demolition, and very soon a modern building of warm-coloured bricks, aglow with cheerfulness and welcome, will take the place of the crumbling walls and dilapidated though lovely structure, which went back to the days of Queen Anne. Of the gracious fittings of this little housing gem the Committee have retained the fine old Georgian staircase, the pine panellings, and the old fire grate which used to hold the glowing warmth that for centuries warmed the hearts of those who lived—and died—in this place of many memories. Architectural considerations prevent the inclusion of these accessories in the new building, but if any of our friends could put the Committee in touch with a possible purchaser, they would render Cecil Houses a great service.

The estimated cost of the new building will be approximately £7,000, and in view of the urgent necessity for the re-establishment of a Cecil House in this district, we would beg our friends and supporters to help us to the utmost with the necessary funds.

It is a matter of deep concern to everyone interested in helping the homeless that for the time being the congested area of Holborn should be without a centre for the provision of beds. It is, however, our earnest hope that, with the assistance of our sympathisers, there is a possibility that Nos. 34 and 35 may be ready for our guests by the end of this year.

The new House is designed to include forty-nine beds and two cots, with the usual complement of bath, washing, and laundry rooms.

The Committee take this opportunity of stressing the increasing and pleasurable use made of bathing accommodation in all the houses.

"Can I have the water right up to my neck, Matron?" is a frequent query from older women. They seem to think that hot water in profusion is so great a luxury that it borders almost on extravagance. Our younger guests, however, accept the amenity as a matter of course, which shows the significance of improved environment. The average of eighteen to twenty baths in use each night, and twelve every morning at Waterloo Road shows a gratifying increase in the standard of personal taste.

Ten years ago our bathing average was considerably lower, while the number of women who, through lack of proper facilities for bodily comfort, had to go to the cleansing station was perceptibly higher. Nowadays a verminous case is rare.

Our latest house in Waterloo Road continues to be popular and successful. It has a special appeal for young people, who appreciate to the utmost the *camaraderie* and friendliness of their fellow lodgers. The Matron has been most fortunate in finding jobs for those who, by circumstances of temperament or physique, are ineligible for stereotyped employment.

Mrs. X., whose origins, it is thought, are West Indian, was too poor to obtain a denture. The fact was brought to the notice of the Committee by the Matron, and through another institution arrangements were made for Mrs. X to be properly equipped. In possession of new teeth she was able to obtain occasional employment in crowd work on the films.

"And I've started a Post Office Savings Book, Matron, and as soon as I can I'm going to take a little room. I have to work sometimes through the night, so I must get some sleep during the day."

Life has completely changed for Mrs. X.

Some of the girls and women who have come to Cecil Houses when life has been particularly hard, keep in touch with the Matrons long after they have no longer to seek the shelter of a common lodging-house, and the letters received at the houses show the kindly and affectionate relationship of the Matrons with their guests:

"Dear Matron,

"I thought you would like to know how things turned out with me, as I was very fed up when I left you. Well, I had my baby, and do you know, she is the loveliest wee thing imaginable. I wouldn't give her up for anything. I'm glad I did not commit suicide, after all.

"And J—— and I have got married, so things are all right in that direction, too. We have taken a room. J—— gets the dole and I go out to work every morning and afternoon. I see to little M—— before I go, and then J—— looks after her when I'm not there. It's a bit hard, but I don't mind so long as there's someone worth doing it for.

"I'd like to bring my baby one evening, and show her to the other girls, if you don't mind.

"Thanks for looking after my case when I was in hospital, and for the bed-jacket which you sent with L——.

"Remember me to the staff.

"Yours sincerely,
"B."

And again:

"Dear Matron,

"I shall never forget the kindness of 'Cecil Houses', as I am so very happy in my situation, and my mistress is so very kind, and trusts me entirely. She leaves me at week-ends in charge, and always gives me an extra 10s.

"The muslin aprons you gave me were very useful, and helped me along until I could buy some more.

"May I come along one evening, and bring some fruit for your people?"

"L. G."

This woman is only one of a number who has found a job through Cecil Houses. Another—Mrs. C.—wrote:

"I cannot tell you how grateful I am for so kindly helping me in my distress.

"The situation is very nice, and the country air is doing me a lot of good.

"As soon as I take my wages I will send the 5s. you lent me."

And added to this letter is a note from the Matron: "This 5s. has been paid back."

The same Matron reports:

"Ill-clad, footsore, and tired out, Mr. and Mrs. B., with baby George—born Jubilee Day—arrived at Cecil House on the night of April 4th.

"A few old pots and pans, with ragged clothing in an old perambulator, were their only possessions.

"After we had settled Mrs. B. and baby in the sitting-room they had hot tea, and milk for baby, afterwards hot baths, and I am glad to say we were able to clothe both mother and child from head to foot from our wardrobes.

"After a good night's rest, Mrs. B. told us that they had tramped from Newcastle to London—in a very roundabout way they had covered over 800 miles in six weeks.

"Now—in May—I am happy to say that the husband has found work, and Mrs. B. is also at work in a café, and Jubilee George is thriving at the crèche. Mrs. B. said that Cecil Houses gave them their first helping hand, and made it possible for them to obtain work."

And yet another little story from the same house:

"We were rather concerned when we first saw Mrs. E. Two young girls helped her up the steps one night, shortly after 10 p.m.

They had found her, hardly able to move along, and tried to take her to the institution. However, the institution was too far away for the old woman, so they asked us if we could give her a bed for the night.

"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,' the small, lined face looked at us with determination, her voice clear and confident, her manners those of a domestic who had served long and faithfully. She marshalled her two sticks with dignity and grit. 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.'

"'Only let her get her hand on the banister'—that was all she begged of us, and we found it typical of her whole attitude towards her infirmity.

"She told us she had been taken to hospital from her mistress's house suffering from paralysis of the legs. For five years she was bed-ridden, and then the awful dread came to her that if she did not make a desperate effort to walk she would lie in hospital till she died.

"'The doctor laughed at me,' she told us, 'when I said, "Only let me get my feet on the floor, sir."'

"And four months later her two sticks were shuffling through London.

"Every night when her journeys bring her near us, she stops at Cecil House. 'My word,' she said, on her last visit, 'if I were an able-bodied woman I *would* appreciate this place.' But she cannot make use of all the house; she is too old to use the laundry, but she is glad and grateful when, at intervals, we can replenish her stock of clothes.

"Her dearest wish is 'that God will grant me strength to go about till the last. They wanted me to go "inside",' she said reproachfully, 'but not while I've got my faculties.'"

Cecil Houses have proved a great boon not only to those who, like Mrs. E., have nowhere else to go. Mrs. F. was very happy during her stay with us:

"I write to express my thanks for the very clean and comfortable bed, and for the glorious supply of water for bathing. I think it a great blessing to women that there is such a place. I had no idea there was such a place. I came to London for the anniversary of the West London Mission—I was in service before I married—and come up in May and in the new year for the social. I hope to be fortunate enough to secure a bed again when I come up to London. With grateful thanks."



OUR FIRST LITTLE HOUSE—NOW BEING REBUILT ON ENLARGED SITE

Our friends have been very good to the various houses, and gifts of cakes, sandwiches, and other "extras" have made it possible for the Matrons to provide occasional and unexpected treats for our guests.

This year—the second anniversary of its opening—Waterloo Road held its annual birthday party. The Matron and her staff prepared and cooked a steaming hot supper of sausages, onions, and the popular "mashed", followed by custard and fruit pies and unlimited cups of tea. The crockery was "lent" by the staff, and altogether an exceptionally hilarious evening was enjoyed. The total cost of the entertainment came to under £1, partly contributed by the personnel, who ungrudgingly devoted their spare time to its success.

Christmas Day, last year, had a very special significance for Cecil Houses. Her Majesty the Queen bestowed a number of gifts on the houses and the women, with the following gracious 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 Christmastide, and Her Majesty sends them all her best wishes for a happy time.

The distribution of Her Majesty's munificence brought the keenest joy to all concerned, and added considerable zest to the festivities.

This is not the first time that Her Majesty has helped Cecil Houses. The Committee are indebted to the Queen, not only for her approval of the work and a generous monetary donation, but for the gifts of a large arm-chair 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. The Queen visited Devonshire Street before its opening and expressed herself pleased and satisfied with all the arrangements.

Every Christmas since the first House opened the kindness and generosity of our friends has made it possible for all our lodgers to enjoy on this one day relief from the desperate anxiety of finding food and a bed. A free breakfast, an ample Christmas dinner of beef, pudding, etc., tea and supper are served, and a party of professionals give up their own Christmas afternoon to provide the entertainment. A free bed is also given and the following reports from the Matrons at the five Houses show how deeply last Christmas Day was appreciated.

"We all had a delightful day, everything in perfect harmony and the women enjoyed themselves thoroughly. We were able to give garments to every lodger, which included a dress from the

wardrobes for Christmas Day, helping in this way to brighten their spirits. We were fortunate in hearing the King's speech, everyone joining heartily in the National Anthem. We were favoured with two good pianists and the fun lasted until 2 a.m. The concert party was greatly enjoyed, and a girl befriended by Cecil Houses presented the House with a wonderful bon-bon six feet long, a gift from her mother.

"The gifts from Her Majesty the Queen were greatly admired and appreciated."

"My assistant's sister-in-law very kindly made coconut ice for the lodgers on Christmas Day. Mrs. E. sent the bran tub, as she always does, on Christmas morning. Miss D. came on Christmas night and brought two friends dressed as Mickey Mouse and Minnie. They danced with the lodgers and gave chocolates. It caused great fun and added to the enjoyment of the evening. The little gifts from the caterers for those who sat down to dinner were greatly appreciated."

"Christmas Day passed off very nicely and the dinner thoroughly enjoyed. The concert was more than enjoyed, and we had a happy time until 1 a.m. The Queen's presents were drawn for, and the box that had contained the handkerchiefs was drawn for separately, a friend putting a shilling in for luck, and it was won by old lady B.—our eldest guest."

"At the office, the Queen's gifts were drawn for and I got some lovely things for our House. On Christmas Day Mrs. Chesterton brought the gifts along to the House, also reading the Queen's message which, I may say, caused great happiness."

"The concert party was very good, and all the food served on Christmas Day greatly enjoyed, and it was certainly a great success. The bran tub gifts so kindly given were fine, everyone got a parcel as usual, all having a new pair of stockings. It proved the best I have been able to do."

"All the guests send thanks for the splendid Christmas Day. Everything passed off well and everyone pleased and happy. The concert party was exceptionally good."

For the information of new friends it should be pointed out that the Cecil Houses already established are the outcome of the experience 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.

*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.

Up to date Five Houses have been established :—

March 28th, 1927—35, Devonshire Street, W.C.1, for 44 women and 2 babies (opened by the Lord Mayor of London. Closed for rebuilding April 6th, 1936, to be re-opened early in 1937).

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).

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 and Daly's Theatre 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 Thorndike; Mr. W. Clarke Hall; Mr. John Galsworthy; Sir Gerald du Maurier; Mr. G. K. Chesterton; Miss Margaret Bondfield; 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. Sheriff; 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; and Miss Margery Pickard spoke of the urgent need of beds for homeless women and in support of the work of Cecil Houses. Messrs. Bon Marché, Liverpool, kindly lent the Basnett Gallery for a meeting in October last when the Lord Mayor of Liverpool took the Chair and Miss Edith Rose, Major J. Brunel Cohen and Mrs. Cecil Chesterton received a generous response to their appeals.

Cecil Houses open at 8 p.m. 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 our help has been asked on behalf of German and French girls and women who have come to London as domestic servants.

In one case the police arrived at 2 a.m. with a young German girl who had been found wandering with her little suit-case and her small store of German money. She could not speak a word of English and was crying piteously. At the Cecil House to which she came, the night portress at the time—the widow of a British soldier—was by birth an Alsatian. The gratitude and relief on the young face when she heard her native tongue were indescribable. She curtsied to the officers, begging the portress to thank them for their chivalry. Not to be outdone, the constables gravely and profoundly bowed and the little stranger went off happily to bed. She had come to London to take up a situation, but finding that her employers were anti-German, patriotism would not allow her to remain and she fled into the streets. The next morning—Sunday—the Matron arranged for her to be received in an Anglo-German hostel until her future could be settled.

Our own countrywomen and girls, stranded in London, are

brought to us in the same kind way. During the past few weeks we have had the following reports from our Matrons :—

“The police, after a telephone conversation with me, sent a girl and her baby for one night as they are sending her home to Newcastle. They were so glad I was able to take her in.”

“Saturday night late a woman with daughter of 16 and girl of 7 were sent along by taxi by the police. The poor woman was working late and when she got home at midnight she found her children in the street and the woman of the house the worse for drink.”

“Monday night another young mother with baby seven months old sent along by the police. Thursday night I found baby was ill when she came in and got the hospital to admit her at once.”

“Police brought a lodger by car at 1 a.m. Another constable brought a woman from King’s Cross Station for a few hours’ rest as she was travelling to Newcastle with an early train to visit her son at the Royal Infirmary and she had come all the way from Devon.

“Also the Lady Almoner at M—— Hospital asked me to accommodate a woman, at her expense, for a week, which I am doing.”

The hospital authorities work most effectively and kindly with the Matrons as the following shows :—

“Rather a bad case of T.B. was removed by ambulance on Saturday at midnight. This was quite a young girl who had come in late and had only been in bed half an hour when a fellow lodger reported to me she was in danger of choking. The ambulance was here almost immediately and she arrived at the hospital safely.

“I arranged for a young girl to be admitted to B—— Street Hospital with terribly cut feet. She had been walking about in cheap light shoes which had cut right through the top of her feet.”

Since Cecil Houses opened some 564,766 beds and 37,495 cots have been occupied up to the end of April, 1936.

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, however, 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.

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.

WITH THE CO-OPERATION OF FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO FIND EMPLOYMENT FOR 853 WOMEN AND GIRLS AS GENERAL SERVANTS, WAITRESSES, CHAMBERMAIDS, AND DAILY HELPS. THE MAJORITY OF THESE HAVE DONE VERY WELL.

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

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.

Cecil Houses are open to visitors every Thursday afternoon, from 3.30 to 5 p.m. (*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. During the past year some 52 meetings were held. 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. Once, however, a 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 material, 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.

Their particular appreciation is due to Major J. Brunel Cohen who, since the inception of the Fund, nine years ago, has acted as Hon. Treasurer with continual and ungrudging service. They are happy to say, however, that he is remaining on the Executive and that Cecil Houses will still have the benefit of his interest and support.

The thanks of the Committee are also due to Mr. D. G. Somerville, M.P., who has kindly taken over the arduous duties of Hon. Treasurer. Mr. Somerville has acted as Hon. Financial Adviser since the beginning of the work, in which his advice as to the purchase of sites and buildings for the erection of Cecil Houses has been of the greatest service.

May, 1936.

*The following are Extracts from
Speeches of our Supporters*

At the Basnett Gallery, Liverpool, October 24th, 1935

[by kind permission of The Bon Marché (Liverpool) Ltd.]

THE LORD MAYOR GIVES HIS VIEWS

I am very pleased that I am in the Chair because the Chairman has certain rights and prerogatives, and I am going to exercise one right that I have exercised during the year as a prerogative of the Chairman. When I tell you that I have to-day attended meetings at 12, 1, 2.30 and 3 p.m., and have three more after this, you will readily understand that one has not had much time to dissect the literature which has been kindly sent to me about Cecil Houses and which describes to me the object of this meeting.

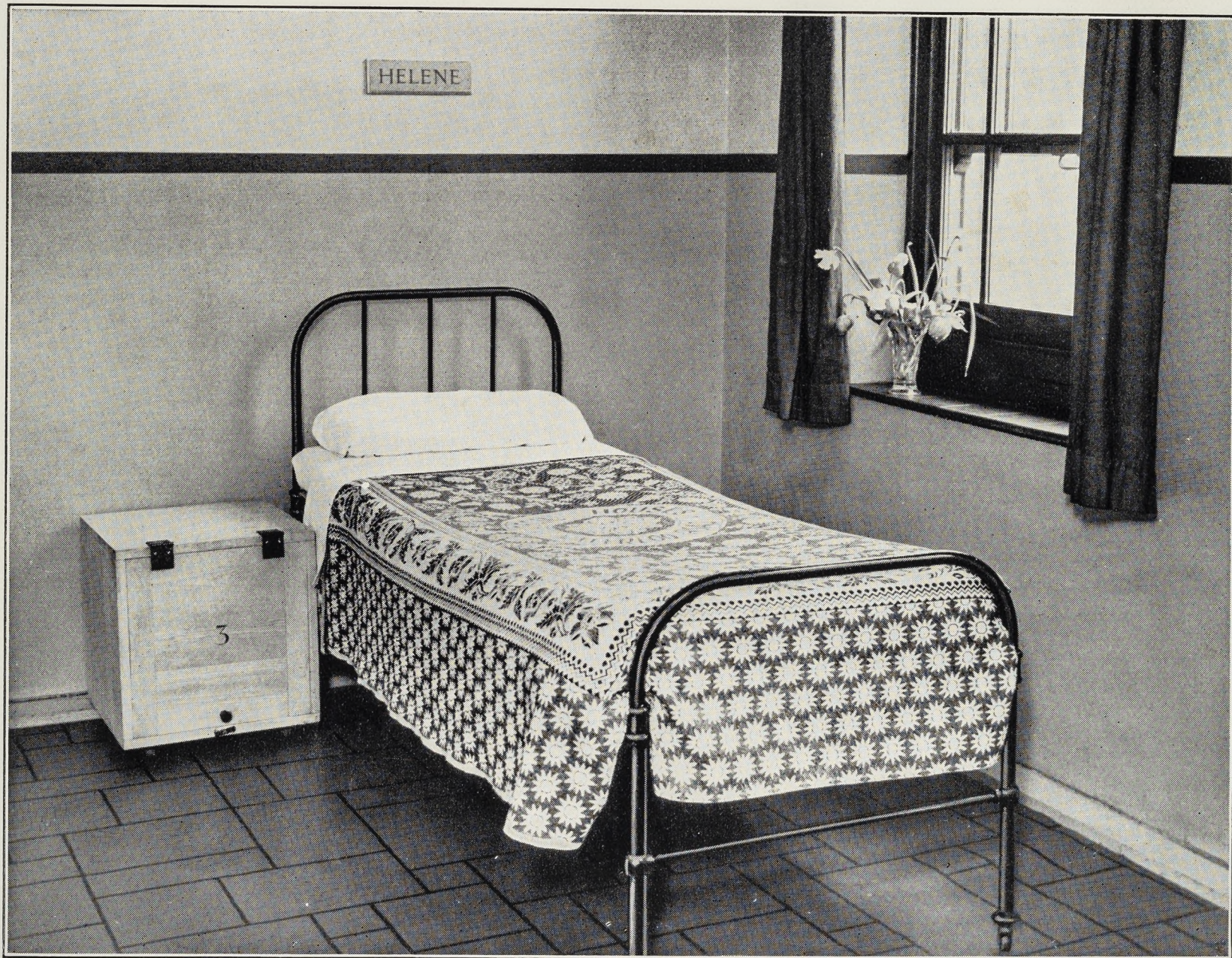
Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, I see, is the second speaker, probably she knows so much about it, that if I spoke first she would only expose my ignorance to the world. Therefore, I am going to ask Mrs. Chesterton to speak now and then I am going to dot the i's and cross the t's.

The Lord Mayor of Liverpool.

**“. . . THE WALKING ABOUT . . . THE
WALKING ABOUT . . .”**

I have had the privilege of speaking to Liverpool audiences several times and I have the happiest possible recollections of their kindness. But I have not before dealt with the problem that we have come here this afternoon to consider, and that is the homelessness of certain women in London.

It is not a provincial or local problem ; in fact the capital city collects from all over Britain, but their experiences—whether local or provincial—are the same. It is one of the most tragic things to find yourself in a big city with nowhere to go and no friend to



IN GRATITUDE TO "HELENE"—AN ENDOWED BED AT CECIL HOUSE

turn to. Girls and women find that very often they get a job only to get out of it, and they have not been able to save any money. Some are on the dole ; some are domestics who are not on the dole, and they have the feeling of helplessness and homelessness which is a very tragic thing, not only mentally but spiritually. I know how they feel—I have tried it out myself.

At the time I tried it I did not know, and I expect a great many other people do not know, what happens to women in London with no homes, no friends and no work.

I thought that there were Public Lodging Houses for women just as there are Public Lodging Houses for men. We have all heard of lodging houses, run by the London County Council and the Borough Councils, where for a shilling a night a man can get a bed. But they don't run lodging houses for women. I remember an official telling Major Cohen and myself that women were so dangerous that they could not run lodging houses for them. I replied : "We are not very dangerous when we are asleep."

"But," answered the official, "you never know what women can do."

I know what women can do when they cannot get a bed—they wander about, conscious of a most terrible desertion—they are not wanted—nobody cares anything for them. I found that out for myself when as a journalist looking for experience, I lived the life of a destitute woman.

I wanted to find out what happened to the homeless and I discovered that there were no lodging houses for women, and that then, as now, the only lodging houses that existed were those run by charitable associations, and those run for profit.

My first experience of a place run for profit was not encouraging. I paid 1s. 2d. for a night's accommodation and the mattress was terribly lumpy. I had to choose between frozen feet and frozen shoulders as the bedclothes were too short. There was no decent place to wash and I realised then a most important thing : that cleanliness is largely a matter of money.

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.

I found myself after a while getting grimy and dirty, but in the weeks I lived as a destitute woman selling matches, scrubbing steps or washing up in a Soho restaurant, I never spent money on

a bath; I always bought food, though like most women of my class I have always been used to a hot bath. But very few lodging houses at that time supplied hot water.

One of the things I learnt was that a woman feels as she looks. I always think that men have the advantage of us in that respect. If a man puts on a clean collar, or even turns the one he has on, he can present some sort of an appearance. A woman in a soiled ulster and shapeless hat which has been soaked and soaked, a woman whose feet are absolutely tired and worn out, who hasn't any shoes but drags about with the appearance of leather over feet bound with bits of string—she feels as she looks—down and out, unable to face the world, unable to apply for a job.

It is often said that if you are honest and straightforward you can look anybody in the face. I used to sit on the edge of a chair in the Labour Exchange whenever I applied for a job as a cook—I am really a good cook—but I am sure I looked a thoroughly undesirable person. I could not get a job as a cook, as I had no references. There are many women unable to get jobs without references, not that they have done anything bad—but because luck has been against them. How quickly a woman can lose all her position in life! Through bad luck she loses her job, her savings, her little home and finds that she is down and out. It is going to be very difficult for her to climb back again into the self-supporting position she once had.

One of my experiences—and I have had a number—was at a very chilly and miserable lodging house run for profit. In a room lit by a broken gas mantle I could not go to sleep and presently, at about 3 a.m., the door opened and a woman came in and sat down on a bed. She began to cry in such a hopeless fashion that I asked what was wrong.

“Oh, my dear,” she said, “it's the walking about—the walking about. I've been looking and looking for a job and I'm worn out. I have just got the money for my bed to-night, but to-morrow I shall have to start again.” Walking about, walking about, is one of the greatest tragedies in London. Hopelessly walking until you are almost dropping with fatigue. I used to think, all too readily, when I found women looking half-doped, that they had been drinking. Believe me, they had not been drinking, they had just been walking about without food, without hope, without the prospect of a bed at night. What I realised was endorsed by people who have worked for years among the destitute.

Then there is that terrible spiritual feeling—the feeling that you are cut off. I think that women feel very acutely the way that other women look or feel towards them. It is a great mistake to

suppose that women don't care about the opinions of other women—they realise in a flash what those others are thinking.

I remember one night when I found myself quite unable to get a bed, for though I had enough money to pay for it every lodging house was full.

I walked about because I did not want to spend the night in the casual ward at Southwark. There you are put in a cubicle—which when I occupied one was called a “cell”—and in the morning when you get up, probably after a bad night, you go in the common-room where you get luke-warm tea. This is a really crying injustice against women. The men in the casual ward are called earlier than the women and they get the hot tea. It is owing to the chivalry of the men who restrict their demands that women get any tea at all.

This night I walked about, over the bridges down into South London. I felt as though I were in a city of the hardest hearts imaginable. I could not get a bed, I had the money, but there was not one available.

Presently in that desert of pavement I heard footsteps coming towards me. At first I was just a little frightened, then I thought: “What have I to be frightened of? I have only a few pence.”

A little woman came towards me and I asked: “Is there anything I can do?”

She looked at me pathetically. “I haven't had a talk with anybody this evening,” she said. “You know, it's hard to feel you don't belong . . .”

That is one of life's cruellest tragedies—you don't belong, there is nobody to care what you do—nobody to share your hopes—nobody to share what bit of luck may come your way.

There are so many women who don't belong, in London, with nowhere to go, no friend to turn to.

Over and over again one meets these women. You will find girls arriving in London hoping for a job, with an unconquerable spirit of adventure, very often with only their return ticket and perhaps a few pence to carry on. They come to London and they don't in the least know what they are going to do if they can't find work. They wander about the streets and if a policeman spots them they are arrested and sent to Holloway on a charge of vagrancy. The authorities usually send them back to their people, but the stigma remains—they have been to prison, because they had

nowhere to go—no place to turn to for a helping hand. They don't belong—they have no home, no friends in London.

The more lucky ones appeal to the police and are often directed to Cecil Houses. But these are not all. You will discover if ever you are in London, late at night, that there are still people who sleep out. At the present time it is against the law to sleep out and those who do so may be charged at the police station and sent to prison for the crime of being homeless.

There are all sorts of homeless women who find shelter in Cecil Houses—domestic servants looking for a job, cinema attendants with very little money, waitresses, middle-class girls who are glad and anxious to come to us, not only for a good bed, but also for the human conditions we try for. A journalist once described our Houses as "A one night stand of a home"—a human place where a girl can be helped.

Since we started we have been able to get a good many women and girls situations, and the majority have kept their jobs and done extremely well. It is a fact that if you leave a woman or a girl to wander about London she will gradually become so hopeless and so helpless that she will merge into a class of society she would never have met at home—not because she wants to, but because of those terrible circumstances which are so cruel, especially cruel to the woman in a strange city. I want to stress this point very deeply, because I am asking you this afternoon to support Cecil Houses.

We have found that an increasing number of girls and women come down from the North. When I had my experiences as a destitute down and out I met a number of girls from Liverpool, and it was from Liverpool that the first offer of help came.

Major Brunel Cohen wrote and said he did not know that things were so bad for homeless girls, "but if you will try and start a lodging house I will try and help you". And he has done so. He has not only helped us with his money but also with his time and his enthusiasm and devotion, indeed, perhaps but for Major Cohen there would have been no Cecil Houses. I feel sure that as almost the first help came from Liverpool, Liverpool is going to help us again because of the number of girls who come from this city and who come from the North.

We have a house in Wharfdale Road, quite close to Euston, St. Pancras and King's Cross where the police on duty near the stations send women and girls who arrive late at night.

When these north country arrivals ask where they can get a bed they are told: "You go to Cecil House, there is a north country matron there—now run along home," and when they hear a pleasant

north country voice greeting them, they exclaim: "I was so lost, but now I feel happy and at home."

It is very difficult for anyone who has always been securely placed to realise the trouble and anguish that comes upon a woman who feels herself absolutely on her own resources. It is so difficult to realise what it means—the hopelessness of getting up—if you can call it "getting up" from the shelter of a doorway—wondering if you are going to get a bed that night.

When I was down and out I always knew at the back of my mind that I could go home, but I could share to some extent the terrible feeling of loneliness and degradation that comes upon you when you are not going to have a bed, or the means of keeping yourself clean, and that is what very many women undergo each night. They will tell you at the Crypt of St. Martin's Church, which is open to the homeless, that there are so many that they can only give a bed once in about three weeks to the same woman. The rest of the time she will drift and drift, with maybe a free night here and a free night there.

I always think this is a work which, though men should support, must especially appeal to women. We none of us know what may happen. The turn of the wheel may come and we may find ourselves absolutely without means, without a home, without hope, undeservedly cut off. I feel because of that possibility we should help our sisters less fortunate than we are. Those of us who enjoy so many advantages should do something to help those others. If I may say so, in my experience I have found that these women are very fine, sympathetic and generous. They are ready to share their last penny—their supper of fried fish and chips—with the woman who has none.

And so I am asking you to do what *you* can, not only to help Cecil Houses, but to help those women and girls of the North who drift down to the great city in the hope that work awaits them, only to find too often no work, no helping hand, nothing but a stony pavement on which they must walk and walk.

Someone has already handed up £25 and I do feel that if you cannot give as much as that you might at least say that you will collect that sum through many of your friends. You give £25—or 50 friends 10s. each and that would be an enormous help. But even if you cannot give pounds please promise to give something.

We are lucky enough sometimes to get good big donations, but the smaller ones all add up to help a big total. I remember the very morning we heard a friend was going to give us £100 we found in our post a 1s. from a little office cleaner. So I do ask you to put down this afternoon what you are going to give us.

Mrs. Cecil Chesterton.

WHY LIVERPOOL SHOULD HELP

Mrs. Chesterton said this was not the first time she had addressed a Liverpool audience. I have addressed a good many Liverpool audiences in my time—always wanting something—mostly votes, but on this occasion it is not a vote, it is cash. In my time I was accorded votes—quite as many as I wanted and begged for, and I hope this afternoon I will be accorded as much money as I ask for.

You have listened to a most moving account told you by Mrs. Chesterton of her experiences in London a few years ago and what is going on in London night after night. Things have not changed since she wrote "In Darkest London". What has been done to help these poor ladies who are destitute, have no comforts and very little funds, and who, even if they have a certain amount of money, have nowhere to go? Where for the expenditure of 1s. or 1s. 6d. a night could they procure anything like decent comfort and adequate accommodation?

We never attempted when starting Cecil Houses to compete with the Salvation Army or with the Church Army. It was not our entire desire to deal with women absolutely destitute but with the problem of the woman who has a little money—who could afford 1s. or so a night; there were no decent lodging houses in London for her to go to. If any of you have ever seen the usual type of lodging houses, I don't think you or anyone belonging to you would like to see them a second time.

We decided that for a 1s. a night we would endeavour to give the very best accommodation possible with a high degree of comfort. When Mrs. Chesterton wrote that book, "In Darkest London", I and a certain number of other people wrote to her and we said we would like to assist in solving this problem. A meeting was called at Sir Philip Sassoon's house in London and that was followed by a similar meeting at the Mansion House. Some £3,000 was collected. We bought a very small and tumbledown house in Devonshire Street, and fitted it out with 44 beds and 2 cots. From the very first night it was full, and has been full every night since. Altogether we have five houses throughout London, each one actually larger than Devonshire Street, with a larger number of beds; 266 beds are occupiable every night and 22 cots in the five houses, and Mrs. Chesterton tells me 75 people were turned away last week. We give, in addition to a bed—and when we say a bed we mean a bed—clean sheets for every newcomer, with the proper number of blankets and a bolster on which you can sleep, not just one which you have to turn round and round all night. We also have a very nice and comfortable common-room painted in gay colours, bright fires burning, ample washing accommodation, baths, foot baths, wash basins, and accommodation where women can wash their clothes and another room in which to dry these

clothes. Everyone is provided with tea and bread and butter on arrival and the same is given in the morning, but I think that we should perhaps state that we conduct ourselves on the same lines as the Adelphi Hotel conducts itself; a woman comes in, planks down her 1s., and says: "I want a bed." "No. 322," we tell her, her bed is in such and such a room. We do not ask any questions, where they come from or where they are going to, or what they have been. All we know is, that somebody has come to us for a night's rest and lodging and we are prepared to give it to them.

In most of these cases the women have their 1s., and through that our Houses are self-supporting, collecting the money from the public such as you to buy the house in the first place and equip it. After they have been equipped those houses pay their way—which means the cost of salaries of Matron, complete staff, renovations, rates, taxes, etc.

In some ten years we have started five houses and we have on one side a profit of between £600 and £700.

You may wonder why I should come to you in Liverpool. I know you also have your own problems just as much as we have in London, but what we appeal to you to-day for is to help the Liverpool women, of whom there are quite a large number who come up to London. These women come up for some reason—perhaps to follow their husbands who are looking for work, and very often find themselves with nowhere to go. They may meet a friendly policeman who directs them to one of our houses where they may spend the night. They may only have 2d. or 3d., but it is not the desire of Cecil Houses to turn these women away. In order to meet these cases we have a Needy Fund. The Matron of each House has instructions to use her own discretion and to pay the 1s. for any woman who comes along, and it is incredible the number of women who could take advantage of that and who, as a matter of fact, don't. The number of women who don't pay is infinitesimal. Many make the 1s. up another time. Of course, that cannot happen in every case and it is for that reason we have this "Needy Fund".

I am asking you to subscribe—it takes about £20, actually £18 5s. 0d., to pay for one bed—and it occurs to us that you here in Liverpool would be interested enough in this movement to help your own people who may be stranded in London. I do not want to bleed you white, but £100 from you here to-day would keep one bed going for five years or five beds going for one year—then you would indeed be helping us very considerably.

Mrs. Chesterton was kind enough to say I have been generous—I was not in the slightest degree generous—I felt very uncomfortable and thought I would never be able to sleep again after I had read Mrs. Chesterton's book "In Darkest London". It must appeal

to each one of you when you think of those poor unfortunate people who, through no fault of their own, are walking about the streets with nowhere to go and nowhere to turn, when, by only subscribing 1s. or so, you can at least help them for a while. Then it seems to me that you are being very privileged, certainly that is the way in which I look upon it.

Major J. Brunel Cohen

“. . . THEN AS NOW”

Will you forgive me, please, for going back into ancient history? I am going back to the days of thirty-five years ago when I was an outside worker, my district extending from Hyde Park Corner to the far end of King's Road, Chelsea, the district covering South Belgravia, including Victoria Station, for outside and night work.

I was also appointed through the late Lord Roberts for special work around Chelsea Barracks, which housed some of our crack regiments; with a special request not to wear uniform, and work alone.

In two years' experience it was amazing to discover the number of women and girls frequenting the Barracks district, who came from as far as Scotland, from the provinces, and even small villages.

I constantly dreaded going out for this late night duty, because our own little shelter for girls was always full, and the difficulty of securing temporary accommodation for those whom I came across night by night and wished to help more permanently.

It being in the days of the hansom cab, I could not afford the fares, and the horse omnibuses did not run frequently through the small hours of the morning, therefore it meant tramping miles often through the streets of London, to say nothing of the despair of the poor girl and myself when we went from Shelter to Shelter and were told "No room."

How glad I was to see that Cecil Houses do not question those who need a bed, for I could visualise the number of cases where the women would go to the Superintendent in Charge and confide to them their troubles. How often the very fact that the questioning was not done would bring forth the confidence of the women. One case in point at my own Shelter at St. Vincent's of a girl named Jane, whom I helped, came to me. I asked no questions—she needed a friend. When I was writing late at night she came down

from her bedroom and asked if she could speak to me alone, saying she was so touched at not being questioned that she could not sleep until she had confided to me the dreadful trouble she was in, because she felt that if I knew I would refuse to keep her. "Jane," I replied, "whatever trouble you are in, all the more reason why you should find a shelter at St. Vincent's." She came from the North of England and was subpoenaed to give evidence in one of the biggest civil actions of that time, against a theatre in the North of England. She had run away in sheer fright and despair from her home town. I went to an actor friend and asked if she was on the right side or the wrong, and being informed that she was on the right side made me determined to help her, and for six months I was involved with investigation work. Eventually, our side won the case, but it cost thousands of pounds. I kept in touch with Jane until she died.

Many of us feel it is very difficult to support our own provincial charities, but in the case of the Cecil Houses I hope that my few words can prove that it was really our own provincial and country women and girls that we were really helping, who drift to London. Therefore, I feel that Cecil Houses have a definite claim upon our generosity, for of the hundreds I was privileged to help in my outside work, only a few were Londoners.

Will you do all you possibly can to help Cecil Houses?

Miss Edith Rose, O.B.E.

OUR THANKS TO LIVERPOOL

In the minute's reflection that you have to make up your minds what you are going to send to Mrs. Chesterton, I offer on your behalf a very grateful vote of thanks, first to the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress, who, in the stress of an exceedingly busy day, have found time, as they always do find time, to come to-day to this meeting, and to Miss Edith Rose for coming here and talking to us; and to the Directors and Management of Bon Marché for so kindly giving us this very excellent hall in which to hold the meeting.

William Armstrong

"MEET THE LADIES"

By

ROBERT NICHOLS

"We are the Cecil House girls," they cheerfully chorused, led by a determined old body who, with hands bleached and seamed by scrubwork, pounded the piano.

"Who wrote that?" I asked.

"The little slip of a thing in the corner," answered the Matron of the Wharfdale Road House, the second of the Cecil Houses I visited.

"Might we have it again?"

So they sang it again:—

We are the Cecil House girls.
We are the Cecil House girls.
We know our manners,
We spend all our tanners,
We are respected wherever we go.
We go marching down the Old York Road,
Doors and windows open wide.
Hi, di, hi, di, hi, di, hi!
We are the Cecil House girls.

As they sang, I covertly observed the composer of this hearty ditty. Yes, she was a little slip of a thing—not more than eighteen probably—fair-haired, frail-featured, shy. In other circles, I decided, she'd be reading Virginia Woolf. For that's what one at once perceives: a change of background, a change of clothing (all save the invariable silk stockings), and each—or most—would be instantly recognisable as often met before. That elderly managing-looking person with the dark steady eye, the strong throat and the very upright sitting posture—she's obviously someone of importance in "county" circles. And then there's the comfortable large lady with her elbow firmly planted on her attaché case (we carry our worldly possessions with us here)—she . . . well, I chatted with her last week. Ronnie had just gone to Sandhurst and, "Do you think, Mr. Nichols, that Somerville is the right college for Ursula in a year's time?" Then there was "Granny," one of those shy old ladies who see everything and twinkle silently. The judge's wife? Quite possibly.

I amused myself awhile by playing "transpositions". This identification of the inhabitants of a—to me—new world by pitching individual ladies one at a time into the clothes and background of an appropriate individual in the old was revelatory.

Later I found it of practical use. For there is one sovereign rule in all the Cecil Houses: "*Women applying for beds will not be called upon to answer any question whatsoever.*" It is a good rule and of all the good features of the Cecil Houses, perhaps the best, because the most human. Confidences can, however, be invited and often meet with considerable response. This method of transposition aids approach. For, though the details are infinitely various, the main types are constant.

"Have a cigarette, Doris," I said. "That's a jolly song. D'you think you could let me have a copy?"

Doris wavered a little—just sufficiently—like other poets elsewhere—and obliged.

Meanwhile the Tragic Lady in the corner sat moveless. She had straight black hair and an aquiline nose. She was aged about thirty-five. "She speaks to no one," said the Matron. "Better days, of course. No telling how it happened. I think she must have been a private secretary."

I didn't glance at her again. Even the eye must not ask questions. One must respect the individuality of humans before one can help them. And perhaps the first help is this knowledge of the existence of respect. For myself I think that real love doesn't ask questions. Sometimes it is told things. That's all.

There are those who quarrel with this idea of no questions asked. When the Cecil Houses first opened these persons prophesied an endless shindy, drunkenness, thievery and so forth. They also hinted that to provide beds for vagrant women was to "subsidise prostitution". But there is very little quarrelling and such as there is is mainly caused by those who are slightly "mental" and therefore not to be held entirely responsible. Drunkenness is rare. Extraordinary generosity and not thievery is the rule. As to prostitutes—not so many turn up as used to. And how is prostitution subsidised by selling a lonely woman what she wants—a bed, alone? Truly it is staggering how little these worldly-wise comprehend the plain fact that a homeless woman will sometimes sell her body for nothing else but a warm room and a bed to lie in.

It is easy to enter a Cecil House. The woman rings. The door opens. She goes to a little window. She pays a shilling. For her shilling she gets 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. The hostels open at 8 p.m. and close at 10 a.m. 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.

The ladies are lonely after the street. One gets dammed up

emotionally walking about or scrubbing steps or standing in the dark all day with cinema programmes. They like to chat. There are children's cots in special rooms. Children are favourites. And for those disinclined to chat there's a chair in the corner in which to sit down—blessed rest!—to brood, to sip the cup of tea, to nibble biscuits, to listen to the girls round the piano singing "Annie Laurie", "The Long, Long Trail", "Danny Boy". Only those who have trudged all day in shoes often not too well fitting or in ill-repair know how tired the feet can be—not to speak of the soul! So, after a while, to bed, with perhaps a hot bath—restorative to the self-respect—first.

There are five such hostels in London. Each tends to have a different character. Waterloo Road, for instance, is more "matey" than Devonshire Street, and Devonshire Street more metropolitan than Wharfdale Road, whither come so many from the North. (There's a Northern Matron there. Hearing her voice, the ladies say: "Oh, we're hame!") Folk-ways are changing rapidly and one of the results is observable in the hostels. I refer to the number of homeless—and all-too-often all-but-jobless—women over thirty-five. Employers are all for youth nowadays. This is especially true of domestic servants. Only too many mistresses, where but one servant is kept, would rather have a girl under twenty than a woman over thirty-five. A very large number of the women who use the hostels are drudges of thirty-five and over, who eke out a living—of a sort—on purely temporary jobs, often jobs of only a day, dish-washing, scrubbing floors, holystoning doorsteps. These ladies are—and no wonder!—by and large apt to be much less cheerful than the young. There are, too, the women—only too large a number—of forty-five and upward. Most of these are spinsters or widows. These last, having drudged for years and brought up a family, find, after all their toil and trouble, that the young wives of their married sons have little use for them about the house. So out they go again—to earn their keep as they did when they were girls. But they are not the women they were. Life has used them up. Some suffer from infirmities. Their lot is very hard. To such the hostels are an especial boon. For if youth is demanded by the employer, there is also to-day, at least intermittently, some regard for youth and its difficulties. But few are they who think of those old ladies whose claims on the community are at least as great as those of youth. Not that I do not sympathise with youth, the more piteous for having so much to learn and so often destined to learn too late. Yet a sense of proportion is desirable. And it seems to me that these old ladies deserve more attention and sympathy than they are apt to receive in the modern world.

The chief recreation in the Houses is music, especially a sing-song. There are gramophones, but the ladies don't seem to care much for using them. What they like is to get round the piano and sing the old tunes—I heard no jazz—or sit round and listen to the others. There are a surprising number of women able to

play the piano among "the Cecil House girls". The ladies like to dance too. Occasionally they indulge in frolics, and competitions in turning head-over-heels have been known. For, by and large, an atmosphere of invincible cheerfulness and fortitude prevails. . . . In summer a lot of sewing goes on. The ladies—especially the young ones—like to look smart. And in summer finery doesn't spoil so soon. Then, too, a lot of hair-washing takes place—so much that it can, I think, be definitely classed as a recreation. And always, all the year round, there will be anxious brows bowed over pen and ink. To these compositions much time and trouble are given.

The rooms are cheerful and very clean. There is no odour of congregated humanity. Directly the doors close in the morning the rooms are thoroughly washed and disinfected. Yet the "feel" of the Houses remains "Homey" and not at all clinical. To this state of affairs the Matrons and their assistants contribute by their understanding and tact (a marvel to the male). One Matron said to me: "Of course we sometimes get troublesome women. But women, if I may say so, usually know to a hair exactly how far they may go with another woman." I saw evidences of real affection between the ladies and the Matrons. And I don't wonder at it. There is real love in those Houses. In fact, when I left my last, that was what I most remembered. And I venture to think that it is just because no questions are asked that, when confidences are given, they are apt to be genuine. For though there are some women—especially elderly women—for ever reserved and locked in upon themselves, many will talk and talk freely.

Among those who were silent the most striking (to me) was a woman of about fifty with chestnut hair and an intellectual face. The Matron told me that this lady comes for a few nights at a time and disappears as mysteriously as she comes. She but seldom speaks to any other women. Night and morning she is on her knees in prayer for half an hour. She is gracious in her manner and extremely grateful for the slightest attention shown her. But no one really knows anything about her and no one is so impertinent as to ask. And that probably is why this woman—obviously well-bred and entirely respectable—is able to use the Cecil House. Her pride remains intact.

Among the talkers was the old lady who had such bad feet. I met her in the Waterloo Road House. She'd walked that day all the way from Highgate. She'd been knocked down by a lorry two years ago and never really got over it. Her feet were so bad she was urged to go into hospital again. But she wouldn't go. At length the reason appeared. She feared she'd never come out. This was not so unreasonable as it appears. For, of course, many such old ladies do die—since we must all die somewhere—in hospital. But this old lady had a theory that such old parties as herself were sometimes suffocated with pillows by unsympathetic Powers who considered her sort too much trouble. In Waterloo

Road, too, I met rose-cheeked Laura (let us call her that). She was very communicative. Laura is seventy years old. Almost every day she goes to Herne Hill or Camberwell Green to feed the birds. Tomtits are her favourites. I asked her where she came from. "I'm a citizeness," she said proudly. That is to say she was born within the confines of the City of London. She knows the City well—every old court and alley of it. She regretted changes. In another walk of life she'd be, I think, a Corresponding Fellow of the Royal Society of Antiquaries. But these old ladies do not all sigh after the vanished pomps of yesterday. Some are very up to date. Witness Vanessa. She's coloured. She's got a crowd-work job on George Arliss's latest picture. The films for her. That's real life, that is.

"Baskets"—so called because of the number, filled with unknown valuables, by which she is always surrounded—Baskets's inclinations fall elsewhere. She is strong on domestic ties, especially those of marriage. But, although engaged three times, she has somehow not achieved or kept—it is a moot point which—a home. "I went to Australia in 1914. There was a retired dentist said he wanted to marry me—fair mad about me he was. Good-looking man too—fair-haired. I was thirty-seven; he was fifty but said he was forty-four. I cost him seventy pound in all—what with going there and back. For I didn't marry him. When I got on the jetty there he said: 'Where's your clothes?' And of course they was all in the bag I carried in my hand. I don't think he liked that. He was a bit peculiar too. Wanted to have the ring made out of his spare gold fillings. Fancied he'd take out all me teeth too and give me new ones. Not that that mattered. I'd have let him. But he was a widower and had a married son, and the son and daughter-in-law thought I was after his money. Which I wasn't—I mean no more than was necessary for my keep as his wife. So back I came. A fair pedigree I call it, don't you? Been engaged twice since. But it came to nothing." "Baskets" sighed, then laughed gleefully and a little coyly. "The men say I've got wicked eyes." (This, alas, was a delusion. Baskets's eyes are large, black, luminous, vaguely puzzled—but wicked, no!—that was pure romance.)

Chloe, however, has experienced marriage. She's twenty-four and looks seventeen; a pretty, slight little creature in a tight skirt and blouse with a tammy flopping over toward a *retroussé* nose and half-hiding one of a pair of blue eyes that seem to smile and, on closer inspection, are seen to be extremely sad. That they are sad does not cause astonishment. She comes from the Rhondda Valley—"We used to pick up coal atop the mines and sell it to go to the pictures."—and she married at eighteen. Six months later her husband drove a knife clean through her wrist and out the other side. She ran away from him. Though distinctly attractive, she finds it difficult to hold a job. For she's getting deafer and deafer (we are going to see about that). Her last job was in a fish kitchen. "Fifteen bob a week and all the fish I wanted." But she

didn't. The smell was too much for her. She's very generous. Whenever she "has a bit" she likes to give it away. She's that sort.

Martha, poor soul, even more seldom has anything to give away, though doubtless she would if she had. She's about fifty, slight, with a square, lined face, grey hair parted down the centre and looped over the ears. Her eyes are strangely calm and of so faint a grey that, looking into them, one is reminded of a wet winter dawn over a still landscape. Martha never complains. Martha came in late that night—at half-past ten. She'd been washing dishes since ten in the morning and was due up on another job—in luck for once!—at five o'clock next morning. Martha had only been out of hospital three weeks. "You see, I have epileptic fits. Not very often. The last one before that was twelve months ago. So perhaps I shan't have another for another twelve. I hope so. It gets you frightened. Not that I remember much. You just wake up in a strange hospital. But it does get you frightened and I'll tell you why. You see I heard in the hospital how some that are subject that way don't wake up at all. And how's one to tell from day to day when it's going to happen to you? But when I think that way, when I'm frightened, I say to myself: 'Don't you be frightened, my girl. If it do happen, why then you don't have to work any more.'"

Such are some of the women who pass through these Houses. Hundreds pass.

I said there are five of these Houses. Alas, one—the Devonshire Street House—will soon cease to be. It must be rebuilt. Funds are needed. They will be found. And I hope that you, reader, will be one of those who help to find them. But there are other things needed beside funds. We could do with another piano. We could do with clothes. We could do with sound shoes and boots—but don't let there be too many Size Four among them. Our ladies are given to fancying that they take size four. It is a little mistake on their part—attributable, perhaps, to a vanity not common to them only. (Sevens and Eights are more their mark.) We could do with light literature—detective tales, novels dealing with love, short stories of all sorts. We haven't much in the way of a library in any of our Houses and some of our ladies dearly love fiction. (Fact, you see, is sometimes a little too much for them—especially if elderly—at the end of a long day.) And then there are your thoughts. Think about us, ponder on us and come to visit us. If you're feeling a bit blue we'll cheer you up. (I was feeling very blue when I visited my first House. I expected to come away gloomier than ever. And I came away cheered and fortified.) And if you're feeling cheerful, let's share it with you. We won't ask you questions, though you may ask the Matron anything you like. And as we won't question you, so you, when you go away, are little likely to question yourselves as to your intentions. You'll know what you want to do—you'll want to help. It isn't a question of "charity". Charity is a cold word. It is a question of love. That's what you'll feel, and that, in whatever form it takes, will be what you will give.

WOMEN—WHAT OF THE NIGHT?

By

ELEANOR GORDON PHILLIPS

On a raw February night a slight, bedraggled woman crept along the pavement of Shaftesbury Avenue, offering here and there a box of matches to likely customers. One of many who trudge the streets in the hope of picking up a few pence, she attracted no particular attention.

But the rain-soaked garments clothed a spirit of undaunted courage.

Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, journalist since her teens, was that woman, and to find out for herself just what happens to homeless and destitute women she 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.

It had been said that there were plenty of places where poor women could get beds—"Rowton Houses" for women, L.C.C. shelters, as well as places run by philanthropic and religious bodies—and Mrs. Cecil Chesterton determined to test the truth of that statement.

A terrible and tragic truth it was.

She first found that there were no Rowton Houses for women. Lord Rowton had not included the weaker sex in his scheme for clean, decent houses where a night's rest may be had for 1s., nor do the L.C.C. or the Borough Councils cater for them in this respect.

And so, for a fortnight, this voluntary derelict slept where and how she could—sometimes in places supported by charitable societies, sometimes in establishments run for profit where from 1s. to 1s. 2d. was charged for a bed with a lumpy mattress and clothes that either left your shoulders freezing or your feet numb.

She found the number of shelters and lodging houses tragically inadequate for the number of applicants who nightly knocked at the doors.

At the end of the experiment she wrote "In Darkest London", from which I quote as follows :

"I went back to my home raw with fatigue and with an added perception of sorrow ; but with a wider and deeper comprehension of the infinite loving-kindness of the human heart. The outcasts never failed me. When I was spiritually hungry, my hands were filled to overflowing with those small deeds of kindness which flower to perfection in the darkest and bleakest soil. I had passed through a door little, if ever, used by the well-fed. I had experienced actual physical privations which women of the middle class may weep over, but cannot comprehend. I had touched the bottom of destitution ; I had had no place wherein to lay my head. Never again



CHRISTMAS DAY AT CECIL HOUSE

can I look out on life with the same eyes ; never again can I forget that all night long women are wandering to and fro upon the pavement, or trying to sleep in an alien bed.

"And yet, what I have seen has not made me hopeless, rather do I glory in the knowledge that starvation of body, or starvation of mind, cannot, and does not, sear the soul of the outcast. And for this reason, and because I had had shown to me the beauty of giving, I cannot rest until I awaken the same desire to give among those women who, like myself, have always known the security, the peace, the contentment of a home."

Following the publication of the book a rain of letters poured in on her, suggesting that if only the author would undertake organisation, the writers would give their help. More and more inquiries came, and finally Mrs. Chesterton, through the kindness of Sir Philip Sassoon, who lent his house for the occasion, called a meeting of those interested, when a Committee was formed with the Lady Lovat as Chairman, Major J. Brunel Cohen, M.P., as Hon. Treasurer, Mr. D. G. Somerville, M.P., as Financial Adviser, and Mrs. Chesterton, Hon. Organiser and Secretary.

Within a few months premises were found in the Old Poetry Bookshop at 35, Devonshire Street, Theobald's Road, W.C.1, where, with the invaluable assistance of the late Mr. Ralph Knott (who with his partner Mr. E. Stone Collins designed the County Hall), Mrs. Chesterton planned and arranged a place where any woman or girl, for a shilling a night, could get a good bed in really comfortable surroundings, a hot bath if she wished it, hot tea and biscuits at night, and, in the morning, best of all, **no questions asked**. It was sufficient that a woman was in need of a bed for the door to be opened to her, and if she had not the necessary shilling the Matron could take her in entirely free, the money being paid from a Needy Fund specially provided for the purpose by friends.

The House, brightly painted, warm with large coal fires, coloured curtains and comfortable chairs, was full within a few days. The Committee voted it should be called after its founder, but she asked that it might be named Cecil House—in memory of her husband, Cecil Chesterton, who was killed in the War.

A year later a second House was ready in Wharfdale Road, King's Cross, N.1 ; and others have followed at 194, Kensal Road, W.10 ; 179, Harrow Road, W.2 ; and lastly, at 266, Waterloo Road, S.E.1.

And how has this been done ?

The money needed to buy the freehold, reconstruct or build and equip, is raised by public subscription but—and this is most important—once the necessary cash has been found to open it, each House stands on its own financial feet, the money paid nightly by the lodgers meeting all expenses of rates, salaries of Matron, assistant, night portress, cleaners, and the cost of gas, coal, light, washing, groceries, etc. Mrs. Chesterton says that to be really effective any scheme of this sort should be self-supporting. And so it is that if she and the whole Committee should pass from our ken to-morrow,

those Cecil Houses already in being would carry on, opening their doors night after night to the homeless and the needy.

All sorts and conditions of women come to these "Common Lodging Houses", as Cecil Houses, under their licence, must be called. Aged women with only the old-age pension to live on, who fear the loneliness of a tiny room and are not really capable of even the amount of work necessary to keep the smallest home in decent order; mothers with babies, who through illness or unemployment have lost their home and but for the temporary shelter of a Lodging House would be forced into the workhouse; young girls full of optimism and the spirit of adventure who come to London for work but on arrival have no place to go; middle-aged women who in competition with the younger and better equipped are gradually losing hope of regular work and have come down to casual charring or office cleaning; the derelict and the disillusioned.

Mrs. Chesterton, the Matrons at Cecil Houses, and many others widely experienced in this kind of work emphasise that in the vast majority of cases women do not sink to poverty and destitution through crime or drink, but more often through sheer misfortune. A serious illness which eats up small savings and leaves a frail ill-nourished body, and a thousand other turns of fate, account for hundreds of the decent, honest women in these places which have been so aptly named "a one-night stand of a home".

There is one day at Cecil Houses which stands out above and beyond all others in the year. That is Christmas Day. Friends and sympathisers contribute just what they can to the Christmas Fund, which not only provides a breakfast, good dinner, tea and supper, but—greatest of all—a free night's shelter, so that those who for these few glorious hours have enjoyed plentiful food and warmth and small gifts may know, when night falls, that even though they have not been out to earn the pence to pay for it, a warm and comfortable bed awaits them on this night of nights.

Women of all classes and of all creeds have helped the fund, which is non-sectarian. Her Majesty the Queen, with that rare and profound understanding of the problems of homelessness and unemployment, not only sent a monetary donation and visited the first House, but has most graciously presented each House with a gift—an arm-chair for one, two cots, an overmantel, a clock, and a portrait of herself for the others.

At the moment there are sad hearts in the first Cecil House at No. 35 Devonshire Street, W.C.1. Christmas is approaching, but those who have passed through its doors, occasionally or often, are lamenting that soon this familiar spot with its association of human companionship and sympathy must fall into the hands of the housebreakers.

Built in the days of Queen Anne, it has stood the passage of time, but demolition of adjacent premises has shaken its foundations and the Committee have decided that it must come down. But, like the phoenix, it will arise from its ashes, for by great good luck

the next-door premises have been acquired, and within a year a new and larger building will appear.

At least, such is the intention of Mrs. Chesterton and her Committee. But more money is needed for the rebuilding fund, and a very urgent and personal appeal is made to all those who can possibly help to send their gifts to the Hon. Treasurer at the offices of Cecil Houses, 11 Golden Square, W. 1.

Those of us, says Mrs. Chesterton, who have warm beds, a comfortable home, the love of family and friends, will feel they can more fully enjoy these things if they hold out a helping hand to the many who, through no fault of their own, face homelessness, poverty and hardship so bravely. To everyone interested in this work a very cordial invitation is extended to any of the Houses during visiting hours; all particulars can be obtained from Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, 11 Golden Square, W. 1.

Reprinted from "Humanity", December 13th, 1935.

GIFTS OF SHOES, COATS, SKIRTS, JUMPERS,
UNDERWEAR, OLD LINEN, ETC., FOR FREE
DISTRIBUTION TO THOSE WHO NEED THEM
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SHOULD BE MADE PAYABLE TO
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COPIES OF "IN DARKEST LONDON"
BY MRS. CECIL CHESTERTON, CAN BE
OBTAINED (PRICE 1s., POSTAGE 3d.)
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NOTICES FROM THE PRESS

"How homeless women in London celebrated the Jubilee is described in the seventh annual report of Cecil Houses Women's Public Lodging-House Fund. . . .

"On Jubilee night the women were given a special supper and a night's free lodging."—*Daily Telegraph*, May 16th, 1935.

". . . Cecil Houses announce that the original house to be converted into a friendly hostel is now to be rebuilt on its old site in Devonshire Street, one of London's dreariest thoroughfares. There are now five self-supporting Cecil Houses. The last has proved especially useful to provincials, for it is near Waterloo Station, and homeless travellers are sent by police or railway officials for a good night's rest, warmth, meal, and a welcome, 'with no questions asked'. . . . Funds, clothes, and comforts are still badly needed to spread further this much-needed movement."—*Birmingham Post*, May 17th, 1935.

"Cecil Houses present their seventh annual report and, as usual, it is the kind of document to make one reflect upon the contradictoriness and topsyturvydom of the queer logic of living. The story of the report tells of an urgent need, in itself a revealing commentary upon the ordinary, unspectacular distress which ought to be preventable, and yet remains part of the life of every city, is unhappy enough, but there is the other side of the picture. Cecil Houses, founded by a woman for the help of women who are homeless, seem, however, to be challenge as well as answer. . . . The shilling a night the women pay for a good bed—it is threepence for a cot—a hot bath, supper, and breakfast, meets the cost of running the hostels once the initial expenditure of building and equipment has been defrayed by public subscription. But it is the spirit behind Cecil Houses which makes them more, much more than the ordinary institution or self-consciously 'charitable' undertaking. No question is asked of applicants who book a bed. No one is interrogated or advised unless help 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. The next move in the growth and development of the work of Cecil Houses is to be the rebuilding and enlargement of the first house that was opened in Devonshire Street."—*Scotsman*, May 20th, 1935.

"The Cecil House in Devonshire Street, Bloomsbury, was the one the Queen chose to visit when she first became interested in the work, and the arm-chair and umbrella stand in the present house were her gifts towards the furnishing of this haven for homeless women."—*Birmingham Post*, May 22nd, 1935.

"From the hour when the Queen read Mrs. Cecil Chesterton's poignant story of how the very poorest women in London live (if it can be called living, which seems so much worse than any form of death), she has taken deep and pitiful interest in the magnificent efforts that have been made to provide

clean and reasonably-priced lodging houses for homeless or vagrant women. When the first Cecil House was opened in Devonshire Street, W.C.1 (now to be rebuilt on the old site) she went to see it, and helped not only with money but with gifts of an arm-chair and umbrella stand. To each of the four houses that have been opened since, she has likewise made presents, and if there is anyone in comfortable circumstances whose hand does not fly to open purse or pocket-book after reading 'In Darkest London' she, or he, must have a more grudging heart than I judge any English human being to possess. . . ."—*Liverpool Post*, May 27th, 1935.

"The annual Report just issued shows once more the great boon these Houses are and how many more of them are needed. The original Cecil House in Devonshire Street is to be rebuilt as soon as funds are forthcoming. . . . The police send a woman in emergency to Cecil Houses, and probation officers, missionaries, welfare societies and charitable guilds have an understanding with the matrons whereby any stranded woman or girl can be put up and the money for her bed sent on at specified intervals."—*Policewoman's Review*, May, 1935.

". . . a new cheap edition (of 'In Darkest London'), Mrs. Cecil Chesterton's vivid narrative of her experiences as a 'down and out' exploring the doss-houses of London. An appendix relates how on the first publication of her revelations of the appalling conditions she discovered, the organisation now known as 'Cecil Houses' (The Women's Public Lodging-House Fund) was formed and there are now five Cecil Houses in various parts of London. It must be a source of pride to the Jewish community that the preliminary meeting took place in Sir Philip Sassoon's house, and that Major J. Brunel Cohen became Hon. Treasurer. The Chief Rabbi has shown a keen interest in the work. The purchase of the book from the offices of the organisation at 11, Golden Square, W.1 will benefit the cause."—*Jewish Chronicle*, May 31st, 1935.

"Cecil Houses set up in London to provide cheap and comfortable lodgings for women are proving a boon not only to Londoners but to many provincials. "This is pointed out in the Annual Report which appeals for gifts of shoes, coats, skirts, jumpers, underwear and old linen for free distribution to those who need them most. "There are now five Cecil Houses in London. For a shilling a night a woman can get a good bed, hot bath, facilities for washing clothes, tea and biscuits at night and tea and bread and butter in the morning. A charge of 3d. a night is made for a cot.

Like Hotel.

"In necessitous cases Cecil Houses provide a free bed from a needy fund raised by subscription.

"'Cecil Houses are run on the same lines as an hotel in that no lodger is required to take any part in cleaning and bedmaking,' states the Report. . . .

"Mrs. Cecil Chesterton was inspired to start the movement by the fact 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.

"Copies of her book, 'In Darkest London', describing her experiences of the plight of homeless women, will be sold at 1/- each at a special stand provided by Lewis's Ltd., at their Liverpool store next week.

"The entire proceeds will be given to the Cecil Houses Fund."—*Daily Herald* (Manchester Edition), June 1st, 1935.

"In appreciation of the work of Cecil Houses (Inc.), a movement to provide public lodging houses for women, incorporated under the Board of Trade, and which provides, at a very small cost, clean bed, bathing and washing accommodation for thousands of homeless and vagrant women, Messrs. Lewis's, Liverpool, will devote a stand on the ground floor for the sale of shilling books called 'In Darkest London'. The entire proceeds go to the movement."—*Liverpool Echo*, June 3rd, 1935.

"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 . . . and the account of the unobtrusively excellent work which is being done is published in their Report. . . .

"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 some that existed were so repulsive and officialised that any clean and uninquisitive doorstep 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, hot bath 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."—*The Era*, June 19th, 1935.

"Recently I paid a visit to Cecil House, Devonshire Street, London, the first of those five lodging houses for women founded by Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, and named in memory of her husband.

"Every night an army of homeless women and girls find their way to Cecil House—match-sellers, flower-sellers, street-hawkers—girls who have come from the country and are finding it hard to find work in London; charwomen; unemployed hotel servants; cinema attendants; educated women who have somehow come down in the world; vagrant women who drift from place to place.

"There is no patronage; no inquisitiveness. The rule of Cecil House is that no questions are asked. If a woman wants to talk, the matron listens sympathetically and gives advice and help. If a woman prefers to keep silence, she is left in peace.

"At Cecil House, Devonshire Street, there is accommodation for forty-four women, and there is never an empty bed. The beds are clean and comfortable with spotless sheets and blue and white covers. The matron showed me over the bright dormitories, and pointed out, at the side of each bed, a wooden locker where private property can be stored.

"For one shilling a homeless woman or girl can get a night's lodging at Cecil House. The moment she arrives she is given a cup of hot tea and some biscuits. The matron mentioned that most women bring in their own fish and chips or anything they want for supper. Then there are excellent facilities for washing their clothes, which are hung in a drying-room, so that they are ready to put on next morning. Some of the women are given an entirely fresh outfit in place of the deplorable old garments they are wearing.

"They may have a bath in a shining white-tiled bathroom, with as much hot water as they like. Soap and towels are also provided. In the morning there is another cup of tea and a big slice of bread and butter.

"The Queen showed her appreciation of this work by paying a personal visit to Cecil House, Devonshire Street, where she was shown over the premises; and also by presenting an arm-chair and an umbrella-stand."—M. H. in *The Birmingham Post*, August 2nd, 1935.

". . . It seems a long time since Mrs. Chesterton startled the country with her book 'In Darkest London', which told of the plight of extremely poor women, for whom, unlike men of the same class, municipal bodies made no provision at all of sleeping room at low prices; but the stir is still active, and besides the five Cecil Houses established in London, where any homeless woman or girl can get a good bed, hot bath, tea and biscuits—and no questions asked—countless people throughout the land have learned from Mrs. Chesterton's book directions for efforts of their own towards alleviating human distress."—*Newcastle Journal*, September 26th, 1935.

". . . Mrs. Chesterton, at least, has nobly contributed towards solving this desolate problem, and through her investigations, five Cecil Houses have been opened in London for needy women, who can take their children with them, and where the women applying for beds are not called upon to answer any questions whatever, but can secure a good bed, hot bath, hot tea and biscuits at night, and tea and bread and butter in the morning, with soap and towel and facilities for washing clothes included, for one shilling per night, and for 3d. a baby's cot."—*Woman's Outlook*, July, 1935.

"In this book ('In Darkest London'), the author gives an account of the period of self-imposed destitution upon which she embarked as a prelude to the foundation of the Cecil Houses scheme, the fame of which, as one of the most attractive forms of philanthropy yet evolved, has spread far beyond its country of origin. . . . Though child welfare is not one of the specific objects of the scheme, the Committee frequently assists friendless unmarried mothers by placing them in touch with organisations which can help them, arranging for their reception in maternity homes or infirmaries, and later, assisting them to place their children. We look forward to the day when the scheme will be extended beyond London, its home of origin."—*Mother and Child*, October, 1935.

"When the first Cecil House for homeless women to sleep in at night was being got ready by two women who were scrubbing the woodwork for which there was no money to repaint, a policeman suddenly appeared at the door. 'The Queen is coming along to see you ladies,' he said. Before they could remove their scrubbing aprons, there she was, inquiring in her kindly practical way what she could send as a gift, and her presents were an arm-chair for the matron, and an umbrella-stand for the women's sitting-room."—*Great Thoughts*, October, 1935.

"On behalf of homeless and destitute women in London, and particularly with the object of helping such women who reach the city from Liverpool, an appeal was made at a meeting presided over last evening by the Lord Mayor of Liverpool (Alderman F. T. Richardson), at Bon Marché.

"The Meeting was asked to support Cecil Houses (Inc.), an organisation which provides lodging for women in London. Mrs. Cecil Chesterton described her experiences when she lived for a time as a homeless woman in London. She spoke of the hopelessness and loneliness and fatigue experienced by such women and girls. She had previously thought there were lodging houses for women, but she found that that was not the case. She found that no one cared about the plight of women with nowhere to go.

"She found that cleanliness was largely a matter of having money to pay for a place where one could wash, and that when she earned a little money she spent it not on a bath but on food. There were very few lodging houses where hot water was available. Cecil Houses had, in the words of one observer, provided 'A one-night stand of a home.' They would like to set

apart in one of their houses a bed for any Liverpool woman or girl who asked for it, and she appealed for the money to make that possible. Twenty pounds would keep that bed for a year.

"Major J. Brunel Cohen, honorary treasurer of Cecil Houses, described the facilities provided—a good bed, a cheerful common-room, places for washing and drying of clothes, baths and refreshment—all for a shilling a night. There were 266 beds in their five houses in various parts of London, and they had to refuse beds far too often."—*Liverpool Post*, October 25th, 1935.

"Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, the well-known author of the book 'In Darkest London', was the speaker at a meeting arranged by the National Council of Women, held in the Congregational Hall, Aylesbury, on Friday evening. The Rev. A. E. Cornibeer, Vicar of Wendover, was in the chair, and in his introductory remarks, said . . . he was sure she had made the subject of her address her own. He had had experience of work in the East End of London, in the slums of Portsmouth, in Lancashire, Northumberland and Westminster, and so knew something of the conditions. . . .

"Mrs. Chesterton said she was very pleased to come and speak at Aylesbury, but it must be very hard for them to realise the acuteness of unemployment at the present time and what destitution was like. She herself did not realise it until she tried an experiment of living without any money in her pocket some years ago.

". . . She was repeatedly asked to publish her experiences in book form, which she did. This aroused considerable attention, and a meeting was held in London in 1926 to see what could be done. Many well-known people were present, and the first Cecil House was opened in the same year, this being so named after her husband, who had died in the Great War. This house was run on the same lines as a men's lodging house. Further money was raised by various meetings, and there were now five Cecil Houses. . . . A small charge of a shilling a night, including baths, was made. It was surprising, said the speaker, how the women rarely failed to pay up their shillings, and if they could not pay all one night they would give something towards the amount. The Cecil Houses were entirely self-supporting, but they still needed help to build more. Mrs. Chesterton said her audience could do their bit towards this by buying a copy of her book 'In Darkest London', the profits of which went towards this cause."—*Bucks Herald*, December 6th, 1935.

". . . I wonder how many readers in Mid-Rhondda know what Cecil Houses means, even to their own sisters and daughters. Cecil Houses is a monument of creative effort and has done as much to alleviate the biggest social problem of London as anything.

"Cecil Houses are the result of the revelations given in Mrs. Chesterton's book 'In Darkest London', and every man, woman and child of the Rhondda would benefit if they read the work. When the Lord Bishop of London read what Mrs. Chesterton had to say about the position of public lodging-house accommodation for women in London, he was appalled and asked Mrs. Chesterton if she could initiate a movement to relieve the situation. The bare fact that public lodging accommodation was divided into 87 per cent. for men and only 13 per cent. for women will convey briefly what the position was. Mrs. Chesterton formed a distinguished committee to remedy the position and paid homage to her husband's memory by calling the houses after his name. Mr. Cecil Chesterton was one of the most distinguished Editors of Fleet Street, and died in France as a private soldier.

". . . There is an enormous amount of public work going on in the Rhondda Valley at the moment and 'In Darkest London' would give public workers an insight into London's problems which cannot be dissociated from



GOOD-BYE TO NO. 35—APRIL, 1936

any other part of Great Britain. At the present moment there are five Cecil Houses and each of them cost £7,000 to build. For 1/- per night a woman is given a light supper, facilities to wash her clothing, and bed and breakfast before leaving the following morning. But what perhaps should be particularly emphasised is *that no questions are asked*.

"Commenting on the work done at these Houses one well-known public figure said the poorest of the poor, homeless wanderers, if she be a woman, does not lose, cannot lose, her essential rights—the right to sleep and shelter. Regardless of the woman's occupation, she has not to undergo the ordeal of questions regarding her work which can be so humiliating and embarrassing.

"Mrs. Chesterton spent a fortnight on the streets of London in all types of weather in the dead of winter. She sold matches to keep body and soul together and went from lodging house to lodging house, talking to destitute women who experience all the great hardships of the vagrant, and learnt first-hand of their discomforts. 'In Darkest London' is full of interesting and frequently heartbreaking stories of the lives of these people.

"Cecil Houses now caters for nearly three hundred women and children nightly and it is surprising the number of Welsh girls trying their luck in London in domestic service and other occupations who are able to have warmth, food, and shelter in one or other of the houses each night.

"Every district should have its Cecil House, Mid-Rhondda as much as London, and every worker who has regard for social problems should buy a copy of 'In Darkest London' and follow it by reading 'Women of the Underworld'. Purchasing them would have the added virtue of giving a subscription to Cecil Houses, since much of the profits are devoted to the work of this great institution. Cecil Houses has won the admiration of every Londoner and might be regarded as a monument to effort for human understanding."—*"Rhondabout", The Mid-Rhondda Outlook, July, 1935.*

"From the interest created by the original edition of 'In Darkest London' sprang the Cecil Houses (Incorporated) Women's Public Lodging-House Fund. This fund may be benefited if copies of 'In Darkest London' are ordered through its offices at 11 Golden Square, London, W.1. It may be added that the book is a most vivid description of the author's personal experiences, during her bold experiment as a 'down-and-out'."—*Rotary Wheel, July, 1935.*

"This is the sixth edition of 'In Darkest London', first published in 1926, which led to the founding of the first Cecil House as a cheap lodging house for homeless women, which has been followed by four other houses. The proceeds of this edition are to be devoted to the reconstruction of the original Cecil House. Mrs. Chesterton published her experiences in searching the streets of London for a night's lodging, disguised as a homeless vagrant, sometimes selling cheap goods.

"The London County Council refuses to assume the responsibility of running municipal lodging houses for the female sex on the plea that we are difficult to manage. This means, in effect, that the L.C.C., like the majority of people, confuse lack of means with lack of morals and are terrified to be associated in the work of providing beds for prostitutes lest they should be accused of countenancing a loose method of life.

"As a true picture the book is well worth reading, and the present price brings it within the reach of everyone, with the satisfaction of knowing that one is contributing in a practical manner towards housing homeless women."—*The Policewoman's Review, July, 1935.*

"It is difficult for a woman with a comfortable home to imagine what it feels like to be a homeless woman in London.

"Mrs. Cecil Chesterton lectured upon this subject at the meeting of Bromley Congregational Literary and Musical Society on Monday, when Mrs. F. S. Alexander presided.

"The title of the lecture was 'Through Darkest London'. Just over eight years ago Mrs. Chesterton was talking to some fellow journalists in Fleet Street when the conversation turned upon what happens to the women and girls who come to London thinking they will find the particular job they want to get. As a result of the conversation she went to the editor of a Sunday paper and offered to write a series of articles based on her experiences for at least a fortnight as a homeless woman with no money, no job, and no reference. He commissioned the articles, and so one cold February day she left home dressed in her oldest clothes, with no money, carrying a brown paper parcel containing a comb, tooth brush, etc.

A Kind Policeman

"She went to Euston and mingled with the people coming off a train from Liverpool. In Euston Road she went up to a policeman and told him a fairy tale to the effect that she was a cook who had come to London to look for a job. He directed her to a Salvation Army hostel, but she found that was for women and girls in regular jobs and she had not got a penny. She was told to go to Mare Street, Hackney, where the Salvation Army often had spare beds for homeless women. She set out to walk the distance of about nine miles and by the time she had reached the Essex Road was almost in a state of collapse, but a kind policeman then gave her twopence for her tram fare. Arriving at the home about one o'clock, she was admitted by a woman who asked her name and took her to a room full of sleeping women and said: "Good night, dear. God bless you." In the morning Mrs. Chesterton washed herself with hot water and had a breakfast of porridge, tea, bread and margarine.

"Giving the name of Annie Turner she then went to a Labour Exchange and soon found that she could not get a job without a reference. She was, however, supplied with the names of some women who required the services of itinerant charwomen. On the way to the first house she looked so forlorn that a workman took her to a coffee shop, gave her a steaming hot bowl of coffee and offered her some money.

Experiences as a Charwoman.

"The mistress of the first house did not like the look of her. At the second she cleaned some steps and was given fourpence. Twopence was spent on a tram fare to the Angel, and later she got another job as charwoman. Then she had a meal of sausage and onion and enjoyed it, for by this time she was very hungry. In the afternoon she sold matches and had some tea and cake. The rain was accompanied by sleet.

"At that time a man could get a bed for a shilling, but it was left to the religious societies like the Salvation Army, the Church Army, the Catholics and the Nonconformists, and people who wanted to make profit to run lodging houses for homeless women. The house she went to was run for private profit in a court off Holborn. She paid 1s. 2d. for a bed and the right to wash with cold water in the morning.

"That was a typical day in the life of Mrs. Chesterton during that fortnight. She said that a very small proportion of the women come right down the social ladder through drink and crime. One of the women she met had been the manageress of a restaurant and had had a bad illness. The women who frequent common lodging houses suffer with bad feet on account of the constant walking about. Very often they undress under the bedclothes.

Usually they do not sleep well. Some of them give way to crying. One night a fellow lodger stole Mrs. Chesterton's bag containing 8½d. and a powder puff. Most of these women are kindly, compassionate and generous.

Cecil Houses.

"When the articles describing Mrs. Chesterton's experiences were published people sent her money, so she formed a committee and eventually the first Cecil House was opened. Now there are five of these homes—the last, in Waterloo Road, was opened by Sir Charles Collet when Lord Mayor of London—where for one shilling a night a woman can get a good bed, hot bath, hot tea and facilities for washing her clothes. Gifts of shoes, coats, skirts, jumpers, underwear, old linen, etc., for free distribution to those who need them most will be gratefully received. The headquarters of the Cecil Houses are at 11, Golden Square, London, W.1.

"Several questions were asked at the close of the lecture. Replying to one of them, Mrs. Chesterton said homeless men and women would rather go to prison than spend a night in a casual ward; the former was more comfortable and they received more humane treatment. In her lecture she had mentioned that when spending a night in a casual ward she discovered that instead of the door being locked the handle had been taken away."—*Bromley Mercury, November 23rd, 1935.*

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

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CECIL HOUSES
(INCORPORATED).
Combined Houses Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31st December, 1935.

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 Insurance	332 19 11	391 1 11	246 13 6	395 3 0	315 17 7	1,681 15 11
„ Printing and Stationery	16 8	1 6 10	—	2 3 6	2 3 6	6 10 6
„ Postages	12 0	10 9	12 0	14 0	4 0	2 12 9
„ Telephones	10 6 7	9 4	11 19 9	13 12 10	13 19 1	59 2 7
„ Lighting	35 16 4	37 1 6	42 10 0	47 9 5	44 1 11	206 19 2
„ Insurance	13 15 6	21 18 9	25 5 8	29 3 6	21 9 6	111 12 11
„ Soap and Disinfectant	6 1 11	12 5 6	4 9 9	5 7 4	9 16 11	38 1 5
„ Repairs and Replacements	30 9 2	114 0 2	43 12 4	117 19 11	88 2 8	394 4 3
„ Provisions for Women and Babies	46 1 4	50 4 3	36 19 5	38 6 2	60 5 4	231 16 6
„ Laundry	38 2 5	43 0 6	43 16 2	60 8 4	43 17 11	229 5 4
„ Coal and Coke	26 16 0	29 4 9	17 6 0	42 4 6	36 10 8	152 1 11
„ Rates	51 19 6	83 1 0	73 3 4	129 3 10	106 9 2	443 16 10
„ Sundries	27 0 4	34 12 10	47 19 9	40 0 5	29 8 9	179 2 1
„ Balance, being excess of Income over Expenditure for the year ended 31st December, 1935, transferred to Balance Sheet	181 0 11	136 1 5	12 13 6	91 14 7	57 14 6	479 4 11
	£ 801 18 7	963 14 6	607 1 2	1,013 11 4	830 1 6	4,216 7 1

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	778 9 6	935 4 0	569 7 3	1,007 15 0	829 13 0	4,120 8 9
„ Interest on Investments	19 5 0	24 10 0	—	3 10 0	—	47 5 0
„ Interest on Deposit and Current Accounts	4 4 1	4 0 6	4 13 11	2 6 4	8 6	15 13 4
„ Subscriptions transferred	—	—	33 0 0	—	—	33 0 0
	£ 801 18 7	963 14 6	607 1 2	1,013 11 4	830 1 6	4,216 7 1

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". . . A delightfully told story of an adventure in an unknown world where kindness, humour and even beauty spring up in unexpected places."—*Women's Leader & Common Cause*.

"A simple, sincerely written account of her experiences as a casual. . . . Her book should be read by all."—*The Observer*.

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"Her book 'IN DARKEST LONDON' is a revelation and a challenge. . . . Only on rare occasions do we lend our editorial columns to an outside financial appeal. But in this case we have no scruples."—*Methodist Times*.

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"This book will, we hope, be widely read. We have no space to deal with one-quarter of the things in it which cry out for comment, but we commend it very strongly."—*Sunday Times*.

"It is a wonderfully fascinating account of the underworld of flower-sellers and match-sellers and fifth-rate prostitutes; but beyond that it presents a most powerful plea for real charity and for the provision of decent sleep-places for destitute women."—*The New Statesman*.

